



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

GIFTS – Romans 12:1-9

1 Introduction Paul's letter to the Romans is a fascinating and complex book! It is full of exciting theology as well as challenging advice on how to live the Christian life. As he often does, Paul spends the early chapters explaining his teaching, then the concluding chapters saying, 'Right, in the light of all this teaching, how should we be living for God?'

That is the point we reach in **Romans 12**. Paul says, 'It's wonderful that we have been saved by God's overwhelming and undeserved grace, so let's worship him by giving our lives back to him in response to that amazing grace, for his use and his glory.'

'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.' (v.2 – J B Phillips' paraphrase). Paul challenges us to resist the pressures and attitudes of a world that lives in rebellion against God, and to allow our new minds to transform everything we think, say and do.

2 Honest self-appraisal (v.3) We should be *humble* in our attitude towards our fellow Christians. If we recognise that we and our fellow Christians are all sinners saved by God's grace, that will help us not to think of ourselves too highly.

3 Body ministry (v.4-5) The image of the church as a human body with a diversity of members is seen also in **1Cor 12:12-20**. The church has many members with different gifts, all united in Christ, the Head of the body. And each of us belongs to all the others; there is no room for merely private faith or isolated discipleship – if we are related to Jesus, we are related to one another.

4 Gifts of the Spirit (v.6-8) ALL who are members of Christ's body have received different grace gifts from the Holy Spirit. As well as the list of gifts in these verses, there are other lists too – **1Cor 12:8-10; Eph 4:11; 1Pet 4:10-11**. Some are to be used in the context of a church service while others have a wider function. Paul's point is that the life of the Christian community depends on God and the gifts he gives through his Spirit. Every church is a *charismatic* community, for without God's gifts ('*charismata*' in Greek), we could not function as the church of Jesus Christ.

v.6 keeps us humble! The phrase '*according to the grace given to each of us*' underlines that we cannot claim credit for either the natural abilities we possess, or the spiritual gifts given to us by God as he decides. *Everything* we have is God's gracious gift to us.

***Charismata* literally means grace-gifts – they are sovereignly and undeservedly given by the Holy Spirit. There is no basis for boasting or envy. Every member of the body has a special place and purpose. Whether more or less prominent in the eyes of others, the same standard applies to all: it is required of believers that they be found faithful (1Cor 4:2). Work with what God has given to you (2Tim 1:6), and seek to please Him rather than other people (Gal 1:10; 1Thes 2:4). (Harold S Martin)**

5 Gifts and Fruit How do these relate? They are certainly different. Gifts have to do with service; fruit have to do with Christlike character. Gifts tell us what a person has; fruit tell us what a person is. Having a particular spiritual gift does not necessarily indicate a Christlike person or godliness in a person's life. The fruit of the Spirit, especially love, should be the context for the operation of the gifts of the Spirit. Paul makes it clear in **1Cor 13** that spiritual gifts without spiritual fruit are worthless. Fruit are eternal, but gifts are temporal (**1Cor 13:8**). The qualifications for a church leader in **1Tim 3** stress fruit more than gifts. In God's eyes, it is better to be godly and Christlike than to have a particular gift, but the Lord wants us to wants us to exercise our gifts and be godly.

6 Examples of spiritual gifts The list in **v.6-8** has some overlap with the examples in Paul's other lists. These gifts vary from those we might label 'spiritual' to those which seem more mundane or practical, but Paul makes no distinction.

- **Prophecy:** a gift of being led by God to give a message to an individual or group, sometimes applied to a particular situation.
- **Serving:** acts of practical service, for which Jesus in his ministry set the pattern (**Mk 10:43-45**). The word often refers to men and women who serve as deacons, ministering to the church by organising and providing for the material needs of the community.
- **Teaching:** refers to the teaching of the Scriptures – passing on the truth of the gospel and preserving it from error. 'This is arguably the most urgently needed gift in the worldwide church today, as hundreds of thousands of converts are pressing into the church, but there are few teachers to nurture them in the faith' (J Stott).
- **Encouraging:** this has a wide range of meaning, ranging from encouraging and exhorting, to comforting, conciliating or consoling by coming alongside people. It is a gift often used behind the scenes in personally helping people or offering friendship to the lonely and giving fresh encouragement to those who have lost heart. Barnabas 'the son of encouragement' is often mentioned as a good example of this gift in action (**Acts 4:36; 9:26-27; 11:22-23**).
- **Giving:** personal giving, with generosity, without grudging, and without ulterior motives or hidden purposes. Contributing to the needs of others is something for everyone to do, but Paul sees that God gives to some people the gift of having a particular inclination to give, and perhaps the means too.
- **Leadership:** the verb can mean 'to care for' or 'give aid'. It could also refer to leadership in both the home and church, and should be done responsibly and seriously.
- **Showing mercy:** this is a gift which could take many forms, caring for anybody in need or in distress, eg aiding the poor, caring for those who are ailing physically or mentally. Whatever the function, it should be done cheerfully, not reluctantly or patronisingly.

7 Discover and use your gifts Each part of the Body of Christ is important; no Christian should consider their gift of less significance or value than someone's else's. Every person and every gift is vital for the well-being and growth of the church and is to be valued by everyone.

So **DISCERN** your gift, **DESIRE** and pray for a gift (to build up your own faith and aid the Body of Christ), **USE** your gift to the full and seek to develop it (v.6), and **CELEBRATE** both your gifts and others' gifts, thanking God for what he has given to his Church.

To discover the area of ministry in which God has equipped us, we can

- **Ask ourselves.** We can try to identify our spiritual gifts, where our heart lies, what our abilities are, what sort of personality we have, and what experience we have.
- **Ask others.** Sometimes they can spot things about us that we haven't noticed. Asking others is not always easy; it can sound like seeking compliments. But we can do it with those we know and trust.
- **Ask God.** Prayerful seeking of God's will for where and how we should serve is vital.
- **Have a go.** Very often, we cannot be sure whether we are shaped for a particular area of service until we give it a try (whilst recognising that we will not be perfect at it at the first attempt).

For homegroups

1. In what ways do we/you tend to be conformed to the prevailing culture (v.2)? How in practice can we/you overcome this tendency?
2. What should we do with what God has given us (v.6b-8)?
3. What can we do to celebrate the gifts we see used in the church?
4. If you have a gift and use it in church and someone then congratulates you, how might you respond?
5. Read Acts 6:1-7. How many of the principles found in Rom 12 can you see illustrated in this story?
6. Our judgment of our own spiritual gifts can be distorted either by self-importance (v.3) or by its opposite, a low self-image. How can we overcome both, and achieve 'sober judgment' (v.3) about ourselves?
7. Read Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-27; 11:22-26. What do these verses teach us about the gift of encouragement that was seen in Barnabas?
8. How has Rom 12:3-8 affected your understanding of spiritual gifts?