

WHAT ARE YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS? Romans 12:3-8

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Of all the subjects that deal with practical Christianity, spiritual gifts are the least understood. Most Christians do not have the foggiest idea what spiritual gifts are, how they function, or for what purpose they are given.

A spiritual gift is a God-given ability or capacity for the purpose of service. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). Many Christians have more than one, "Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles" (2 Tim. 1:11).

Spiritual gifts are sovereignly given by God as he wills: "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11). Probably, God gives these gifts at the moment of salvation. He gives us the exact gifts he wants us to have, so we should be content with them, not always trying to be something God never intended us to be. This does not mean that we should not desire other gifts so that we might do even greater Christian service (1 Cor. 12:31), but only that we should not be discontent if God is not so pleased to call and gift us.

Spiritual gifts then are given to the universal church, the Body of Christ, and are to be used as each Christian is dependent upon the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus gives gifts as he wills, and it is his prerogative to direct the gifts of the Body as he sees fit. The various parts of the human body never take orders from the hand or the foot; they take orders from the head. It is the head that sends down messages. As members of the body, Christians must take their direction from Jesus Christ.

ACCEPTING GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL IN THE BESTOWAL OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS — Romans 12:3

It is interesting to note that after Paul's exhortation for the Christian to dedicate his life to God and lay his body on the line, he speaks about spiritual gifts. This is because the best way to get moving for God is to discover and use the spiritual gift that God has given you. He has supernaturally endowed each Christian with the capacity for service. Thus, the Christian is to stir up the gift that God has given him:

“Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Tim. 4:14).

“Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6).

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” Apparently, some in the local church in Rome felt they were superior to other Christians because they had special, outstanding gifts from God; they had spiritual pride. Their estimate of their place in the Body of Christ was too high, and this brought pride and vanity to the local church:

“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

These believers had not learned that all that a Christian has comes by God’s grace and is to be used for His glory.

“But to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” The Christian is to have a serious mind and an objective evaluation of his gifts, and to realize that all he has is from God. He must realize that “without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5), and try to think others better than himself:

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

To learn to take second place takes much grace from God and is a mark of real Christian maturity. As Spurgeon said, “It takes more grace than one can tell to play the second fiddle well.”

God has created us, saved us, and given us gifts according to his sovereign will. We are to learn to be content and humble in his will for us. While there is a tendency to overestimate our gifts, there is also a tendency in some to underestimate gifts. We are to use what gifts God has given us to the maximum.

THE UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF GIFTS WITHIN THE BODY — Romans 12:4-5

Gifts are given to individual members of the universal church, but these gifts find their expression through the local church. Why has God placed you in a local church? What is your gift? How can you use this gift in that particular local assembly?

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office [function].” Paul uses the illustration of the human body to make a point concerning the Body of Christ, the church. The human body is made up of many parts, and each part has its specific function. Each part also needs the other parts if the body is to function properly. Some are out front where they can easily be seen (e.g. eyes, nose, hands, feet), while others are in the background (e.g. heart, liver, spinal column). Yet, all are important and each needs the other. Contract hepatitis or break your back and you soon realize how important these parts are to the rest of the body.

Consider the example of the armed forces. For every man who carries a rifle on the front lines, there are thousands that support him. The infantry is supported by naval bombardment and field artillery. Then there must be those who supply food, ammunition, and fuel. Some have more glorious positions, but all are necessary — and those who perform the glorious tasks could never do so without the support of the others. The same thing is true in the church. Those on the front lines of Christian service are supported by thousands of other faithful saints who are doing what God called and gifted them to do.

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” The Body of Christ needs each member if it is to function properly. There is no member of the universal or local church who is unimportant, for each has a gift to use in building up the church:

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered [blended] the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked” (1 Cor. 12:12-24).

Does a person's hand constantly slap his own face? Does his mind constantly think evil of his own person? Does his tongue constantly talk against his own body? No! If it did, the body would be schizophrenic. Each member of the Body is important, so we must learn to work together in unity, harmony, and love.

USING SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN HARMONY — Romans 12:6-8

Paul gives a list of spiritual gifts he would like to see better exercised in the local church at Rome. This is not an exhaustive list; others are mentioned in other books of the Bible. There are at least eighteen different gifts mentioned in Scripture (some question whether seven of them are in existence today). There may also be gifts that are not mentioned in Scripture. Here are some very important gifts not mentioned in this passage:

Evangelists (Eph. 4:11): While it is the responsibility of all Christians to be witnesses by life and lip, some are specially gifted in evangelism. Men such as George Whitefield, John Wesley, and D.L. Moody, Billy Graham and Bill Bright were or are gifted men in evangelism, and we couldn't be like them if we wanted to be. These men have consistently been effective in leading others to Christ.

Pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11): This is the special gift of tending and instructing a flock of believers in a local church. A pastor-teacher must give himself to the study of the Word and to prayer so that he may feed the flock. He is not called to be an administrator, counselor, psychiatrist, youth leader, Christian education director and janitor. One reason so many pastors cannot teach the Word to people is that they are so bogged down with administration. One pastor I know was so busy with administration and hospital visitation that he didn't have proper time to study the Word and to pray. He was under so much pressure because of this that he developed ulcers. "I know it isn't scriptural," he said, "but the people demand it." People must understand spiritual gifts. Most of the duties laid on a pastor-teacher in the average local church can and should be done by the congregation, for God has given them the gifts to get the job done. Most of the visitation should be done by the elders and the people.

Faith (1 Cor. 12:9): This is an exceptional ability to believe God, and it includes a ministry of prayer. I knew an elderly woman named May Walker, who is now at home with the Lord Jesus Christ. She learned to read at age 55 because, having just been saved, she wanted to be able to read God's Word. When I first met May, she was in her late 70's and she

was crippled. But she didn't let this stop her from exercising her gift of faith and prayer. Every day she would spend six to ten hours in prayer. She got hundreds of positive answers from the Lord. She would sit in her rocking chair day after day bringing before the Lord all kinds of requests. This woman had a gift and used it until her dying day.

"Having then gifts according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." Prophecy was a first-century gift of receiving revelation directly from God and giving it to the assembly. At that time there was no New Testament canon. Prophecy, in a general sense, may also refer to proclaiming the Word with power. One does not have to be a member of the clergy to have this gift.

"Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering." This refers to the gift of service and helps. It is the ability to see things that need to be done, and then to get out and do them. This blessed gift is so needed in the average local church. A person with the gift of helps preaches a sermon with the action of his life — and actions speak louder than words.

"Or he that teacheth on teaching." Teaching is the ability to instruct by analysis and application. Teaching takes the gift of studying, and this gift can be found in those who teach in seminary, college or Bible school. It should also be found in the local church: those who teach Sunday school should have this gift to some degree.

Every teacher of the Word of God will someday give account to God for his ministry. The serious Bible teacher constantly asks himself these questions: Have I listened to God's voice? Have I laid my own reason in the dust before God in order to take it again, enlightened by him, for use in my work? Have I been spiritually alert and dependent upon the Holy Spirit? Have I gone again and again to the Word to refresh my own soul before speaking to others? Have I tried to live what I preach? Have I acknowledged my sins when the Lord showed them to me, and have I repented of them? Have I been lazy? Have I insulted the Lord by feeding his sheep with ill-prepared food?

"Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." Exhortation is the ability to encourage and comfort, to move the will, to warm the heart, and to impel to action.

It is such a silly thing to blame someone for not exercising a gift that he does not possess. Frequently someone will speak who has the gift of teaching, and as he instructs the mind is illuminated and we understand much better than we did before. All the intellectuals go away saying, "My, what a wonderful speaker! I learned so much under that man!" But all the emotionally oriented people go away saying that he was terrible and dry. This is blaming the man for not exercising a gift of exhortation which he

doesn't possess. On the other hand, when an exhorter without the gift of teaching speaks, all the intellectuals go away saying the message was terrible and dry, with nothing edifying in it at all. But the emotional people say, "How wonderful! We could listen to him all day." All men do not have the same gifts, and all people do not have the same personality make-up. No one man is ever going to meet the needs of all the people!

"He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity [liberality]." This is the ability to give of one's substance with sacrifice. All true Christians will give of their monies, but some have a special capacity. This does not have to be a gift among the rich only, for there are many poor folk who sacrifice out of their poverty.

When I was pastor of a church in California, a very dear Christian widow was a member of the congregation. She had very little money, and lived off a small rental and her social security check. Yet she gave liberally to the Lord's work. She gave four times as much as some people who had much, much more. I later discovered how she sacrificed. She bought her grain in 100-pound sacks and ground it into flour herself. She limited her driving to save gas. She ate nothing but what she needed. And she made her own clothes. Why? She did these things because she wanted to give to the Lord's work. She had the gift of giving.

Some among the wealthy also have the gift of giving. With this gift often comes the ability to make money. If God has given you this gift, it is not so that you can have a higher standard of living (although this may be true), but so that you can give and help support the Lord's work.

"He that ruleth, with diligence [zeal]." This gift would most certainly be found in the office of elder. A man might be a good guy, a sharp businessman, etc., but without this gift of ability to rule in the assembly, he is not qualified to be an elder. Only those who have this ability should be put into this office. The gift of leadership may also be found in other positions in the local church.

"He that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." This is the ability to care for the sick and feeble. There are some Christians who can cheer up a hospital room and some who cast a gloom on it. It is a matter of giftedness.

CONCLUSION

These gifts are spiritual capacities and can only be effectively used when one is under the control of the Spirit. It is possible to use a spiritual gift in the energy of the flesh, and when this is done the gift often dies when it is not given public recognition. To be effective, a spiritual gift must be connected with the power of the Holy Spirit.

A modern kitchen has a number of electrical appliances: a refrigerator, a microwave oven, a toaster oven, perhaps an electrical oven and stove. Each is designed to do a different thing, but all use the same power. And unless they are connected to that power, they are useless. This is the way with spiritual gifts. They are divinely given capacities, and they require the power of the Holy Spirit if they are to function.

Each believer has been given spiritual capacities. Some are thousand-gallon tanks, some are hundred-gallon tanks, some fifty, and some ten. A ten-gallon tank cannot be a thousand gallon tank no matter how hard it tries. But a ten-gallon tank is more fruitful if it is overflowing than is a thousand-gallon tank that is only half full. God holds us responsible to use our God-given capacities (spiritual gifts) to the maximum. Use the gifts he has given you to the fullest, and do not try to be something God never intended you to be.

This message has been directed to Christians, but there is a gift that God will give the non-Christian. It is the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. What must you do to receive this gift? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.