

Different Gifts - Part 2

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[0 : 0 0] If you turn to Romans chapter 12, if you have a Bible or it might come up on the screens as well, Romans chapter 12, and this is the second week we're looking at verses 6 to 8.

We looked at it last week and we're going to look at it again this week. And so I'm just going to read it again. It's part of a series we've been doing in the summer just on this chapter alone, Romans chapter 12.

And we have these words in verse 6, having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them if prophecy and proportion to our faith.

If service in our serving, the one who teaches and is teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

Okay, to the people who were here last week, and I just say, I wonder what your memory is like, I wonder if you can remember anything that I said from last week, probably not, that's okay, I'm sure some of it might come back to you.

[1 : 0 5] And if you weren't here last week, then this will all be fresh and you'll not hear someone repeating themselves as they did after preaching on it last week.

But I hope that each time we meet together that it's important that we pray about it and we pray that we get encouraged and built up and that we grow in our faith as we look at God's Word and as we think about God's Word for our lives.

So last week, very briefly, I'll just skim over the points that we looked at last week because we looked at these verses about spiritual gifts in the church, gifts that God gives us in a kind of more general way.

We spoke about the generosity of God who gives these gifts, including our salvation, including the fact that it's not something we earn, we can't make ourselves right with God that He gifts it to us, it's something we can ask for and He will take us and redeem us and give us new life.

So the generosity of God, the gift giver, not just in salvation but in the gifts we need for life. We saw that every Christian has spiritual gifts, every one of us.

[2 : 1 3] Everyone is the gift of grace and all of us have different gifts that God gifts us, sometimes uniquely when we become Christians, sometimes it's just a higher intensification as it were of natural talents that we already have.

The gifts are there to serve and to be served. The gifts are there for us to serve one another. They're not for getting big heads and being self-important, they're about serving other people and serving other people in the church family.

And that we are to be people who are willing to be served by others with their gifts. We're not to be proud and standoffish and, you know, I can't be bothered with others.

It's a case of being willing, as Louise was talking about, that we all need one another and we all need that reality of support and strength and encouragement, whatever it might be. And basically we saw that these spiritual gifts split roughly into two groups, word, gifts, speaking, teaching, all that kind of stuff, and work gifts.

Word and work is what I call the speaking gifts or serving gifts. And the two are, they do the fusing together at one level, but as a general context that's what we have.

[3 : 33] So that's a very quick summary of last week. We're just going to look at this chapter a little bit more, this section a little bit more today. First of all, can you remember also that this letter that Paul writes under the inspiration of God was to a great wee church in Rome, the capital city of the empire.

So remember it was written to a real church, a great little church, and it was full of real people. Right at the beginning of the New Testament, people who had become Christians in the city of Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire.

We had a great wee church in Edinburgh, in the capital of Scotland. And this living word of God, this inspired message of God is still as relevant and still as important.

Ordinary people. Ordinary people heard it then. Ordinary people hear it now. It's not for special people, it's not for weird people, it's just for people who have come to faith in Jesus. In Rome, 2,000 years ago, and now in Edinburgh as a church family ourselves.

The message is just the same for us, and it's for real people who were going into real situations in real life. Nothing theoretical, nothing just unimportant or insignificant.

[4 : 48] And remember if you've been here throughout the series, I've said it every single week, so you'll be tired of me saying it. But the first 11 chapters of Rome, the letter that Paul writes to the church is all about deep, meaningful theology, truth about God.

It's about who we are, about God being our Creator, about us rebelling against God, and about Jesus coming and saving us, and about real theological truth.

And then from chapter 12, he says, therefore, let's live out our lives because of what God has done. So the truth affects how we live, and that is no different then from it is now.

And he's applying that truth to our hearts and to our lives in these sections. And remember all of that, first 11, if I asked you a question, you wouldn't answer because it's a Scottish Presbyterian church.

But if I threw out the question about what's the summary of the first 11 chapters, you would all reply shouting back if you've been here over the weeks, God's mercy.

[5 : 52] Because that's what it's all about, chapter 12 begins that way, in the light of God's mercy. That's the summary of all the theology, of all the truth that is written in the Bible.

It's God's incredible mercy. It's incredible love for us, even though we didn't deserve it and we often turn our backs in it and we stick our fingers up at God. It's His incredible mercy.

And I don't want you to forget that because I don't want myself to forget that, that it's not ordinary, it's not unremarkable. It's not just to shrug our shoulders at that.

The love of Jesus Christ, the mercy of God is at the heart of everything we know about the living God and Jesus Christ. And we want to plead with Jesus on a daily basis to move this truth that we know from our heads into our hearts.

That's what we desperately need. This truth that is about God's incredible love for us, moving from a theological reality into a personal life-transforming reality, because He wants us to be new people from the inside out as we take His love and grace and apply it into our own hearts.

[7 : 10] That's why God gave us the truth. God's mercy is... That's what's revealed. His mercy of everything in all the battles, in all the struggles, in all the darkness, in all the difficulties, in all the questions, in all the doubts, in all the fears.

He wants us to know that His truth reveals His great mercy and His great mercy is what transforms our hearts into being people who love Him and love one another.

And that's really what this section about the gifts is all about. So I'm going to take a look again briefly at the gifts. And can I say in the first place that these gifts are listed, there are seven gifts listed here, spiritual gifts are listed here.

They reflect characteristics that should be in every one of us as Christians. If we are a Christian here today, if you're not a Christian here today, I'm delighted you're here. It's excellent that you're here.

And I hope that the love of God and the truth of God's mercy and grace will be something that will challenge and touch your heart today. And that somehow you'll think, well, I didn't really expect this, but God obviously had me here for a reason, and that you'll be touched by His love and grace in some way that maybe I can't explain.

[8 : 20] But for us, if we're Christians, then these gifts should reflect characteristics that are in every believer. Every person in Christ as the Holy Spirit living in their hearts, we're made alive by the Holy Spirit.

And we're all commanded to... and we all have these gifts in our lives. We're commanded to show these characteristics. We should all desire to and should indeed prophesy.

I'll explain that one in a minute. We all serve. We all teach. We all encourage one another. We contribute to the needs of one another.

We all lead. We all show mercy. These are the seven gifts that are listed here. We all do these things. You know, it's not that you can look at this and say, oh, okay, I don't have the gift of showing mercy.

I'll just be a merciless swine. It's not like that, is it? It's not that some of us can show mercy and others can't. We're all required to show mercy. Right throughout God's Word, we're required to show mercy.

[9 : 26] We're all required to contribute to the needs. We're all required, and we all do teach one another, and we all serve one another. So these gifts are characteristics of us all.

But some of us have these gifts very specifically in a more heightened and in a more gifted way from God.

We have specific gifts and abilities that maybe are natural gifts, but the Holy Spirit comes in and heightens them specifically as we are called.

You know, it's a bit like in life, we all sing. But not all of us can get up the front and sing because we don't necessarily all of the specific gift of being able to do that.

We can all to a greater degree maybe run a little bit, run for a bus. But not all of us can break world records of running.

[10 : 22] I think we can all draw a stickman if we're asked to, just draw a stickman. But not all of us can bring a canvas to life in a life-changing way for people who look at it.

So you see the difference? That we can all do these things, and we're all called as Christians to do these specific characteristics. But some people have these characteristics in a more gifted way, in a more special way that is used by God in the church.

And that is really what we're looking at today. The gifts are listed here, seven gifts, and I would say they're split into word and work and I think that helps us maybe to understand speaking or serving, however you want to designate it.

So the word gifts here are prophecy and teaching and encouraging, which are listed in these two verses. And the word works, the word...

Sorry, the work gifts, sorry, are serving, contributing, leading, showing mercy. So there's seven split three and four ways, roughly.

[11 : 31] And some of them are self-explanatory, I'm not going to spend much time on some of them. But I want to spend a little bit of time on prophecy, because there's been lots written about prophecy, if your gift, let's use them, if in prophecy, in proportion to our faith.

Now obviously there's a lot of disagreement about what it means, prophecy here. But what I would argue is that it's not the same as the prophetic office, like the Old Testament prophets and even the New Testament apostles who had prophetic gifting, who they breathed out, they breathed out God's word by the Holy Spirit's inspiration and gave us infallible truth, truth that has become what we call the Bible, what has become God's revelation, God's word to us.

So that's completed, that finish when the Bible was completed and the Bible that we have and that the church has recognized is that. So that in terms of prophecy, there's no new prophetic word from God that is infallible for the whole church.

You know, there's no gospel according to Archie anymore. You know, there's no new message given that could be added to the Bible, because the Bible is complete. And we have the message from beginning to end, and we have the picture of creation, fall, redemption, glorification.

And it's all there for us, and that is no longer a role and a gift, a spiritual gift for anyone. Now, there may have been a slightly different role in the New Testament among the New Testament church before the, what we call the canon of Scripture was completed in terms of prophecy.

[13 : 14] But for us today, I think the role of prophecy as it's spoken of here is more akin to sometimes preaching, but I think it's more than that.

But we see that, and we looked at it when we were looking at 1 John last semester, that the early New Testament churches were plagued by false prophets by people who came and spoke a message that was different from the apostolic truth, infallible truth that was given through the apostles.

Whatever in the New Testament is the message given to test the message of the apostles. It was declared it was given. It was to be accepted as God's word.

But very often the apostles spoke about testing the spirits, testing those who came and preached, whether they were preaching in line with what had been revealed.

And so already there was that clear distinction. Just as the spirits was in the context of false prophecy in 1 John 4, we looked at that. But this is something that is to be done in proportion, it says, in proportion to our faith.

[14 : 25] That could be translated according to the measure of the faith. So we take it, we reveal God's word, we speak about God in a prophetic way.

And the Bible is the measure, the faith that is spoken of is given the definite article, the faith that has already been revealed. So it's to be in line with that. So it's to be in line with God's already revealed truth.

So what really does it mean for us today here in St. Louis or in Scotland in the 21st century and in any Christian church? Well, I would argue that it's the gift of taking God's word and applying it in a spirit anointed way to a particular situation, maybe a spiritual insight.

And certainly that should include what preaching does. Preaching should do that. It's not exclusively what preaching is, but it certainly should do that. It might be speaking a God-given warning.

It might be something that's been given in a dream that the person feels under God's spirit and God's grace is relevant for another person and is significant and important to be shared.

[15 : 34] It could be applying Scripture in a miraculous way to a person's life where you might say, well, look, God brought you very, very powerfully to my mind when I was reading this verse.

I think He means it especially for you today. I don't know your situation and it may be that person specifically needed that message from the living God.

And there's that recognition that it's taking God's word or taking God's truth and moving our spiritual relationship with God beyond mere intellectual or propositional truth and recognizing that we're in a relationship.

And that sometimes He speaks to us in a way that's good not just for us, but as we share it with other people and we see the importance of that. And I think we should all be doing that.

I think we should all be speaking truth in one another's lives. But I think there's a spec... some people have a special gift of being able to very powerfully apply God's word and apply God's truth or be given a message from God specifically for someone never that would contradict the Bible's revelation and never something that would be divisive or be separatist but would be for the building up and encouraging of other people.

[16 : 52] Now, I think that's why I read from 1 Corinthians 14, 13 and 14 because it's speaking about gifts, isn't it? And he talks there about pursue love, the great chapter, which is... he's speaking about gifts to the early church in Corinth, but I will show you the most excellent way and that is the way of truth.

But then he goes in verse 14, but pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. And I think therefore if it's something that Paul is encouraging the whole church to seek, it's about the ability to take God's word and recognizing the vital truth of God's word that we live it and share it together as believers.

Strange, isn't it? Sometimes as believers it's the last thing we talk about together. It's the last thing we think about together. Well, we get a church over, that's great, and then we can talk about anything else.

And we talk about our lives and we talk about everything but we don't share either our experiences or the truth of God's word together. And that's very important that we do that.

So that's what I think prophecy primarily is about. And then he goes on to speak about teaching. That's fairly clear, isn't it? It's making God's truth clear and understandable. Some people have got a really great gift at doing that.

[18 : 23] That may be different from preaching. Absolutely. It might include preaching sometimes. But some people are brilliant at one-to-one teaching about God and about the truth one-to-one or in small groups or with children or with their peers or with people who are not Christians.

They're great at sharing it. Not everyone is the same, but some have this really special gift of teaching that they use for the good of the church, for the good of the Christian family to teach more about the person and the nature of Jesus.

And I think that kind of links in with encouragement or exhortation as it's spoken of here. It's that whole ability. Louise has got that gift because the word that we have here for exhortation or encouragement is not just a slap in the back, oh, come on, keep it going.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's all right, you'll get there in the end. It's more about counsel, counseling, building up people in the faith, sharing the promises of God, pointing them to Jesus.

Again, it's something we can all do. But some people have got a great gift about it. On the other side, it's so easy to complain, isn't it? So easy to moan at one another.

[19 : 41] It's so easy to knock each other down. We do struggle a lot as Christians not to edge God off the throne and put ourselves back on there.

We like it. We like being on the throne. We like being the judge of everyone else. We love that. It's easier. Makes us feel good about ourselves. We judge other people who we think are worse than us.

But we're called to be encouragers and counselors who point people to Jesus who's on the throne and recognize His rightful place to be there.

So we look to prophecy and teaching and exhortation. That's the kind of word gifts. Then the other four are just serving gifts. Well, one of them is called serving. And it's an incomplete list.

It's just a general, sometimes a general word given for what we do and serving is one of them. Just covers a variety of ways that we help.

[20 : 41] It's the idea of a practical gift, using these gifts to God's glory. Whether it's working in the church office or DIY work or helping practically where people are in need.

Your brothers and sisters who are in need. It's a simple formula. It's just having the ability of looking out and saying, well, I can help and I'd love to.

And those who serve it, they're the behind the scenes giants of the church. The giants are not on the platform. Never.

The giants are never the ones that are well known. The giants of the church are always the servants, the behind the scene giants who serve not for praise, not for glory, not for popularity, not for position or anything like that, but who give quietly in service to God.

And it would include contributing to the needs of others. That's specifically with a financial support. Those who are gifted financially. Now we're all called to give from what we have to the living God because it all comes from Him anyway.

[21 : 51] But this is specifically those who maybe are gifted in ways. We would never, the ways we was talking about the church plants, we would never have been able to build these church plants practically, administratively, humanly speaking without the generosity of people who gave, who are the gift of being able to contribute to the needs of others and who did so wisely.

And there's leadership that's mentioned here. It's the ability, I think in Christ, to have people who will follow you as a leader because you lead with a servant heart, because you're able to share vision and you're able to delegate and you don't care about controlling everything.

You don't want to control everything. You want to leave it up to God to do that, who are forgiven and are forgiven leadership. And then the last one there is showing mercy, that's the gift of working with those who maybe have the deepest needs in our church community and beyond.

Those are vulnerable, those are emotionally broken, they isolated sometimes the socially awkward, the sick, the dying, those with physical or medical conditions that make them dependent, that we serve and show mercy and show love to such.

So these are some of the gifts that are mentioned here. Some of you will have them specifically in a unique way in relation to your character. Some of them we can ask for more, we can ask for these gifts if we need them and if the church needs them.

[23 : 25] But we're all called to show these characteristics to one degree or another in our Christian lives and that's a challenge. And I'm finishing just with this. How do we live together as a Christian community in the church family using these gifts?

Because it can't stress enough the importance of these gifts being taught about in the context of a church family, there's a small church plant in Rome and all the letters were written to small church plants in the New Testament.

And it's what we mentioned last week that all the gifts are given not for ourselves, not for our aggrandizement, not to be big shots, but in order to serve one another.

Because that's the model of Jesus Himself. As we are Spirit dependent, we live our lives willing to, in thankfulness and prayer and dependence, serve one another.

So what do we see about these characteristics because some of them have got ways that are expressed about how to serve them.

[24 : 36] And we recognize that in terms of prophecy and proportion to the faith, in other words it's to be obedient to the Word that's revealed, then it speaks about giving, doing it generously.

And it's one who leads with zeal or with diligence, and then one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness. So there are four amazing ways to live our Christian lives together and individually.

In obedience with generosity, with zeal and with cheerfulness. Isn't that great? The great that we are giving the way that we're to serve as a people together and how we live our lives.

So it's in obedience to the revealed truth. So we're not to go against what God reveals, against His mercy and against His grace. And that's a challenge, isn't it? It's a challenge for us today.

But we're to do so generously. We're to serve with whatever gifts God has given us, I think, generously and not grudgingly. Oh, well, I better drag Him a feat in service because maybe Jesus will accept me.

[25 : 42] It's not about that. It's not about being accepted. We're already accepted because of what He's done. It's out of gratitude. So there should be generosity, not for self-promotion, not for a name, but in a sacrificially generous, open-handed, open-hearted way.

But also zealously, as we're told in terms of leadership, diligently as giving our best. It's not a case we live our lives and then if we've got one percent of energy left at the end of the week, well, that's what we'll give to the Lord.

It's not as an afterthought we serve Him. It's a priority. It's zealously, diligently giving our best, whether it's in leadership as it's applied here or in any other gift.

We're to do it with that diligence and zeal at home or at work, whether you're working in an office or whether you're working in the church or whether you're unemployed or whether you're at home, whatever it is that you're to do what you do, whether it's gainfully employed or serving in different ways, it applies to us all that we're to have that diligence in service.

And last thing, beautifully is doing it cheerfully, acts of mercy with cheerfulness. You know, if you're in deep... If you're a person who's in deep need of the mercy of someone else, particularly vulnerable or particularly struggling, and it might be just on an odd occasion, and it might be more regularly in your life, you don't need morose help.

[27 : 23] You don't need someone to come who's a misery guts and say, I'm here to help you. You don't want that. You don't want help that's miserable. You want cheerful help, cheerful serving, merciful, you know.

You don't want to see, you don't want to show mercy with a growl. That's kind of not mercy, is it?

In the use of our gifts, in the use of who we are, in our mercy, we're to do it cheerfully, not grudgingly with our heart in the right place.

And all of these descriptions of how we serve relate to our hearts. They all relate to our motives.

They relate to what's important to us. And as Christ is important to us, and why can I say that? Because these characteristics of serving reflect the life of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

[28 : 25] We can know that that is how He served. That He served in obedience to His Father. That He served generously of His time and of His energy and of His efforts.

That He did it diligently with zeal, with passion. And He did it cheerfully. Do you think of Jesus as a glum, miserable character? I say, well, it doesn't say in the Bible that Jesus laughed.

Well, big deal. You know, of course He laughed. Of course He celebrated. Of course He did what He did cheerfully. He didn't do it in a morose way.

He did it because He was the Son of God who was coming to be a redeemer. He did it because He was wanting to do it. He did it because He said, not my will but yours be done.

And it reflects the person of Jesus Christ. And we look to Christ and we say, Lord, You did this. And You did it for me. You did it by going all the way to the cross for me.

[29 : 22] Please help me to show these gifts. And help me to use the gifts that You give me in this way, in the kingdom. And through prayer, let's be strengthened.

And not just strengthened ourselves but strengthened for one another and helped to strengthen other people, building one another up. And make that be our desire and our will.

And I think if it was increasingly, and it is increasingly, in the great words of Louis Armstrong, what a wonderful world this would be. And if you want to see a picture of that, look at Romans 16, the last chapter of this book.

It gives you a great picture of a wee church in the big capital city of the empire and how they served one another with God's gifts, women and men together serving.

And Paul names them all. And it's beautiful. Read it if you have time. The last chapter. Let's pray. Father God, we pray that we would see who You are, we would understand who You are, that we would come to know You as Savior and Lord because there is no other hope for us.

[30 : 36] There's no other way. Forgive us when we crawl back onto the throne and when we demand that others serve us in with our wrong attitude and help us to be servants and serve with the gifts You've given us.

And no, when we do that, when we go out, as Paul says here, use them. Use our gifts. And when we do, we find that we too will be more open to being served, to being dependent and to growing.

And that loving, serving, sacrificial, cheerful, zealous, and obedient people may be a beautiful witness to a world that needs to see that.

And people who are our friends and family members, maybe who are not Christians, who seek what they see in us and seek the salvation that Jesus gifts freely to any who come to Him and cry out for His salvation.

May we experience that more and more, we ask in Jesus' precious name. Amen.