

## A Gifted Membership Romans 12:6-8

We saw two glorious truths last time we were together and that is that we are all joined to the body of Christ, and we are all part of the universal body of Christ. All of us belong because we have been placed there by none other than Jesus Christ himself. The second thing we saw is although there is a diversity - none of us are the same - there is a unity, and glorious unity of faith in Christ. We have the same belief in Christ as Lord and Saviour. We have the same standing of not guilty and totally righteous in God, but we are different. We have different skills and talents and upbringing but God brings us together in one body. And we realize the outworking of the universal body of Christ where all believers are bound to Christ is the local church. And many are so discouraged when they look at the church, but some times we have to step back and look at the diversity and the glory of what Christ is doing in that diversity, and we have to realize that this is Christ's church and he is building it.

And he continues on in verse 6 and says, **“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them”**, and then he continues on and lists some of the gifts that are given to the church. And there are several observations that we have to make here. One is that these are grace gifts that are given to us by Christ. Look at the phrase “according to the grace given is.” We do not decide who gets what. And if they are grace gifts then they minister grace to others. That should be easy to see. These could be natural abilities that are now sanctified through the Spirit. If you taught others before you were saved then you taught others natural things, but after you got saved you taught individuals about Christ then that is a grace gift. He gave that talent and that ability to share the grace of God with others. These are grace gifts that minister grace for the welfare of God's people. That should be easy to see.

The other thing we see is that they differ. They are not all the same. And even in differing categories of gifts there are difference in people and individuals. People have differing strengths and weaknesses, and those in differing measures which makes them different than others. We are all a hodgepodge of different strengths and weaknesses, abilities and talents that makes us uniquely different from others. We should marvel at God's creative ability. But our problem is that we do not see the creative genius and the grace of God in our lives, and as sinners we want what others want or do not appreciate what others have. We want to serve as others serve, and we might even question the fairness of God in how he has made us or equipped us to used among his people. But God knows what he is doing and has made you with all your peculiarities so that you would be you, and you would be a grace gift for others.

So if we are all different then we can make another observation, and that is one that we made last day. And that is I haven't been given everything that I need to follow Christ and to love Christ but has has given gifts and talents and abilities to others that I need if I am to grow in the grace of Christ. Grow in Christlikeness is truly a community project. I need others. As we come out and participate in services and fellowship with others, there is a humble admission of need in my life, and this is one of the means of grace that God is going to bring the necessary change in my life.

Another observation that leaps from this page is that I not only need others, but others need me. I need to be active. I need to be involved in the life of other believers.

So often one of two things happen. One is that individuals want to be involved in a particular ministry, and if they can't they will not participate. We focus on our ability or our so called gift and if I cannot function in this way, then I will not function. The last gift on this list is mercy. Does God want all of us to be merciful or only those who have a gift of mercy? Some will be more gifted but he expects us all to seek to be merciful and grow in mercy. This list does not exempt us from loving and serving others because we cannot do the things we want. We are to active by servicing others. And that is the second thing we see here is that this is a command. Paul speaking of all our capacities and abilities and the grace given, "**let us use them.**" So often individuals are looking at what the church can give them. They are takers and certainly not givers. They are sponges that soak up all that they can get, and if they get all they can get, some times go on to a different church. God's people and all of God's people are to be givers, and are to be active. We are to be consumed with giving grace to others. We are to use any and all capacities and opportunities that God gives us to be used for God's glory and the welfare of others.

Are you seeking to love others? If some one was to look at the past year of your Christian life and your involvement in the church, what conclusion would they come to - are you a taker or a giver? Are you seeking to bless others or only profit from them? Even when we benefit from the ministry of others, God gives us that grace not just for our own benefit but that we might be a blessing to others. So this morning, I want us to go through this list and really be challenged to be busy about our Father's business, looking for opportunities to minister the grace of Christ to others.

1. The first gift that we see mentioned here is the gift of prophecy. V.6.

This is one of five lists of spiritual gifts in the N.T. The others are found in 1Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30, Eph. 4:11, and in 1Peter 4:11. And in total the number of gifts that are listed are 19 but that is far from exhaustive as far the gifts and abilities that God has given to the people of God for the welfare of the people of God and for the glory of God. And here is one that seems to be particularly of interest of many in recent years, and that is the gift of prophecy. I remember a young man was in my office one day, and he was quite convinced that he was prophet sent from God and that he had a specific message that he was to give to the church that particular Sunday and I was to give him the pulpit that Sunday or risk the judgment of God coming upon me.

And it is amazing that there were prophets in the early church. We read in Acts 13:1, "**Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.**" Acts 15:32 says, "**And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.**" We read that God used them to build the foundation of the church in Ephesians 2:20, "**built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.**" So prophets were active in the early church.

Now the meaning or the historical meaning of the word prophet is not just one who prophesies about the future but one who forth tells, in other words, what is involved is revelation from God. They did not learn through the ordinary way of study and learning from Scripture but the revelation came directly from God. Now these

individuals were not as authoritative as the apostles. When Paul wrote these letters people were to realize his authority. But the prophetic ministry was always judged by other prophets to see if the message really did come from God. 1Cor. 14:29 says, **“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.”** This was direct revelation that was given by God and was to be preached and taught to be people of God for their welfare and edification.

Now look at the verse here: **“if prophecy, in proportion to your faith.”** Now what does Paul mean “in proportion to your faith”? It could mean that he gives differing messages to differing prophets and none have the full message, or it could mean be careful not to add to the message your own thoughts or opinion but only what God had measured out. And it is amazing to look at this gift, because the foundation of the church has been already laid by the apostles and prophets and therefore this gift is no longer necessary or no longer exists in the church. And often we miss the point of this verse, and that is the grace of Christ that is given or meted out in the church for the welfare of the members. The church at Rome before Paul wrote this letter had no access to these truths of justification, sanctification, glorification or election. There was no written document called the New Testament. And the books that were written were not in wide circulation and many were not accessible. So what did God do? He gave prophets to the church at Rome or Antioch or Corinth so that they could be taught and stabilized and grow in their faith in Jesus Christ. Now we have the full revelation, and now we have the foundation laid, and there is no need of prophets today. We have the sufficient Scripture.

And here is my point, it is not like any church in the New Testament was free from strife or battles. All had their warts and blemishes. But God metes out or sends out his grace in this day and age through the church. When I say, “I don’t need the church,” I am saying that I do not need God’s grace. It is through the gifts of the membership and his grace that he gives that he gives grace to us. The gift of prophecy in the early church is just one example that he gives his grace through the church.

2. The second gift that is given is the gift of service. V.7a.

It is amazing to look at some of these lists because some of them really get our attention but others we are just not too keen about. In the early church, especially at Corinth they might envy someone who had the gift of revelation but look down upon a gift like this one that names service or other translations have it- “minister.” And it was used of waiting on tables. It was something that was beneath many people to do. It was menial and often forgotten work like washing people’s feet before a meal, and we recognize that Jesus took on this task just before true Passover meal. It might include working in the nursery or cleaning the church or helping someone with housework or lawn work. The word “minister” took on a Christian connotation in serving others and labouring for the benefit of others for the glory of Christ.

The stem of this word was also used to describe deacons in the church. We realize that ministry and office was established in Acts 6 to help in the distribution of supplies to those in need. And listen to Acts 6:2-3, **“And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from**

**among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.**” And it is not that this labour was below the apostles but God had given them a specific task and nothing should cause them to deviate from that task. But the incredible thing as we see here and also over in 1 Timothy 3 is that serving or deaconing was not relegated to someone who just has nothing else to do, but for men that were had a good reputation for godliness and were full of the Spirit and wisdom. Ministering to others on whatever form it takes is a grace gift given by God. It is a gift that we do not deserve.

And I do not think this is just talking about the specific office of deacon but any service that is done in the church for others for the glory of God. And I love the way it is worded here, **“in service, in our serving.”** “In our serving” has the meaning - get busy or get it done. Exercise that ability that God has given you. If you see a need or something that needs to be done, then don’t wait for someone else to do it. There is what is known in the church and many organizations as the twenty-eighty rule. And that is that twenty percent of the people do the work for the other eighty percent. And here is something if you gifted at vacuuming, if you have that ability then do it for the glory of God. Look at your time or look how to make time and use whatever capacities that God has given you to serve others. God knows all about your service. It does not have to be in public ways. in fact if that is the only service we will do then there is something desperately wrong with our hearts and in our lives. So many often say: there is just nothing for me to do, but they never reach out. They never visit maybe a shut in, or cook a meal for someone not just because they are in need but just to encourage them in their walk with Christ. They never seek to pray with someone else or befriend someone. There is so many different capacities and abilities that God has given us to be a means of grace in the lives of others. We just need to be willing.

### 3. God gives the gift of teaching. V.7.

There is a sense where we recognize that others have a gift of teaching. They are able to explain and apply the teaching of the word of God in our lives. They are able to explain it so that we understand and see its relevance in our lives. We see what the passage says and God uses the teacher through teaching the Scriptures to flood grace and change into our lives. But there is also a sense where we are all teachers and God to some degree has gifted all of us. We teach others in how we talk and function every day. Children very quickly can tell where mom and dad’s hope really does lie. People at work can tell through our lips and our efforts at work what we truly believe and think about Jesus. We are all teachers in some way.

And we recognize the importance of this gift because without it we cannot carry out the Great Commission that Jesus has given us. Matthew 28:19-20 says, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** We are not only to make disciples but mature disciples, and how we mature disciples is through teaching them the truths of Christ. Not only are we to mature disciples but we are to cultivate through the gifts and talents of others, or through the gifts and capacities that God gives others - we are to make teachers in the church of Jesus

Christ so that they can continue on the ministry of making and maturing disciples. Paul instructs Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, “**and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.**” We teach and raise up teachers in the church that they might teach and also raise up teachers also. It is to be ongoing.

This is also a gift that every pastor is to have and to cultivate and grow in. As you look at the qualifications of deacon and pastor in 1 Timothy 3, the only difference is the pastor has the ability to teach. A deacon may or may not have that giftedness, but it is indispensable in his ministry. And we see that in Ephesians 4:11-13, “**And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.**” All of these gifts are verbal gifts. And why are they given? To equip the saints for the work of ministry. It is one of God’s means of grace where he causes other graces to operate and function in the church of Jesus Christ. And where the members are functioning and ministering then the body is being built up. We are seeing Christ and his glory and the significance of what he has done. We are not being tossed here and there, but we are labouring together for the glory of Christ.

And it really is a shame that the pastoral office has been reduced in many churches to a CEO or someone who is so busy with other ministries and leading other ministries that he has very little time to teach and preach. And some pastors busy themselves with so many activities that keep them out of studying and pouring over the Scriptures and praying over a text that he might feed and teach the people. Paul would say to that man, “**the one who teaches, in his teaching,**” in other words - teach or preach the Scriptures. Do not neglect this gift given by the grace of God.

So we looked at the first three gifts in this list, and it should be evident that none of us are gifted in every way. And even if we have a particular talent there are even varieties in this gifts and talents that we can benefit and learn from. And one of the things that this should cause us is never to be haughty. It should cause us to never to be proud and arrogant as if I don't need others and their ministry to me. This is the mind of Christ in us. It causes us to see God’s means of grace and to be in the church. But it also should cause us to seek not only to be in the church but functioning in the church. It is such an encouraging truth and humbling truth that God has chosen to use us and has given us a measure of grace to be a spiritual benefit in the lives of others that they might magnify Christ. I do not have to be like others because I cannot. God has made you - you. Look around and be active for the glory of your Lord and Saviour who has given grace that you might expend it on others.