

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 3

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:6-8

Preached on: Sunday, September 9, 2012

The Eighteen Spiritual Gifts (that fall into 3 categories: sign, speaking, serving)

Group 1: The Revelatory (Sign) Gifts (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-29) . . . helped start the church growing; gifts that provided revelation of previously unrevealed truths and an accompanying ability to communicate those truths in inspired messages, authoritative and binding on the entire Body of Christ.

1. **Apostleship**
2. **Prophecy** (the ability to proclaim inspired messages that were binding and authoritative on the church; included the ability to perceive the thoughts and motives of other persons; the ability to preach, expound, and exhort the Word effectively)
3. **Distinguishing Spirits** (discerning clever counterfeits and heresies)
4. **Word of Wisdom** (revelatory at times; to have special insight into the mysteries of Scripture)
5. **Word of Knowledge** (revelatory at times; application of truth; understand and skillfully apply Scripture)

Group 2: The Confirmatory (Sign) Gifts (1 Cor 12:8-10) . . . to confirm His inspired messages during the first century.

6. **Faith** (extraordinary trust in overwhelming situations)
7. **Healing** (when a person became the specific divine channel for producing a miraculous cure for a physical problem for the purpose of confirming and authenticating both the message and the messenger of the gospel)
8. **Effecting Miracles** (broader than physical healings, like raising the dead or blinding someone as an act of judgment)
9. **Tongues** (the miraculous ability to speak languages never acquired by natural means—a sign intended to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Gospel and the hardening of Israel; they became unnecessary and passed away with the completion of the NT and the maturity of the NT faith)
10. **Interpretation of Tongues** (the miraculous ability to translate into one's own native tongue from a language that had not been learned by natural means to edify other believers)

The only gifts operative today (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:10-11)

Note: Variation of gifts 2-6 possibly still in effect today

Group 3: Speaking Gifts . . . benefited the church not only in its infancy but also in its continuing growth until Christ's second advent.

11. **Evangelism** (persuasive power to effect the will more than the intellect; includes missionaries and church planters)
12. **Teaching** (ability to grasp, arrange, and present revealed truth effectively and in an organized manner so that recipients have an enhanced understanding of the text under consideration; appeals more to the intellect than the will)
13. **Pastor-Teaching** (the gift of teaching combined with shepherding; pastoral care)
14. **Exhortation** (power in persuasion, geared primarily to the will of the believer more than the intellect; advising, warning, correcting, strengthening; encouraging and persuading the grieving and distressed to find reassurance in Christ)

Group 4: Serving Gifts . . . support the speaking gifts to make them more effective.

15. **Helps** (ministry, service to those in physical need)
16. **Showing Mercy** (relieving those in distress, misery, pain, and anxiety)
17. **Giving** (the sacrificial giving of oneself; sharing and imparting that which is one's own; investing material substance in spiritual undertakings to reap maximum spiritual dividends)
18. **Governing** (administrating, leading, ruling)

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We come again to this time when we can open up the Word of God and allow the Spirit of God to speak to us. Will you take your Bibles and turn to Romans chapter 12? And we have come now to verses six through eight. This is the third and the final in a series on the Christian's attitude toward fellow Christians as we continue to make our way verse by verse through this amazing epistle.

Follow along as I read Romans 12 beginning in verse six.

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.¹

I trust that your heart is overflowing today with adoration and praise because of the mercy that God has granted to you. Think, where would we be today were it not for God's mercy. It is hard to imagine, isn't it? And on the basis of that unmerited mercy, the apostle Paul has urged us in the previous verses to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice that is acceptable to God, which is our reasonable or our spiritual service of worship. And when we have that kind of whole hearted commitment to God, it will manifest itself in how we serve Christ. And we serve Christ by serving his people, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And this, therefore, manifests itself in the whole idea of the attitude that we have towards our fellow believers, an attitude of humility, an attitude of one ones, and an attitude of service that we will focus on today.

May I remind you that Paul speaks, first of all, of this attitude of humility by way of review in verse three. He says:

"I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."²

So, as we have studied, a humble believer will have a contagious doxology. No one will be able to miss it in his life and he will be so overwhelmed with the mercy of God that he will present his body as a living and holy sacrifice and he will do this through the humble and faithful stewardship of the spiritual gift that God has allotted him. This is Paul's whole point. This is where he is going in this text. So we are to be a blessing to others as we serve the heads of the body, the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Romans 12:6-8.

² Romans 12:3.

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And, of course, you want to always ask yourself. Does this describe me? Or do I live just for myself or just for my family. And, secondly, we have learned that we are to also have an attitude of oneness. Verses four and five he says:

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.³

Even as the physical body is made up of many members that perform various functions, so also in Christ the many members form one body, a single unit, the Church. We are one body, shall we say, in union with Christ. There exists a unity of the members of the body despite all of our diversity. We are interrelated. We are interdependent, because each member belongs to the other. And, again, you need to ask yourself, "Is this the attitude of my heart? Do I see how important it is that I live consistently with this great truth that I am a member of the rest of my brothers and sisters in Christ? Or am I content just to be the lone ranger and live out here on my own?" which is a very unbiblical concept.

Dear Christian, know this, that only when you grasp these profound realities of God's mercy and the humility that needs to flow from that and the importance of our oneness, the spiritual union we have in Christ, only then will you have an attitude of service. And that is where we come to today.

If you are not serving Christ in his Church there is probably two reasons. Either, A) you are ignorant of really what that is all about or B) you are rebellious. Today I am going to remove forever number one. You will not longer be ignorant if you listen to what I have to say. And if you continue to live as a lone ranger and not serve Christ, the answer is real simple. You are living in rebellion.

So what is this attitude of service? Notice in verse six he says:

"And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly."⁴

The term gifts in the original language comes from a word *χαρισμα* (*khar'-is-mah*) which is a form of *χαρις* (*khar'-ece*) which is the Greek word for grace. And so what Paul is saying here is that God's grace, in other words, his unmerited favor towards those who trust in Christ as Savior, this grace is the source of our gifts, these supernatural abilities that God has distributed to every believer at salvation. And here we are told that they differ according to the grace given to us. Differ speaks of the diversity within the body and grace of the unity. And so, as we think about this, we realize that in the infinite wisdom and sovereignty of God he decreed that he would enable each of us in very

³ Romans 12:4-5.

⁴ Romans 12:6.

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unique ways to serve him in his body by serving others in the body, to put his glory and his grace on display. And what a precious and exhilarating thing this is to behold, to see it in this church and in other churches where those who have been saved by his grace exercise their gifts and the body functions in just an amazing way. But, oh, what would it be like if every member even of this body would be so inclined.

Grace gifts are manifestations of the presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only gives the gifts, just as he determines according to 1 Corinthians 12:11, but he also empowers them, Paul says, for the common good, 1 Corinthians 12:7.

So here Paul says let each exercise them accordingly. In other words, get on the ball. Let's use them. That is the idea. To do otherwise will dishonor God. Frankly it will dishonor God in three ways. Number one, it betrays a lack of gratitude for God's mercy. Number two, it betrays an attitude of pride. You think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. You are number one. You are not part of the rest of the body. And, thirdly, it betrays a wanton disregard for the unity of the church, the oneness that is supposed to reflect our union with Christ, a oneness according to verse five whereby:

“...we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”⁵

Now, in order to give the saints at Rome and each of us a better grasp of the importance of the diversity and the unity of the gifts, Paul is now going to list seven categories of gifts common among saints that they were to use, they were to exercise according to the various functions and the same with us. But before we look at this closely you might want to pull out the handout that you have in your bulletins. By the way, of those of you listening through the internet, we will make this available online in addition to the transcript. You will see a list of the 18 spiritual gifts that are mentioned in the New Testament. They are mentioned in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians four and 1 Peter four. And they fall into three categories. They are sign gifts, speaking gifts and serving gifts. You will notice that the sign gifts can be divided into two sub categories. Group one would be the revelatory sign gifts. Those were the gifts that helped get the church started, gifts that provided revelation of previously unrevealed truths and an accompanying ability to communicate those truths and inspire messages. They were authoritative. They were binding on the entire body of Christ. They would include the gift of apostleship, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, word of wisdom and word of knowledge. And you can read some of the descriptions that I have for you at another time. But, secondly, in the sign gifts there were not only the revelatory sign gifts, but the confirmatory sign gifts. These were to confirm God's inspired messages during the first century. They included faith, healing, effecting miracles, tongues and interpretation of tongues.

⁵ Romans 12:5.

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Now you must understand that the sign gifts authenticated both the message and the messenger of the gospel. In fact, during Jesus' earthly ministry the apostles, according to Mark 16:20 went out and preached everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

Likewise Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 12.

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”⁶

The writer of Hebrews also elaborates on the purpose of the sign gifts in Hebrews chapter two beginning with verse three.

“After it [the gospel] was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”⁷

Of course, the teachings of Jesus and the apostles were the absolute standard of all other teachings and, ultimately they were included in the New Testament canon and with the death of the apostles and the finality of divine revelation recorded in their inspired writings there was no longer and need for the sign gifts to validate the message and the messenger when they would reveal and confirm truth and so they gradually disappeared. With their death, that is the death of the apostles and, frankly, even before their death the sign gifts gradually faded from the scene and are no longer operative today.

We see this, by the way, even in the New Testament record. For example, 1 Corinthians was written in AD 54 and in it Paul described various sign gifts in chapter 12 verses nine through 10. He described the gifts of healing, miracles, speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues. But none of those are mentioned here in Romans 12. And there is a good reason for that. Romans was written four years after 1 Corinthians and by then the sign gifts were already disappearing.

By the way, they are also not mentioned in Ephesians four and 1 Peter four which written even after Romans. So all we see in the latter epistles, including the texts that we have before us are categories of gifts that are really two fold, speaking and serving gifts. The sign gifts are the very unique role in the establishment of the early Church. The early Church was in desperate need of inspired, infallible, authoritative, all sufficient truth. And the first century sign gifts were all together different than the counterfeit sign gifts still common among us today that wreak such havoc in the Church.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:12.

⁷ Hebrews 2:3-4.

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As a footnote, there have only been a few very limited periods of history noted for their miracle working signs and wonders. We see it first in the period of the Exodus where God authenticated his message and his messenger Moses. And after that period was over you have the five books of the law that were written, the Pentateuch. And then you have the next period in history, the period of Elijah and Elisha when God's official voices really needed special affirmation during that time in the midst of prevailing apostasy. And over that period of time and some of the subsequent prophets that were there that worked great miracles you see ultimately the rest of the Old Testament being written and finalized. And then the third period, of course, is the one we are talking about here with Christ and his apostles, during the transition of the old economy into the new from God's specific dealings with his covenant people Israel, to his dealings with all men, not on the basis of the law, but on the basis of grace. And at the end of that period you have the New Testament canon finalized.

So the only gifts operative today are those that Peter mentioned in 1 Peter 4:10-11. They would be the speaking and the serving gifts. You see those on your list there, the speaking gifts—evangelism, teaching, pastor teaching and exhortation—and then the serving gifts—helps, showing mercy, giving and governing.

Now let's look at the sample categories of spiritual gifts that Paul mentions here in verses six through eight. But I want you to remember here before we even get into this that you must see these like the primary colors on an artist's palette. You know how they mix basic colors—and I am not artist here—but there are basic colors that they will mix and match in countless ways and this is what the master artist, the Holy Spirit has done with each of us to paint the masterpiece of Christ and his character on the canvas of his Church. And also be careful in trying to make very precise distinctions. In fact, as we look at these things it is impossible to distinguish between God given natural talents and God given spiritual giftedness. And there is no need to do that. All we need to remember is we are to be so overwhelmed with the mercies of God that we present our bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice, serving Christ and in the providence of God he will direct us into those places where we are uniquely gifted to serve him. It will become obvious. We will discuss that more later.

So let's look, first, at the gift of prophecy. Notice in verse six he says:

“... if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith.”⁸

In other words, if this is your gift, do it according to the proportion of your faith. Prophecy comes from the Greek word προφητεία (prof-ay-ti'-ah) and it means to speak forth. And this is simply the gift of preaching. That is what I am doing this morning and you do it in many ways, as well, but this is primarily the gift of preaching. Unlike the Old Testament prophet who would receive new revelation directly from God and who

⁸ Romans 12:6.

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had great authority amongst God's people and even like the sign gift of prophecy in the early stages of the nascent Church where certain individuals in the Church would receive direct revelation from God and would be able to even discern the thoughts and motives of others, the gift of prophecy here simply refers to the gift of preaching, of proclaiming the Word of God.

Now Paul makes this clear by comparing this gift with the counterfeit gifts of tongues. This is a very important context for you. So let me back up a little bit. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul explained the legitimate use of the gift of tongues. And that was the ability to speak in foreign languages. And it really had a three fold purpose. It was a three fold sign to unbelieving Israel. And Isaiah points this out in his prophecy and Paul quotes this in 1 Corinthians 14. It was a sign of cursing and blessing and authority. I am not going to get into all of that, but suffice it to say that was the purpose of tongues. And he went on to explain that the gift of tongues, the legitimate gift of tongues had absolutely no place or purpose in the Church where believers were present. That was never its intention. Tongues were solely for unbelievers. So when that purpose ceased, when the New Testament canon was complete, so, too, did the gift.

But the Corinthian Christians got caught up in their self induced pride and emotion and they were counterfeiting the gift of tongues with all kinds of ecstatic gibberish like the pagans did of that day and we see it today in various churches around the world. But the source was not the Holy Spirit, but rather pride induced emotion, to kind of show off and make yourself look more spiritual than you were. There was no evangelism going on with that, no edification, just more of kind of a look at me emotional frenzy as you hear people come up with whatever they say. I use the phrase {?}. Whatever it is, that was what was going on and you see it even today.

But Paul explained that the legitimate use of tongues was never to be used without having a person who had also the gift of interpretation of tongues. They had to be present to translate the divine revealed truths to others who did not understand the language. But all of this went South, as we would say. All of it deteriorated in the early Church. It continues to this day. So in that context Paul contrasts tongues, especially the madness of the counterfeit tongues with the gift of prophecy, the preaching of the Word of God. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:3 he says:

“But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.”⁹

And then later he even contrasted the confusion of legitimate tongues being used in the Church that... where they weren't even supposed to be and contrast the gift of prophecy. Therefore he says in verse 22 of 1 Corinthians 14:

⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:3.

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So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe. If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.¹⁰

So, again, the gift of prophecy is merely the gift of preaching. It is the unusual ability to instruct and admonish, warn, rebuke, correct, challenge, comfort, encourage and even evangelize the lost.

Calvin described it in this way. Quote, "I prefer to follow those who extend this word wider, even to the peculiar gift of revelation by which anyone skillfully and wisely performed the office of an interpreter in explaining the will of God. Hence, prophecy at this day in the Christian Church is hardly anything else than the right understanding of the Scripture and the peculiar faculty of explaining it, inasmuch as all the ancient prophecies and the oracles of God have been completed in Christ and in his gospel, for in this sense it is taken by Paul when he says, quote, "I wish that you spoke in tongues, but rather that you prophesied," 1 Corinthians 14:5. Quote, "In part we know and in part we prophesy," 1 Corinthians 13:9."

Calvin goes on to say, "And it does not appear that Paul intended here to mention those miraculous graces by which Christ at first rendered illustrations his gospel, but on the contrary we find he refers only to ordinary gifts such as were to continue perpetually in the Church," end quote.

So the gift of prophecy is the gift of preaching and he says according to the proportion of his faith. In other words, the preacher must not say anything contrary with his faith in Christ and the fidelity of God's Word. He must remain faithful to his calling to be the voice of God to the people of God, not to preach his own agenda.

Paul then moves to a second gift in verse seven, the gift of service.

"... if service, in his serving."¹¹

Now this is similar to the gift of helps that we find in 1 Corinthians 12 verse 28 and the apostle here uses the word *δουκονια* (dee-ak-on-ee'-ah). We get our word deacon, deaconess from that. And it speaks of practical service. You might think of it this way, just the practical gift of ministry as we would see performed in the diaconate, that is the

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:22-25.

¹¹ Romans 17:7.

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office performed by the deacons. Like those, for example, in Acts six who were placed in charge of providing food for widows and so forth. But its application reaches beyond any kind of an office, even though it is certainly a must in that office, as well as in the office of the elder. We see it, for example, in the life of Phoebe. Remember in Romans chapter 16 verses one and two Paul speaks of, quote:

“...Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”¹²

We can also see this, for example, in the story of Mary and Martha. You will recall that Martha got a little perturbed with her sister Mary because Mary was sitting over there listening to Jesus teach while she was doing all the preparations for the dinner. And in Luke 10 verse 40 she says:

“Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone?”¹³

So, basically, the point is this. Anything that we do to minister to others in the name of Jesus encompasses the gift of service. The old Church father Chrysostom wisely said, quote, “Every spiritual work is a ministry.” And, indeed, some are especially gifted in this area.

Then there is the gift of teaching, number three, verse seven.

“... or he who teaches, in his teaching.”¹⁴

I have defined the gift this way. Teaching is the ability to grasp, arrange and present revealed truth effectively and in an organized manner so that the recipients have an enhanced understanding of Scripture. And this is going to appeal more to the intellect than to the will. We know the Great Commission, Matthew 28 beginning in verse 19 Jesus said that we are to:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”¹⁵

And we all have that responsibility, some have more of the gift in that realm than others. Of course, Jesus was the supreme example of this gift. In Luke 24 we read of a post

¹² Romans 16:1-2.

¹³ Luke 10:40.

¹⁴ Romans 12:7.

¹⁵ Matthew 28:19-20.

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resurrection encounter that he had with some of his disciples in the road to Emmaus. You will recall that they were confused about the death and the resurrection rumors of Christ and we read how Jesus comes along and he says:

“Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”¹⁶

And then the text tells us that they recognized this as Jesus and in verse 32:

“They said to one another, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?’”¹⁷

Now, again, like every gift some are more gifted than others in any of the gifts, certainly in the gifts of teaching as well. But the true measure of the gift is not merely helping a student to understand what is being taught, but causing that student to come alive with a burning within them because of the content of the truths that they are learning. Beloved, if our hearts are not set ablaze by what is being taught, little will come of it. The gift of teaching far exceeds the mere dissemination of truth. It is the Spirit empowered renewing of the mind that causes us to be so transformed that we joyfully present our bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice acceptable to God. And we become more conformed to the image of Christ. That is what teaching is all about. Teaching is the very life blood of Christianity. Without it the Church falls part. Without an understanding of Bible doctrine believers will have no discernment and they will never be able to live a life that is truly pleasing to the Lord. They will never experience the power and the joy, the fruits of the Spirit that are so exhilarating as we live out our life this side of glory.

It would appear that the apostle Paul had a combination of all of the gifts, but certainly his spiritual gift included preaching and teaching. Teaching is also a requirement of the office of an elder. He must be able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2. He must be able, according to Titus 1:9 to hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching so that he will be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. In fact, the elders of the Church have the responsibility to help there, especially young men, but women as well, but certainly young men to discover and develop their gift of teaching. Paul charged Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2:

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”¹⁸

And certainly that is a passion of the leadership here at this church as we move ahead with the discipleship training and ultimately the Bible institute that we want to put into

¹⁶ Luke 22:27.

¹⁷ Luke 24:32.

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 2:2.

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place.

Now some will ask, “What is the difference between the gift of prophecy, that is preaching and the gift of teaching?”

Well, first of all remember that the content will be the same. But the distinction is basically this. Preaching is much more of an ability to proclaim and expound and exhort the truths of Scripture with power and authority, typically to a larger group of people, both saved and lost and it appeals both to the will and to the intellect of the people listening, whereas teaching is more of that ability, as I say, to grasp and arrange and present revealed truth in a way that systematically instructs believers in a very organized manner. And it appeals primarily to the intellect, but not without affecting the will. The gift of pastor teacher combines this gift of teaching with shepherding which is pastoral care of the sheep. But it should also include the gift of preaching.

In fact, Paul told young pastor Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16:

“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching...”¹⁹

A word that I take very seriously as we all should.

Frankly, if a church has weak leadership in this area, especially in the office of pastor teacher, the members will be exiled to an island of doctrinal ignorance and spiritual infancy and they will never mature. They will remain in that state and many times not even know they are there. So to prevent this from happening the Spirit of God gifts many of his people, both men and women, from Sunday school teachers to seminary professors with the gift of teaching.

Fourthly, Paul speaks of the gift of exhortation. Notice in verse eight he says:

“...or he who exhorts, in his exhortation.”²⁰

Exhortation is an interesting term in the original language. It translates a compound Greek noun παρακλησις (par-ak'-lay-sis). παρα (par-ah') means to come alongside, like we would use paragraph and so forth and καλεω (kal-eh'-o) means to call. And when you put them together it has the literal meaning of to call someone to another side. That is exhortation. In fact, the term is closely related to παρακλητος (par-ak'-lay-tos) that is used to describe the Holy Spirit who is our advocate, our comforter, our helper. In fact, in John 14:16 Jesus used the title helper to describe both himself and the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 4:16.

²⁰ Romans 12:8.

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So exhortation encompasses all of this, the idea of coming alongside someone to persuade them, to warn them, advise them, encourage them, strengthen them even instruct them, to help them practically apply sound doctrine to their life that their lives might be pleasing to the Lord.

The ministry of Barnabas whose name mean son of exhortation according to Acts 4:36 provides us with a great example of this gift. He encouraged or literally exhorted the Christians in Antioch to remain true to the Lord in Acts 11:23. And we read in Acts 14:22 that he joined Paul in encouraging the new Christians and in three cities of south Galatia to continue in their faith even in the face of great adversity and persecution.

In 1 Thessalonians three and verse two Paul spoke of Timothy's use of this gift when he encouraged the persecuted Christians in that city. There we read:

"...we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith."²¹

Also in 1 Thessalonians chapter two and verse 12 we read how Paul used this gift to induce correct moral choices. He said, quote, "Exhorting you that you might walk worthily of God."

And later Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2:

"... reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering."²²

These are the kinds of things that we should all do in the body of Christ, but some are especially equipped and endowed for this sort of thing.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of the gift of exhortation in Hebrews chapter 10 beginning in verse 24 when he admonishes us to, quote:

"...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."²³

It might be helpful for you to know that we ought to see this gift manifested in musicians. While music is not a spiritual gift, God often uses it as a channel whereby men and women with the gift of exhortation can through the lyrics of their song sway the wills of the people that need to hear these truths so that they can more effectively follow the Lord.

²¹ 1 Thessalonians 3:2.

²² 2 Timothy 4:2.

²³ Hebrews 10:24-25.

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Dr. Robert Thomas says this. Quote, “This gift is critical of the body’s growth. But it has limitations. Its use must be in conjunction with the gift of teaching. And a proper balance between the two is vital. Preaching that is all exhortation and devoid of instructional content wears thin very quickly. The benefits from it are very short lived. That is why the New Testament never speaks of a pastor exhorter the way it does of a pastor teacher,” end quote.

So that is the gift of exhortation. What about the next gift, the gift of giving? What is this all about? Well, it seems rather straight forward in verse eight.

“...he who gives, with liberality.”²⁴

In the original language three Greek verb that is used here is in what we would call an intensified form. And it really denotes, therefore, the sacrificial giving, the sharing, the imparting of that which is one’s own, the sacrificial giving of one’s self and of one’s material blessing. Certainly God has bestowed a special measure of this gift on many down through the centuries who have also been blessed with abundant resources, people who are wealthy. However, you never want to forget that the systematic, sacrificial giving of one’s financial resources is the responsibility of every Christian, not just the ones who have more. We read this, for example, in 2 Corinthians 9:7. Paul says:

“Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.”²⁵

So don’t limit this gift only to those who possess large material resources, those with minimal resources many time also have this gift. I have been in places around the world and third world countries where I have seen people who have virtually nothing manifest this gift in ways that are staggering.

We see the term used in Luke three when the multitudes ask what they should do to, quote:

“...bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance.”²⁶

And John the Baptist replied in Luke three verse 11:

“Let the man who has two tunics share.”²⁷

²⁴ Romans 12:8.

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 9:7.

²⁶ Luke 3:8.

²⁷ Luke 3:11.

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By the way, that is the same Greek word as used here in verse eight for the word give.

“Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise.”²⁸

I remember my African brothers. It was a real treat for them to have an egg. And when I was there teaching in Kenya the brothers insisted that I got three eggs every day and they got one egg every other day. Needless to say, I could not eat those three eggs. And every time I eat an egg, I think of that. That is the gift of giving.

Once again Barnabas provides an excellent example of a man with this gift. In Acts 4:36-37 we read of how he and others in the early Church of Jerusalem sold their property and took the proceeds and gave it to their needy brethren. And we read of how Barnabas himself sold a tract of land and brought the proceeds to the apostles to distribute. That is the gift of giving. Notice also Paul tells us in verse eight he who gives, do it with liberality. This denotes heartfelt giving without any ulterior motive. This is not giving to get. This is not giving to be noticed.

You might recall there was a couple who did that and paid a very severe penalty in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira. But those with this gift are typically ones that are very, very vigilant in seeing the needs of others. They know how to give wisely and selectively. And many times we see this as more private sacrificial benevolence rather than something that is public. People with this gift have no desire for any recognition. They are motivated simply out of a heart of love, a heart of compassion, a love for Christ and a love for the one receiving the gift.

In 2 Corinthians eight there is an amazing testimony of a church that lived in poverty that was filled with people with his gift. They were the impoverished and persecuted saints in Macedonia. For this reason Paul says, quote:

“...in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.”²⁹

It is the same term that Paul uses here in verse eight.

For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 2 Corinthians 8:2.

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:3-5.

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What a blessed thing this is to see in the Church many, many of you have this gift, and we see it manifested in remarkable ways. And Paul speaks to them about the gift of leadership, number six, verse eight, again. He says:

“...he who leads, with diligence.”³¹

Paul calls this the gift of administrations or governments in 1 Corinthians 12:28. This, of course, is a prerequisite for the office of elder as we see in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, but we see that the term in the New Testament is never used of governmental rulers, but it is used of those who are the heads of family and those that are leaders within the Church.

Now in the Church this gift consists of a unique ability to administer direction in the Church. It includes external organization, to be able to wisely steer the flock of God into channels that are most effective for their service. It is the idea of even piloting a ship. And that is how the concept is used in Acts 27:11 and Revelation 18:7.

So skilled leadership is the ability to harness all of the diversity of gifts within in a church, to prevent everyone from kind of doing their own thing. A leader will be a unifier, not a divider, but never a compromiser of truth. There are many New Testament passages that speak of gifted leaders, that help us understand that they are to exhibit qualities like wisdom, boldness, genuine unselfish concern for the flock, sacrificial giving of themselves and, of course, it always will manifest itself in the context of a team effort. We never see in the Church where you have just a one man show, for example. Gifted leaders are team builders. They are never self builders. They realize that they don't have all the gifts and that we all have to come together. But that is the unique gift of leadership.

And, by the way, one of the ways that you can really know whether or not you are a leader is to look around and see if anybody is following you. People will seek a leader out. They will gravitate towards a leader. Leaders don't have to campaign like we see in our political arena to get people to follow them. Leaders are likened to shepherds in the Scripture that lead their sheep. They never drive them.

And notice Paul says:

“...he who leads, with diligence.”³²

In other words, with haste, with a sense of urgency, with zeal, with earnestness, with passion. John MacArthur says, quote, “Although it is not limited to those offices, the gift of Church leadership clearly belongs to elders, deacons and deaconesses. It is significant that Paul makes no mention of leaders in his first letter to Corinth. Lack of a functioning leadership would help explain its serious moral and spiritual problems which certainly

³¹ Romans 12:8.

³² Romans 12:8.

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would have been exacerbated by that deficiency. Free for all democracy amounts to anarchy and is disastrous in any society, including the Church. The absence of leaders results in everyone doing what is, quote, 'right in his own eyes,' end quote, as the Israelites did under the judges."

So that is the gift of leadership and as you get involved in various capacities of service, you may see people begin to gravitate towards you and begin to affirm you in that particular area of giftedness.

These seventh and the last category is that of showing mercy. Verse eight he says at the end:

"... he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."³³

That is how you are to do it. And mercy really describes those who actively and intentionally seek to relieve those in distress, those in misery, those in pain, those in anxiety and fear. I like to think of this way. The gift of mercy is sympathy and compassion in action. It is an amazing thing to watch people who are truly gifted in this realm. This gift is closely related, by the way, to the gift of exhortation. And often you find believers with a combination of both. These will be the kinds of people that are drawn to things like jail ministries and hospital ministries, hospice ministries, ministering to the poor, to the handicapped and the disenfranchised and so forth. And he or she will exercise is gift, Paul says, with cheerfulness.

In other words they are going to have a smile on their face. I mean, who wants a person coming to visit you in the hospital and they are all gloomy and down. You know? They will have a sense of encouragement about them like Jesus demonstrated when he showed mercy to the poor.

In Luke 4:18-19 we read how he gave sight to the blind and he set free those who were downtrodden and so forth. And, again, I have seen a number of you with this gift. In fact, I have been the recipient of your mercy on many occasions.

Now in closing just for a couple of minutes I want to give you eight ways to discover and develop your spiritual gift. I will make this short and concise and hopefully it will be helpful to you. Number one, believe that God has gifted you with at least one spiritual gift. Beloved, you have got to start here. You have got to rejoice in this. If you don't function in your proper role doing what God has gifted you to do, you must realize that the whole body is going to be crippled. We can be so much stronger if you use your gift.

Number two, believe in the possibilities and purposes of the categories of gifts currently operative in promoting continual growth and unity in the body of Christ. Said a little bit

³³ Ibid.

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definitely, beloved, grasp this glorious truth of the synergy that God has put into motion whereby he takes the speaking and the serving gifts and works them together in this amazing organism called the body of Christ.

Number three, pray. Just remember that first word if you remember nothing else. Pray. God will give you zeal to use your gift or gifts, as the case may be, but only when it is first tempered by the pursuit of life.

If I could put it this way, get on you knees before the Lord and cry out to him to help you understand where you are best suited to function for his glory in his body. Get serious about serving Christ. Learn to cry out to him to help you discover and develop your spiritual gift, but only with an attitude of humility and love.

Number four, take into consideration your natural abilities, your circumstances, your resources, with which the Spirit tends to match our gifts.

You see, these are the things that tend to pave the way for uniqueness in ministry. Bear in mind that the Spirit of God never wastes anything. He doesn't equip you and give you inherent aptitudes and give you certain backgrounds and so forth and then just kind of set all of that aside. He is going to use that even in the context of your gifts.

Number five, get involved in various capacities of service for a prolonged period of time and extend every effort in experimenting with various functions.

We taught our children to swim. They were always afraid of the water. It is not good enough to have five seconds in the water and realize, well, that is not for me. No, you are going to have to work at it a little bit more for that, more than that. And eventually you learn how to swim. I know the analogy breaks down at some level with spiritual gifts, but I think you get the point.

So get involved. Give some of these obvious categories that fit into your background, give them some time. That is the proving ground for your gift.

Number six, ask yourself I you derive a legitimate sense of inner satisfaction and joy found in some functions more than others. Beloved, if there is no inner satisfaction, if there is no joy, then there is no gift, because when you re using your gift there will be an exhilarating sense of fulfillment and excitement.

And then, number seven, be brutally honest and evaluate whether or not your alleged gift—because, again, keep in mind you might be wrong—is worthwhile to the body of Christ and truly bearing fruit. You see, this is the ultimate test of your giftedness. If it is not bearing fruit, if it is having some kind of a negative impact on other people, there is a problem there. Be brutally honest with yourself in that regard.

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And then finally—and this is so important—solicit feedback from other mature and respected Christians who will be honest with you. Folks, this typically means not your mom and dad, not your wife, not those people who know you best. Even though you want their feedback, make sure you go to people who are going to be able to say, “Sweetheart, I am sorry. That is simply not your gift and here is why.”

They can help you discover the degree of your gift, the possibility of more than one gift and even a combinations of gifts.

So, beloved, I challenge you, even as Paul challenged young Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6.

“... kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you.”³⁴

And as you do that, you will watch God do some amazing things in your life and some amazing things in this church or whatever church you serve in.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths. They are really very straightforward, but sometimes they are counterintuitive to us. Sometimes they rail against our flesh. So, Lord, I pray that by the power of your Spirit you would help us to apply these things that we might enjoy fully all of the blessings you long to give us as we serve you in ways that are consistent with the way that you have uniquely endowed us and gifted us to give you praise, to give you glory and to serve your people. We ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus our Savior that he might be glorified. Amen.

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³⁴ 2 Timothy 1:6.