

Sermon 142: Romans 12:6: Spiritual Gifts

OUTLINE

Having gifts
Differing gifts
Gracious gifts
Employing gifts

INTRODUCTION

What am I good at? Where will I be useful? How can I make a difference? These are questions every person asks themselves and ones that the bible has been answering for years. We all have spiritual gifts to serve with. I am not good at anything! I am a good for nothing! No one will miss me when I am gone! These are self-esteem issues that the Bible likewise has been addressing for years when it talks about spiritual gifts. We turn now in our study of Romans to a most wonderful topic, the matter of spiritual gifts. Paul in speaking about our being living sacrifices has spoken about our unity as a body and our diversity in function. Paul moves Romans 12:6-8 to look at a sample of some of the gifts that God has given us for service.

Paul has been renewing our minds. To help us be servants, he renews our minds about what we are. To help us be united and be in community Paul renews our mind about our union as a body. And now in order to fit us for service he will renew our minds about our abilities.

We will be spending several weeks looking at the matter of spiritual gifts. Today we want to look at four things from v6. Firstly, that each one of us has gifts, and we will look at how we can identify them; secondly, God's sovereign appointment in causing us to differ; thirdly, the gracious nature of gifts, and fourthly, using them in service.

Having gifts

How do I recognise my Gifts?

Many people are in the dark as to what gifts are what, and most do not know whether they ever have gifts or not. In this section we have ten basic points which will hopefully help each person discover their gifts. The Bible says, "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). Paul says in Romans 12:6 'having gifts....' Every single one of us has a gift from God; the key is now discovering it.

1. Natural abilities

The first place to begin looking for your gifts is by looking at your natural abilities. Most people think that talents don't qualify as gifts. This is a myth! Most gifts are anointed, sanctified talent. If you were a good teacher before salvation it is still true of you. If you have good business sense and strategy skills, this can very definitely be used in the Church as administration. If you are good with children, you can be called to kids ministry, or with music in the music ministry. These natural abilities must be the first place we look for our gifts. When evaluating your natural abilities, the modern notion of multiple intelligences can be helpful. We often think very narrowly about gifting, and need our categories expanded. Here are some other categories to think about:

- **Verbal-Linguistic** - Being good with words. It involves "the world of words and sound and meter of a linguistic sort." Poets and writers (in the church this could include translation, mission work, blogging, etc.)

- **Logical-Mathematical** - Being good with numbers. This intelligence includes the ability to reason inductively and deductively, to use numbers and recognize abstract patterns. Mathematicians, logicians, scientists and computer programmers. (in the church this could be the person who uses IT in service of the church; those who think doctrinally and test all things and mixed with a teaching gift could be very useful, etc).
- **Musical** - Good with music. The "ability to represent the world musically." Understanding patterns, sounds, harmonies and rhythms in music. Composers, conductors. (in the church this could be the musicians, song writers, etc)
- **Spatial** - "The capacity to form and manipulate mental representations of large space (pilots or navigators) or more circumscribed space (chess player, sculptor, anatomist, geometer)."
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic** - "The capacity to solve problems or make things with your whole body or parts of your body (hand, mouth)." Musical performers, surgeons, athletes, craftsmen, dancers, actors.
- **Interpersonal** - "Understanding other people." Communication and relationships with other people. Politicians, sales people, teachers.
- **Intrapersonal** - "Having a keen understanding of yourself, your desires, strengths, weaknesses, and how to operate on that self model." (it is often those who are introspective who have a high awareness of need in others)
- **Naturalist** - "The capacity to recognize patterns in the living world." Charles Darwin is the example usually given.
- **Existential** - Gardner considers this a possible intelligence. "The human proclivity to ask fundamental questions like who are we, why do we live, why do we die, and why is there a world."¹ (those who are into evangelism, apologetics, theology and teaching would have this big picture way of thinking).

Realise that there is IQ, EQ, and many other ways to be used by God. We must not be restricted to good speakers, servants and musicians as the only ways to serve God.

2. Past training and opportunities

God's providence extends even to before we were Christians. And so we should be looking for the cultivation of our gifts and the preparations of our ministries in our past training and opportunities. Have you trained in counselling, finance, child care, music, social upliftment, architecture, construction, catering, etc? You would be surprised to see how often your "ordinary" training fits you for essential tasks in the Church.

3. Answering urgent needs

Often answering urgent needs reveals dormant gifts and cultivates and sharpens your known gifts. Perhaps a shortage of Sunday School teachers gives you an opportunity to discover your teaching gift or having to lead a Bible Study when the leader is sick. Having to organise a function may reveal your administrative abilities. So respond to the needs around you, and perhaps your gifts will surface.

4. Desires

What is your heart's desire? God often puts a desire in our hearts to get our feet moving. Is there some desire you have, like seeing the lost saved, or helping the church discover God in worship, or seeing young Christians develop or seeing young teenage girls become godly women? This may indicate the direction of your life that God has for you!

1 http://eho.org/homeschool_prep/article.asp?articleid=47

5. Joys

What gives you joy? Is there a particular ministry which brings you deep satisfaction and joy? Do you feel fulfilled after visiting a shut-in or a lonely person? Do you feel complete doing tasks for others? Do you feel exhilarated after sharing the gospel (most people do)? Or from sharing a truth or a word of encouragement with someone? Joys, like desires, indicate a possible gift and purpose.

6. Blessing

Which area of your service experiences much blessing? When you open the Word are people taught and blown away by your insights? Do you have particular success in evangelism? Do children respond well to you? Do people seek you out for counsel or prayer? Are you able to lift up the down-hearted? Where does the Lord bless your service, this may be the place of your calling.

7. The Counsel of Others

What do others say are your strengths? Some of us are so self-effacing or lack confidence that often it is through the words of others that a person sees their gifts. Husbands and wives especially are to encourage and grow each other in this way. Have you had more than one person tell you that you are good at a certain something? What do mature believers feel your abilities are? Wisdom is in the counsel of many.

8. Your complaints

Your complaints may reveal an aptitude in a certain area that is presently being neglected. I used to criticise the worship at a Young Adults meeting, giving many points of criticism and points for improvement. The guy leading the thing was grateful that I was so keen to see it done rightly and gave me the job. Your frustrations may reveal an ability waiting to be unleashed.

9. Obey the general rules

All Christians are to show mercy, be hospitable, evangelise, encourage etc. And it is usually in obedience to these general commands that we discover we have a knack for some or one. God steers a moving ship! Are you obeying the general commands?

10. Past hurts and healing

All of us have suffered pain and brokenness, we have all been afflicted by sin in some way. And from those times we received healing, insights and lessons that we can pass on to others. Perhaps you've lost a child, or gone through a divorce, or suffered with Cancer. These things can sensitize you to the need of encouragement, physical help and teaching that others might need. This is the point Paul makes to the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 1:3-4, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.'

Differing gifts

Paul tells us that not only do we have gifts, but we have gifts that differ. We have made this point, but Paul makes it every time he speaks of the gifts, God in His sovereignty has appointed the designation of gifts. God has determined who will get what. There are gifts that come with offices and authority, and there are gifts that don't. There are gifts that are miraculous and there are gifts that aren't. There are gifts that will get appreciation and the praise of man and there are gifts that are secret and will not. So instead of coveting the

popular gifts, or the spectacular gifts, or the gifts that come with authority, accept God's sovereign appointment.

To say that you have no gifts is a lie, and to say that your gifts are useless is to insult God's sovereignty. It may be that you need some encouragement to discover your gifts but think in line with scripture, God has given a diversity of gifts to each one including you. Those with low self-esteem, those who look over their lives and see nothing special about themselves, those who think there would be no difference if I died, you are wrong! Rudolph the red nosed reindeer sums this up for us very nicely. Rudolph was rejected by the other reindeer, he was self-conscious and insecure because he had a bright and shiny nose. The other reindeer mocked him for being different, but it turns out that he was a specialist for foggy conditions, and Rudolph is celebrated for his differences which became useful in that odd situation. Every part of the body is needed, every member in the Church is needed.

You may think 'I am useless because I can't preach, or play an instrument', you are wrong. You are like the person Paul speaks to in 1 Cor. 12:15, 'If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.' Well, here is what Paul would say to people like that.

Firstly he would say, 'But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose' (1 Cor. 12:18). If you don't have a certain gift that you think important, God made it so, so when you complain you are complaining about what God has done. The problem with complaining against God is that he never gets things wrong, and he has the right to do what he wants. Contentment comes from faith in the goodness and wisdom of God, that he knew what he was doing when he put you together. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Secondly, there is no one that he has overlooked, the text says, 'each one of them'. This Paul deliberately threw in, for those sorts of people who are self-effacing, who are always looking for the possible way to defame themselves, and find a way for making themselves a victim, Paul leaves no room for such pessimism. There is divine ordering in what you do and do not have. Remember now, if it is God who gives it, you cannot be proud and boast, and if he doesn't give it, then you can't complain and whine. And remembering that it was deliberate should put into our heads that there is a plan, be it not ours. God has given you a place and a set of gifts to be there. Service in the Church is not for those who have enough gumption and pride to promote themselves, every person has a role, and gifts for that role, discover it we must. And thirdly, diversity makes for better functioning, 'If all were a single member where would the body be?' (v19). Medically it is called cancer when one part of the body breaks its bounds and cells multiply wrongly to the proportion that they are supposed to be in the body. The Church needs all of its parts, there are none that do not matter.

Gracious gifts

Next Paul tells us that these gifts come by grace, 'Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.' In all of our thinking we must be grace centred and this applies to the gifts as well. The word grace and gift are the same Greek word, 'charis' from which we get Charismatic. How important this is to note. You have received your talents and abilities not because you are sinless, more worthy, more intelligent, just a better sort of person. You have them because a sovereign and gracious God appointed it to be so. You are as unworthy as the rest of us. However, God in His goodness has given you gifts. In His common grace He has given His gifts to both believers and unbelievers, the natural gifts that is. All your endowments are not merited but granted.

This means they are not yours to do with as you please. You are a steward entrusted with a charge. They have come to you by grace and should be exercised towards others on the basis of grace. Freely you have received freely give. Do you have a gift of mercy, give it unconditionally, give it to those who are unworthy as well as those who are worthy, give it to your enemies as well as your friends, give it when it isn't being returned, and when it is costly. Do you have a gift of hospitality, be as promiscuous as grace is in being hospitable, do not look for the worthy but be indiscriminating in your service. The rich, the poor, the believer, the unbeliever, let grace drive your gift, give as it has been given to you. Being reminded that these gifts have to us by grace must set the tone in how we give to others.

Consider Christ in His service. He had the worship of heaven in glory, the love of the Trinity, an existence free from death, suffering and temptation. Yet because of grace, because of love, because of His desire to save us He put aside His privileges and veiled His glory and taking to Himself a full human nature. He experienced all the deprivations of this life and was tortured to death to serve us, and then told us that His foot washing life is a paradigm for us to follow. We were not looking for Him but He came to us, we did not serve Him, yet He served us, we had only earned judgement yet He did not deal with us as our sins deserved and took all the judgement we deserved to Himself. When we consider the gifts we have received in order to be fitted for service, we must think of grace as the source of our gifts and the rule by which we serve others with them.

Employing gifts

At this point we are speaking in the most general terms about gifts, and the last thing Paul mentions that we want to look at is the fact that we should use them, 'let us use them.' This goes without saying, but because we are neglectful it in fact needs saying. There will be things particular to each gift that needs to be said but here are a few general considerations.

Firstly, what is the proper place for using your gift? This of course will depend on the gift. For example, a woman may have a teaching gift which she cannot exercise in the collective worship service of the church but may be able to exercise in the Sunday school class or even in the school classroom during the week. Not all gifts need to serve a purpose in the Sunday worship services. Many of the gifts that you have are probably already employed on a daily basis in your employment. You can use your gifts to earn money for your family. You can use your gift for the good of society as you seek to be a good citizen. You can use your gift in seeking to minister to the lost, or you could use it in the life of the church without having to have it feature in the worship service. When you think of gifts don't only think of those things that happen in the Sunday services.

Let me add that if you are already involved using your gifts in some way, then let us know. We want to pray for you and support you in your efforts, perhaps even partner with you. As an elder I need to know what you are involved in. I am to give an account for your soul and I cannot do that if I don't know what you are involved in.

Secondly, don't wait for the pastor to tell you how to use your gift. I don't view this church as a bunch of people sitting on the shelf and when I need to run a particular program I pull in people with those gifts. Don't wait, get going. I would rather have the problem of having to rein you in because you are so enthusiastic in doing, than to try and get you moving.

Thirdly, be creative. God in His sovereignty has dealt us the cards we have in the gifts and people and opportunities we have. In His wisdom He has put us here in Timaru with the

people we have. So we need to look at the needs in community and the church and try and connect the needs with the gifts we have. For example, there is a need to evangelise the elderly in old age homes, and there are a lot of good singers in the church. We could put these two things together and start a group that sings and visits folk in order to bring the gospel. Another example is the fact that we have some hunters in the congregation, so when it came to camp time, we were able to keep costs down by providing meat through hunting. Who would have thought that hunting could be used to serve the church. We must look at the needs, look at the gifts we have and get going. For this reason no two church will look alike in their ministries. No two churches have the same sets of people and needs.

Next week we will be looking at the cessationist and continuationist debate and looking at the issue of which gifts we should expect to see functioning today.