

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT, PT. 1
ROMANS 12:3-8

Gifts are funny things — sometimes what we think would be a nice gift for someone is hardly noticed or received well; other times something we think is insignificant or even inappropriate is the favorite gift of all. Many years ago — back when I made my living in seminary as a pool cleaner — I had a customer who told me one day of her grandfather and the unique relationship she had with him. When she went to get married and her friends hosted a bridal shower for her, that grandfather sent gifts for her — and they were all power tools. So here was this petite, southern belle surrounded by power tools and all her in-laws to be were wondering what kind of crazy grandfather she had, and she was overjoyed.

That same woman would annually go with her husband on a trip to Las Vegas to watch some boxing matches. One time after she returned from viewing a title bout with Sugar Ray Leonard I commented that it was very nice of her to go along with her husband on his trip and she quickly corrected me: “Oh, I don’t go for him; he doesn’t like the fights. He goes because he knows I want to go!” Who would have thought that?!

This morning we want to begin talking about gifts God has given to believers. Now there are obviously many things that God has given us, but I want to think with you about the particular gifts that God gives us through the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

We’ve been talking in recent weeks about the work of the Holy Spirit and this morning I want to initiate a discussion about the most well-known work of the Holy Spirit. Most believers understand that the Spirit gives us gifts, but the purpose and intention of the use of those gifts is often misunderstood and misused, so I want to spend 2-3 Sundays thinking with you about these gifts.

As we begin, here is a simple definition of the gifts of the Spirit:

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE GOD’S ENABLEMENT FOR EVERY BELIEVER FOR SPIRITUAL SERVICE IN THE CHURCH.

1. Essential ASPECTS of Spiritual Gifts

- ✓ What spiritual gifts ARE NOT
- ✓ What spiritual gifts ARE
- ✓ What the ORIGIN of spiritual gifts is
- ✓ What we should do if we do not have a particular spiritual gift

2. Essential ATTITUDES Towards Spiritual Gifts (vv. 3-6a)

- ✓ What we do in serving others is an overflow of our TRANSFORMED lives
- ✓ Don't think too MUCH about your gifts and giftedness (v. 3a)
- ✓ Don't think too LITTLE about your gifts and giftedness (v. 3b)
- ✓ Gifts are given diversely for mutuality and unity, not superiority (vv. 4-5)
- ✓ Spiritual gifts are God's divine and gracious enabling to meet the needs of OTHERS (v. 6a)

3. Three Categories of Spiritual Gifts (vv. 6b-8)

- ✓ FOUNDATIONAL Gifts: PROPHECY (v. 6b)
- ✓ SERVING Gifts (vv. 7-8)
- ✓ TEACHING Gifts (vv. 7-8)

4. How to Discover Your Spiritual Gift(s)

1. Essential ASPECTS of Spiritual Gifts

- What spiritual gifts ARE NOT
 - ✓ *Spiritual gifts are not a place of service* — it is not the ability or the place where that ability is exercised (e.g., “he has a real gift for working in third world countries”).
 - ✓ *Spiritual gifts are not an age group ministry* — e.g., “she’s gifted with junior highers...” Every age group needs the exercise of all the gifts: evangelist, teacher, helps, administration, faith...
 - ✓ *Spiritual gifts are not a specialized ministry* — e.g., “he has a real gift for small groups.”
 - ✓ *Spiritual gifts are not a natural talent*. There may be a relationship, but not necessarily. A university professor may be gifted to teach microbiology, but she may not be able to unfold the rich treasures of Scripture, and if so, she would be a teacher without the spiritual gift of teaching.
- What spiritual gifts ARE
 - ✓ *Spiritual gifts are unique abilities given to the believer by God for the purpose of accomplishing spiritual service for others* (1 Cor. 12:11).
 - ✓ *Spiritual gifts may also be the gifts of gifted people given to the church* for the equipping of the church (Eph. 4:11-13).
 - ✓ *Spiritual gifts are marked by unique gifting or effectiveness when that gift is exercised*. E.g., all of us can help others with physical needs — cleaning the home of elderly person; but the one who has the spiritual gifts of mercy/helps doesn’t see it as an inconvenience and always does it with joy (v. 8).
 - ✓ From the *four lists of gifts* (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; 1 Pt. 4), at least 18 gifts have been identified, though the lists are likely *representative and not exhaustive*: apostleship, prophesying, discerning of spirits, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, miracles, healings, tongues, interpretation of tongues, faith, teaching, helps, administration, exhortation, giving, mercy, evangelism, pastor-teacher.
- What the ORIGIN of spiritual gifts is
 - ✓ *Spiritual gifts are given by God to believers*. God, through the Holy Spirit gives the gifts (1 Cor. 12:6-7). Notice how often Paul says that the gifts come **by** and **through** the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8-9). It is the Spirit who wills and determines and distributes the gifts according to His purposes (**1 Cor. 12:11, 18**). And those gifts are a gift of God’s grace — the right gift for the right person (Rom. 12:6). So no believer can manufacture his own gift. And no believer should complain

about or desire a gift he does not have. It is well to pray that the Lord would reveal our giftedness to us and for the maturity of our gifts and for appropriate gifts for the church body (1 Cor. 12:31 — 2 per. pl.), but we do not pray for particular gifts for ourselves (they're already given).

- ✓ *Spiritual gifts are given by God to believers at the time of conversion.* Cf. Rom. 12:6 — ***we have gifts*** = every member of that body was in possession of gifting. And since the Holy Spirit is the giver of these gifts, it seems to be assumed that He arrives with those gifts at the spiritual baptism of the believer (when the believer is united to Christ through salvation, 1 Cor. 12:11, 13).
- ✓ *Every believer has at least one (and sometimes more than one) spiritual gift.* While not stated explicitly, it is suggested (1 Pt. 4:10 — ***manifold grace of God*** could refer to single gifts being used in various ways, or various gifts given to the same individual). And we see examples of multi-gifted people — e.g., Paul, who had gifts of apostleship, evangelist, teacher, *and more?*
- ✓ *No believer has all the gifts* (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:29-30). And because of that, it may be that not every church has all the gifts — or all the gifts in equal proportion — either.
- What we should do if we do not have a particular spiritual gift
 - ✓ *We should cultivate whatever spiritual gift we have (1 Tim. 4:14).* Though we have gifts, those gifts mature and become more effective the more we practice and use them. Possession of the gift does not assume maturity (as the Corinthians proved). So we need to grow in sanctification as we also grow in use of the gifts. Further, while we have gifts at salvation, we still need training and equipping (**Eph. 4:11-12**), which is why even though a man may have the gift of pastor-teacher he is not immediately hired as pastor.
 - ✓ *All the spiritual gifts are responsibilities commanded elsewhere in the NT.* So, for example, even if I don't have the gifts of evangelism or helps, I can still — and should — share the gospel and administer grace when those opportunities arise.

2. Essential ATTITUDES Towards Spiritual Gifts (vv. 3-6a)

- What we do in serving others is an overflow of our TRANSFORMED lives (vv. 1-2) — we can't *really* serve Christ if we don't have a growing relationship with Him.
 - ✓ A focused and ordered life comes from genuine faith in Christ (v. 1, appealing to mercy by confessing sin asking forgiveness), a growing transformation into the likeness of Christ (v. 2).
 - ✓ It is possible to come to church and seek to “work for God” in order to appease conscience or obligate God to save and “bless” us, but without salvation and fellowship (transformation), there is no real service of God.
 - ✓ Some of us may want to serve, but before we serve, we need to make sure we've been saved...
 - ✓ Some of us may want to serve, but before we serve, we need to cultivate fellowship.

"All spiritual ministry flows from the reality of our knowledge of God and our fellowship with Him and His Son." [J. Oswald Sanders, Enjoying Intimacy with God.]

- Don't think too MUCH about your gifts and giftedness (v. 3a)
 - ✓ Paul's words — ***do not think more highly of yourself*** — apply to everyone. They are all-inclusive. Not just for pastors, elders, deacons, disciplers, etc..., but for *every* believer. It's an all-inclusive command because it's a common and all-inclusive temptation to be prideful.
 - ✓ Command is straightforward: if you want to serve in God-glorifying way, don't think highly (or too much) about yourself.
 - Don't inflate your value to others (being above service) or the need of others to serve you.
 - Four times in this section he uses form of word "to think" — as you serve, guard your thoughts about serving and beware of pride!

"A good many are kept out of service of Christ, deprived of the luxury of working for God, because they are trying to do something great. Let us be willing to do little things. And let us remember that nothing is small in which God is the source." [D. L. Moody]

- Don't think too LITTLE about your gifts and giftedness (v. 3b)
 - ✓ When Paul says, ***think so as to have sound judgment***, he means, "Think seriously, soberly, reasonably..." In other words, he is calling the Romans to think accurately about their position and responsibility in the church body. Sound judgment and sound thinking is the kind of thinking that does not say — e.g., if one has the gift of administration — "my abilities preclude me from leading others," but it is the kind of thinking that says, "the Lord has positioned me with certain gifts inside the body of Christ so that I might honor Him by leading them..."
 - ✓ Paul is talking about a false humility that diminishes the real work of God's grace in your life.
 - ✓ God has saved, freed, redeemed, made holy, secured, empowered, gifted *every* believer for service. That's all part of his work of faith. Don't diminish that work! It is *His work* in you, but it is also His work *in you*. Keep both in balance (this is hard!).
 - Pride assumes more prerogatives than the Lord has given us.
 - False humility assumes a lesser role than the Lord has assigned to us.
 - Both diminish the gifting God is working in us through the Holy Spirit.
 - ✓ Imagine your 7-year-old son says, "I want to mow the lawn with you..." He can't handle the mower, but you want to begin training him, so you acquiesce and spend 45-minutes walking straddle-legged over your son, leaving a "kind-of-straight" path. At the end, he says, "we did it!" It's true, he participated, but who really did it? This is akin to the Spirit working His gifts in us.

- Gifts are given DIVERSELY for mutuality and unity, not SUPERIORITY (vv. 4-5)
 - ✓ Notice the emphasis on differences in vv. 4-5 — **many members**, and **all the members**, and **not having the same function**, and **we are many**. In a church body, there are many individuals with many differing kinds of gifting & function. We are **many** (v. 5a) — cf. 1 Cor. 12:14ff. — feet, eyes, hands, members that “seem to be weaker,” and “less presentable parts.”
 - ✓ And while he points at all the diversity in the church body, notice also the emphasis on unity — **we have**, and **one body** (2x), and **in Christ**, and **members of one another**. So while there is diversity, there is also unity. Why does Paul emphasize these two things that seem to be opposed to one another — diversity and unity? He is affirming that God made His family with many children, but with one purpose: unified, mutual ministry (v. 5).
 - ✓ Differing gifts does not mean differing “blessing” from God — it’s meant to meet diverse needs.
 - We are many, but we are also one (not unlike a marriage).
 - We’re one body, married to one groom, having one purpose — to glorify God (11:33ff) by mutually serving one another and meeting one another’s needs.
 - ✓ So these verses answer the question, “Who can serve?”
 - Because we’ve been equipped, *anyone* who is a believer in Christ may serve. We not only *may* serve, but for the health of body, we *must* serve.
 - Anyone can serve, but the intention is not to glorify the servant, but to care for others.
 - Don’t be jealous of another’s gift or function in the body — they are positioned where they are by God; rejoice with them, and serve where you are with all the gracious strength God has given you.

“Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. So they organized a school.

“They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

“The duck was excellent in swimming; in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his web feet to be badly worn, so that he [became] only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that-except the duck.

“The rabbit started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming.

“The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed “Charley horses” from overexertion, and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running.

“The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing classes he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there....

[He was given an F for cheating and diagnosed with ODD — Oppositional-Defiant Disorder.]

“The point of the story is obvious. Like the animals, every person has his own special but limited set of capabilities. Trying to operate outside those capabilities produces frustration, discouragement, guilt feelings, mediocrity, and ultimate defeat. We fulfill our calling when we function according to God’s sovereign design for us.” [MacArthur, Romans 9-16, 161.]

- Spiritual gifts are God’s divine and gracious enabling to meet the needs of OTHERS (v. 6a)
 - ✓ As mentioned previously, when Paul says, **according to the grace given us**, he reminds us that whatever gift we have is a manifestation of God’s grace to us. In fact, that theme of grace is repeated in the other spiritual gift passages: Eph. 4:7; 1 Pt. 4:10, and implied in 1 Cor. 12:7. Do you see your gift as God’s kindness and benevolence to you?
 - ✓ And one reason that it is His grace to you is that it is the means by which you get to serve others. The reason for the gift is to meet the needs of others — your gift is of no value to you until you use it to benefit others. Paul makes this clear in **1 Cor. 12:24-27** — God has put the body together so that as each member uses his/her gifts then every member of the body receives the care they need. For example, the value of exhortation for the exhorter is in seeing God work through him to strengthen a weak brother, and the value of the one who has the gift of showing mercy is that he gives mercy to another (not that he receives it himself).
 - ✓ The differences in gifting are not the arbitrary decisions of “fate” or an uncaring giver, but of God’s grace. Your gift is a **gracious** provision from God who gives what is good for us, and glorifying for Him; don’t fight it, rejoice in it.

3. Three Categories of Spiritual Gifts (vv. 6b-8)

- FOUNDATIONAL Gifts: PROPHECY (v. 6b)
 - ✓ There were a number of gifts that were given to the early church that were given as transitional gifts until the Scriptures were completed that are no longer in operation today. Primarily they are: *apostle*, *prophet*, and the *sign gifts* — tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, and healing. We will dedicate an entire message to that one topic since it is such a significant topic today.
 - ✓ For now, recognize that Paul separates the gift of **prophecy** from the other gifts (v. 6), suggesting it is different from the others (he makes that much more clear in 1 Cor. 12).
 - When the NT talks about **prophecy** and prophets it includes:
 - ... direct revelation from God
 - ... an ability to accurately (100%) predict the future
 - ... “no one can demonstrate that he is a prophet apart from an ability to predict the future...

Any individual who claims to be a prophet merely due to an insight into Scripture is making an erroneous claim.” [Thomas Edgar]

- The prophecy given must be ***according to the proportion of his faith***. I love the NASB, but this is a poor translation (NIV and ESV have ***your*** and ***our***, which are also unhelpful). Literally, it is ***the faith***. The article ***the*** can be translated as “his,” but it’s probably best to take it most simply here: ***the faith***. That is, if one is going to prophesy, it cannot deviate in any way from the standard of faith that is revealed in Scripture. It must be consistent with what we already know about God, Christ, the Spirit, salvation, the church, etc.

- SERVING Gifts (vv. 7-8)

- ✓ Here Paul identifies four serving gifts — ***serving*** (the word from which we get “deacon”), ***giving***, ***leading***, and ***showing mercy***. Other serving gifts are: faith, discernment, and pastor/teacher.
- ✓ Many times people will assume something like, “Well I know I don’t have a teaching/speaking gift and I don’t know what else I could have so it must be helps...” as if serving others and being merciful to those in need is secondary — a “consolation prize.” One writer says, “This gift is not to be minimized. These persons are as significant in a local church as linemen are to a football squad.” [McRae]

- SPEAKING Gifts (vv. 7-8)

- ✓ Here Paul identifies two speaking gifts — ***teaching***, ***exhortation***. Other speaking gifts are word of faith/wisdom, evangelism, pastor/teacher.
- ✓ The distinction between teaching and exhortation is that in teaching the teacher transmits knowledge while the exhorter stimulates his hearers to action. The exhorter confronts those who are wayward and walks alongside those who are weak and hurting and helps them the first to resume his walk with Christ and the second to continue in his walk with Christ.
- ✓ That there are both speaking and serving gifts tells us that we need our minds to be renewed and we also need help in tangible ways.

4. How to Discover Your Spiritual Gift(s)

- We will talk more of this next time.
- For now, recognize that discovering the identity of your gift is not nearly as important as practicing obedience when commanded; virtually all the “gifts” are commanded elsewhere of all believers:

- **service** — Gal. 5:13 *“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **serve one another.**”*
- **teaching** — 2 Tim. 2:2 *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, **entrust** these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*
- **exhortation** — Heb. 10:24-25 *and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging** one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.*
- **giving** — 2 Cor. 8:1-4
- **leading** — Titus 3:8, 14 *This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to **engage** in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men....And let our people also learn to **engage** in good deeds to meet pressing needs, that they may not be unfruitful.*
- **showing mercy** — Matt. 5:7 *“Blessed are the **merciful**, for they shall receive mercy.”*

- And since that’s true, just be about the business of being obedient as you have opportunity.

CONCLUSION:

Probably the Christmas my father most anticipated giving me a gift was when I was 11 years old. I was excited for the day, but in retrospect, not as excited as him. He and mom picked the gift they thought was perfect for my interests but when I opened it, all they received was an obligatory, “Oh. That’s nice. Thank you.” It was a mechanical set — little bars and wheels and pulleys and screws and nuts that you use to assemble a variety of kinds of structures. Knowing that I was showing some interest in taking some things apart and putting them back together, they figured it was perfect. It wasn’t. Apart from the obligatory play day on Christmas, I’m not sure I ever used that gift again. It’s still essentially in brand new condition — 40 years after that Christmas.

Sometimes believers view the gifts they receive from the Lord in the same way: “I don’t know what it is,” or “I want something else,” or “I don’t want to use this gift,” so the gifts of God that are given for the building up of the body go unused or undeveloped.

Not only do we have the Spirit of God indwelling us, but the Spirit of God has been given to equip us and produce unique gifts in and through us. It is not only a responsibility to use those gifts, but also a great joy and one of the fundamental ways that believers honor and glorify God.