

A Gifted Membership Pt.2 Romans 12:6-8

We have been going through this chapter for a little while. And we realize Paul is indicating how we should respond or live in light of the truths in the opening 11 chapters of the Book of Romans. He says that we should live lives that are transformed and that are sacrificial to the glory of God. And then he begins through command and teaching show us what that life looks like. And one of the things is that we are not to think too highly of ourselves. And one of the most blinding sins in our lives is pride. In fact we have to stop and think about pride before we ever see it. And what pride thinks and even feels is that we are different than one another. We do not see our sin or our struggle with sin. I can see your sin, and you need God's grace to change but I do not need it. And the other thing that we are blind to in pride is how much we need one another. We think we are sufficient in and of ourselves. But we need others in order to grow. If we are married we need our spouse whether we think we do or not. Friends need their friends, and we all need the body of Christ in whom we are joined together. God has so designed the church that we are interdependent on one another. Show me a Christian who has nothing to do with the church and I will show you a Christian who is at the very least not growing to be more in the image of Jesus Christ.

And he gives some examples of the gifts and talents that God gives others that we might grow. We saw in verse 6 that these gifts differ from person to person. No one is the exact same as the other person. We are all unique and if we are believers in Christ, our hodgepodge of strengths and weaknesses that make up who we are, is the gift that God had given. He has uniquely constructed, created and made you, and you are what others need. But here is the other aspect: the other members are exactly what you need. He has apportioned as he sees fit, so we are gifted and made as we are by the skill and wisdom of God.

And we looked at three gifts that were necessary for the life of the believer and the growth of the believer. The first was the gift of prophecy. We said during the early years of the church God gave direct revelation to an individual in light that they did not have the finished word of God. They received light not the way that we receive that light today through studying over the Scriptures, but it was directly given. And it was directly given notice first and foremost not as a blessing to them but a blessing to others that they might grow. Another gift was that of serving. The ability to do what is necessary without even being noticed. This is what it means above to live your life as a living sacrifice for the glory of God. It is not about being noticed but about serving others that they might grow in the likeness of Christ.

And thirdly, God gave the gift of teaching. And there is a sense that we are all teaching others. As we live and function, and as we talk and interact with others, in some way or another we are indicating who God is, something about God. We are teaching others. But there is another sense where this is a gift. In fact, this is a gift that is indispensable for every pastor. His calling is to preach and teach the Scriptures, to grow others that they might do the work of ministry to we all come to the full measure of Christ. And we can all look back at our Christian lives and be so thankful for the teachers in our lives that have taught us the things of Christ, helped us see sin, admonish us in areas where we needed to be admonished. And as we recognize that, it

should show us how much we need the consistent teaching of under shepherds if we are to continue to grow in the image of Jesus Christ, how much we need other teachers in the church in our lives. We hear so many voices, but we need to hear these voices that proclaim God's Word.

Let's go on and look at some of the other gifts, and as we see them may God humble our hearts with the need of one of the glorious instruments of grace that he has given us, and that is - one another!

1. We see the gift of exhortation. V.8.

We many times do not look at our words and the impact of our words, even though they are very influential in people's lives. They can hurt or heal. They can cause despair or give hope. They can cause anger or joy. They can discourage or bring delight. They can tear down or build up. God gave words to us as a gift that we might not only know him but train others to know him. And we all know the glory of a word that is timely spoken. And certainly we are thankful for those who have ministered the words of God to us, and helped us see and savour Christ, especially through the struggles in our lives. But the question is what effect are our words having on others? Are individuals in your life being encouraged or discouraged in following Jesus. We might be thankful for others strength and gift of exhortation but it is something that all of us should be involved in.

Now look how this is worded here, "**the one who exhorts, in his exhortation.**" There is both the verb and the noun being used here. And both are indicating what one should do, and also describing the gift or the ability itself. And this is one of these terms that is very broad, so you see this in various translations from the word exhortation to encouragement to counsellor. They are all trying to bring out the meaning. And the Greek term that is being used here is "paraklesis" which is a compound word. It has the word alongside and also to call. And when you put those two words together, it means to be called alongside another. In fact, it is the term that is used to describe our Paraclete - the Holy Spirit of God who is another Comforter that has come to us. So exhortation can be used in the life or another brother and sister as they live in this fallen world, to counsel or admonish or encourage another to keep trusting and following Christ even though they have huge battles in their lives.

We see this ministry in Paul and Barabbas in Acts 14:21-22, "**When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.**" And notice the counsel and encouragement is not "you can do it" or "Great job, well done!" But it directs hearts and lives in the middle of the storm to the God of this Word. Yes, it is tough, but remember God is in control and he told us it would not be easy. We can trust his will is being accomplished. We, through his grace can keep going and trusting him.

Some individuals in the church are skilled at giving that timely word, or taking the Scriptures and applying them to the battles of our lives, so that we have direction and hope and encouragement. And we can look back and see that ministry from others in our lives. But there is a real sense that we are not just to be receiving that instruction

and encouragement but to be giving it. Listen to Hebrews 10:24-25, **“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”** Notice the “let us.” It is so easy to want others to minister to us, but whose life are we willing to enter? Are we seeking to rescuing the hurting, fallen and confused and share the same truths that have been shared with us? What a blessing God has given us in the church of Jesus Christ to have those who exhort and encourage us on this path toward Christ. Praise God that we can be both encouraged and encourage. An encourager not only wants you to succeed but is willing to come alongside and give the necessary help and encouragement. We all need encouragers in order to live for Christ, and we find them in the church, and we are all to seek to cultivate this gift in the lives of others. Praise God for his goodness.

2. The gift of giving. V.8.

This is one of these gifts that believers quickly exclude themselves from. Just haven't been given this gift. Some have but some don't. And we do see that in many of these gifts we are to grow in them. There are some that we cannot share. You might not be gifted in public speaking and teaching, but all of us can grow in serving, or encouraging others, or right here in giving. We live in an age of affluence, and we believe more of the message that life, joy, security and contentment is found in having more things and better things - having the things that money can buy.

This is why the words of Paul seem so strange in Philippians 4:11-12, **“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”** Paul speaks that he has learned to be content with whatever God gave him whether plenty or not. We say many times: I would like to learn how to be content with plenty! But the secret here is to look at all that you have as a gift given by God to make much of Him. If you are not content with what you have now, then if you have more you would not be content. If you do not sacrificially give to the church or others now, you are fooling yourself to think that you will give if you have more. Paul says he has learned to be content. Giving shows where our heart and priority lies.

And there is something beautiful about living a simple life, not having or needing the best or the largest house, or fanciest car or whatever, and having that you might invest in the kingdom of God. And I realize that some seem to have a giving heart and that is from God. It does not mean that they have much but just that they are a cheerful giver. They delight in God and are looking for opportunities to give.

And God has given some gifted individuals to the church, but they exercise their gift not only to meet needs but as our example that this is the new life. How we handle money or our wealth should show the new life in Christ. Paul talks about putting on the new man and how it changes our lives in Ephesians 4:28, **“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”** People who used to take advantage of others, now work hard with their hands, not only to meet their own

needs, but also that they will have in order to bless others and give them a visual demonstration of the gospel of Christ.

So let me ask: how are you using your money? Are you living beyond your means? Do you ever plan to give to the church or do you leave that for others, making an excuse that they should sacrifice but you should not? We have all been on the receiving end of the generosity of others. It might be a meal given or money given or whatever. And it encouraged our hearts to follow Christ. Are you have that ministry in the lives of others for the glory of God? Are we even putting any aside if a need arises in the church or someone else's life. This is a tangible way to use the gifts that God has given us for his glory. This is a tangible way the church is different and cares for one another. We are to be known as givers because God is the great Giver!

3. The gift of leadership. V.8c.

We never think of leadership as a gift, and it might be surprising when we see in this list of spiritual gifts. And at the core of this word is the idea of governing or administration. And leadership certainly is not easy. It is open to criticism and complaints, but those who have this gift manage God's people and lead God's people. They could include elders or pastors, and deacons, but not limited to those offices. And the importance of this gift cannot be overestimated. If we just had a free for all every Sunday then it would not amount to any spiritual benefit. And leadership is not just about leading people but taking them somewhere for their spiritual benefit. And we should be thankful for those who can manage and organize well. They are a gift for our spiritual grow. Without them it would be hard to grow. And here is the amazing thing: God gives a desire to be an overseer or a leader in the church, and you can see that through their character but also through their zeal. They love God and they love God's people. Certainly we do not want unqualified individuals in leadership but if someone does not have a zeal or desire to lead than he should not. Things get done. They are not procrastinating but zealously leading the people of God.

And therefore, if this is recognized as a gift from God that will help us go in the direction that God wants us to go, then we have to realize our responsibility to recognize those who lead and rule over us, and seek to follow them. The writer of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 13:17, "**Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.**" This is the meaning and the outworking of humility. I do not have all the answers and God has given me leaders in the church to shepherd my soul. I have to make it easy for them to lead by following them. If I do not, I am fighting the gift that God has given for my grow.

4. The gift of mercy. V.8d.

This again is one of those attributes that we can see and recognize in others, and at the same time, a character quality that God wants all of us to cultivate in our lives. Mercy is the ability to help one who is in a miserable condition. It is having the resources to come to the aide of others. And it is incredible because believers do not just do acts of mercy but they come with the attitude of cheerfulness and care. They look forward to representing our Lord. They are looking for opportunities to show and

display God's mercy, especially in the household of faith. Of course, this can include doing acts to the poor or needy. But it is also ministering to one another. It could be something simple as making a meal and difficult as forgiving one who has sinned against you. And there is a joy in forgiveness and you take the debt that one owes and you forgive that debt. Why? It is because it displays in a small way the great forgiveness that is found in Christ toward us.

We need to see examples of this in the church of Jesus Christ, so that we can grow in mercy. The church should be known for being merciful, not giving people what they deserve but what they do not deserve. And we do it with cheerfulness as to the Lord! I heard this one person forgive another, and he said, I have to forgive because God commanded, but I really don't want to. The greater the debt against us, the greater the opportunity to display the wonderful redeemer Jesus Christ who paid our debt. There is a cheerfulness in displaying his great mercy shown to sinners like us.

And let me just end with this: it is easy to look at this list of seven gifts that are given to the church to realize that we are not gifted in every way. We are not a finished product. We really do need others. We do really need to recognize that other individuals in the body of Christ are different than us but that is not a determiner but a gift to me that I might grow in the likeness of Christ. But in order to profit from the giftedness of the church you need to be active in the church, faithful to the membership and to the services; placing yourself under the giftedness of others. It is a humbling but such a glorious reality to say that I need others.

But the other thing we need to realize is something we have said in the last couple of weeks. By not being involved in the church of Jesus Christ you are robbing believers what they need in their lives. You might not have any of these attributes in a singular fashion that we have mentioned today, but you have a little of this gift and a little of that gift and ability, so much so that you are different than all. To say that I am not gifted is to not see the obvious. It is not so much a skill that you have but you, with all your strengths and weaknesses that is a gift of Christ. Get to know people. Talk to them before and after the services. Have them over for a meal. God will use you in ways that you never thought he would. Someone once said so wisely, "It is not your ability but your availability that God is looking for. Realize he has made you different from others for a reason, and trust in him.