Discovering Your Spiritual Gift
Scripture: Romans 12
Code: BQ31611

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly. (Romans 12:6)

The spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, primarily in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12, fall into three categories: sign, speaking, and serving. Before the New Testament was written, men had no standard for judging the truthfulness of someone who preached, taught, or witnessed in the name of Christ. The sign gifts authenticated the teaching of the apostles—which was the measure of all other teaching—and therefore ceased after the apostles died, probably even earlier. “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance,” Paul explained to the Corinthian church, “by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12). The writer of Hebrews gives further revelation about the purpose of these special gifts: “After [the gospel] was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb. 2:3–4). Even during Jesus’ earthly ministry, the apostles “went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed” (Mark 16:20).

First Corinthians was written about a.d. 54 and Romans some four years later. It is important to note that none of the sign gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:9–10—namely, the gifts of healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues—is found in Romans 12. The other two New Testament passages that mention spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:7, 11; 1 Pet. 4:10–11) were written several years after Romans and, like that epistle, make no mention of sign gifts. Peter specifically mentions the categories of speaking and serving gifts (“whoever speaks” and “whoever serves,” v. 11) but neither the category nor an example of the sign gifts.

It seems evident, therefore, that Paul did not mention the sign gifts in Romans because their place in the church was already coming to an end. They belonged to a unique era in the church’s life and would have no permanent place in its ongoing ministry. It is significant, therefore, that the seven gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6–8 are all within the categories of speaking and serving.

It is also important to note that in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the term *pneumatikos* (v. 1, lit., “spirituals”) to describe the specific divinely bestowed gifts mentioned in verses 8–10. He explains that “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (v. 4), and that “the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (v. 11).

But in Romans 12, the apostle uses the term *charisma* (gifts), which is from *charis* (grace). In First Corinthians, Paul emphasizes the nature and authority of the gifts—spiritual endowments empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Romans he simply emphasizes their source—the **grace** of God.

Paul introduces this list of gifts by referring back to the unity in diversity he has just pointed out in verses 4–5. **Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly. Differ** relates to the diversity, and **grace** to the unity. Under God's sovereign **grace,** which all believers share, **we have gifts that differ according to** the specific ways in which He individually endows us. Just as verse 3 does not refer to saving faith, verse 6 does not refer to saving **grace.** Paul is speaking to those who already have trusted in Christ and become children of God. To His children, the apostle explains, "God has allotted to each a measure of faith" (v. 3) and has bestowed on them **gifts that differ according to the grace given** to each one. Grace is God's favor, unmerited kindness on His part, which is the only source of all spiritual enablements. They are not earned or deserved, or they would not be by grace. And the grace is sovereign, in that God alone makes the choice as to what gift each of His children receives. Each believer, therefore, is to exercise his gifts accordingly.

The prolific Puritan John Owen wrote that spiritual gifts are that without which the church cannot subsist in the world, nor can believers be useful to one another and the rest of mankind to the glory of Christ as they ought to be. They are the powers of the world to come, those effectual operations of the power of Christ whereby His kingdom was erected and is preserved (see *The Holy Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, n.d.]).

Although we obviously must pay attention to our gift, we can never faithfully exercise it by focusing on the gift itself. They can be used fully of the Lord only as "with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). We can serve Christ only as we become like Christ, and we can exercise the Spirit's gifts only as we present ourselves as living sacrifices and submit to His continuing transformation and sanctification of our lives.

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