

Different Gifts - Part 1

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[0 : 00] But there's no doubt that the world that we live in, the world we inhabit, can sometimes be a scary place, can be lonely, and it can be confusing.

Not always, not all the time, but if we look up and if we look around us or if we go through our own lives and our experiences, that can certainly be the case.

And what people look for, I think generally speaking, in that confusion or darkness or sadness or scare, scary reality or loneliness, is they look for experiences and for life that contradicts that, that shows or counteracts that.

They look for love, for security, and for beauty, in whatever context, in whatever way that can be found. And these things are great.

These things are all good. And all our neighbours are looking for these things, and our friends and our colleagues. And that's what life's about. Some will do it intentionally, some will kind of be rather unintentional and thoughtless about it, but nonetheless, I think, that is what people, in whatever way they're looking, they're looking for these things, love and security and beauty and maybe many other things that counteract some of the darker aspects of the world in which we live.

[1 : 24] And all these things are good, but they're not enough for us. As people, we are complex and deep, and we search for something more.

We need something more because we are created in God's image, and we need relationship with Him. And so we come to worship today as believers, as Christians, if we're all Christians here, if you're not a Christian, it's brilliant that you're here, and we're delighted that you're here, and we hope that you'll be challenged by God's Word and by some of the things that we have done today.

Be happy to speak with you afterwards. But as believers, we come together and worship because in Christ, we are acknowledging we have something better.

We have something great. And I know, I know my sermons have that effect on people, but she's a woman, a young woman of great wisdom, great insight.

But in Christ, we have something greater and something more glorious, and we've been transformed and are being transformed as Christians by His grace and by His goodness.

[2 : 40] And the short time that He gives us here, I know it might not seem that for you younger people who are here, but as we get older, we recognize the shortness of time, and none of us are guaranteed, of course, time.

He calls us to plunge wholeheartedly into knowing Him, to knowing all about Him, to know about His grace in our lives, and to know about His gifts that He gives to us, and to know what it means to live life with Him and for Him.

And if you're anything like me, which maybe I hope you're not, but if you're anything like me, it may be that your greatest struggle is that you have a small God and a big me.

I think to a greater or lesser degree, that's the challenge in the battle we all have. However, it reveals itself, small God, big me. And what the Bible looks for, what Christ looks for in our lives, what the Holy Spirit seeks to do in our lives, is to enable us to be transformed and continue to be transformed, to change that so that we find ourselves having a big God and that we find ourselves in the right relationship with Him and in the right perspective.

Not thinking too highly of ourselves, but with sober judgment as we saw last week when we looked at it. And I think the doxology at the end of chapter 11 is really helpful for us because it's at the end of that great section, tough section, versus chapters 11-13, which tells us all kinds of things about God and about ourselves and about salvation and about His amazing reality.

[4 : 21] But then Paul comes to this place where he's just kind of speechless. He doesn't really know how to respond because it's so incredible and so the revelation that he's been given, it's a bit like the revelation of John at the end of the Bible where John is kind of like just weakened.

He doesn't, he can't even sit up because it's just so incredible what he's been, what's been revealed to him about God. You know, Paul just sees the depth of the riches and the knowledge and the wisdom, you know, who can ever repay God, who can be like God, who can even equate themselves with God that we ever can repay Him for who He is.

And then of course he goes on, as we saw in the first week, to summarise that whole section by talking about God's mercy. It's all about His mercy. It's all about His grace.

It's all about what we don't deserve and what yet He pours out into our hearts and lives as believers. So the doxology is really an expression of that mercy of God.

God's love poured out. And you know, maybe if you're not a Christian here today and many of our friends are not Christians in their lives, yet they've received astonishing gifts from God.

[5 : 41] Even the gift of intelligent rejection of Him comes from Him, the ability to argue against Him, their atheism, the patience that He gives them to express their mind in this disordered way is a recognition of His common grace, the natural life, the breath, the relationships, the taste, the talents, the comforts, all of these things that we saw people crave in the darkness and the confusion of life are gifts from God.

And that is a reality of His patience with us. But as believers, believers we are recipients of His remarkable grace, of the revelation of His character that we've come to accept and believe by faith, the amazing truth of the triune divinity, that remarkable and paradoxical truth of one God, three persons, divine society and yet a society that, speaking reverently, ripped apart by Jesus becoming flesh, coming down into our experience to pay the price that we can never pay to be right with God, to deal with the sins that we can never deal with, to overcome the death that we can never overcome and to do that freely and fully, to expose and forgive our shame.

Shame is the unspoken paralysis of so many, isn't it? The shame that they have, that they feel they are unable to deal with and yet God in Christ takes and forgives and redeems and changes for us as we come to Him.

And so we are Christians who are constantly asked to remind ourselves of the avalanche of gifts that He gives us as believers, and we fight against small God, big me.

And we want to see big God with all His gifts, His forgiveness, subsumed in His remarkable grace of life and forgiveness that He bestows on us, the acceptance, the belonging, the empowerment, the spiritual life, the hope, not just for now but for eternity.

[8 : 05] All of these things, and He owes us nothing. You know, Paul recognizes that in verse 35 of the Dock's Allege, and he says, who has given gifts to him that he might be repaid, you know, he owes us nothing.

And yet we can never repay him for his generosity and for his goodness. No, and the greatest gift, of course, is Himself.

He gives us Himself. God couldn't give us any more. He couldn't. You know, you can't give any more than yourself. And this divine, perfect, eternal being gives Himself by being our substitute, becoming flesh like us, dying and rising again, and in salvation, gives us Himself in the person of the Spirit.

So that's really what this section is, the introduction to this section and to this whole area of spiritual gifts. And yet his greatest gift, I think, is only the beginning, and again, I'm speaking respectfully here and I don't mean to suggest anything other than the absolute centrality of the cross.

But we often stop at the cross. We stop there and think that's it. That's all we need to consider. Now, I know you can talk about being in danger of this ground.

[9 : 33] And of course, for our salvation, that's where we must go, we must bow our knees at the foot of the cross. But sometimes we pay lip service to the resurrection and only briefly acknowledge Pentecost.

And we leave our salvation at the cross is what I'm trying to say. We rest on that maybe a conversion experience from many years ago and think, well, that's it all done.

Well, I keep the Christ at the cross and that's me. But he asks us to take the living truth of a living. He's not dead. He died on the cross, but he gave himself to death, but he rose again on the third day because he wants us to recognize that it is not just that we are transformed by what he has done, but he is transforming us by his living power and by the gifts that he gives us.

So salvation is his carousal, is his grace to us. The gift, we can't earn it. He gives us it freely. But our life in him, the gifts he gives us to live our lives for him are the carousal matter, the gifts of his grace that he asks us to live and use in his service and for his glory.

So I'm looking briefly at the kind of concept of spiritual gifts this morning as the foundation for this section. Next week we'll look at the individual gifts that are mentioned, as I said.

[10 : 59] So the gifts that he gives us in Scripture, he speaks about in Scripture, are there in our lives and for our lives to promote godly generosity.

That's what he wants us to be. He wants us to be godly and generous like he is. And the gifts he gives us are for that purpose. The Holy Spirit is to transform us as unique people.

You're all unique. There's nobody the same here. You're all unique. You're all individual, and God has saved you as Christians in an individual way. And he gives you gifts.

He gifts you what you need to become an image bearer of him. And he wants us to know that generosity of love that he alone can give that's marked by purity, by selflessness, and by gratitude.

And we see it in Christ the man. That is revealed in Christ, and we see his unbelievable love and devotion to his Father. Father not my will, but yours be done.

[12 : 01] Humble himself, small Christ, big Father, in his meditorial role. And his relentless commitment to rebellious, selfish, hopeless people to redeem and change them forever.

And we bear that image. We can't be saviours. We can't be messiahs. We can't go to the cross. We can't be resurrected in our own strength.

But we are called to be transformed into the image of the God who has made us in each of our own unique lives and characters.

That's what the spiritual gifts are all about. And I think we need to think about the Father more in that way.

We can picture an idyllic scene. I hope you don't think it's too candy flossish. But loving parents, part of a secure and joyful family on Christmas morning, and the children wait to receive their gifts.

[13 : 06] Individually wrapped with a child's name on it from smiling parents who love them, opened up a gift that, in that ideal world, really matches them and is good for them and matches their personality and what they feel they need in their lives.

And when they all open up their gifts, they all intermingle and share them. Okay, that's when it becomes unrealistic. That's where nobody does because no, no, the kids never want to play with, they never want to share their gifts with anyone else.

Sinful reality comes in here. And I know it's an imperfect picture. But we need to think a little bit more about the God who's like our Father who's like that with us, who gifts us in our lives, characteristics and abilities that are unique to us in the way that they're expressed and in the way they're worked out, that we need to make us more like Him.

That's what He does through the Holy Spirit. And all of us have that. Every single one of us, as believers, are gifted not just with grace, not just with salvation, but with the abilities to live out our lives, to meet the needs that we have in our lives to serve and glorify Him for the good of His people which He'll come on to speak about.

So what about these gifts from God and their characteristics? So the broad strokes today, next week we'll look at the individual gifts and we know that there's a list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and also in Ephesians 4.

[14 : 43] That's where the gifts are listed. It's not an exhaustive list. There's lots of gifts of the Spirit of God that are not specifically listed in Scripture, but these are the main ones.

But what can we say about these spiritual gifts that God's give to individual Christians in the church? To you, if you're a Christian today, in the context of belonging to a church family.

Well, very simply. Basically they're given to every believer, every single believer comes to Christ and is gifted not just with salvation, but with spiritual gifts that enable them to live out their lives.

Verse 6 of chapter 12 says that having gifts, we're all members of one another, having gifts that differ according to the grace given to them. And though we are many in one body and each individually, members of one another, all having gifts.

Okay? We recognize that and gifts can be spiritually enhanced or Holy Spirit enhanced natural gifts that you have.

[15 : 49] Maybe you're a good teacher or whatever it happens to be and the Spirit empowers these natural gifts that you're given and they're used for His glory and in His kingdom.

Or it may be radically new gifts that He gives you when you come to faith. But every single one of us has spiritual gifts starting with grace, obviously. What God has given sovereignly to us.

We haven't earned it. We haven't worked for it. We don't deserve it. They are His gifts to us. Remember that important reality. Every one of you are gifted by God and if you looked around you today to the other Christians in the church, you will see that every one of them are also gifted by God.

And sometimes we need to change the paradigm of our thinking and we need to recognize the generosity of God, not only to us but also to other people. And that is hugely significant, given to every believer.

And these gifts that He gives are different. Just like each of us, we're all different here today. We all look different. We all have different experiences. And God works into that uniqueness, the different gifts that He gives to His church, to His people.

[17 : 05] Now, Paul uses the illustration here and in Corinthians and in Ephesians the image of the body with Christ as the head and the parts of the body being different individuals with different gifts.

And that speaks powerfully of unity, absolute unity together, but also diversity that we're different. And that's hugely significant.

It's not about uniformity. It's about unity in Christ, who's our head, and diversity that we have different gifts to make the whole body function properly.

A whole body of arms would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? So we're not to be envious of people or grade people or judge people because they're different from us.

We're not to wish that everyone was like me as a Christian, and we're not to wish that I was like someone else. We can spend our lives doing that, can't we?

[18 : 09] Oh, I wish I had the gifts that that person had. I wish I was spiritually enlightened in the way that they are. Or I'm not, God hasn't given me any gifts.

I'm the poor relation in the Christian church. That is not how we're to think. These are the whispers and the deceptive words of the evil one because we are all significant and we're all important in the kingdom.

So that's the second thing, the gifts are different. The third thing is that His gifts are for the common good. We see that in verse 5. So although we are many, one body and Christ individually, members of one another having different gifts of grace given to us, let us use them.

And of course, in 1 Corinthians 12, 7, it talks about the spiritual gifts being given for the common good. Again hugely important because in our hearts we take gifts and we think, hmm, my precious, my gift.

We want to keep it and we want to grow ourselves and we want to be important because of it. And yet He says that the whole thing about our gifts is that we are givers.

[19 : 20] It's for the common good. It's for the church of Christ. It's for the family that He gives us gifts. What does that mean today? What does it mean for you in the... I was going to say the pew.

In the seat today in church. What is it, what's significant? Well, it is that we are given gifts by God to help know Jesus better and also to reorder our hearts and our loves so that we are open both to be givers of grace and receivers of grace.

Now that's very important. And that's one of the things I want to stress today because as a preacher I'm very guilty and I ask for your forgiveness for this.

We're preaching all the time about our responsibility to serve, to go, to have a serving heart, to serve others. And that's all great.

That's all very important. Sometimes I think it becomes a bit guilt ridden in the wrong way.

[20 : 22] Drive people by guilt. So many things to do. Who's going to serve, blah, blah, blah. And it can become very guilt inducing. Grace is hugely significant.

But can I remind you also in the Christian community, you have to be open to being served. You have to be open to receiving the giftings of other people to enable you to live your Christian life.

It's not just about giving. It's about receiving. It's not just about coming into a place, I'm going to transform it all with my gifts and my abilities. It's humbly saying, I come here because I need you.

I need my fellow Christian to encourage, to build, to teach, to bring me closer to Jesus. And so we have this important reality that gifts are not just about giving, that the church is not just about serving.

It's not just about putting out. It's not just about being expended. It's about receiving. It's about being built up. It's about being encouraged and nourished and loved and forgiven, forgiving and forgiven.

[21 : 30] That's what it's about. That's why it's not a consumerist thing. That's why it's not here. We never strive just to be come along to the Sunday service and boom, that's it. It's much more than that.

We're a community of people together. And we're the people who use our gifts for one another and receive the gifts of others for us. And that is a hugely important aspect of recognizing that our gifts are for the common good.

The nature of God, Jesus Christ, He received water from the woman at the well. Her gift to Him humbled Himself to that degree.

And we are to accept God's promises and the grace of others for ourselves in whatever form it takes.

His grace and His gifts of grace and the Holy Spirit comes laden into our lives. And He wants us to take these gifts and see our lives turned upside down for Him so that when we sit together in church shoulder to shoulder, it's saying something about our dependence on one another, that our gifts are at each other's disposal and that we are here to serve and be served together.

[22 : 52] I think so. It doesn't happen so much now, but sometimes we used to preach in different places. And I think sometimes, and this is maybe just a broad and maybe brutal generalization, but sometimes you could tell a little bit.

If there was 20 people in church, in a church that held 1200 and they were all dotted about, nobody was ever close to one another. Maybe it had been the family seat for 100 years and maybe it was fine.

But sometimes I think our body language can maybe speak into our separation from one another. We're called to use the gifts that God has given us to edify the church.

Ephesians speaks about that because the default battle we have, the default battle I have, maybe you don't, but I'm sure you do if you're honest, at one level is selfishness.

I don't want to be needy and I don't want to be dependent on others, not even God's grace and certainly not the fallen and failed and fragile Christian church.

[23 : 59] I don't really need to be leaning against Christians who fail me or who need me because they're a pain in the neck and they should just be cut loose.

It's not the language of grace. It's not the language of the cross. It's not the language of Jesus Christ.

And very often in churches we feel, I'm not receiving anything. No one cares about me or serves me. No one's gifts are being used to enhance or build up my life.

That's never a great thing. I'm not excusing that in the slightest. But you're not a victim. You're not called to be a victim in the church. You're called to say, well, if no one will serve me, that's just okay and I'll keep giving and I'll keep serving because God will not stop giving and will not stop fueling me and enabling me to serve.

And by doing so, I hope others will change. His gifts are for the common good. We're nearly there. His gifts fit broadly into two categories, we'll maybe say a bit more with these next week.

[25 : 11] But first Peter 4 verse 11 maybe helps explain that too, as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks as one who speaks the oracle of God. Whoever serves as one who serves by the strength of God's supplies. And that's really just a summary of all the spiritual gifts that they're split into two real categories, speaking and serving.

Or I prefer maybe word and working, word gifts and working gifts. And they're not precisely divided or separated because they all inter-merge a little bit.

But we'll look at the details of the list here in Romans next week. The word would be categorized by things like the apostles, prophecy, teaching, encouraging, evangelism, wisdom, tongues, discerning spirits.

And work would be things like mercy, giving, faith, hospitality, healings, miracles and so on. All the gifts that he gives us are given to help us know and serve Christ better together.

[26 : 21] It's interesting, we often associate I think God's spiritual gifts with experiences and relationships, but yet understanding, as we've seen in the previous verses that we've looked at, is a huge part of love and a huge part of understanding the transformation that God is working in our lives.

Renewing our minds, being taught, learning is absolutely vital. So we might see that next week that these gifts are hugely significant and hugely important in the church because it's about transforming our minds so that our bodies and our lives are equipped to love other people, love God and love other people.

And as his body, we partner with God in these things. Never to use our gifts to say, look at me, or with false humility to say, oh, don't look at me, I have nothing to offer.

Who do that sometimes, don't we? Oh, I've got nothing to offer the church. I've got nothing to offer fellow Christians. God hasn't gifted me with anything. Not so.

Not so. I guarantee, as much as I'm able to guarantee, that we will all be surprised by who is closest to Christ on the throne in heaven, those who are nearest to Him.

[27 : 51] It will not be the big shots in the Christian church. It will not be the ones that allegedly, I think, have all the gifts that are associated with greatness.

Our Christ emptied Himself and He was a nobody. And He died as a nobody. In the eyes of the world, and those around Him, even His friends deserted Him, apart from a few faithful women, and John.

And yet He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. So we use our gifts to learn more about the servant king and to humbly serve Him with what He's given us.

So His gifts fall into two categories. And then briefly, how do we know what our gifts are? Well, I think we know what our gifts are with sober reflection, as we looked at last week in verse 3.

We need to think of ourselves, not too highly, but not too low, but in sober reflection in the light of God's mercy and His grace and His sovereign giftings to us.

[28 : 57] We trust and we believe that He does what's right. We look at His Lordship over the natural gifts we've had as we've grown up, and we commit them to the Lord to use them, to transform them so that we're living for His glory, and that we're using them for His glory in the church.

Maybe how you respond to need or the things that burden you, the things that you're good at. These are the kind of things that might help you discern what your gifts are that God gives you and that He will use uniquely in your own life and your way.

And the best way of discerning them is just by using them. Just use whatever gifts you have in the church and serve, and God will show you where your gifts are, and others will, it will become clear to others, and they will confirm these things to you as well.

But whatever we do use them, you know, that parable of the talents that Jesus tells, very sobering. One guy just buried all his talents because he had a wrong perception of his Master.

Grace will always act. Grace will always take the gifts that God has given in salvation and the spiritual gifts, and it will use them.

[30 : 20] It's gratitude, isn't it? It's that whole thing again. It's grace, what He gives us. The same root word is gratitude is how we serve Him. And next week we're going to look at the way we use these gifts in terms of our attitudes, and it's really exciting.

And it's really transforming because we're not to kind of drag our feet and grumble about getting, well, I suppose I better because it's right. It's a whole different attitude.

But as we close, let's remember, let's remember the greatest gift. Let's remember the greatest gift. It subsumes them all.

First Corinthians 13, the passages read, misunderstood, ignored, great chapter that expresses the characteristics of love, 1 Corinthians 13, and it says, earnestly desire at the beginning of that, the greatest gift.

And that is His love, His grace, His salvation. And His grace is to be the flavor of everything that we do.

[31 : 27] It's to be the motivation and the description and the character and the look of everything in all our service, in what we humbly receive from others and what we humbly use to serve others.

It's the most excellent way. It's the Via Dolorosa. It's the way of suffering. It's the way of the cross.

It's the way of emptying ourselves of our ambitions and our self-centeredness and knowing Christ's redeeming love in our hearts and the fullness of life that He promises to us.

And that, I guess, is the big question for all of us. Have we received the greatest gift? And if we have, how are we allowing His grace to transform our lives, our hearts, and our understanding of what it means to belong to His body, the church?

Let's pray. Father God, we ask that You would help us to know and understand You better, that we would not discuss or think about these spiritual gifts in a theoretical way or in a theologically, I know better, the new way, but that we would be humble as we come to them, that we would recognize we all have gifts, that we're all called to use these gifts and to receive the service of others in our lives.

[33 : 02] We need one another in this Christian life. We're called, if we are to be effective as the body of Christ, to be coordinated and united and helping one another in the battle that is the Christian life, with Christ as our head and with the Holy Spirit, pumping life into our spiritual veins.

So help us, forgive us when we have small God, big me, and enable us by grace through renewing of our minds and the offering of our bodies as living sacrifices to be transformed to be having a right understanding of ourselves in the light of a big God.

Amen.