



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 38



SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SERVING GOD

^{12:3} For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

(Romans 12:3-8)

INTRODUCTION

Having introduced us to the proper application of the marvelous proclamations and expositions of the first eleven chapters, namely the presentation of our bodies to God, the Spirit now develops the reason for this response. It is often the nature of Christian men to approach matters of religion from Mount Sinai. Thus, words like commandment, authority, duty, and obligation, rise to the surface of their vocabulary, becoming the primary motivation for living unto God. While there is some merit to this approach, it is certainly not the highest level of involvement, nor does it represent the most noble incentive. When lawful, it is largely how those who dwell in far off places are addressed – those living in

practical aloofness from God.

The presentation of our bodies to God, without defilement and acceptable to Him, has been described as our *“reasonable service,”* or *“spiritual act of worship.”*^{NIV} As such, it is utterly unreasonable not to make this presentation. To fail in this presentation constitutes one unspiritual and unacceptable before the Lord. If this assessment is true, and I am persuaded it is, it completely changes the way in which the contemporary church is evaluated. Many of its boasts fall to the ground as worthless.

The text before us elaborates on the reasonableness of the sacrifice of our lives

to God. Those in Christ have been called into holy involvements, and they are to be properly prepared for them. There is an underlying assumption that we have been placed in the body of Christ for a reason. There is a work to be done by each individual that requires the presentation of one’s body as a living sacrifice to God. It is a work that requires holiness on our part, and acceptance on God’s part. What is more, apart from this work, there is no reason to be added to the church (Acts 2:47), or be placed in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:18).

I understand this may appear too harsh. Some would rather imagine we were called out of unholy involvements,

The grace of God equips the saints of God to do the work of God--by Given O. Blakely

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THINKING PROPERLY (12:3)
- II. WE ARE MANY, YET ONE BODY (12:4-5)
- III. GIFTS THAT ARE DIFFERENT ACCORDING TO GOD'S GRACE (12:6a)
- IV. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY (12:6b)
- V. THE GIFT OF MINISTRY (12:7a)
- VI. THE GIFT OF TEACHING (12:7b)
- VII. THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION (12:8a)
- VIII. THE GIFT OF GIVING (12:8c)
- IX. THE GIFT OF LEADING (12:8c)
- X. THE GIFT OF SHOWING MERCY (12:8d)

but not into holy ones. Such cannot conceive of God's employment of every member of the body of Christ, choosing to think of only a few select souls being placed into actual Kingdom activity. Of course, there is a religious superstructure in place that encourages such vanity of thought. But it is seriously wrong, and must be thrust from us as the plague it really is. It will defile the soul!

At the very outset of creation, God declared the purpose for man: *"let them have dominion"* (Gen 1:26,28; Psa 8:6). Initially, that *"dominion"* related to the creation itself: *"over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."* The Psalmist stated it this way, *"Thou madest him to have dominion*

over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (Psa 8:6-8).

Do not imagine for a single moment this is the most precise statement of God's purpose for mankind. It was more of an introductory statement than a complete one. Governorship of the natural creation is far from being the pinnacle of the *"dominion"* God intends for man. There is sufficient revelation on this matter to make it sure to our hearts and minds. Men do not now have dominion over the creation.

- ☐ Three times Paul suffered shipwreck, often involving storm and tempest (2 Cor 11:25).
- ☐ The perils to which he was subjected involved *"perils of waters," "perils in the wilderness,"* and *"in perils in the sea"* (1 Cor 26).
- ☐ *"Hunger and thirst,"* and *"cold and nakedness"* were also among the experiences he endured (2 Cor 11:27).
- ☐ Saints of old time who ranked high before God *"wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented . . . wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth"* (Heb 11:37-38).

These precious souls did not appear to have dominion over the elements, as some boast today. But that does not mean they had no dominion, or that they were not

given authority. Further, they will surely rise up in the day of judgment against those who have misrepresented the will of God and the nature of His great salvation.

The thrust of the application of our salvation is not dominance over the natural realm, but the presentation of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Do not imagine that God has called you into Christ to avert storms and famines. Whatever you may think of the possibility of such things, they are not the framework within which Divine fellowship and utility is realized.

When Jesus sent out the seventy, He told them, *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"* (Luke 10:19). But this was by no means intended to declare the nature of future involvements with Jesus. It related to the fulfillment of a work, not a domain of authority. James was killed by Herod. The Apostles were beaten by the Jewish council (Acts 5:40). Stephen was stoned by the council (Acts 7:59). Paul was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19). Antipas was martyred by the enemies of Jesus (Rev 2:13). Such noble souls as these would surely wince if they heard some of the nonsense that is preached in the name of Christ today.

The immediate area of our dominion will be defined in our text. It will be seen as bearing directly upon our relationship to the people of God. That relationship will involve Divine endowments, the grace of God, and the benefit of the saints.

THINKING PROPERLY

^{12:3} ***For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*** This is an elaboration on WHY we are to ascertain the will of the Lord: i.e., *"so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect."* ^{NR5V} The strong intimation is that living pleasingly and profitably

before the Lord is not possible while one is ignorant of His will. God is not served in a state of ignorance. In fact, ignorance of God actually alienates the soul from Him. As it is written, *"They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts"* (Eph 4:18).

As the above text indicates, an ignorance of God is a mark of being

unregenerate. It has no place in the believer. Wherever the smallest portion of it is found, a hearty effort must be extended to rid ourselves of it. One of the key marks of the New Covenant is, *"for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them"* (Heb 8:11).

Thus we have been admonished to *"present"* our bodies to God, a sacrifice of life, in order that we may come to know the good will of God. With determination,

The grace of God equips the saints of God to do the work of God--by Given O. Blakely

we are to avoid being conformed to this world. Rather, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, which transformation will enable us to know the will of the Lord.

The Spirit will now delineate a chief aspect of God's "good, and acceptable, and perfect will." It is essential to understand this is not an academic matter, involving merely the human intellect. This will involve our participation in the will of God as well as our knowledge of it. In salvation, we have been called into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9). We become laborers together with God (1 Cor 3:9), and the extension of Christ's own Person. The church is "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23). It is the repository in which His character and power are being poured. Here is where His will is executed and His purpose is being fulfilled. Our identity with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:4-6), has been in order that He might live in us and work through us.

This marvelous circumstance is seen in the words, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God **through us**"^{NKJV} (2 Cor 1:20). Again, it is written, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and **through us** diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place"^{NKJV} (2 Cor 2:14). The weight of this situation is also seen in Paul's testimony concerning His own participation in this purpose. "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading **through us**: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God"^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:20).

Not Limited to the Apostles

The Apostles have been placed "first" in the church (1 Cor 12:28). They are "first" in priority, with the greater responsibility of putting the foundation in place, and making known the formerly hidden purpose of God (Eph 3:5).

This Divinely orchestrated circumstance has led some to view the Apostles as separate from the rest of the body of Christ. This view is largely in the

background of people's thinking, yet has moved them to live as though there were no God-ordained ministries in Christ's body today, or at best, very few of them. Thus masses of professing *Christians* have been reduced to mere spectators, with relatively little, if any, involvement in the good will of God. However, there are a great number of ministries that have been

It is essential to understand this is not an academic matter, involving merely the human intellect. This will involve our participation in the will of God as well as our knowledge of it.

put into the church "after" the Apostles. These ministries are called "*spiritual gifts*" (1 Cor 12:1; 14:1,12). Those possessing them are called "*stewards of the manifold grace of God*" (1 Pet 4:10). As the Head, Christ works through them to minister grace to His people (Col 2:19).

These gifts are the theme of this section of the twelfth chapter. Their presence and functionality are the reason why we are to know the "good and acceptable, and perfect will of God." As we will see, the point is not merely to know about these abilities, but to actually be a part of their fulfillment.

SPEAKING THROUGH GRACE

"For I say, through the grace given unto me." Paul does not speak out of the reservoir of flesh! Nature is not the domain from which his knowledge of the things of God has been obtained. He does not speak as a Roman citizen and resident of Tarsus. Neither, indeed, does he address the people from the perspective of one who sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He does not speak as an expert in the Law, trained and disciplined among the most strict sect of the Jews, the Pharisees (Acts 26:5). In the flesh, he was, indeed, all of these things. Yet, they were a wholly unsuitable context from which to

address the people of God.

The man of God speaks "through the grace" that was given to him. By this he means he is speaking "as God's messenger."^{NLT} He speaks in the capacity of an Apostle, where God has placed him in the body. He does not venture his opinion about things, but declares what grace has enabled him to see. He has been entrusted with a message, and he now speaks in strict accord with that message.

Spiritual gifts are dispensations of the grace of God. For this reason, those possessing them are "administering God's grace in its various forms"^{NIV} (1 Pet 4:10). Words that are spoken through the grace of God are words of love and benefit. They declare gracious provisions, and announce congenial desires. They are good for us, and yield good results. They announce God's "thoughts of peace" toward us (Jer 29:11). Such words must not be received as harsh laws, but as revelations of God's goodness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Paul speaks with authority, but it is authority to edify, not to bludgeon and coerce. As it is written, "according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction" (2 Cor 13:10). Again he writes, "our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction" (2 Cor 10:8). When this intention is perceived, Apostolic admonitions become sweet and precious to us.

Let us devote ourselves to speaking more from grace. As it is written, "Let your speech be always with grace" (Col 4:6). Thus will our words be "good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph 4:29).

SPEAKING TO EVERYONE

"... to everyone who is among you." The words that follow are not addressed to the leaders alone, but to everyone. They are not intended for the wayward only, but for everyone. In a day fraught with specialized ministries to special groups, it is exceedingly refreshing to read a word

that is for everyone!

This circumstance should come as no surprise to us. The Gospel has been declared to be God’s power to effect salvation in *“everyone who believes”* (1:16). Glory, honor, and peace are promised to *“everyone who works what is good”* (2:10). Christ is announced as *“the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes”* (10:4). *“Everyone”* who names the name of Christ is to *“depart from iniquity”* (2 Tim 2:19). Christ tasted death *“for everyone”* (Heb 2:9). Messages of grace are for *“everyone.”*

This observation may appear rather elementary, and even crude and unnecessary. However, we are living in an era when the power of the truth has been decidedly neutralized by addressing special groups within the body of Christ rather than the whole body. Often differing vocabularies are used to declare varying emphases. You will find no such approach in the Word of God. John the Baptist gave counsel to the soldiers, but his message was for everyone. Jesus spoke to everyone, with occasional words to groups like the Pharisees.

The more a word is addressed to special groups of believers, the less power it has to edify. The Apostles were appointed to minister to two major bodies of people: the circumcision (Jews) and the uncircumcision (Gentiles) – Gal 2:7. Their message, however, was essentially the same. They laid the same foundation and declared the same pivotal realities. **A Gospel that cannot be preached to everyone ought not to be preached to anyone.** A message that is confined to one part of the body of Christ is one that ought to be viewed with suspicion, and received with great reluctance. The message before us is *“to every one of you.”*^{NIV}

HOW NOT TO THINK

“ . . . not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” Other versions read, *“not to have an over-high opinion of himself,”*^{DARBY} *“Be honest in your estimate of yourselves,”*^{NLT} and *“never pride yourself on being better than*

you really are.”^{NJB}

We Are God’s Workmanship

At the root of this admonition is the fact that we are God’s *“workmanship”* (Eph 2:10), and have been placed in the body of His Son in strict accordance with His good pleasure (1 Cor 12:18). To think *“more highly”* of ourselves, or pride ourselves in being better than we really are, is to think of ourselves apart from our placement in the body. It is to assign a

However, we are living in an era when the power of the truth has been decidedly neutralized by addressing special groups within the body of Christ rather than the whole body. Often differing vocabularies are used to declare varying emphases.

value to ourselves that does not comport with what has been given to us by God.

According to the Measure of Wisdom

To view it from another perspective, it is to conduct ourselves as though we had more wisdom that we really possess. This would involve making judgments we are incapable of making. It also involves speaking as though we had authority about matters concerning which we have no *“spiritual understanding.”*

Abilities That Are Received

Yet another way in which persons can think too highly of themselves is to treat their abilities as though they had not received them. As it is written, *“For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”*^{NKJV} (1 Cor 4:7).

Probing Matters Unrevealed

There are matters that ought not to be probed or investigated. These are things God has not been disposed to reveal to men. It is written, *“The secret things*

belong unto the LORD our God” (Deut 29:29). Although the curiosity of man is disposed to look into such matters, it is better to confess with the Psalmist, *“LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me”* (Psa 131:1).

A remarkable amount of corruption has entered the professed church through preachers and teachers who have thought more highly of themselves than they ought to think. As well, a considerable amount of unlawful controversy and division has taken place for the same reason. This is an area where every person must take care.

THINK SOBERLY

“ . . . but to think soberly.” To think soberly is to think within the context of reality. Rather than extending ourselves beyond the borders of what we have experienced and seen, thinking *“soberly”* humbly acknowledges one’s own limitations.

Those in Christ are to make a proper estimation of their own gifts and abilities. In so doing, they will be able to minister to and advantage the people of God. To fail to do this will only bring disruption and discord among the saints. Each believer should so conduct their life as to avoid the aphorism, *“If I could buy him for what he is worth, and sell him for what he thinks he is worth, I would make a significant profit.”*

THE MEASURE OF FAITH

“ . . . as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Other versions read, *“as God has allotted to each a measure of faith,”*^{NASB} *“in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you,”*^{NIV} *“each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned,”*^{NRSV} *“measuring your value by how much faith God has given you,”*^{NLT} and *“recognizing that God has given to each one his measure of faith.”*^{NJB}

It is true, there is only *“one faith.”* From one point of view, ones possession of it can be referred to as *“little faith”* (Matt

6:30; 16:8), or “*great faith*” (Matt 8:10). That, however, does not refer to a “*measure of faith*,” assigned by God, but to the reception and use of that faith. Peter spoke of the faith we have received as being of the same kind as that which the Apostles received: “*to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours*” (2 Pet 1:1). This, however, is not the perspective of our text.

The Measure

The word “*measure*” does not refer to quantity, i.e., a lot of faith, or not so much faith. It refers to a vessel used for measuring, such as a cup, bowl, bushel, omer, etc. The size of the vessel does not determine the value of the substance placed in it. One may use a small spoon for measuring salt or flavoring, but a large multi-cup vessel for measuring flour or

sugar. **The capacity of the vessel, or the measure, is determined by what the substance it measures is used for.**

So it is with the “*measure of faith*.” While all of God’s people are given faith, each possess it is a measure – **a capacity to fulfill a particular function in the body of Christ.** The faith of the Apostles made them adequate for the Apostleship. The faith of Philip and Timothy equipped them to be evangelists (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5). The faith of Apollos made him an apt exhorter (Acts 18:27-28). The faith of Barnabas made him an able encourager and consoler (Acts 4:36).

It is important to note that faith, not training, makes us effective ministers for the Lord. Men are prone to view educational attainments as kingdom

credentials, but they are not. **It is what God gives us that equips us for effective work in His kingdom, not what we gain from men.** That may appear to be very rudimentary, but it can easily escape our attention.

The exhortation to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and to think soberly, is an admonition to concentrate on what our faith equips us to do. We are to come away from philosophizing about faith and ministries. Ministry to the saints is to be accomplished, not talked about. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to do this. Thus we are exhorted to allow our faith to be the directing influence of our work. Our thinking is in view of our faith. Our labors are to be motivated by our faith. Our gifts are made effective by our faith.

WE ARE MANY, YET ONE BODY

“⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

The people of God have been called into a single body, each individual being endowed with faith that qualifies him to provide needed resources to the rest of the body. Thus it is written, “*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful*” (Col 3:15). The Spirit will now show us that God has so devised nature, particularly our bodies, that it reflects His intention for the church.

THE PORTRAYAL OF NATURE

“*For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function . . .*” Our bodies are a demonstration of different parts working in harmony.

This same perspective is provided in the book of First Corinthians. “*For in fact the body is not one member but many. If*

the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a

The people of God have been called into a single body, each individual being endowed with faith that qualifies him to provide needed resources to the rest of the body.

hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather,

those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our representable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another” (12:14-25). The following should be noted.

- The body consists of many members.
- Being part of the body does not consist of everyone being the same member.
- All members are not the same.
- If there were not multiple and differing members, there would be no body.
- No part of the body can say it has no need of the other parts.
- Parts which appear to be weaker are often even more necessary.
- The parts of our body that are not of themselves attractive, are attired in a more comely manner.
- There is no need to vaunt the more

prominent parts.

- All of this is a deliberate arrangement so there will be no schism, or rupture, in the body.

MANY, YET ONE

“... so we, being many, are one ...”

The word “many,” in this case, means many different kinds. “Many” are numerically large (Rev 7:9), but numeracy is not the point. Just as the body has many different **functioning** parts, and all of them are necessary and beneficial, so the body of Christ has many different, yet essential, parts. They are “parts” in relation to function. They serve differing, yet harmonious, purposes.

Every part of the body of Christ is functional, deliberately placed in it to minister the grace of God. The call to sober thinking summons us to think in harmony with what God has called us to do.

The Human Body

In the human body, there are external visible parts such as the head, torso, shoulders, arms, legs, hands and feet. There are also external parts that are of a different nature, like the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. There are other external parts that have different characteristics, like hair and skin. There are internal organs like the heart, liver, kidneys, and lungs. There are internal members like bones, tissues, sinews, and blood vessels. Blood and water are a vital part of the body, as well as the brain. Within the bloodstream there are microscopic bodies that are necessary, like white and red cells, and numerous antibodies. There are entire bodies of knowledge that deal with segments of the body. Histology is the study of tissue structure, while Cytology is the study of cell structure. The human body is indeed marvelous for its diversity and complexity, and more marvelous still for its unity. How true it is, “*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psa 139:14). No wonder those with insight confess, “*Know ye that the LORD He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves*” (Psa 100:3). That applies to the realms of both nature and grace, the flesh and the spirit, and it is marvelous to consider.

The Body of Christ

As we might expect, the realm of the Spirit is even more marvelous than the realm of nature. Nature is only a faint reflection of the domain of the Spirit. The vast variety of spiritual functions within the body of Christ, together with their harmony with one another, and effectiveness for the purpose of God, is evidence of a great God with a great salvation.

There are no exhaustive lists of the various functions within Christ’s body. Occasionally, the Spirit will mention some of them. They are largely viewed from the standpoint of their variety and effective ministry. Too, those that are provided are

Just as the body has many different functioning parts, and all of them are necessary and beneficial, so the body of Christ has many different, yet essential, parts. They are “parts” in relation to function.

given in view of the church addressed by the Epistle, and are therefore not intended to be a completed listing. Some samples are provided below, confirming what marvelous variety is found in them.

ROMANS. Prophecy, ministry, exhorting, giving, and showing mercy (12:6-8). **In Romans, the gifts are viewed from the standpoint of faith, which is the means through which they are executed.**

FIRST CORINTHIANS. Word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostles, prophets, teachers, helps, and governments (12:8-10, 28). **In First Corinthians, the gifts are viewed from the standpoint of their origin and effectiveness. They are**

distributed by the Spirit (12:4), administered by the Lord (12:5), and activated by God who works all in all (12:6).

EPHESIANS. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers (4:8-10). **In Ephesians the gifts are seen as Christ’s provision for the church during the time of our absence from Him.**

FIRST PETER. Speaking and ministering (4:10-11). **Peter speaks of the gifts in relation to the grace of God, declaring in their execution we are stewards of the manifold grace of God—or the grace that, in the gifts, takes various forms.**

WE DO NOT HAVE THE SAME OFFICE

“... and all members have not the same office.” Most versions read, “*the same function.*” Behind this is the postulation that every member is functional, or serves a specific and needful purpose. No believer can say they do not belong to the body of Christ because they are unable to do what they conceive to be most important. On the other hand, no believer can boast they have no need of the other members because they imagine them to be inferior.

The roles we play in the body of Christ have been assigned to us, not selected by us. The faith that has been given to us is in strict accord with that assignment. When our faith is strong, we will fulfill our function to the glory of God and the help of His people.

ONE BODY IN CHRIST

“... are one body in Christ ...” Elsewhere it is affirmed, “*there is one body*” (Eph 4:4). Much is made of this in Scripture. Those who are in Christ “*being many are one bread, and one body*” (1 Cor 10:17). Believers “*are one body,*” and “*by one Spirit,*” have been “*baptized into one body*” (1 Cor 12:12,13). The precise statement of our text (“*we, being many, are one body*”) is also made in First Corinthians 12:20. It is also declared that

The grace of God equips the saints of God to do the work of God--by Given O. Blakely

in Christ, Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled unto God *“in one body”* (Eph 2:16). We have been *“called in one body”* in order that the peace of God might *“rule”* in our hearts (Col 3:15).

This *“one body”* has been reconciled unto God and freed from the tyranny of the devil, the flesh, and the world. What is objectionable about them has been cut away from them, and they are being built together for *“the habitation of God through the Spirit”* (Eph 2:20).

The term *“one body”* is not a synonym for *“one church,”* as ordinarily conceived. With great care, the Spirit applies the concept of oneness to the functioning members – *“one body.”* This is not an institutional view, and designedly so. Those who use a text like this to disenfranchise other believers reveal the wretchedness of their own hearts. If anything, the concept of *“one body”* excludes those who are idle and non-contributive. Even that would be an inappropriate use of the expression.

“One body in Christ” underscores that we are not only individual members, but that we are connected to the Head of the body. Jesus ministers vitality to His people through the individual members, making them a cohesive whole. It is from Jesus as *“the Head”* that *“the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow”*^{NIV} (Col 2:19).

The Fulness of Christ

One of the most remarkable descriptions of the church is found in the book of Ephesians. Earlier I alluded to this text, but it will bear further scrutiny. With great power it is affirmed, *“God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way”* (Eph 1:22-23).

Although Jesus is *“the Head of the church”* (Eph 5:23) and *“the head of the body, the church”* (Col 1:18), that is not the

point of this text. **The Spirit is not speaking of authority over the church, but of provision for it.** God has made Jesus *“Head over everything,”* investing Him with *“all power in heaven and in earth”* (Matt 28:18). He has authority over all of our adversaries to restrain them. He has power over all the armies of heaven, to marshal them to work for our good. He has authority over the dispensing of the gifts of grace, so that we may receive them. He has been made Head over all of these things *“for”* [the benefit of] *“the church, which is His body”*

By calling the church Christ’s

But He is not simply filling them with attitudes or character traits, although that is involved. Rather, He is endowing them with the capacity to minister in His name – to advantage His people by doing for them what He Himself does. Thus, they become workers together with Him.

“fulness,” the Spirit is affirming that Jesus is filling His people with Himself. This is another way of saying they are *“made partakers of Christ”* (Heb 3:14) and of the *“Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). But He is not simply filling them with attitudes or character traits, although that is involved. Rather, He is endowing them with the capacity to minister in His name – to advantage His people by doing for them what He Himself does. Thus, they become workers together with Him.

MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

“... and individually members of one another.” Other versions read, *“each member belongs to all the others,”*^{NIV} *“we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others,”*^{NLT} and *“as different parts*

we are all joined to one another.”^{NJB}

The body of Christ is not comprised of disconnected members. That is the condition of those without spiritual life, not those who are alive unto God. Disconnected members are like Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones. They were not connected together. It was not until the word of the Lord came in power that *“the bones came together, bone to his bone,”* forming something that would eventually be functional (Ezek 37:7). Then, the bones became *“members of one another.”*

The point here is that no individual member of the body possesses all of the fulness of Christ. To put it another way, **no member is sufficient of itself, or can live in isolation from the rest of the body.** Thus Titus was refreshed by the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:13), and himself comforted Paul (2 Cor 7:6). Onesiphorus *“oft refreshed”* Paul (2 Tim 1:16), and Phebe succored, or helped, him (Rom 16:1-2). Paul was comforted by the faith of the Roman brethren, and they were comforted by his (Rom 1:12). Aquila and Priscilla ministered to Apollos (Acts 18:26), and Apollos *“helped them much which had believed through grace”* (Acts 18:17). Mary *“labored much”* for Paul and his coworkers (Rom 16:6), and Epaphroditus *“ministered to”* his *“wants,”* or need (Phil 2:25). All of these were *“members of one another,”* supplying needed graces in accordance with their personal faith.

Believers Fit Together

The people of God fit together. They are a spiritual house that is *“fitly framed together”* (Eph 2:21). Other versions read, *“the whole building, being joined together,”*^{NKJV} and *“the whole building, being fitted together.”*^{NASB} **The factor that knits and fits us together is not mere commonality, but what Jesus supplies through us.** That supply is like the mortar that bonds the people of God together, thereby making the house, or temple of God, strong. Thus, from the Head, Jesus, *“the whole body”* is *“being fitted and held together by that which*

every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part"^{NASB} (Eph 4:16). It is the flow of grace through the individual members that fits them together – when *"each part is working properly."*^{NRSV}

We Need One Another

Thus, the body is not held together by its profession, but by the working of each individual member. When we come into Christ, we are *"added to the church,"* making us one with the rest of the body (Acts 2:47). Our responsibility is now to *"keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph 4:3). This is not done by

getting together, discussing, and ironing out our differences. That is too philosophical, and has not yielded extended and profitable benefits.

The "unity of the Spirit" is kept, or maintained, by means of mutual ministry, or edification. That is the whole point of the fourth chapter of Ephesians (vs 12-16). That is involved in being *"members of one another,"* and is the point that will now be developed.

The Promotion of Humility

There is an uncomely quality in the flesh that seeks to arrive at a point where

others are not needed. To be able to stand alone, and function without the assistance of anyone else is thus thought to be an attainment of great value. First, such a state is not possible. It is purely an imagination, whether in nature or in grace. However, this is particularly true in Christ Jesus.

Our interdependence upon one another is a great promoter of humility. It regularly reminds us that our sufficiency is of God, and that it has been largely ministered to us through Christ's body, which is His means of expression. Humility opens the door for effectiveness.

GIFTS THAT ARE DIFFERENT ACCORDING TO GOD'S GRACE

"^{6a} Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them . . ."

HAVING GIFTS

"Having then gifts differing . . ." Other versions read, *"And since we have gifts that differ,"*^{NASB} *"We have different gifts,"*^{NIV} and *"God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well."*^{NLT} Those who are fond of applying the pronoun *"we"* to the Apostles, when speaking of *"gifts,"* will have a most difficult time doing so with this passage! This text is not speaking of the Apostles, but of *"the body,"* and all who are *"members in particular."* That includes the Apostles, but is not limited to them.

another" (Rom 14:19). That, of course, is why he showed them an even *"more excellent way."* It is the way of *"charity,"* which edifies (1 Cor 13).

The Spirit will now reason with us

ACCORDING TO GRACE

" . . . differing according to the grace that is given to us." All versions, whether literal or paraphrased, read the same way.

"Gifts" are Kingdom abilities, or aptitudes. They fit together, yet are *"different."* In accounting for the difference in these abilities, the Spirit takes us to the grace of God. Prior to this (verse 3), the gifts were traced back to a *"measure of faith."* How is it that they are here associated with grace. The answer is simple. In all of its aspects, salvation is ever *"by grace through faith"* (Eph 2:8). Grace has to do with what is given, faith with how it functions. Grace assigns the gifts to us, and faith delivers them. Grace makes them *"gifts,"* faith makes them ministries.

Further, no one has faith that does not have a connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. Additionally, no person is connected to Christ that does not have an aptitude to benefit His brethren.

It is a foregone conclusion that all of those in Christ *"have gifts."* They are different, to be sure, but they are very real and need to be cultured and expressed. When Paul admonished the Corinthians to *"covet earnestly the best gifts,"* he was not suggesting they were in the body without already possessing spiritual abilities. Prior to that he reminded them, *"But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired"*^{NASB} (1 Cor 12:18). His point was not that they should seek after particular gifts, but ones *"wherewith one may edify*

concerning spiritual gifts. He begins with the posit that we do have them. They are an aspect of our faith, and are determined by our *"measure of faith."* There are no members in the body of Christ who do not have faith, for that is what constitutes them *"the children of God"* (Gal 3:26). Further, no one has faith that does not have a connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. Additionally, no person is connected to Christ that does not have an aptitude to benefit His brethren. Those are the underlying assumptions of this text, and are a key to understanding them.

Grace is *"manifold,"* or multifaceted. Thus, the gifts grace brings are various, different from each other, yet harmonious in their objective. Grace saves us, yet does it through faith. As it is written, *"For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace"*^{NASB} (Rom 4:16). Faith is the means through which the grace of God becomes effective, whether in saving the soul, or enabling it to minister to the people of God.

Differing gifts allow for expanded

The grace of God equips the saints of God to do the work of God--by Given O. Blakely

ministry and a plentitude of edification. More grace can be received by the individual when that grace takes varying forms and ministries in the rest of the body. The more restricted we are on the sources of edification, the more deficient we become in our own persons. Those who limit themselves to a single “minister” can rise no higher, or receive no more, than is ministered by that solitary individual.

Further, we are not limited to those who are in our generation. Those who have completed their race may still minister grace to us. The Apostles and Prophets are primary evidences of this.

before us from the field of battle and labor. Wherever a gift has been given, whether in the past or the present, it has been “for the profit of all” of the body^{NKJV} (1 Cor 12:7).

There are some things you cannot receive unless they come from other members of the body. If Jesus received ministry from others, who are you to suppose you are exempted from such service. We read of “*Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance*” Luke 8:3). In another place we read of “*Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the*

LET US USE THEM

“*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.*”^{NKJV} Other versions read, “*let each exercise them accordingly,*”^{NASB} “*let us exercise them.*”^{NAB} Unused gifts become a reason for chastening, and even condemnation. Gifts are a matter of stewardship, and they are to be faithfully used for the edifying of the body.

It is particularly important to note Satan has encouraged the development of non-contributory religion. The shell of religion is kept, yet is wholly lacking in spiritual substance. There is a “*form of the truth,*” but a denial of “*the power therefore*” (2 Tim 3:5).

Notice the wording of our text. It does not say “*IF we have gifts,*” but “*Having gifts differing.*” The issue is not whether or not we have received a spiritual ability, but if we are using it. If God has placed us in the body where it has “*pleased Him*” (1 Cor 12:18), let us conduct ourselves in view of that placement! If God has dealt to every person “*a measure of faith*” (Rom 12:3), let us see to it that it finds profitable expression through us.

The Spirit will now mention several of these gifts, and how they are to be used. In my judgment, Paul deals with the more prominent gifts in Rome, as he also dealt with the more prominent ones in Corinth. The admonition will not be basically corrective, as it was in Corinth. The brethren in Rome, it appears, had conducted themselves more admirably toward one another, and thus did not require extensive teaching or correction as those in Corinth. Faithfulness does have its own reward.

The more restricted we are on the sources of edification, the more deficient we become in our own persons. Those who limit themselves to a single “minister” can rise no higher, or receive no more, than is ministered by that solitary individual.

Yet, we are not limited in this regard. Wherever a member of the body existed, grace was given to that member to minister. Some of them received grace to pass truth to succeeding generations. We may profit from them. The vast array of those who have received a “*measure of faith*” to minister to the saints is staggering. While there are no laws or procedures bound upon us in this regard, we are to know we are “*members of one another,*” even those who have gone

Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem” (Mark 15:40-41).

Jesus used Peter’s boat (Luke 5:3). He wrought a great miracle with a young boy’s lunch (John 6:9). Who is the soul who would think himself beyond receiving from others? Let us learn from our Lord to think soberly.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

“^{6b} . . . if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.” Other versions read, “*If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith,*”^{NIV} “*such as the quality of a prophet, let it be made use of in relation to the measure of our faith,*”^{BBE} and “*if it is a gift of prophecy, we*

should prophesy as much as our faith tells us.”^{NJB}

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

It is most unfortunate that some sophists have sensationalized this gift, limiting it to a declaration of the future, or coming events. That is not a fair

representation of the gift of prophesy, and it has certainly not yielded optimum benefit to the people of God.

The word “*prophesy*” means “*a discourse emanating from Divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and*

admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing hidden things.” Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary Prophesying does include the matter of foretelling coming events, but that is a subordinate and secondary meaning. The primary meaning is forth-telling, or telling forth, things revealed by God.

We are not left to conjecture or etymological resources in this matter. The Spirit speaks directly to the subject. “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men” (1 Cor 14:3). Other versions read, “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort,” NIV “those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation,” NRSV “the word of the prophet gives men knowledge and comfort and strength,” BBE “helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them,” NLT and “speaks to other people, building them up and giving them encouragement and reassurance.” NJB

Edification

Edification involves building up believers, promoting their spiritual strength and stamina. It is related to bringing clarity to the things of God, so that the hearer understands more clearly and is less confused. The result of edification leaves the recipient with more spiritual knowledge and understanding, a greater degree of confidence, and a larger measure of joy and peace. Where these things have been accomplished, prophesying has been done.

Exhortation

Exhortation calls the hearers up higher, urging them to appropriate what has been given to them. It arouses the soul to action that glorifies God and puts one more fully into the mainstream of the will of God. Exhortation is one of God’s chief ministries to the human will.

Comfort

Comfort is encouragement. Whereas exhortation rouses the will, comfort awakens hope, causing it to come into

prominence. Comfort causes trials and hardships to be minimized. When comforted, sufferings are seen as momentary, and the prelude to a greater weight of glory.

PROPHESYING AND FAITH

Prophesying is to be done in strict accord with one’s faith – what the prophet is able to see. Before the term “prophet” became prominent, those who prophesied were called “seers.” Thus it is written, “Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come,

If one objects that men should not be expected to do what Jesus did, it must be remembered that Christ’s body is where He pours forth Himself. This is where His “fulness” is deposited, and where He ministers to His brethren

and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer” (1 Sam 9:9).

A “seer” was someone who perceived or understood. The truth had been unveiled to the person, and he spoke what he had seen, or comprehended. In this regard, false prophets were those who had seen a “vain vision,” or one that was not true (Ezek 13:7).

Prophets Cannot Be Trained

It goes without saying, but you cannot train a prophet. Such a person is not produced by an educational or academic process. Like all other spiritual gifts, it requires a “measure of faith” to be a prophet—to be able to edify, exhort, and comfort the people of God.

The Proportion of Faith

Being a prophet does not qualify a person to speak on matters he does not understand. A person who speaks in the

behalf of God can only declare what he has seen—what he comprehends, or understands. To fail to confine oneself to this is to refuse to speak “in proportion” to one’s faith.

“In proportion” to faith is strict agreement with one’s faith, only declaring what has been apprehended, or understood. It is never right to venture an opinion in the name of a prophet. There must be a direct correlation between the faith of the speaker and what he speaks. If this Divinely imposed rule was duly honored, a great number of ministers would quickly resign their positions.

Opening the Scriptures

The person who prophesies is able to “open the Scriptures,” as Jesus did to the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:32,45). If one objects that men should not be expected to do what Jesus did, it must be remembered that Christ’s body is where He pours forth Himself. This is where His “fulness” is deposited, and where He ministers to His brethren.

A person who is fundamentally ignorant of the Scriptures should not be given license to speak much to the people of God. Those who do speak in the behalf of Jesus are to “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet 4:11). Other versions read “let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God,” NASB and “as one speaking the very words of God.” NIV Their speech is to not only be in words “taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” NIV (1 Cor 2:13), but in strict harmony with the Scriptures. A real prophet will never declare something that is at variance with the Word of the Lord.

The person who is gifted to prophesy, speaking unto men to edify, exhort, and comfort, ought not be assigned menial duties that are unrelated to those ministries. When the Lord has gifted an individual for a noble ministry to His people, no other work is honorable.

All too often, this is the tactic of the institution. They ignore abilities God has given to those within their walls,

assigning to them works that are more suited to the goal of the institution than

the work of the Lord. I fear this is a far more serious condition than men are

inclined to think. Such actions rob the saints, dishonor Jesus, and ignore God.

THE GIFT OF MINISTRY

“^{7a} . . . or ministry, let us use it in our ministering . . . ” Other versions read, *“If it is serving, let him serve,”*^{NIV} *“or the position of a Deacon of the church, let a man give himself to it,”*^{BEBE} and *“If your gift is that of serving others, serve them we.”*^{NLT} There is a peculiar wording in this verse. The NKJV captures the full sense of the expression: *“or ministry, let us use it in our ministering.”* The *“it”* that is used in ministering is the gift of ministry itself. In other words, the gift cannot be used for self-serving, but for serving others. The idea is stated most precisely in the words of our blessed Lord. *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matt 20:28), or *“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”*^{NASB} There is a Divinely appointed intent in the bestowment of spiritual gifts, and they are to be executed in strict fulfillment of that intention. Men are not at liberty to inhibit these gifts or seek to reassign them.

had grown exponentially, the number of disciples being *“multiplied.”* A sense of care for one another had developed. The mass of believers were *“of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common”* (Acts 4:32).

However, in process of time, some inequities began to occur in meeting the needs of various people. It is written, *“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations”* (Acts 6:1). Knowing the people of God have been called to peace, the Apostles immediately set out to resolve the problem. *“Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven*

ministry. The importance of this work of service is seen in the caliber of men who were required to accomplish it. They were to be *“men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.”*

The word pleased the people. They did not need a further explanation of the requirements, and they made perfect sense to them. Finding men duly qualified (Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas), they *“set [them] before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them,”* thereby setting them apart for the work. They did their work well, for it is written, *“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”* (6:7).

An Official Office

Unlike the offices of an Apostle (except for Mathias, Acts 1:16-26), and Prophet, men had a hand in selecting deacons. They did not make deacons, but recognized and set them apart for the work of serving. Because of the involvement of others, requirements were specified for these servants (1 Tim 3:8-13). This is a legitimate office, placed in the body of Christ.

There are those, gifted of God to administer practical and business affairs of the church. Such is not a menial work, as indicated by the qualifications set forth in the sixth chapter of Acts, and the third chapter of First Timothy. It might be well to briefly recount them.

- Men of honest report, or a good reputation.
- Full of the Holy Spirit.
- Full of wisdom.
- Grave, or reverent.
- Not double-tongued, giving conflicting words.
- Not indulging in much wine.
- Not greedy of filthy lucre, or pursuing

The importance of this work of service is seen in the caliber of men who were required to accomplish it. They were to be “men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.”

THE GIFT OF MINISTRY

Those who place an undue emphasis upon spiritual gifts rarely mention this one. The word translated *“ministry”* refers to the office, or function, of the *“deacon.”* This is an office of *“service,”* or *“ministry,”* and involves seeing to the needs of others.

A Unique Need

The need first arose in the church approximately two years after the day of Pentecost had *“fully come.”* The church

men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2-4).

Although the work was important, it was not one to be done by Apostles, who had been placed in the body in a different capacity. It was not that the work was demeaning. It was, however, something that would require extended involvements, which would have detracted the Apostles from their commissioned

- dishonest gain.
- Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.
 - Men who are first proved, or put to the test.
 - Men who are found blameless.
 - Their wives must be grave, reverent, and dignified.
 - Their wives must not be slanderers or gossips.
 - Their wives must be sober or temperate.
 - Their wives must be faithful in all things.
 - The deacons must be the husband of one wife.
 - They must rule their children and their own houses well.

Those who serve well as deacons will experience growth in Christ. It is written, *“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus”* ^{NKJV} (1 Tim 3:13). Two notable examples of the fulfillment of these words are Stephen and Philip, both of whom went on to become great preachers of the Word.

In my judgment, this is a particularly

weak area in the contemporary church.

USING IT IN MINISTRY

The gift of ministry is to used in ministering – in serving others. Attention is to be given to the work of service, and seeing to the needs of others. Some degree of creativity or originality may be used. The idea is to use the faith given to the individual in the manner in which it is intended to be used.

A person with the gift of service should not be put into a leadership capacity. His ability to lead will be discovered while he is ministering to the needs of others, working under the leadership of someone else. Neither, indeed, should gifted servants be required to fulfill duties unrelated to their calling. That would be as unreasonable as an Apostle serving tables. God is not honored by ignoring His gifts to do man’s will.

Expanding the Thought

There is a sense in which this requirement can be fulfilled in every member of the body of Christ. Though He was the King, Jesus served (John 13:4-5). The Apostles, though placed first in the church, served (Acts 20:34). Prophets

serve the saints by edifying, exhorting, and comforting them.

Regardless of the particular function assigned to the saints, they are admonished, *“through love serve one another”* (Gal 5:13), and *“be subject one to another”* (1 Pet 5:5). The spirit of service is a most wonderful quality.

There is a word on ministering given by Peter. It is appropriate for this discussion. *“If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 4:11). To attempt to do God’s work in the energy of the flesh is strictly forbidden. In fact, it is impossible.

The Lord gives the work, and the ability to do it as well. It is our business to put the ability and the work together. The purpose for this is clearly stated: *“so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”* ^{NIV} If, then, these directives are ignored, God will **not** be praised in all things through Jesus Christ. Who is able to measure the magnitude of such a transgression? It is on the part of wisdom to avoid such a sin.

THE GIFT OF TEACHING

“^{7b} . . . he who teaches, in teaching . . .” As simplistic as it may appear, the one gifted to teach is to use that gift to teach. Just as worldly abilities cannot be employed to do the work of God, spiritual abilities are not intended to fulfill worldly duties. Although there may be disagreement on this matter, our text is quite clear on the subject. Our gifts are involved in being members of the body of Christ, and that body is the target for our ministry. Now we come to the gift of teaching – the person endowed with the ability to instruct, expound, and clarify.

THE GIFT OF TEACHING

This gift is ranked third in the dispensation of grace: *“thirdly teachers”* (1 Cor 12:28). Some of the more external and attention-getting gifts are *“after that.”* Teaching would be

involved in *“the word of wisdom”* and *“the word of knowledge”* (1 Cor 12:8). It appears, however, that *“teaching”* is more consistent than a word of wisdom or knowledge. Those endowments appear to

functions within a more broad base. It is also on a more consistent basis.

This gift is mentioned in Ephesians, and is linked with pastoring, or

The gift of teaching is not intended to instruct in the field of economics, domestic responsibilities, or motivational skills. Whatever may be said for those fields of discipline, they are wholly unrelated to the body of Christ. The gift of teaching is not intended to instruct in the field of economics, domestic responsibilities, or motivational skills. Whatever may be said for those fields of discipline, they are wholly unrelated to the body of Christ.

deal with specific issues, while *“teaching”*

shepherding – feeding the flock of God

(Eph 4:11). A teacher can instruct people in the ways of the Lord. A teacher can “expound” the way of the Lord more perfectly and thoroughly to someone with an immature view (Acts 18:26).

THE WORK OF TEACHING

The teaching of reference does not pertain to the things of this world. This is a vital distinction that must be grasped by the saints. The Spirit opens the real nature of teaching in a statement made to the Galatians. “Let him who is **taught the word** share in all good things with him who teaches”^{NKJV} (Gal 6:6). Other versions read “taught in the Word,”^{KJV} and “instruction in the Word.”^{NIV}

The purpose for spiritual gifts is not the correction of society, or presenting resolutions for social ills. Believers are certainly not opposed to such things, but they do not require Divine endowments, and we greatly err in imagining they do.

A “teacher” puts a handle, so to speak, on the Word of the Lord, so people can carry it in their minds, and apply it to their lives. Such a person makes the Word of God come alive, opening it like a precious box of jewels.

Nicodemus knew Jesus was a “Teacher” (John 3:2). His teaching separated Him from all other teachers, for “He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mk 1:22). No less than fourteen times the Gospel’s say of Jesus, “He taught.” Jesus has taken this aspect of His Person and endowed certain within His body with the ability to teach His Word.

Paul was ordained a “teacher of the Gentiles” (1 Tim 2:7). In Ephesus he “taught publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Apollos “taught diligently” (Acts 18:25). Paul and

Barnabas taught the Word of the Lord (Acts 15:35). For a year and six months Paul taught in Corinth (Acts 18:11). For two whole years he dwelt in his own hired house “teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). The Apostles were noted for “teaching the people” (Acts 5:25,42).

The church at Antioch was noted for having several “teachers” (Acts 13:1). Some of them are named: “Barnabas, and

among “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23). Yet, “their works do follow them” (Rev 14:13), being public and known to many. It is never wrong to learn from such kingdom notables, not lifting ourselves up as though we had no need to be taught. The Lord gives the gift of teaching because there is teaching to be done. Those so gifted are to devote themselves to teaching.

Those who are teachers should

A “teacher” puts a handle, so to speak, on the Word of the Lord, so people can carry it in their minds, and apply it to their lives. Such a person makes the Word of God come alive, opening it like a precious box of jewels.

Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

Once again, it is a sin of the greatest magnitude to take members of the body that have been given the gift of teaching, and assign them to roles wholly unrelated to teaching. Yet, this is being done continually in churches and various other Christian institutions. It is not unusual to find a certain obstinance in professed Christians that refuses to recognize the gift of teaching. Such assign their own criteria for teaching the Word of God, for which action they will surely be judged. When God makes a person a teacher, whether it is Paul, Apollos, or Aquila, it is the business the people of God to give ear to what is declared by them.

No small number of these teachers have completed their race, and are now

determine to leave the people of God more informed and knowledgeable of the Word of God. Let them refuse to be moved into areas of spiritual trivia by those who cannot see afar off. Men may fancy that they can study the Word of God for themselves, needing no teaching from others. But when they have finished pondering this puff of theological smoke, let them explain why God has placed teachers in the church? Let them consult with the Ethiopian eunuch who unashamedly replied, when asked if he understood a certain Scripture he was reading, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:31).

Let the teacher devote himself to teaching, and let him not think his labors are in vain! God has called him to, and endowed him for, a most noble work. Many a confused and helpless soul will be helped by their teaching. Let them be strong, and quit like men.

THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION

“^{8a} . . . he who exhorts, in exhortation . . .” While a prophet speaks “unto exhortation,” the one “who exhorts” specializes in it. Just as some

people’s faith equips them to prophesy, the faith of some enables them to effectively serve others, and the faith of still others makes them capable teachers,

just so, the faith of some is tailored to make them exhorters. The church must make room for the work of these people, for God has placed them in the church.

The grace of God equips the saints of God to do the work of God--by Given O. Blakely

That is the area where they are effective, not the world.

THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION

An exhorter is one who moves people into Kingdom activity. He awakens sluggish wills, and rallies the people to activities that honor God and prepare them for eternity. Following their baptism into Christ, Peter *“with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation”* (Acts 2:40). When Barnabas came to Antioch, he *“exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord”* (Acts 11:23). Judas and Silas, themselves prophets, *“exhorted the brethren with many words”* (Acts 15:32). Barnabas and Paul confirmed the souls of the disciples, *“exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22). When Apollos was disposed to pass through Achaia, the brethren wrote letters to the people, *“exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped*

them much which had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).

There are people within the body of Christ who can move us from slothfulness to faithfulness. Some can stir us up, so that we will run more energetically and with more consistency. When they address us, the commissions of the Lord seem more doable, and we are encouraged the more to heartily enter into them.

EXHORTING

And what are such people to do? How should one who has been given the gift of exhortation conduct his life? He must give himself to exhortation. The people of God need his ministry, and he needs to speak that he might be refreshed (Job 32:20).

However, there is a most unfortunate circumstance in our part of the world. The institutionalized church has made no provision for the gift of exhortation. They have made room for the lecturer and the scholar, but not the exhorter! They have adjusted their roster to allow for

administrators and assistants, but have no place for the gift of exhortation. If an exhorter was present in the average church, when would he exhort?

When was the last time you heard a stirring call to lay hold on eternal life, or to save yourself from this wayward generation? How about a summons to faithfulness, diligence and constancy? When are exhortations sounded to continue in the faith, and cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart? For many, these words have a strange sound. But they are not strange, and those who challenge us with such admonitions are gifts from God to us!

Now, you cannot train an exhorter, for he is motivated by his heart, not his head. His gift comes from God, not from exposure to human expertise. It is a ministry that flows from a perception of what is needed among the saints. The one who exhorts has a driving compulsion to see the saints laying hold of the benefits that have been provided for them.

THE GIFT OF GIVING

“^{sb} . . . he who gives, with liberality . . . ” Although the gifts mentioned in Romans are few in number, they represent an extremely wide range of ministry. From prophets to servants, and teachers to givers, we are being exposed to the breadth of salvation. Let me remind you that all of these gifts have two sides. The first is the ability that comes from God. The second is a heart to do it for the glory of God. Thus a prophet will declare the Word, even if it jeopardizes his life. The one who serves will do so, even if it is not appreciated. The teacher will expound the Word, even though it is not popular, and may become inconvenient. The one who exhorts has a heart to do so, even when it represents a new and challenging thought to the listeners.

The gifts of God come with a longing to do them, and a great dissatisfaction if

they are not exercised. The heart is also looking for an opportunity to use the gift. Now, we will see how those with the gift of giving are to fulfill their ministry.

Let me remind you that all of these gifts have two sides. The first is the ability that comes from God. The second is a heart to do it for the glory of God.

THE GIFT OF GIVING

There are some who despise the thought of having possessions. They believe there is virtue to poverty, and that God is always honored by having just enough for ourselves. But this is not a fair representation of the case. I am quick to

say that we are not to be covetous, and are to be content with such things as we have (Heb 13:5). But do not imagine for a moment that everyone in the body of Christ subsists on a meager fare. The Word of God affirms, *“not many noble are called”* (1 Cor 1:26). It does not say, *“not ANY noble are called.”*

As already mentioned, there were some noble women who ministered to Jesus out of their substance (Lk 8:3). During the early days of the church, when unusual circumstances existed, *“as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need”* (Acts 4:34-35). **They had the gift of giving!**

During those days, Barnabas, called

“the son of consolation,” “Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:37). He had the gift of giving!

When Paul sent the converted slave Onesimos back to his master Philemon, he said, *“If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account” (Phile 18). He had the gift of giving.*

When the churches in Macedonia heard of the needs of some of the brethren, they rallied to the cause, gathering a gift for them. Of them Paul said, *“For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.*

And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will”^{NIV} (2 Cor 8:3-5). They had the gift of giving!

There are people, strategically placed within the body of Christ, who have the means to assist others. They also have the heart to do so. They are quick to see lacks that need to be met, like the good Samaritan who saw the beaten and robbed man by the wayside (Luke 10:33-35). **He had the gift of giving!** How are such people to give? What is to be their reaction to need?

GIVING WITH LIBERALITY

“Let him do it with simplicity.” The word “simplicity” means most sincerely, without seeking self interests, and with

personal sacrifice. It is giving without the clutter of pride or the quest for glory. Consequently, because of this glorious simplicity, the giving is bountiful and liberal, with no thought of having less because of giving generously.

Other versions capture this sense. *“He who gives, with liberality,”^{NKJV} “let him give generously,”^{NIV} “let him give freely,”^{BEBE} and “give generously from the heart.”^{NJB}* Concerning this ministry, it will be enough to remind you of the words of our Lord: *“freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8).* And again, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).* God be praised for these liberal souls! They have been placed in the body to relieve it of undue concerns, and sweeten life’s cup. Only eternity will reveal the effects of their generous spirits.

THE GIFT OF LEADING

“^{sc} . . . he who leads, with diligence . . .” Other versions read, *“he that ruleth, with diligence,”^{KJV} “if it is leadership, let him govern diligently,”^{NIV} “he who has the power of ruling, let him do it with a serious mind,”^{BEBE} “if one is over others, with diligence,”^{NAB} and “if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious.”^{NJB}* This word will be intimidating to those who do not like to be a subordinate, and challenging to those possessing this particular gift.

THE GIFT OF LEADING

There are some who believe everyone in the body of Christ is equal. But this is not the case at all. There are some who *“are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thess 5:12).* These do not lead by coercion, or the exertion of carnal authority, but they do lead. Remember, it is God who gives this gift. First Corinthians refers to this gift as *“governments,”^{KJV} or “administrations”^{NASB} (1 Cor 12:28).* First Timothy refers to the *“elders that rule well,”* or *“direct the affairs of the church well,”^{NIV}* affirming they are *“worthy of double honor.”* These are particularly singled out as *“those who*

work hard at preaching and teaching”^{NASB} (1 Tim 5:17).

The thirteenth chapter of Hebrews

These are not bosses, like those who govern the men of this world. They lead by example (1 Pet 5:3), and by their faithful admonishing, teaching and preaching (1 Thess 5:1;2 1 Tim 5:17). They are watching for men’s souls, not their business, not their homes, and not their private lives.

also speaks of those *“that have the rule over you.”* They are described as watching for men’s souls, and those who will give an account for their responsibility. Heb 13:17,24). Peter admonishes elders, *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to*

the flock” (1 Pet 5:2-3).

These are not bosses, like those who govern the men of this world. They lead by example (1 Pet 5:3), and by their faithful admonishing, teaching and preaching (1 Thess 5:1;2 1 Tim 5:17). They are watching for men’s souls, not their business, not their homes, and not their private lives. They do not have the kind of authority that makes men answerable to them. However, **they** are answerable to God for how they handle their stewardship.

A *“leader”* is directing people in a path he himself has taken. He is demanding enough to keep the people moving forward, but gentle enough not to discourage them. I have found there are not a lot of this type of people, and it is probably good there is not.

LEADING WITH DILIGENCE

What is a leader to do – a person who has *“power with men” (Gen 32:28)?* Some, because of the recalcitrance of people, withdraw from leadership. They do not feel it is worth all of the aggravation. But

if a person is genuinely gifted to lead, the word of the King is straightforward: *“he who leads, with diligence.”*

The word *“diligence”* means with earnest care and consistency. Those he is leading do not wander from the straight and narrow path because of his indolence. The Lord was serious in dispensing the gift of leadership to him, and he is serious in executing it to the glory of God.

While the Apostles and other disciples were awaiting Divine empowerment for their work, Peter *“stood up in the midst of*

the disciples,” calling their attention to the need to replace Judas. He correlated the matter with Scripture and, under his direction, a replacement was selected by God through them (Acts 1:15-26). **He was a leader,** and he led with diligence.

Early in the history of the church, dissension arose over the acceptance of the Gentiles, and what laws would be binding upon them. Paul and Barnabas, and certain other men, were sent to Jerusalem *“about this question.”* Instead of calling for a congregational meeting, they appealed to *“the Apostles and elders”*

(Acts 15:2-4). They were endowed with the gift of leadership, and executed their gift with diligence (Acts 15:23-31).

As with the other spiritual gifts, spiritual leaders cannot be trained, even though men speak as though they can. They are gifted by God, not educated by men! They are to understand that God is with them in their work. He has equipped them for effective ministry. That will motivate them to be diligent in the execution of their responsibilities. Jesus is surely with them throughout the duration of their ministry.

THE GIFT OF SHOWING MERCY

^{8d} *“ . . . he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”* Here is a gift for which the flesh has no longing. It can more easily covet to prophesy, teach, or rule. It can even seek recognition through giving like Ananias and Sapphira. However, to show compassion or mercy is not attractive to the flesh. There is a great need for this ministry, and thus God has especially gifted some to show it. There is a sense in which all believers are to show mercy. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”* (Matt 5:7). In fact, the *“wisdom that is*

THE GIFT OF SHOWING MERCY

Those with the gift of mercy abound in the grace of being merciful. It is their strength, and they delight to show it. They have a sense of the need of mercy, detecting candidates for it before others do, and being quick to meet that need. Mercy involves compassion, and helping the needy out of a sense of profound pity for, and empathy with, them.

When Jesus interrogated a certain man concerning the good Samaritan, He asked him, *“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him*

him” (Luke 10:37). Mercy, therefore, relieved the afflicted person, provided for his continued care, and took care of any debts that were incurred.

Let it be clear, *“he who shows mercy”* is the person particularly endowed with the ability to detect the need for mercy, and meet it. While this word may be applied to anyone showing mercy, whether particularly gifted or not, it has specific application to the person who has been placed in Christ’s body to show mercy. What is to be the manner in which that individual *“shows mercy?”*

SHOWING MERCY WITH CHEERFULNESS

“Cheerfulness” involves a cheerful disposition: gladness of heart because of the opportunity to show kindness to the needy. It also involves a *“readiness of mind,”* which finds great joy in exhibiting the mercy. The person with a *“ready mind”* looks for an opportunity to *“do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10).

In this manner, the gifted person is participating in the Divine nature. It is said of Jesus, *“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart”* (Psa 40:8; Heb 10:7). Also, it is said of God Himself, *“He delights in mercy”* (Micah 7:18). There are some to whom the Lord has especially given this quality.

Those with the gift of mercy abound in this grace. It is their strength, and they delight to show it. They have a sense of the need of mercy, detecting candidates for it before others do. Mercy involves compassion, and helping the needy out of a sense of profound pity for, and empathy with, them.

from above” is *“full of mercy,”* and will be exhibited by all receiving it (James 3:17).

that fell among the thieves?” The man wisely replied, *“He that showed mercy on*

The grace of God equips the saints of God to do the work of God--by Given O. Blakely

CONCLUSION

We see from this brief but pungent passage, that spiritual gifts involve the consent of our wills and the exercise of our faith to become effectual. They come to us because of the grace of God, and our

faith is the means through which we are both qualified and enabled to use them. They are designed to bring advantages to the body of Christ. They also bring great satisfaction to those who faithfully handle

them, becoming one of the primary means through which they accrue rewards and treasures in heaven. Give due attention to what you can do for the Lord, and do it diligently and energetically.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 7/13/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 9-21 of the twelfth chapter. The theme will be, **“CONDUCT BECOMING OF CHILDREN OF GOD.”** Spiritual life has certain characteristics – certain ways in which it is made known. Faith moves the child of God into these attributes, bringing profit to the saints and glory to the Lord. This text urges us to enter fully into the life of faith. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

*Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Jonathan (Jonstalk@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)
Adah/Jason Hutchcraft (Email Temporarily disabled)*

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>