

# Gifts that Differ

Romans 12:6-8

## Introduction

We come to the topic of spiritual gifts this morning – this has been the subject of a fair amount of controversy thru much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of the church. A number of professing Christians today claim to speak in tongues. Others claim the gift of prophecy for themselves. There are numerous so-called healers on supposedly Christian television broadcasts. Some claim to be modern day apostles.

What should we think of all of this?

Is prophecy still going on today? / Do we still have apostles?

I think there are some genuine Christians – who may share different opinions about some of the gifts – and there are some who actually do great harm to the church in this area as well

A couple weeks ago – I got a call from the Gideon's – wanting to verify that such a person was a member in good standing in our congregation – which I was able to affirm. Then the woman on the other end of the phone asked if she could pray for me. I said – 'sure'. I like to encourage people to pray!

So – she begins to pray - - - and she was really going at it – she was in her element – this was her moment to shine - - - then all of a sudden she dropped in a couple of gibberish type of words – and then said - - Oh I just prayed in tongues – I hope you don't mind. No – no you're fine. Then she finally wrapped up her prayer

Then I prayed that God would bless the Gideons

When I was around 17 – someone tried to teach me how to speak in tongues

I was interested / curious

However – the experience did not lead to much – and I became convinced after the fact that there was nothing supernatural taking place

After doing some reading on tongues – I discovered that many bible scholars do not believe that tongues is even for today – and that throughout church history – there is a consistent witness that tongues and the other sign gifts faded with the closing of the apostolic period of the church

Jonathan Edwards: 'The first century was the era of miracles. But soon after that, the canon of Scripture being completed, when the Apostle John had written the book of Revelation, which he wrote not long before his death, these miraculous gifts were no longer continued in the church.'

Augustine: 'Miracles have not been allowed to stretch into our time, or the soul would always be looking for sensations.'

Cessationism - is the view that tongues and some of the other sign gifts have ceased in the church since the apostles

It's not that we don't believe in tongues [or prophecy] – it's that we don't want to call something tongues that is not tongues – we see no evidence that the biblical gift is still in operation

Ravi Zacharias: 'I remember my mother lying in bed, her life hanging in the balance after a stroke at the age of 57. A group of elders from the church came and prayed for her. Afterward, one of them told us that the Lord had told him that my mother would get well. My younger brother, especially who was twenty-two at the time was greatly encouraged by this word of assurance of God's promise to heal her. However - her condition deteriorated and a few days later she died.'

It's kind of exciting to have someone make a promise like that – [the Lord told him!]

But – those with a little bit of foresight and discernment ask - how do we know this is a prophetic word?

And what will be the consequences if you are wrong

Should we take you out and stone you – like they did in the OT?

Paul refers to 7 spiritual gifts that God has given to the church

\*\*\* God wants all of us to serve Him by blessing the body of Christ with the gifts He has given to us to use for that purpose

Robert Haldane: 'It is the duty of all to spend and be spent in the service of their Lord.'

## I. Prophecy - v. 6

**Prophecy** – those who speak prophetically speak by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A prophet sent by God / speaking the truths of God cannot err

The gift of prophecy was necessary when God was giving new revelation – not necessary today

Prophets could give a warning –

**Acts 21:10-14**

Agabus was a prophet – predicted Paul’s arrest – and it came about – [Paul did not feel compelled to change his course]

The funny thing was – God used this passage in a unique way – at just the right time – in my life

Because I was making plans to go to seminary – and I was given this portion of Acts to teach to our SS class - - - at the time - - - That week – I had a couple men from church take me aside and tell me that I was taking my wife out to the pit of hell – meaning Los Angeles

i.e. – you should think about changing course

They were not prophets – did not claim to be prophets

But - - - I felt this passage of Scripture told me to stay the course I felt God was leading me on

A lot of quasi-Christian groups have their prophets [today] – the Mormons and Joseph Smith / Brigham Young - - - the Catholics and the Pope / New Apostolic Reformation

We don’t need added prophecies

The faith has been once for all delivered to the saints – Jude 3

The Apostolic period was a unique period

Apostles and prophets were part of the foundation of the church

Ephesians 2:20 - 'Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.'

MacArthur: 'It was the unanimous perspective of the church fathers that the apostolic age was unique, unrepeated, and limited to the first century of church history.' [p. 98]

II Corinthians 12:12 - 'The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.'

That meant Paul the Apostle could do things others could not

None of the reformers claimed to be prophets or apostles – Calvin / Luther / Zwingli  
None of the giants in history – Edwards / Spurgeon / Whitefield

Harold Camping once said: God told him that in October 2012 - Jesus would return to earth – it didn't happen – he was guilty of teaching false doctrine / impersonating a prophet!

It certainly is not helpful to the cause of the church to people running around and making false prophecies

\*\*\* The number of prophecies in the Bible made by true prophets that proved to be false: **zero**

The Apostle John was in the Spirit – when he penned the book of Revelation – Rev. 1

Revelation 1:10 -11 - 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, "write in a book what you see . . ."

'The Lord told me . . . ' – we trust the witness of the Apostles – that's a true prophet

God has told us not to add to Scripture

John MacArthur: 'No religious delusion has been more pervasive or brought more confusion into the church than the belief that God routinely speaks to people outside the Scripture.'

Justin Peters: 'If you want to hear God speak, read the Bible. If you want to hear Him speak audibly, read it out loud.'

we certainly get impressions / promptings / leadings from the Lord - - - but we do not have prophets in the church today – don't need them – some do great harm to the church

## II. Service / Helps - v. 7

We are each called to use our gift[s] and to use it to the glory of God and to the benefit of the church

The next gift is the gift of 'helps' in I Cor. 12

Servants are the backbone of the church

If you help out w/ Awana / serve in the nursery / serve in VBS / run sound / serve on the praise team / bldg. cmte - - - the list goes on and on - we appreciate you!

In fact – this is the same word as used for deacon in the church [διακονος]

A deacon / deaconess was a servant – of which we have many

You can't do anything without people willing to serve

Same word in Hebrews

Hebrews 6:10 - 'For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.'

We as believers – should make time in our lives for serving the Lord Jesus

C.T. Studd: 'It's a short life - it will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last.'

A pastor was in Germany – speaking at a conference – when a friend offered to give him a ride back to the airport. On the way back – they were having this great spiritual conversation about the conference and God's work in their lives – building each other up in the faith - - - and then they got on the Autobahn – no speed limits!

The faster the driver went - - - the less they talked about spiritual things – and the more they focused on simply dodging other cars and avoiding a crash! - - - by the time he was up to 120 mph – spiritual conversation had died out altogether

Some people are living their life on the autobahn!

They have this career goal / this personal objective / I gotta take this class / this house project / this hobby activity / this trip they are planning

When we are finished with this – then I will have time to serve the Lord!

They are busy - - - Crazy busy

They might fail to notice that there is someone who God has brought into their lives – that needs the grace / wisdom or help they can give

We should recognize that healthy Christians are serving Christians

Make service of Jesus a priority

### III. Teaching - v. 7

A primary function of the church will always be that of teaching

It's part of the Great Commission

Matthew 28:19-20 - 'Go therefore and make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;'

Timothy was a teacher

Paul's instruction to him was upon taking care with the Scriptures

Teachers should be prepared / having studied – read some Christian books / etc.

**I Timothy 4:11 - 'Prescribe and teach these things.'**

I Tim. 4:11 - don't just teach anything you want – teach these things!

i.e. the things which Paul said

Teachers teach what is in the Bible or instruct others as to the faith

My dad liked to refer to a preacher who in the early 60's liked to say that man would never land on the moon – God wouldn't allow it

I mentioned that to another preacher - - - and he said – 'oh yeah – that was 'Lehman Strauss' – and he lived long enough to regret it!

Clearly not a prophet there! – not very good teaching either!

I shared that with some men at lunch – and they said that's why God tells preachers to preach the Word!

We are to preach the Word – not our fancies

One man told Harry Ironside – 'expository preaching leaves no room for the imagination'

Ironside answered with Genesis 6 – 'and God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.'

We don't need imagination – we need the Word of God / which is always relevant / always speaks to our lives / always true / always sanctifies [Jn. 17:17]

To teach the Word – we must first know the Word and be good students of the Scriptures

**II Timothy 2:15 - 'Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' [Kjv]**

**II Timothy 2:15 - 'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.' [NASB]**

The best teachers are people who are growing and learning from the Scriptures themselves – and who are applying what they learn to their lives

Howard Hendricks - in his college days had a professor that was well known for his diligence in study and reading. Howard had lunch with this man and decided to ask him what motivated him to study so much. The professor said, 'Son, I would rather have my students drink from a running stream than a stagnant pool.'

There is always something to learn – as long as we are in this body - - - we know in part – we are growing / learning / maturing

Some people: 'I learned it all when I was twelve – confirmed . . .' – bible has dust on it

If you have a heart beat and air in your lungs – there is room to grow

People need God's Word – we never outgrow it – we never exhaust its riches or plumb the inexhaustible depths of this treasure

False teaching has disastrous effects upon the body – but true and biblical teaching builds up our faith and leads us to healthy / Christ-honoring disciples

Homer Kent: 'The laborer for God must give diligence to the kind and quality of his work, so that when he meets God's inspection, he will stand the test and be approved, having no need for shame because of faulty workmanship.'

We need teachers for our SS classes

#### IV. Exhortation / Encouragement - v. 8

Encouragement – παρακαλεω – to come alongside of

This person can encourage / motivate others

David Jeremiah: 'encouragement is like a pebble thrown into water. While there is always an immediate impact, the ripples continue indefinitely.'

Joni Earackson was encouraged – after her accident – when she was able to meet with other college age kids her age – and they all grappled with what on earth God was up to in her life

One kid handed her a copy of 'The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination – and simply said – 'this might help' - - - that book made a huge difference in her thinking - - it showed her how God had this accident as part of His plan for her life - - - she could glorify God in the midst of paraplegia

Acts 9:26-27 - 'And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a

disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he has spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.'

Barnabas opened the door for Paul

Later on – he stood up for John Mark when Paul didn't want to take him on the next missionary journey

Later on – in writing II Timothy – Paul referred to Mark and said – 'bring him for he is useful to me.' - - - Barnabas was an encourager

David Jeremiah: 'do you need encouragement right now? My best advice to you is to go encourage someone else. Are you caught up in your own needs? Go fill the needs of others. You'll reap what you sow, and the love you give will return to you.'

#### V. Giving - v. 8

Randy Alcorn: 'When Jesus warns us not to store up treasures on earth, it's not just because wealth might be lost; it's because wealth will always be lost. Either it leaves us while we live, or we leave it when we die.'

The person with the gift of giving – gives with great cheer / is not looking for the applause of man - - - and is quietly laying up treasure in heaven – supporting God's work

#### VI. Leading - v. 8

Peter gave a charge to the elders

I Peter 5:1-2 - Therefore, I exhort the elders among you . . . Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.'

I Peter 5:3 - 'nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.'

The elder is a shepherd

The shepherd does not drive the sheep – he leads the sheep – he goes before them

The pilot of a ship keeps it on course – arriving at its intended destination

This gift of leadership fits with those who serve on the elder board – or run certain ministries in the church / committees

John Wooden understood this principle about leadership as a coach – and the importance of *example*

“I began smoking during WWII. I would always quit during basketball season. I’d stop on my birthday in October and start again when the season ended. I never smoked in front of the boys. One of the reasons for my finally quitting was to improve my example. I was convicted. I could no longer expect my players to not do what I was doing.”

John Wooden: “A leader’s most powerful ally is his or her own example. There is hypocrisy to the phrase, ‘Do as I say, not as I do’. I refused to make demands of my boys that I wasn’t willing to live out in my own life . . .”

“One of my players complimented me greatly when he said, “Coach – you walked the talk”

You and I can only lead when we ‘walk the talk’

Tony Dungy: ‘Regardless of our situations in life, we are always role models for someone - always - and probably in ways we wouldn’t expect . . . Never underestimate your platform - especially the one right in front of you.’

Parents are leaders for their children

## VII. Showing Mercy - v. 8

James 1:27 - ‘This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.’

A gift of sympathy

Visiting hospitals / nursing homes / homeless shelters / crisis pregnancy centers / ministry to the needy

Don’t bury your gift or talent in the ground - - - use it to the glory of God

Satan – the enemy of the church – does not want us to function as members of a body – or to serve our Lord and Savior who is eminently worthy

He wants us to live for ourselves – and ourselves alone

As we serve God’s people – God is glorified

## Conclusion

Paul told Timothy

II Timothy 1:6 - 'And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.'

Whatever our gift – kindle it / stir it up by usage

'Put me in coach – I'm ready / give me a job to do'

It's a glory to serve in the church!

Psalm 84:10 - 'For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness.'

Let us serve the Lord! - - - for He is worthy! / He gave Himself up on the cross for our sins – rose again that we might have life eternal