
KNOW AND GROW IN CHRIST

PART 12

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his 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.

Today we are going to look at the subject of spiritual gifts and we have provided for you a spiritual gift assessment. This is just a tool. In fact, we try to make that really clear on the front page. This is something that you go through and fill out the questions. I think there are clear instructions. At the end, it provides you some feedback regarding what your spiritual gifts and abilities might be. It's a tool to help you think about how God has gifted you, how the Spirit of God has gifted you, and how to use those gifts.

Our hope is that we are going to use this in the new members course. When someone comes in to be a part of Riverside, this will be a part of the new member's material. They will take this and do some thinking about how they can serve the Lord here at Riverside. Then we thought, "Wow, many of you will not have the benefit of that. Let's provide it for you as a tool to help you."

So that's there for you. I hope that you'll do it. Home group leaders: I hope you will take some time to follow-up. We are going to email you those assessments so that you can get them out during your home group meetings, go through them, and talk about how individuals might be gifted and used of the Lord.

My goal today in this message, then, is to talk to you about the motivation to use your gift and the direction from God in using it. **Really, there are two themes: motivation and direction.** Here is what's interesting. In the passage I read here

in Romans 12, there is a list of seven spiritual gifts. If we went to 1 Corinthians Chapter 12, we would find there a list of spiritual gifts. It's fascinating. If you compare those lists, you will find they are very different. Then we could go to Ephesians Chapter 4 and there we would find yet another list of spiritual gifts that is also different.

When you look at the 1 Corinthians list, it sounds very supernatural. The gifts that are listed are healings, miracles, utterances of wisdom, utterances of knowledge, discerning different types of spirits. It sounds very, very supernatural, very powerful. Then you come to Romans 12 and it is serving, giving, helps, leading. It doesn't sound very supernatural. You may be thinking, "Well, the Corinthians were Charismatics and the Romans were Presbyterian." Okay, no one should get offended. It's just a little joke, alright? That is not the point of the scripture. That's not the point of the difference in the lists.

But, there is an important lesson here which is where I really want to start, because Paul had a deep, prolonged history with Corinth. And he is writing the Corinthian Christians to correct some excesses and to bring things into proper order in the church. When he writes the letter of Romans, he doesn't have that deep history with the church. In fact, he is really introducing himself to the Roman church. He gives us something very valuable in the book of Romans -- it's an overview of his teaching. It's a big picture summary of his doctrine and practice. So, when we come to this passage in Romans Chapter 12, what's provided for us is a discussion on spiritual gifts in general. What we have in 1 Corinthians 12 is a more detailed or more specific application of a teaching on spiritual gifts in a specific context.

Now, in the wisdom of God, we are grateful that we have both. Sometimes you learn certain things from looking at the big picture, right? Then there are other things that you learn by looking at the details and digging down into the particulars. You may even know that you are...have you ever heard this phrase..."whole to part" and "part to whole"? You may know, "I'm a whole to part learner," or "I'm a part to whole learner." Some of you say, "You know what? I need to see the big picture. If I don't have the big picture clearly in mind, I'm confused. The more details you give me, the more confused I become until I get that big picture." Others of you would say, "Well, you know what I need to do? I just need to get my hands in there and get dirty and do it. I learn by doing, and as I start to experience some of the details, I am then able to piece together the bigger picture."

But I think we know and understand that in the end, we want to have both no matter how we go about it. Our focus today is on the bigger picture. I believe that Romans provides for us a more general approach to this topic. For example, when he talks about gifts here, he tells us, "God gives the gifts." But when you get to 1 Corinthians 12, he talks about the Trinity, the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) – that all the gifts come from God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but that there is a specific role the Holy Spirit plays in manifesting the power of God in our everyday life. So we are given detail regarding how we experience the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are not given in Romans 12.

Another example would be in Romans 12. In a very general way, he uses the metaphor of a human body. You are a member of a body. Just as you have physical members in your body, you individually are a part of something greater than yourself. You are part of a body.

Now, in Romans he doesn't go as far as to say that you are the body of Christ on earth. In 1 Corinthians 12 he actually makes that application and discusses it in some length. So you see, this is just showing: general, and more specific. Are you with me?

Here is a general summary of what he says about spiritual gifts, okay? It's not complicated. This is just bullet fashion: boom, boom, boom. Here is an overview.

1. **God has given you gifts.** If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God lives in you (1 Corinthians 12:3). No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit. God has given you gifts.
2. **He determines what gifts you receive.** You can put in your order. You can certainly ask. You can seek. But God ultimately determines what gifts you receive.
3. **We all have different gifts.** There is diversity, a variety of gifts. **It's unity, not uniformity.** There is a variety of gifts.
4. **He gave you gifts for a purpose.**
5. **You are to use your gifts to build the Church.** That is the main purpose that is identified in all of these passages. There are certainly other ways that we use our gifts to be a blessing to people and to serve other people, but the primary purpose identified in scripture is to build the Church.
6. **Use your gifts.** That is a real emphasis here. We are in trouble if every member doesn't have this understanding. "I'm gifted! God has chosen exactly what he wants me to be in the body and I've got to get out there and do it. It's not optional. The body needs me. God has called me to serve."
7. **Don't think too highly of yourself or your gifts.** Okay? That comes out really clearly.

You see, you have this picture. We give you this assessment and you take the assessment. You go home and fill it out and then you come back. Look: Leadership, Teaching -- those are my #1 and #2. Then you show up and say, "Hey, I'm sorry, but I'm a leader. Look. Just step aside and I'll show you how it's done."

We laugh, but there is something very dangerous about this self-identification. "Listen, you really don't have the gift of mercy, so just let me do this, okay? Maybe you should be quiet." You can see where we might begin to see ourselves as

experts, even within our own categories. Paul is working really hard to say, “No. Don’t.” In fact, he provides a certain protection from the misuse of gifts by connecting us back to the gospel.

Here’s the main idea. Here is what we are going to do today. Understanding the gospel motivates me and directs me in the using of my spiritual gifts. Understanding who Christ is, what he has done in my life, what he has done for me, understanding the good news of Jesus Christ motivates me and then gives me direction to do it.

Let me talk about motivation for just a second, because you may have looked at those points and you might have said, “Okay, Brian, you are telling me that scripture tells me I’m gifted, and that I don’t have the same gifts as everybody else. There’s diversity and I am to use those gifts in building the Church. But maybe I don’t really want to build the Church. I mean, I’ve had some bad experiences. Or I just don’t know that that’s my thing. Or I just don’t want to get connected in the local church. For whatever reason, I’m not totally sold that I want to use my gifts in that way. After all, why can’t I just love God and work with others and bless others and share Christ with others? But I don’t really want to dig down in to the local church. It’s just a mess. It’s messy.” Maybe that’s been your experience. For whatever reason, you have reservations.

I want to talk to you about how the gospel motivates you to fulfill God’s purpose -- not just any purpose that we put in there, but God’s purpose. Then, once that’s in us and filling us and motivating us and strengthening us and empowering us, how that then is giving direction to how we use those gifts.

Let me set up the passage in this way. What we have in Romans 12 is Paul beginning to talk about how we live as Christians. **For 11 chapters he has laid out the message of the gospel. It is by far, I think, the clearest overview of the message of the entire bible that we have – these 11 chapters. He basically, from start to finish, tells us that we have a relational problem with God. Our relationship is broken. Sin has broken everything in us and around us and in Creation. We are under the judgment of God because of that sin. Death is our experience now and for eternity. But there is good news. God loves us and he has given his Son, Jesus Christ, who has lived a perfect life in our place. And he offers himself as a sacrifice to pay the penalty of our sin. And the power of sin, the bondage of sin is broken in Jesus Christ. We are cleansed of our sin by faith in him and all things are made new.**

He teaches that for 11 chapters before he really starts to dig down into: “Now, this is how you live it out.” Chapters 1-11 are: what we believe, our doctrine. Chapters 12 and following: application, how we live it out. This is how he starts. Then he tells us how to live it out. Verses 1-2 of Romans 12. We read it:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the

renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

In two verses Paul summarizes how to live the Christian life. If you said, “Brian, I want to memorize two verses that tell me how to daily live what it looks like to apply truth to my life,” this is where you would go. I think this would be an ideal passage. Let me give you five statements to help us think about this summary. #1 is not a statement, it’s a question.

1. **What is it about the message about Jesus Christ that would cause me to want to give my entire life to Jesus?**
Think about this for a minute. When Paul applies his teaching, he says, “I want you to be a living sacrifice. I want you to get up on the altar. What happens to a sacrifice? A sacrifice is killed. It dies. That’s what I want from you. I don’t want you to live for yourself, but I don’t want you to die. I want you to be a living sacrifice, where you just say, ‘Jesus, I’m all yours. No qualifications. No holds barred. Take me. Take everything I have -- all of my life, all of my future, all of my dreams, all of my hopes, all of my past – everything.’” What in the world is there about Chapters 1 through 11 about the message of Jesus that would make you want to do that? That’s the first question that comes to mind because that’s the application he calls for. **He is saying this truth is so transformative, so amazing, so life-defining that you will give your life to Jesus no holds barred.**
2. **This is really a description then of how we worship.** This is how worship is defined, and it is a response to the gospel. Or we could say it is the fruit of the gospel, of this message in our lives. **This is worship: giving our lives to Christ, to God.**
3. According to verse 2, then, **there is a renewed way of thinking.** Our minds are renewed. There is a shift in thinking and then there is an ongoing process of renewal.
4. **I no longer think or act like the world.** I break away from that thinking with this renewed thinking.
5. Finally, there is a practical side. **As I do it, as I put it into practice, I live it out and I test it. I practice it and it proves itself to be true in my life.**

This is your life in Jesus. Now, let’s see if I can illustrate this for you and connect it back to the topic of spiritual gifts.

There are two ways of thinking. There is the world’s way of thinking, and this goes all the way back to Genesis Chapter 3. It goes something like this. It is: “I don’t know if I can really trust God. I mean, if I really live for God, if I really live out Romans 12:1-2 and I give God everything, I’m going to be missing out. And in the end, I think I’ll be miserable.” This is Satan coming to Eve saying, “Did God really tell you that you can’t eat from every tree? He knows that if you eat from this tree you will be like him.” So, this is our thinking. **This is distrust of God and the goodness of God that is underneath every sin.**

So what do we do? Romans tells us we make an exchange. Instead of worshipping God and trusting him, we start to look to created things for happiness: sex, food, money, success, family, marriage – whatever it may be – often very good things, often things that God has given to us, but we are believing that those things are what will ultimately bring us happiness. So there is this thinking.

When it comes to spiritual gifts, it might go like this. “I don’t really want to commit myself to this church.” Or, “I don’t know. I’ll have to go to this extra meeting, and I’ll have to do this. Even now I know this whole thing. I know what Brian wants. He just wants my 10%. He wants to fill a chair.” We have this underlying distrust. It’s easy to have, because you have imperfect, messed up messengers, right?

Okay, let’s think about the transformation that takes place. **The Spirit of God comes into our lives and transforms us. We begin to see that sin is not a joke. Sin is against Almighty God.** We see that he has been so incredibly patient with us and so amazingly loving that we don’t say, “I don’t want you as God, I want sex as god, or I want marriage, or I want *my* way. I don’t care that you made me. I don’t care that I owe everything to you.”

Instead of saying, “That’s it. It’s over for you,” he actually comes in and takes the penalty of that on himself in the person of his Son. He gives me the Son in my place and then his Holy Spirit is given to dwell in me. And there is a change in thinking that says, “If God loves me, there’s no question about God’s commitment to my good, to my wholeness, to my happiness. Whatever you want, God, whatever it is -- tell me and I’ll do it. I’m climbing up on the altar. I’m yours. No longer my way, it’s your way.” That’s what we do every time we baptize someone. We lay them into the water saying, “The old person is dead. We now live to Jesus Christ.”

So, here’s the connection as it is found in the discussion on spiritual gifts. Go to verse 3, if you would, of Romans 12. Listen to the Apostle Paul. “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

I have for you the translation in the ESV, which I just read, and I want to call to your attention to how Paul is reaching back into Chapters 1-11 and the message of grace to teach us about spiritual gifts. Do you see how the big picture is the motivation and the direction for how to use our spiritual gifts? Even his appeal is rooted in the grace of God. He says, “Listen, I’m an apostle. I have this insight. I’m teaching you, all because of a gift from God. I didn’t do this. I didn’t earn it. I was persecuting Christians. I was lost. I was clueless. Oh, the mercy of God! The abundance of the mercy of God! Out of that reservoir of God’s kindness to me, I’m making an appeal to you: Don’t think too much of yourself. Doesn’t the gospel teach you that that’s just crazy? Doesn’t your destiny without Christ, and how Christ rescued you, and what he has done in your life – doesn’t that teach you that thinking you’ve got it all figure out is just nonsense? And that you

somehow have the one indispensable gift that no one else can do without? ‘Hi! Relax, I’m here. Everything’s fine.’” He says, “No, that’s just unthinkable!”

And he makes this appeal that we live according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. That means one of two things. Both are good and both are biblical. I’m going to tell you which one I think it means. It means #1, that your faith is rooted in God and what he has done in your life, so live according to faith, understanding that it is grounded in God. We are not all at the same place in our level of faith. I don’t think that that is the main interpretation here. I think we could misapply that and say, “Well, God just gave me a little bit of faith. That’s all I have. He gave them a lot of faith, me a little faith, so I don’t have a lot of responsibility.” I think that would be very much a misapplication of this phrase. Are you with me?

I think that the proper interpretation or the better interpretation is that the measure of faith is really the standard of our faith. It’s the message. It’s the gospel. And he is saying to live in accordance with that. In [The Message](#), which is a paraphrase by Eugene Peterson – listen to how he grabs ahold of that second interpretation and lays it out for us. “I’m speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me...” Do you see how Paul’s appeal is rooted in Chapters 1 through 11 -- the gospel, the grace of God? “...and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it’s important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.” Do you see it? It’s helpful, isn’t it?

So, **the gospel motivates me.** You say, “Listen, I get it. Because of my old thinking, I am prone to think in terms of using my gifts to secure power and influence, to get my way, to control others. I don’t want to lay down my life to serve because that means I’ll have less of some of these created things that I have believed all my life are going to bring me ultimate happiness. But the gospel frees me to see that God’s love for me is so amazing and so infinite and so perfect, I begin to say, ‘No, no, no – I really *can* trust God.’”

And even though I may get hurt and even though the Church is full of messed up people like every place else, and even though motives are not always what they should be (I understand that), God is greater than all that. And I can fully trust him with my life. If he says, ‘Yes, this is his way,’ I’m just going to jump in and do it. I’m going to follow him.” Not naively, not without discernment.

I would just give this parenthesis. If you are here and you’ve been burned and you’ve been hurt, get healed. If that takes you a while, take three or four days and get healed -- three or four months, three or four years. Your value to this body is not just your utility – how fast you get to work and how much work you do. I would just give this as a parenthesis.

There are some of you here where what we would want for you, what I would want for you is to just be faithful. Receive. Get healed, and we'll all know when it's time for you to jump in. But I want us to see that even when there has been dramatic disappointment, betrayal, and hurt, the gospel heals us so that we don't fall back into that old way of thinking. God will even take that – that bad teaching, being used – whatever it was, and he'll use that for good in your life. So, "I am rejecting now this identity that I'm a victim. I'm not going to wear that as a cloak, because it just feels kind of good; it makes a lot of me. No, no, no, no. That may be true. I may have been victimized, but Jesus redefines me. He gives me a new life story. And I am healed in him." Are you with me?

It motivates me. I could lay the illustration of family alongside right now and say we may have a lot of hurts in family, but when we come to God we get into a new way of thinking and say, "Okay, God tells me that this is how we live, that when we live in marriage we commit to one another, lifelong commitment." We begin to say, "Alright, I don't fully understand all of that, but Lord, how can I not trust you? I'm going to get up on the altar. There's a way that you tell me to do this and I believe." Stay with me – I'm going to make this last connection. What happens is: "I start, I trust you, I am following you." And then the end of Romans 12:2 -- we read it. I begin to prove the will of God. I begin to understand it in a new way. I begin to test it and say, "Oh, yes, yes, that's how it works! That's what a husband looks like. That's what a wife looks like. Oh, that's why God said this."

I'm not saying it's just blind faith. We have a measure of understanding, but as we really commit and trust God, it just starts clicking for us. But the driving force of it is: God loves you. Let me just speak this to you right now. God loves you and has given his Son for you to secure the operation of his goodness in your life, so much so that even suffering and trial will be used for good in your life. That's the motivation and the direction for using our gifts to the glory of God. Amen.