Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Ministry of Spiritual Gifts, Part 2
Scripture: Romans 12:6-7
Code: 45-91

We're going to talk about spiritual gifts tonight. And certainly the spiritual gifts of exhortation and encouragement come through music so very, very often, very grateful for that.

So many people say, "Well, we're so anxious to get involved. We're so anxious to minister. We're so anxious to be ministered to. We really want to get into the life of the church." You know, the church is so very dependent on that kind of mutual ministry, that kind of sharing of life, the tremendous enrichment that comes when the saints minister to each other. That's what we want to talk about tonight. So, open your Bible to Romans chapter 12.

I was reading this week, I read every week, come to think of it. I read every day, come to think of it. And I keep buying these cheap glasses to magnify the print. Do you have that problem? Sav-On Drug store, you know. But I was reading about a man up in Saskatchewan in Canada, some small prairie town, who has made it the objective of his life to collect great violins. And this particular thing that I was reading said that he now has twenty-five of the world's most rare and valuable violins that he stores in his house up in this prairie town in Saskatchewan.

Well, the sad thing about that is it's highly unlikely that anybody's ever going to play those violins. And wouldn't it be marvelous if 25 great violinists got a hold of those 25 violins sitting somewhere in that guy's house? And I'm afraid that many churches are like that. They're sort of a collection of gifted Christians but none of them are making any music. They're all just sort of piled up there waiting to be played. Some of them have been enhanced with Bible-school training, some of them have had experience in college, some of them have ministered other places but for now they're just there. I suppose the church has its own museum pieces, doesn't it? It's a tragic thing to think about. You see, we need each other so much.

Steven Franklin remarked, quote: "Whereas American mothers preserve often in bronze their children's first shoes, celebrating freedom and independence, Japanese mothers carefully preserve a small part of the child's umbilical cord, celebrating dependence and loyalty." Oh I like that. Dependence and loyalty, two great words, boy, those are great words. They describe God's design for His redeemed family. We are dependent on each other and we must be loyal to each other.

I'm disturbed sometimes when I hear people say this is John MacArthur's church. That isn't so. That is not so. I'll be gone some day, somehow some way I'll be gone. It may be that we all go together in the rapture, it may be gone...it may be that I'll be gone before you go should the Lord take me home, whatever's in His plan. And this will be the church of Jesus Christ, whether I'm around or not. This is not my church, this is your church, this is His church. And this is a church where there must be dependence and loyalty. And the body of Christ needs to focus in on these things.

It isn't easy in our society. We really know that. It's a self-absorbed society. Our society is very into pampering its ego, isn't it? Very into pampering its body, its psyche, its lusts, its desires. And anxious to make sure nobody gets in the way of that pampering. And, frankly, it's little wonder that our society has such tremendous problem with mental illness because selfish people generally are the kind who are mentally ill. In fact, William Kirkpatrick...Kilpatrick, I'm sorry, William Kilpatrick, professor of educational psychology at Boston College and a graduate of Harvard, has written in a rather new book entitled, *Psychological Seduction: The Failure of Modern Psychology*, this statement, "Extreme forms of mental illness are always extreme cases of self-absorption. The distinctive quality, the thing that literally sets paranoid people apart is hyper-self-consciousness," end quote.

You become absorbed with yourself and it leads to paranoia. Christian theologians through history, long before psychology had anything to say, have dealt with the devastating effects of self- love, of self-absorption, of being content to pacify yourself, fulfill your own desires, meet your own needs. As early, for example, as St. Augustine, the church was having to deal with this problem. St. Augustine wrote, "Two cities have been formed by two loves; the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glorifies itself, the latter glorifies the Lord."

So, as far back as that, that problem was manifest in the church. John Calvin said, "For so blindly do we all rush in the direction of self-love that everyone thinks he has a good reason for exalting himself and despising all others in comparison." And he then offered a cure for that problem in the church, quote: "There is no other remedy than to pluck up by the roots those most noxious pests, self-love and love of victory. This the doctrine of Scripture does. For it teaches us to remember that the endowments which God has bestowed upon us are not our own but His free gifts and that those who plume themselves upon them betray their ingratitude," end quote.

And the writer of Hebrews, facing the same problem in the community to which he wrote, said that we must come to the place where we stimulate one another to love and good works, not forsaking the

assembling of ourselves together. That is the call like all those other ones for a selfless ministry.

And that takes us right into Romans 12. And it all begins when you present your body a living sacrifice. When you present your mind to be renewed, your will to be God's will, that's where it all starts. Then out of that flows the response of the right use of spiritual gifts beginning in verses 3 and going down to verse 8. And that's our starting point.

Now what did we learn in our last lesson? That if we are to use what God has given us, if we are to really exercise our dependence and loyalty, if we are to be selfless and sacrificial, if we are to live out the living sacrifice approach to the Christian life, which is God's only approach, if we are to do that, we must focus on the right use of our spiritual gifts. And the first thing we saw is the proper attitude in verse 3. Let's look back at it a moment. "I say, through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think wisely or soberly according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith."

The first thing is the proper attitude; don't think too highly of yourself but think rightly about yourself. This we said is the proper attitude of humility. And humility is a proper self evaluation and a grateful heart that knows the source of that is God. The proper attitude of humility is a right estimate of one's own giftedness so that in understanding our gifts we do not over extend ourselves, over exaggerate our function nor do we underestimate and undervalue our function. God has designed each of us uniquely and we must understand that. And when people understand who they are, understand what they're gifts are and humbly and thankfully appreciate them and have a heart of gratitude and move out to minister those things then the body will be healthy.

An article published some years ago in the Springfield, Oregon Public School newsletter makes the point very well. It said this, "Once upon a time the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. So they organized a school. They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects. The duck was excellent in swimming; in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his web feet to be badly worn so that he was only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable so nobody worried about that except the duck.

"The rabbit started at the top of his class in running but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming. The squirrel was excellent in climbing but he

encountered constant frustration in flying class. The reason was his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed charley-horses from overexertion and only got a "c" in climbing and a "d" in running.

"The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing class he beat all the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own way to get there."

Now the obvious moral of the story is simple. Every creature has his own set of capabilities in which it will succeed unless it is expected or forced to fill a mold that it doesn't fit. When that happens, frustration, discouragement, even guilt produce overall mediocrity and ultimately defeat. A duck is a duck and only a duck. It is built to swim, not to run or fly and certainly not to climb. And a squirrel is a squirrel, and on and on we go.

And what is true of these creatures is in a real sense true of Christians in the family of God. God never made us all the same. He made us to be exactly what we are. He planned and designed our differences and He wants us to function in unique design within the body of Christ. If we don't do that, we miss the whole purpose of what we are. And if we get diverted into something else and don't rightly evaluate what we are gifted to do, we will frustrate ourselves and we will produce less than what we were intended to produce. So we must rightly ascertain and rightly understand our gifts.

Now please remember. First, we present ourselves a living sacrifice. Then we rightly evaluate, humbly evaluate, thankfully evaluate the gifts that God has graciously given to us. That's the proper attitude.

Secondly, we saw the proper relationship in verse 4, 5 and the beginning of verse 6. Notice it. “As we have many members in one body,” he's talking about our physical body, we have many members in our physical body, “and yet all members have not the same office,” every one of them is different, “so we being many are one body in Christ,” that is the church, “and every one members one of another having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.

So, as the body is one and yet many members, so the church is one and yet many members. And we have, says verse 6, gifts, *charismata* from the word *charis*, grace, grace gifts. God-given channels in the believer, sovereignly designed for every Christian through which the Holy Spirit ministers to the building up of the church. They're channels in us through which the Spirit of God can minister. They are for the common good. My gifts are for the church. Your gifts are for the church. They're not for me. Mine are not for me, yours are not for you. Mine are for you and yours are for me. That's the way

it goes.

The manifestation of the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:7, is given to every man to profit, for benefit. For whose benefit? For the benefit of the body, for the instruction of the body, for the encouragement of the body, for the building up of the body, for the edifying of the church, 1 Corinthians 14:12 says, the building up of the church. So, every one of us is designed by God in a special way. We ought to understand that. We ought to present ourselves a living sacrifice. We ought to look honestly at ourselves, not over-evaluating nor under evaluating, but thinking wisely about what it is God has given us to do. And if we honestly seek that, as we saw some ways to do that last week, I believe God will show us very clearly what it is He desires we do.

Now as we begin then to pick up where we left off, we come into verse 6. And we notice now the proper service, the proper service. The proper relationship is that we are a body. And a body is dependent. We are not disconnected, we are intimately connected to each other. We are absolutely dependent on the interchange that occurs between us as a body is on the interchange of its own vital members. And so in verse 6, he begins then to give examples of the gifts, the proper service: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling and showing mercy.

Now let me just say before we look at those, that in general in the New Testament, there are three categories the gifts fall into, alright? Three categories. There are sign gifts, there are speaking gifts, and there are serving gifts. That's easy to remember, each with an "s," sign, speaking, serving.

Now the sign gifts were intended for that reason, for signs pointing to something very significant. They were unique to the time of the apostles. They were unique to the New Testament age. They were unique to the establishing of the new covenant, to the time when Israel rejected the Messiah, when the apostles' teaching needed to be authenticated. They were unique to the time of the writing of Scripture. That's why they are called in 2 Corinthians 12:12 special gifts or signs that belong to an apostle. Second Corinthians 12 says in verse 12, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you," and what are they? “in signs and wonders and mighty deeds,” powerful deeds, miracle deeds. So the sign gifts, or the miracle gifts, tongues and healing and miracles and so forth, interpretation of tongues, those miracle gifts were for the apostolic period.

They are those gifts also referred to in Hebrews chapter 2 where it says that God was bearing witness with the ones who were with the Lord, the apostles, with signs and wonders and diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are referred to in the sixteenth chapter of Mark's gospel in verse 20, "And they went forth” the apostles did. and preached everywhere, the Lord working with

them “and confirming the Word with signs following." Miraculous gifts attended the works of the apostles so that the people would know that they were from God. There was no Bible. There was no New Testament to compare their teaching with, so it was the miracles that authenticated them.

Now the sign gifts are included in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul talks about the gifts. First Corinthians 12 was written about 54 A.D., 54 in the year of our Lord, after Christ's birth, obviously. By 58, Romans is written. And what is intriguing is that in Paul's list of gifts in Romans, unlike his list of gifts in Corinthians, none of the miraculous gifts is mentioned. They were very much a part of the list of 1 Corinthians a few years earlier. They are not mentioned at all in the list in Romans. You find another indication of spiritual gifts in Ephesians, written about 63 A.D. and they're not mentioned there. And you find 1 Peter 4 mentioning the gifts and that's in 66 A.D. and they're none of them either.

So, it seems as though you can see even in the sequence of New Testament books that there was a diminishing of those gifts. Well, what is left? If the sign gifts passed away with the apostles, what is left? Well, all you have to do is go to 1 Peter 4 and you will see what is left, the other two categories. First Peter 4:10, "As every man has received the gift, even so, minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." You've been given gifts by God's grace, as you have received a gift, minister it as a good steward. You don't own your gift; you only manage it for God. It's His. He gave it to you to, as a point of stewardship. You are to use it for His glory, alright? So as you've received it, use it.

And then he divides those gifts into two kinds in verse 11. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man serve, let him do it as the ability which God gives." And he divides the gifts into those two categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts, says nothing about sign gifts, which were unique, of course, to the apostolic era.

So, here in Romans chapter 12, there's no mention of the sign gifts. Paul is giving instruction here for the ongoing life of the church. There's no need to correct the Roman church as there was need to correct the Corinthian church because they were misusing, counterfeiting and abusing those sign gifts. But that is not the issue in Romans and when he speaks here to the ongoing life of the church, he says nothing about the sign gifts, as Ephesians says nothing about it, as 1 Peter says nothing about it. So we are left then basically with two categories of gifts, the speaking gifts, such as prophecy and teaching and exhortation; and the serving gifts such as serving, giving, leading, and showing mercy. And I just wanted you to see why it is that Paul leaves out the sign gifts. It is because they have an end to them. It is because they belong to a unique era and not the ongoing life of the church. And his instruction here for the ongoing ministry of the church does not include them.

Now just another footnote, 1 Corinthians list is called "spirituals." The word there is *pneumatikon*. Here they are called *charismata*, grace gifts. In one place "spiritual" simply speaks about their origin. They are the energy of the Spirit. They are empower...rather about their power, their energy, it is spiritual. It comes from the Spirit of God. Here it speaks about them as grace gifts, speaking of their origin as gifts from God. So, both of them just sort of emphasize a different aspect. They are gifts given by grace from God, energized by the Holy Spirit. But whether they're called “spirituals” or whether they're called *charismata* gifts here, they refer to the same thing.

Now just another thought, too, that the list in 1 Corinthians does include some things that aren't here in the speaking and the serving gifts and there are some included here that aren't in 1 Corinthians. Now what that tells me is that these are not rigid, absolute lists, but there's a sense of flexibility and a sense of latitude. For example, in 1 Corinthians you have the gift of the word of wisdom, of the word of knowledge, very much like teaching. You have the gift of prophecy there; you have the gift of prophecy here. You have the gift of ministry here, or serving, and you have the gift of helps in 1 Corinthians. You have the gift of ruling here; you have the gift of government in 1 Corinthians. First Corinthians adds the gift of faith and the gift of discerning spirits. Romans adds the gifts of exhortation and giving and showing mercy. So some of them are the same, some of them are similar and some of them are different.

What this tells me is that there's great diversity and that the New Testament is not trying to lock us in as if this is all there is. The inexactness and the rather casual overlap is very good indication that they're only samples of the dimensions of function within the body of Christ. And I like to call them general categories of giftedness in which there could be a myriad different kinds of manifestations. As I've said in the past, you could take 100 people with the gift of teaching and you would see distinction in every single one of them because of the uniqueness of God's design. These categories are very general and they may be blended like I use the illustration of an artist with a palette of colors, mixing his colors to get just the color he wants. God has painted us a color unlike any other color, mixing together the blending of the gifts he chose for us so that we come out with an individual gift that is very hard to identify in name because it's so unique to us.

So, keep in mind now that this is not going to produce little rubber ducks all doing exactly the same thing. These are categories of gifts in which there's tremendous diversity and blending of these categories. In fact, you maybe have... You may be the blend of many of these categories. But these are samples and a somewhat comprehensive sampling here in Romans of what Paul wants the church to be busy doing. First, present yourself to the Lord. Second, rightly evaluate what it is God

has given you to do. And thirdly, understand that you must mingle as a member of a body and that means you are vital, you are absolutely necessary, you are crucial to that. And then he says do it, and that's his point beginning in the middle of verse 6. If you have the gift of prophecy, then prophesy; ministry, then minister; teaching, then teach; exhortation, then exhort; giving, do it with singleness of heart or simplicity; ruling, do it with speed; showing mercy, do it with your... In other words, do it. It is exhortative. He's not arguing, like in 1 Corinthians when he presents the gifts there; it's pretty much an apologetic. He's sort of trying to correct them and straighten them out and teach them the right things about gifts. Here he's just grabbing them sort of one at a time and saying if you've got it, man, do it. You present yourself a living sacrifice, you rightly estimate what God has given you to do, you understand that you're strategic to the entire body of Christ and then you get at it. There's no place for indolence.

It's an important message. Some people say, "Well, at this point in my life I'm not doing anything." Well, that's not anything that's commendable. You have a gift. Use it. That's the emphasis. And if you're not using it, then maybe you've forgotten the first eleven chapters of Romans, right? All that God did for you? You might say, "Well, Lord, it's just I... If you knew my schedule, oh my goodness, my schedule is so tough." Right. It must be so disappointing for the Lord to hear that kind of stuff. I mean, the one who came into the world to die on the cross for us, who paid the supreme price, the sinless Son of God became sin for us, and all that He went through, all the mercies of God outlined in chapters 1 to 11 and we say, "Hey, Lord, I would just like to get at this deal to show my gratitude but you don't know my schedule." God have mercy on us. What in the world kind of gratitude is that?

First, it indicates to me that you haven't presented yourself as a what? As a living sacrifice. Our church needs this. I mean, I don't know whether... I suppose some people think that everything's going to go on here whether you do it or not. It isn't so. "Well, you've got so many competent leaders and so many good folks doing everything and it will all work out. You don't need me. If I come or don't come, if I serve or don't serve, you don't need me." Oh yes we do need you. And sometimes we find the most difficult thing in the ministry is trying to do what the gifted people designed to do aren't doing. And then you try to organize the organism and that's difficult.

So, you've got to be doing it. That's the whole point. It's an exhortation. And it isn't out of the blue, "Hey, do this." And you say, "Oh, well, maybe I will, maybe I won't." This is after eleven chapters of being pounded with what God has done for you. And now he says would you just use your gift? It isn't as if he asks you to do something and me to do something that we can't do, is it? It isn't as if he asks us to do beyond what we are capable. He just says, "Look, identify what it is you can do, don't think more of it and don't think less of it, just be honest and straightforward and rightly estimate yourself and then do it and be content." That's so basic.

I don't know how to... I suppose you can motivate people with intimidation. I suppose we could motivate people by making you sign on a dotted line and sending you a card every week reminding you of your vow. I suppose we could threaten you with the judgment of God. I suppose we could tax you for every week you don't do it. And maybe we would accomplish something with some of those things but I daresay if a person, if a Christian doesn't sense an internal drive to use his giftedness for the Savior who died for him, that's not an external problem, that's an internal one. That's an internal problem. And it goes all the way back to verse 1 of chapter 12.

So, you say, "Alright, I want to do it." Listen, we... I can't tell you, people, that...strongly enough we depend on this. God's kingdom depends on this. The church depends on this. And, of course, the tendency in a church like ours is just to keep piling people up and they just keep piling on the outside all the time.

And, you know, we...we just... One of the things we're trying to stress now in the next few months is membership in the church. And for a long time we, you know, didn't want to push that because we wanted our community to know that we weren't trying to take everybody from all the churches and get them all locked up here. But we've come to the point now where we realize that you need to identify and you need to belong and you need to serve and use your gift and you need to be cared for and it's a mutual thing. And we want to care for you. And we want to assist you. And we want to provide for you information where you can use that gift and a list as long as your arm of volunteer activity that need people that just have what you have to do. That's so important.

Well, let's look at the gifts. What are the seven that he mentions that really will help us to identify the general areas of giftedness? First of all, prophecy, prophecy, "Whether prophecy, according to the proportion of faith." And we can imply then if you have prophecy then prophesy according to the proportion of faith. Now I believe, and I want to say some things about prophecy because it's so misunderstood. I believe basically it's a gift of preaching, of proclaiming. And I know there are people who believe that it is a supernatural apostolic gift that has ceased. I don't believe that. I believe it's still around and its inclusion in Romans 12 is a good reason why I believe that. It is here with the ongoing gifts of the church. It is not isolated out of this passage. It is not only in 1 Corinthians where the sign gifts are listed, it's here.

Now prophecy is a very important gift, very important. In fact, the apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians said the most about prophecy and tongues. He said the most about tongues because it was being abused and prophecy because it was being neglected. But it's an essential gift. Do you

remember 1 Corinthians 14 and some of the things he said there, such as pursue love especially that you may prophesy? One who prophesies edifies the church. Greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues. Since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. Prophecy is for a sign to those who believe. Desire earnestly to prophesy. I mean, he really puts the emphasis on the importance of prophecy.

Now the Greek term prophecy tells us exactly what it means. It is the term *prophteia*. The verb is *prophteu*. Do you know what it means? It simply means to speak publicly, to speak before, literally. Before what? Before people, to get up and speak. That's all it means. It isn't very mystical. It isn't even very extraordinary and supernatural in that sense. It simply means to speak before people. It is the gift of public speaking. Now prophecy may include in a supernatural prophecy, like a prophet of the Old Testament or a New Testament prophet, it may include foretelling the future. But its primary significance is public speaking.

And the best definition anywhere of the prophetic gift is 1 Corinthians 14:3, "He that prophesies" listen "speaks unto men." Did you hear that? He that prophesies speaks unto men. That's what the prophecy gift is, it's a speaking-unto-men gift. It's one of those speaking gifts mentioned in 1 Peter 4 verse 11, "If any man speak, let him speak the oracles of God." It's a speaking gift that uses the Word of God for its content.

When God called Moses to deliver Israel out of Egypt, Moses —

Exodus chapter 4 and you can go all the way through chapter 7 verse 1 and read the story, but — Moses said I can't do it, I can't speak publicly. God said to him this, "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know he can speak well. Then you shall speak unto him, put words in his mouth and he shall be a spokesman unto the people, he shall be to thee instead of a mouth (listen to this)and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet." What does He mean by that? Thy public speaker. That's all it meant. It was not a supernatural prophet, it was just a man who stood in front of people and spoke. Aaron will do that for you.

And we find such uses repeatedly in the Old Testament. In Numbers 11:25 and 26, 1 Kings 18:29, 1 Chronicles 25:2 and 3 and then, of course, you have it in Matthew 7 where people are going to stand at the judgment and say, "Have we not prophesied in Your name?" Well, what they mean by that, we've been Your preachers, we've been Your public speakers, we've stood up in front of crowds and spoken on Your behalf. Aaron was going to be Moses' speechmaker. That's the idea.

So, 1 Corinthians 14:3 really sums it up beautifully. It says he that prophesies speaks unto men. For what purpose? To edification and exhortation and comfort; to build them up, to challenge them to obedience and to comfort them in need. That's what it is. It isn't necessarily for telling the future. It isn't necessarily supernatural revelation. It is public speaking with the purpose of building up, challenging to obedience and comforting. And the content of it is the oracles of God. It may be to unbelievers. It may be to believers. It is a public speaking gift, proclaiming the Word of the living God. And we find in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verses 24 and 25 indicate to us that both believers and unbelievers can be the recipients of the gift of preaching or prophesying.

Now there's never been a time in God's economy, never ever, throughout all the redemptive history whether you're Old Testament, New Testament or...or to the present day, there's never been a time when God hasn't had His preachers, when God hasn't had His spokesmen. Sometimes yes, they gave new revelation, no question about it. Sometimes the prophet of God spoke in the sense that Ezekiel 7:1 says, "The Word of the Lord came unto me saying." And that does happen in the Old Testament.

But there were also times when it wasn't a direct revelation. They were preaching what was already the oracles of God, what was already received revelation. They were reiterating what had already been revealed.

If you go to the Old Testament, you will find that prophets instructed, exhorted, warned, rebuked, encouraged, they stressed duty, obedience, repentance. They promoted reverence. They called for righteousness. They condemned sin. They warned about judgment. And they promised blessing. And it wasn't always brand new revelation. It was simply public speaking in giving forth the message of God. Their emphasis usually was in a practical application, making the Word of God relevant to life. They were relevant communicators of God's Word, taking the Word of God and tying it into life.

John Calvin even said, "By prophesying I do not understand the gift of foretelling the future, but of interpreting Scripture so that a prophet is an interpreter of God's will." And I might add, a public proclaimer of it.

In Zurich, Switzerland in the sixteenth century, it was customary for all the ministers to get together every week for what they called quote-unquote "prophesying." What were they? Expositional, exegetical, expositions of the Scripture. And the idea was: come to the Word of God, exegete it, draw

together an exposition of it that would be applicable to the day. In fact, in 2 Peter 1...yes, 1:19, Peter says that prophecy is a light shining in a dark place. It is the light of God's Word confronting the darkness of the world.

So, the point is this. The gift itself is the gift of being able to preach the Word of God, to make it relevant to a contemporary situation, to confront a society. You go through the book of Acts, even, with the New Testament prophets and you will find the same thing illustrated in chapter 11, chapter 13, chapter 15. The prophets spoke of a contemporary situation, applying the truth of God. Sometimes it was direct revelation, sometimes it was reiteration. When you see the gift of prophecy, for example, in the list of 1 Corinthians, you know that it can fit in with the revelatory gift; it can fit in with the supernatural gift. When you see it here, you know it can fit in with just an edifying gift in the life of the church.

Now let's look back at verse 6 again. So if you prophesy, then prophesy according to the proportion of faith. Now some people say it means of *the* faith and it may well mean that. I kind of go back and forth on this one, I don't always...I don't always find myself being able to be dogmatic in matters that are like this, but it could be objective, that is *the* faith, because there is a definite article. But that doesn't necessarily mean it has to be. It could be saying, when you prophesy, prophesy according to the proportion of the faith, or to the measure of the faith.

What does that mean? In other words, when you preach, make sure you preach according to *the* faith. "The faith," meaning the revealed faith. To put it in Jude's words, the once for all delivered to the saints faith, the biblical faith.

Or it could be subjective. And it could mean if you prophesy, prophesy according to the proportion of faith. What does that mean? According to the measure of faith God has measured out to you, just as it says back in verse 3. God has dealt to every man a certain measure of faith, a certain...a certain resource, a certain power, a certain energy, a certain ability to minister a gift. It's like God gives gifts and then He gives the amount of faith needed to operate the gift. And he may well be saying now...saying, now when you go to prophesy, do it in accord with the proportion of the gift you have, the measure of the gift you've received.

You say, "Well, which one is right?" Well, both are right. So why quibble. When you preach the Word of God make sure you preach the Word of God, the faith. And when you do it, make sure it's consistent with your measured out ability.

Now, turn for a moment to 1 Thessalonians 5. And this is another indication of the importance of this and also the fact that it goes far beyond some revelatory gift that has ceased with the New Testament. Here the apostle is writing an epistle, giving instruction to the church. And he wraps it up with some very interesting things at the very end. Starting in verse 16 say, "Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesying. Prove all things, hold fast what is good, abstain from all appearance of evil," and so forth.

Now all of this goes together. Verse 18, "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesying, prove all things, hold fast which is good." They all go together. If you despise prophesying, you'll quench the Spirit. If you accept prophesying, then prove it and make sure it's good, right? Don't quench it. But don't just take everything that's preached to you, right? Prove it. Test it. See if it's good.

How do you test it? Well, the first way would be if it squares with what? The faith. And the second way is in Revelation 19:10, "For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy." All true biblical preaching is that: It is preaching the Word of God and exalting the Son of God. It is preaching the Word of God. "If any man speak," 1 Peter 4:11, "then speak the oracles of God." It is exalting the Son of God, Revelation 19:10, "The Spirit of Jesus is the essence of prophecy." It must exalt the work and person of Christ and proclaim the Word of God.

So, if you have that gift, use it. Use it. If you are able to publicly proclaim, then publicly proclaim. What a wonderful gift if you have that. And it comes in all kinds of packages. I mean, it comes in packages of people preaching in wide, great scales to massive crowds, and it comes to people who stand on a street and a whole lot in between. It's a marvelously wide area of giftedness, but what a blessed one. I have a special, I don't know, I guess anybody who has a certain gift has a special zeal for people who might have that gift to see it fulfilled. I pray for more preachers, for more people who have a passion for the proclamation. I want to be faithful. If God's given me the gift of proclaiming, then I want to proclaim. That's what I want to do. I want to use my gift for His glory out of a heart of gratitude.

So, Paul says if you have the gift of prophecy, then get on with it according to the measure of your gift, if you will, and according to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Preach the Word. It's another way of saying what he said in 2 Timothy 4, preach the Word, preach the Word. Be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long- suffering, go for it, he says. And don't let anybody look down on it and don't worry if people want teachers who tickle their ears, you know, who

entertain them. You just preach the Word. So, I'm under mandate, I really am. And if you are, you better get on with it. That's Paul's message.

Second gift is the gift of serving, and we'll spend less time on these. That one was the key one to understand. He says in verse 7, "Ministry, or literally, *diakonia*, the gift of the deacon or the deaconess, the serving gift. If you have the gift of serving, then serve. That's what he says. It isn't very technical, it just says if you have the gift of serving, then be serving. It's a practical service. It's the same as the gift of helps in 1 Corinthians 12:28. It's the same word used in Acts 20:35, “helps” is, to mean support. It's a support gift, gift of practical help, a gift of serving. It could come, and again, in a million, multi-million ways, unique as each individual.

Serving, serving, the word basically means to wait on a table. It's used, for example, when Jesus raised Peter's wife's mother and it says she got up and served them. She *diakonia'd* them, she deaconed them. That's what the word means. It means to serve them something to eat. It's used several places in the New Testament for that kind of thing, to serve, to provide a meal, very, very menial but very important service. It came then to be a very general term for any kind of spiritual service. And throughout the New Testament you find that the word is used over and over and over again. It's a very common word. I counted nearly 75 different times when one form of that word or another is used in the New Testament, serving, serving, all kinds of dimensions to it. Any kind of supporting service, it could be the official service of someone designated as a deacon or deaconess, it could be the unofficial service of someone just stepping in to a gap to serve.

Back in Acts 6, the apostles said, "Look, we need to give ourselves to serving the Word and praying, so let's get some people who can serve tables. We've got to have some support. We have to have some help." And, believe me, it hasn't changed. It really hasn't. I mean, the church is dependent on the helpers. Oh, you know, if people don't use their gifts we go get somebody and bring them in to wash a window, or bring them in to do this, or bring them in to do the other thing, or try the best we can to get the bases covered. But if there were just people who said, "Hey, I have a helping gift, I want to come in and do that." You know, you could come here any day of the week and say, "I'm here, what could I do?" And we could keep... Could we keep you occupied? Oh...just try us. You could help us. You could stuff envelopes, you could make phone calls, you could clean things, you could go to hospitals and call on... I mean, there are myriad of support things that have to be done in the ministry. No limit, absolutely no limit to it. If you have that kind of a gift, then be at it.

And then he mentions teaching. And my intent here is not to give you a full-blown definition of every gift because that's not Paul's intent. And we've done that in our series in 1 Corinthians. But just to

touch on the emphasis of exhortation here. If you have the gift, do it. So he mentions a third one, teaching, and he says if you have the gift of teaching then teach. Be at it.

Now some people say what's the difference between teaching and preaching? Well, the best... It's hard to recover all the distinctions in the Greek terms, but we know this, that the speaking publicly gift, the *prophteia* gift, the proclaiming gift, the gift of the herald, if you will, like John the Baptist, who was a prophet and heralded the coming of the Messiah, the proclaiming gift is distinct from the didactic gift. Here the word is *didask* from which we get “didactic.” And what does that mean? Basically it is... It is a formal, systematic training or teaching that is implied by that word. It is used, for example, of training a choir over the weeks and the weeks until finally they have mastered what they have been trained to learn and they are ready to perform. The gift of preaching is a one-time proclamation. It is a proclamation, an announcement, a heralding of the biblical truth.

But the gift of teaching is the function of systematically training people, taking them from one point to another systematically. It can refer to a teacher in a seminary or a Bible college or a Sunday school teacher. It can refer to someone who disciples a person one-on-one, someone who carries them from point A to point B to point C or whatever. It is the ministry of leading someone along in the systematic understanding of the teaching of the Word of God. The early church met every day, I'm sure. Acts 2:42 says they were continually together in the apostles' doctrine. There was a didactic exercise going on where the church came together to analyze and systematize the Word of God. And that's what we're called to do in Matthew 28, go into all the world, and it says make disciples of all men, teaching them, didactically, systematically instructing them in an increasing understanding of the Word of God, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

God gave the gift to Paul very clearly. Paul was a teacher. Paul could proclaim on the one hand and he could also teach. He could also systematically impart truth. You just read Romans and you'll know he was a teacher. He is the systematizer of all systematizers. And that's what he says in 2 Timothy 1:11, "I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher." He uses all three words to describe himself. And by the way, it's not totally uncommon for a person to be both a preacher and a teacher in God's design. Paul was that.

I believe Timothy was a teacher. In 2 Timothy 2:2 he says, "The things you've heard from me among many witnesses," and I believe Paul systematically taught Timothy, he says, "The same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." You teach them, they'll teach others. Get in the process of systematically teaching people. Timothy, no doubt, had that gift.

I believe Barnabas had that gift, according to Acts 15, I think it's verse 35. Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, here they go, teaching and preaching, proclaiming and applying to the contemporary scene and heralding the Word of God and then getting with people and systematically didactically imparting to them the truth of Scripture.

In Acts 18:24 and 25 we meet another great teacher, a certain Jew named Apollos, born in Alexandria, an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures. He was instructed in the Lord, being fervent in the Spirit he spoke and taught the things of Jesus. Systematically he taught them.

I believe elders have that gift. Elders are to be *didaktos*, skilled in didactics, skilled in teaching. They're to have an aptitude for that. It's the ability to analyze and systematize and pass on, instructing people in the Word of God.

Jesus certainly had it. You remember on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24, he opened the Scriptures and expounded. You know what the word "expounded" is? *Diermneu*, from which we get “hermeneutics,” thorough interpretation. *Dia* adds an intensity. He thoroughly interpreted the Scriptures. That's the teaching gift, to fully interpret, to thoroughly interpret the Scriptures so that it’s understandable, systematic feeding of the Word of God.

I really believe this is the primary function of a pastor. It's unusual when a pastor is both a teacher and a herald, but I believe he has to be a teacher because if he's a pastor he's an elder and elders, it doesn't say are skilled in preaching and prophesying, it says they're skilled in teaching. And I believe the primary role of a pastor is to be a systematic teacher of the Word of God, to feed his people systematically the Scripture, to thoroughly interpret the Bible. That's Bible exposition.

But you know as well as I do that now and then by the design of God there is a rare pastor who is not only a teacher but who also is a proclaimer and a preacher and may have a wider range of ministry than just the systematic teaching of his own flock. But we need to be careful about that because we don't need to expect at that all men who are leading their churches should necessarily have the ability to proclaim on a wide basis, as well as to do the teaching that they're called and gifted to do. So we don't want to take, say, a pastor of a large church like this and make him the standard to which everyone else has to come. God's gifts are different and unique.

But where a pastor or an elder must be evaluated is on the basis of whether or not he faithfully, systematically exposits to his people the Word of God. That's the essence of it. And I fear that not all are doing that. Eric Fife once said, "If the study is a lounge, the pulpit is an impertinence." And if you don't have the gift of teaching, don't fool with it because James 3:1 says stop being so many teachers, for theirs is a what? Greater condemnation, don't be in a hurry to be a teacher.

Let's stop there. I...I just feel maybe we ought to develop those further gifts next time. Let's bow in prayer.

Maybe we haven't touched on your gift. You're saying, "Well, I'm not a preacher. I don't even know that I'm a teacher. Maybe I'm a server." Oh, that's good. That's great, just as good as being a teacher, just as wonderful as being a preacher. You see, the issue isn't what you are; the issue is what you do with what you are. That's right. Did you get that? You see, your eternal commendation is not going to be whether or not you had the same effect that Billy Graham did on the world. The issue in your eternal reward is going to be did you maximize the gift you had because God designed you the way He designed you. Did you use the gift that God gave you? That's the issue, to the fullest.

In a sense, our judgment is relative. Not relative to each other but relative to what God enabled us to do and whether or not we did it. Present yourself a living sacrifice. Abandon yourself to a renewed mind and a renewed will, rightly evaluate your own attitude. Are you humbly thankful for the gift you have and do you understand it not too highly and not too lowly? You understand it? Do you understand how essential it is to the body of Christ, the body of Christ can't function without it? Will you do it? If it's preaching, will you preach? If it's serving, will you please serve? If it's teaching, will you please teach?

And may I suggest to you, please, that you don't have to have a formal office in the church to do any of this? You can just take off and do it. Do it. If God's given you the gift and He wants you to serve, all you need to do is make yourself available if you've rightly evaluated it. That's so important. And we're going to look at the other gifts in our next study. It will be two weeks from tonight because we have a baptism next week, and see where the rest of us fit in. Oh, it's so important. I'll tell you, this is where the joy is in knowing that you've made the most out of your life.

And some of you are saying, "Well, I'm just a kid...I...what do I do?" Let me tell you something. If you don't demonstrate now the willingness to use your gift, you're going to postpone the real place of blessing because you can't enter that place until you've been proven in the simple place. Start now. Start now. What's your ministry? What's your service to Christ? What are you doing now? It may be

ever so small but it's a proving ground and if you're faithful over little, He'll make you lord over much and expand your usefulness. But if you're doing nothing now, you're just postponing the initial steps.

Where is your service? Are you using your gift? Have you... You say, "Well, I'm not sure what." Have you spent time committing yourself to the Lord as a living sacrifice saying, You can have everything in my life if You want it, I'll strip myself bare of everything if that's Your choice, I give You myself. I want to know my gifts. I want to use them for Your glory.

That's the only thing in life that matters, for that builds up the church and that brings glory to the Savior.

Father, thank You so much for our fellowship tonight, good time in Your Word, rich time. May it be fruitful for Your praise, in Christ's name, amen.

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