

Gifts According to Grace

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[0 : 00] And as you're sitting, I'd like you to grab your Bibles and open up to Romans chapter 12.

! If you don't have a copy of the Scriptures with you, then you can grab one of the Bibles that we have scattered around in the chairs. And if you're using one of those pew Bibles, then you just need to turn to page 948 and you can find the passage that we're going to be spending our time together in this morning.

We're in Romans chapter 12. We were in Romans chapter 12 last week. Last week we covered verses 3 through 8. And this week we're not quite moving on from those because we didn't say very much about the various gifts that Paul lists in this passage.

And so this morning we're going to slow ourselves down, pause a little bit before we move ahead through the rest of chapter 12. And we're going to consider, we're going to think about what these gifts are.

We're going to think about how Paul addresses the gifts and then how that ought to impact us. How that ought to impact the ways in which we engage with one another and participate in the life of the church.

[1 : 12] And so I'd like you, if you'd look, if you'd glance down at verse 6, we're going to pick up there and read verses 7 and 8 as well. So if you guys would, would you stand in honor of the Word of God as we read?

Paul writes, Thank you, Father, for this brief list of spiritual gifts that the Apostle Paul gives us.

I pray that we would not only learn about these particular gifts this morning from your Word, but we would also learn about the remarkable unity in the midst of the diversity of the body and how you put us together.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We watch a lot of nature shows at my house. We watch a lot of the Discovery Channel, a lot of the National Geographic Channel, quite a bit of that sort of stuff.

Mostly, partly because my kids just really enjoy it and it's something we can watch together, but also partly because you don't have to worry as much about what might be coming up in the next scene. The worst that they're going to see is some animal eat another animal in a house with a lot of boys in it.

[2 : 36] That's cool anyway, so it doesn't matter for us. And so we watch a lot of the Nature Channel. And I've been surprised over the last several years as I've watched that with my kids, how many animals there are that I had never heard of before.

I mean, just never heard of before, just the remarkable sort of diversity that exists in the world that God has created. And that's not even to mention the different kinds of plant life that exists in the world that we live in.

All the different sort of environments that surround us. I mean, it's remarkable. There's been a show coming on, I think it's a National Geographic Channel, about all the different national parks in the United States.

And even the diversity that exists within our own country is amazing. The diversity of the natural world, it's really mind-boggling when you begin to think about it.

Just the different types of squirrels that there are across the country is really kind of weird to me. I mean, just various squirrels. And I'm still not even sure how to tell the difference between a squirrel and a chipmunk. Some of you can explain that to me later, but I thought I was watching squirrels and they said they were chipmunks.

[3 : 38] And so, I mean, there's just rare, just diversity, rare animals and strange things. And some of them are right around us and we don't even really notice them because of our familiarity with them.

But it's remarkable how God has created the world and how He has put all this diversity within the world. But He's also put diversity within us. Not just people at large, but we saw last week that there is great diversity within the body of Christ.

In fact, we saw three different ways in this passage, in verses 3 through 8, in which Paul describes diversity within the church. He says that God has given to each of us varying measures of faith.

He says that He's given us different functions within the church. And that He's given us different gifts by which we serve within the body of Christ. And in these verses that we read this morning, the Apostle Paul lists seven gifts, seven spiritual gifts.

Now, last week I mentioned those briefly. We talked about them a little bit. But as I sat down in my study this week, I really felt as if we didn't say enough about those gifts last week.

[4 : 44] And so I want us to think about those. I want us to marvel at the diversity that exists within the body of Christ. And Paul gives us a very small and limited snapshot here when he speaks of the gifts, of the kind of diversity that exists within the church.

We know that the church is diverse. We know that. Especially if you look at the church around the world. We tend to be a little bit more monolithic in our churches here. But if you look at the church around the world, you'll see all sorts of diversity.

Ethnic diversity. You'll see diversity of languages. You'll see all sorts of cultural diversity. So that churches that believe much as we believe worshiping in Africa are going to have services that look entirely different from what we do when we gather together.

Or churches that are meeting in Asia and small house churches because of the threat of government. They're doing things differently than the way that we do them. Some of those are because of the setting that they're in in terms of oppression.

But others are cultural differences. I mean, there's a lot of variety in the church worldwide. But there's also a lot of variety and diversity in every local church.

[5 : 55] Because that's how God has designed us. He hasn't made us all automatons. He hasn't made us all the same. We have varieties of gifts.

And as I said, Paul lists seven of those here in this passage. Take a look. We can just look at the seven gifts that Paul mentions. You can see there, beginning in verse 6, there's prophecy, There's the one who teaches, the one who exhorts, the one who contributes, the one who leads, And then finally, the one who does acts of mercy.

All of these Paul calls gifts. And the word gift that he uses here is related to and built off the same root as the word grace. So that when he says that we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, You could very well translate, We have free gifts of grace that differ according to the grace that's given to us.

In fact, there are times when this word translated as gift here is indeed translated as grace in other parts of the New Testament. Because it refers to something that God gives us freely by his grace.

And so Paul begins this discussion, this list of gifts, by highlighting the reality, As we saw last week, that these gifts are a product of God's grace. That he distributes them sovereignly to his people.

[7 : 17] And as we said last week, this list is not an exhaustive list of all the varieties of gifts that God has granted by his grace to his people. There are many, many different sorts of gifts that operate within the church.

Not all gifts will be found in any one congregation, but a diversity of gifts will be found. In fact, if you'll hold your place there in Romans and turn over to 1 Corinthians, We looked at 1 Corinthians chapter 12 some last week because there is so much overlap between what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 And what he says in Romans 12 overlaps in terms of the themes and the discussion, But also in terms of the specific vocabulary and language that Paul uses.

So you find yourself jumping back and forth between these two chapters so that you can better understand one passage by looking at the other. But in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, there's a list of gifts.

And what's shocking or amazing to me is how different the list in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 is from the list in Romans chapter 12. Now that has to do with the circumstances in the city of Corinth, no doubt in the church at Corinth, But it also has to do with the reality that there are just a lot of gifts.

And nowhere in the New Testament does any writer attempt to give an exhaustive list of all the gifts that God gives to his people by which we serve one another. But take a look there. I just want you to see how different this particular list is.

[8 : 42] Look at verse 7, for instance. He says, Only the gift of prophecy overlaps with the list that we have in Romans chapter 12.

All of the rest of them are very, very different sorts of gifts that the Apostle Paul lists here. There are so many gifts that I don't think that we could or should attempt to list all of them.

That's one of the flaws that I find in, I don't know if any of you have done one of the spiritual gift inventories. Some churches will do these things and they're aimed at helping people to identify the gifts that God has given them.

And that's a good goal. But the shortcoming of these, they're little tests. You take this quiz. It looks at your personality and the things that you can do. And at the end of it, it shows you what spiritual gifts you're most likely to have.

But one of the shortcomings of it is that we don't have anywhere in the Bible a complete list of the gifts. And in fact, the gifts as they're labeled oftentimes overlap with one another.

[10 : 24] Sometimes you have one term that refers to one type of gift in one passage, but in another passage, the same term is used in a different way to refer to a different type of gift, which just means that the diversity within the body is even greater than the diversity that we might imagine, even if we were to compile a list based upon all the various lists in the New Testament.

There's a lot of diversity. And we can't possibly review all of those gifts and talk about what all of those gifts are in any number of services, but especially in one Sunday morning service.

But what I want us to do this morning is to attempt to understand at least the seven gifts that Paul lists for us in Romans chapter 12, because they will give us a picture of both the overlap of these gifts and how they actually operate within people within the church, but they'll also give us a picture of the variety as we look and compare to some other passages in the New Testament.

So go back to Romans chapter 12, leave 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and come back to our passage this morning. Let's talk about these. Now, when you look at the list of gifts in Romans chapter 12, once you read through it a few times, it becomes clear that there's no obvious order in which Paul lists these gifts.

In other words, they're not listed in order of importance. They're not listed in any sort of logical order here. Some of the other lists of gifts seem to be in order of importance or in maybe a logical, in logical groupings.

[11 : 49] But here it almost seems like a random smattering of gifts that Paul throws out there. It may be because, as we know, Paul has not been to the church in Rome.

He knows some of the members of the church of Rome that he's met in other cities, but he's not been to the church of Rome. He's writing this letter to introduce himself in the gospel that he preaches to the believers in Rome so that he might gain their support in his missionary endeavors.

But he's not been there. He's not seen the gifts as they operate in the church at Rome. And so he gives this list which contains these sort of broad-ranging descriptions of gifts.

Gifts that are likely to be present in even a church that Paul has not yet encountered. So as we look through these, we can't find a neat reason why, well, they put them in this order because of this or that.

No, it's fairly random. And so what you're going to get this morning from me is a sermon that seems a little bit random. Seven points to just follow the seven gifts as they're listed here.

[12 : 49] So the first one, if you'll look, is prophecy. Now this one stands out a little bit because it's listed in a way that's different than the others. He says that those who prophesy, that those who have the gift of prophecy should exercise it in accordance with the faith that they have, in proportion to the faith that God has given to them.

Now there are two issues that we need to sort of clear up so that we can at least have some better understanding of this word prophecy or those who prophesy. Number one, we have to ask the question, what exactly is the gift of prophecy?

Because there's no unified answer to that question, even within evangelical churches today, with churches that have very similar sets of beliefs like we do. We're not giving this a universal answer.

There are different perspectives and opinions about what this means. And then after we consider that, we also have to ask, what does he mean when he mentions faith? What does it mean to exercise the gift of prophecy in proportion to faith?

What does that mean? So first of all, and prophecy is going to take us a little bit more time than the others because I want to give you guys an idea of the interpretations that are out there. Okay? There are three basic understandings.

[14 : 08] There are probably others that are less well known. But there are three basic understandings and interpretations of the word prophecy or of the gift of prophecy and how it operates in the new covenant, that is, the New Testament era.

There is, first of all, the view that Paul uses the word prophecy at least in this verse. Many preachers and commentators will argue that at least in this verse, Paul is using the word prophecy to simply refer to the preaching of the word.

That prophecy here is none other than what I do on a weekly basis. It's just preaching. And so if that's the case, then obviously prophecy is common and prophecy is happening in every church that meets and proclaims the word of God around the world.

So that under this interpretation, many people are prophesying right now and I would be prophesying right now. That's the first view. Another view says that no prophecy is, in this verse and in the rest of the New Testament, is the same kind of prophecy that we see operating among the Old Testament prophets.

That is, prophecy is receiving from God a direct revelation that, if confirmed to be a direct revelation from God, ought to be accepted as an authoritative and infallible word from God.

[15 : 32] So that oftentimes we will see Paul mention side by side the apostles and the prophets. As if those two offices stand above every other office and every other gift and function within the church.

And if this particular interpretation is the case, then when prophecy is given, it ought to be received in the same way that we receive the scriptures themselves.

Now there's a third view that is sort of in between these views. The third view says that prophecy is a kind of revealing by God to the prophet of some information that he would not otherwise have.

So it's certainly not just preaching and explaining and teaching the word. It's something that God reveals to someone. But that it's altogether different from the kinds of prophecy that God gives, for instance, to the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah or Hosea or many of the others.

That the prophecy that is given to New Testament prophets, many would argue, is not infallible. That is, it contains errors at times. That sometimes the prophets can be wrong.

[16 : 40] And therefore every prophecy should be tested and weighed so that we can pick out what's correct and what's not correct. So you have this sort of spectrum of understanding of what prophecy is that ranges all the way from everyday common preaching to a kind of revelation received by God that's nevertheless fallible, that may contain errors, to a kind of revelation received from God that is the same as a kind of revelation received by the Old Testament prophets.

And once concerned, once someone is confirmed to be a prophet of God, their word ought to be received as the very word of God itself. So the question is, what does Paul mean in this passage?

And what does he mean throughout his letters by this particular term? I don't want to spend my time this morning because it would occupy the entire sermon for me to explain and defend my own understanding of prophecy.

Rather, I want to offer some guides for you regardless of which particular view that you hold. So I want to start with the one that you're going to find least common in churches like ours.

And that is the view that New Testament prophecy is no different than Old Testament prophecy. That a prophet functioning in the New Testament functions the same way as a prophet in the Old Testament.

[17 : 51] So that if they are found to be a false prophet, then you can't believe any of the things that they say. You're not testing and weighing to sort of pick out what's right and wrong. And it's not that one time a prophet is correct and another day he's wrong.

No, either a prophet is a prophet of God and they receive revelation that's infallible, or they are not. If that is the case, if that's how we are to understand the term prophet or the term prophecy in Paul's letters, then I would argue that in that case, we no longer have prophets today.

I would argue in that case that we no longer have anyone functioning within the church as a prophet because the scriptures have been completely written.

The canon, that's the collection of books that we receive as authoritative and infallible from God. The canon itself is closed. God is no longer giving out to his people infallible, inerrant revelation that anyone, be they a self-proclaimed prophet or a self-proclaimed apostle, can receive and then pass on to the church.

No, we don't have those anymore. Why would I say such a thing? What would lead me to that kind of a conclusion? Well, again, I could devote an entire sermon to this, but I won't.

[19 : 08] I want to point you to just one passage out of many. I'd like you to turn over to the book of Ephesians, if you would, real quickly. Turn over to Ephesians.

We can look in chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2. Paul says in verse 19, he says to the Ephesians, You're no longer strangers and aliens.

You're no longer outside the people of God. You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. That's a phrase that refers to the church.

You're a part of the church now, Ephesians. Just because you're Gentiles, you're not cut off from the people of God. You're a part of the household of God. You're a member of the people of God. You are in the church.

And now look at what he says about the household of God. Look at what he says about the church. The church, he says, is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

[20 : 05] The apostles and the prophets, according to the apostle Paul, if we are speaking of the kind of prophets we see in the Old Testament, they are the foundation of the church. The church is built upon them.

But they are not the structure of the church. In other words, there is not, after the last of the apostles, John passed away, there were no more apostles being called out by God.

And likewise, if we understand Paul's use of the word prophet to refer to one like the Old Testament prophets receiving infallible, unquestionable revelation from God, we ought to say that just as there are no more apostles, so there are no more of those sorts of prophets functioning within the church today.

So that if you take that particular interpretation of Romans chapter 12, verse 6, and you understand the word prophecy in that way, then you need to accept and believe that that's not a gift operative in the church anymore.

It's dangerous if we do not. If we accord to anyone today the ability to speak infallibly when the canon of Scripture is closed, we will end up with what you see scattered around the world.

[21 : 16] Various cults with charismatic leaders claiming to have received a new, unquestionable revelation from God. And nearly every cult that exists today exists because someone has appeared on the scene and claimed to be a prophet like the Old Testament prophets.

And yet, so often everything they say is in direct contradiction to what we know is God's infallible word. So in that sense, there are no prophets anymore. And if that's the case, then we need not concern ourselves too much with what this gift is and how it operates.

On the other hand, if we're dealing with the matter of preaching, that's another issue altogether, which we'll come to in a moment. But if we're dealing with that in-between category of revelation received from God that's not infallible, but it is something that God reveals to someone, if it's something that He reveals to someone that they would not have otherwise known, we ought to approach that in the way that, for instance, we're told in 1 John, where He says that we should test the spirits to see whether or not they're a God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

So that if you believe, for instance, that God at times will reveal something to someone that they could not have otherwise known, and that is that something direct from God, but they're not like the Old Testament prophets, they're not unquestionable, then what we ought to be doing is questioning everything that they claim is something they received from the Lord.

And then lastly, the issue of preaching. This goes directly, I believe, to how we interpret the second phrase. If you take prophecy here to be simply a term in this passage that refers to preaching in general, and that's how a lot of older commentators tended to understand this phrase, going all the way back to the Reformers, that's how Calvin understood this phrase, that's how many of the Puritans understood the word here, to refer simply to preachers in general, then it begins to matter greatly how we interpret the following phrase.

[23 : 12] Notice he says in Romans chapter 12, jump back there because I don't want us to get lost in Ephesians or in 1 Corinthians, come back to Romans 12, where he says that if we have the gift of prophecy, if prophecy, it should be exercised in proportion to our faith.

Now the word our is not in there, it's not in the text, it's not in the Greek, so it's in proportion to faith. Then we ask the simple question, what does Paul mean by faith?

What does he mean here by faith? Because there are two possibilities. He may mean the body of knowledge that we believe. He may mean the doctrines that we hold to, the truths that we hold.

So for instance, when Paul says that we have received the faith once for all delivered to the saints, there the term faith obviously refers to what we believe, the things that we believe, the truths, the teachings, the doctrines that we believe.

And so that if we interpret this to be preaching, I would say that we should interpret the word faith as a reference to the doctrines that we believe. And in that case, he would say that all preaching ought to be in, in not in proportion to, but it ought to be, it ought to line up with, it ought to be measured by the truths that have been handed to us by the apostles.

[24 : 31] Every word preached, tested by the word of God. On the other hand, the word faith might, and I believe probably does in this passage, refer not to the doctrines that we believe, but to our personal faith.

I say that because consistently throughout the book of Romans, the word faith refers to our faith, not the things that we believe. In some of other of Paul's writings, it does mean the doctrines that we hold to, but consistently throughout Romans, it refers to our personal faith.

So that my understanding of this passage is that this is in fact a reference to the kinds of prophecy that we see operative in the Old Testament. Therefore, I don't think it's operative today. But Paul says that even those kinds of prophets ought to prophesy in proportion to their faith.

That is, they ought to only prophesy and say the things that God has revealed to them that accords with the level of faith that God has given to them.

So that whether you believe prophecy to be operative today, or whether you believe it to be something that has passed from the scene, we ought to approach it as a good gift from God, one either that allowed us to receive the Scriptures through the apostles and the prophets, and no longer exists today, or as the good proclamation of the Word of God that still exists today.

[25 : 55] And it ought to be received as a great gift that God gives to His people, and all those who exercise it ought to exercise it in proportion to the gift of faith that God has given to that person.

Let's move on because we've spent way, way too much time on prophecy, which means I've got to go really fast through the other six this morning, unless we want to be here all day. Pretty sure you don't. All right?

He says next in verse 7, If service in our serving. If service in our serving. This is a very broad term most of the time in Paul's writings.

In fact, it's used in 1 Corinthians 12 synonymously with the term spiritual gifts. He says there are varieties of gifts and there are varieties of services. So sometimes this word can be used really broadly, really widely, so that it can even describe all of the spiritual gifts, so that we serve others with whatever gift God has given to us.

Here it's a little bit narrower. Here it refers specifically to the calling and the gifting to lay aside your own preferences and to lay aside your own desires in order to help others, in order to give aid to others.

[27 : 06] In fact, this is the same root from which we get the word deacon or servant. I don't think Paul here is referring to the office of deacon, but I think that this is the kind of gift that all those who serve in the office of deacon should have.

So that when we look for deacons within the church, people that we can officially recognize and say, this person is called by God to be a deacon, a preeminent servant leader within the church.

When we look for those, we ought to look for people who have this gift of service. And he says, if service in our serving, in other words, all of the service that we give, all of the laying down of our preferences, all of the aid that we offer to others, ought to be in accordance with our ability to serve.

So often, we forget that not only does God give various gifts to the church, but he gives them in different proportions. Right? So someone may have, two people may have the gift of teaching, but someone may have a greater, one may have a greater proportion of that gift than another.

And the same can be true for service. But in all of our exercise of the spiritual gifts, we ought to do them in such a way that accords with the gifting that we have. So it may be that you have the gift of service, but not to the degree that someone else has.

[28 : 24] You ought not become jealous of that person and wish that you had their level of service, but you ought to be humble and say, God has granted me this portion of the gift of service and I will serve with it.

Or you may have a greater gifting of this service and what you ought to do is, rather than wish everyone else could serve to the degree that you serve, you ought to be grateful that it's by God's grace that you're capable of doing it.

It's by his gifting that you can do it and simply serve and not worry about the level of gifting that others have in the same area. We can say the exact same thing about teaching because it's worded in the same way.

Notice what he says here. The one who teaches in his teaching. And then we have the one who exhorts in his exhortation and then later on, you have the one who leads with zeal.

I think those three, I single those out because there's a lot of overlap in the use of those three gifts. The use of teaching, exhortation, and leadership. Oftentimes you will find individuals in whom those gifts sort of converge.

[29 : 28] They really do. We see that frequently. Teaching is the authoritative passing on of the truth of God's word. That's what teaching is. And while there is a sense in which all believers at time in interacting with other believers, we do teach others, that's a reality.

Okay? You all teach me on a regular basis even in our conversations, and you teach me at times about the word of God in our conversations, and that's teaching. But the specific exercise of the gift of teaching that Paul has in mind here is the authoritative passing on of the teachings of God's word.

The emphasis upon explaining and helping others to understand. Whereas in the term exhortation, we're not simply talking about the explanation of the word of God, but we're talking about the encouraging and the urging of others to live their lives in accord with the teachings of God's word.

So you will see many times the overlap of these terms, teaching and exhortation. Many, many times. I had some passages marked out to go to this morning, but for time, we won't go there.

But where you see this probably more frequently is in what we usually call preaching. What we normally call preaching is the convergence of the gifts of teaching and exhortation.

[30 : 50] Now, at times, you will have a preacher who clearly has the gift of teaching and can explain things in ways that you've never seen anyone explain, and you learn great things from that preacher, but you walk away going, so, now, what am I supposed to do in light of that, right?

Great with the gift of teaching, perhaps lacking the gift of exhortation. At other times, you will find preachers who do not impart a whole lot of new information to you, do they don't offer a lot of explanation of the Word, but their preaching is filled with such exhortation and such challenge for you to act upon the little bit that they've shown you from the Word so that their gift of teaching may be absent or very minimal, but they have a great gift in exhortation.

For most preachers today, we look for sort of a balance of those kinds of things. Just because of the way that preaching operates today in most churches, we look for someone who has a good balance of the ability to teach and explain and the ability to exhort and urge and encourage others to act upon the truth.

But in reality, the reason that we see such a variety in the abilities of various preachers is because you have a convergence of gifts and you have different levels of ability in those particular gifts.

I've never hidden the fact that I'm much stronger on the teaching end of preaching than on the exhortation and challenging you to practically live out the truths that I'm teaching and explaining to you every Sunday.

[32 : 17] It takes a lot of work for me to think through and come up with really practical things for you to do in light of the teaching that we offer from the Word every week.

So there are going to be various combinations and different balances of these gifts. I mentioned leading though as well and I said that this often overlaps with teaching and exhortation.

Because when you have these things come together, what you're often looking at is someone who's occupying the office in the church of elder. Now here's somewhere I do want you to turn in your Bibles where we can see these gifts cross over.

I want you to turn to 1 Timothy chapter 3. 1 Timothy chapter 3 where we find there a list of the qualifications for elders which is just another term for pastor.

Okay? The term actually used here in this passage is overseer. We have these three terms elder, pastor, and overseer that all refer to the same office in the church of the New Testament. And we see here that these gifts of teaching, these gifts of exhorting, this gift of leading, these things oftentimes converge in those who are called to the office of elder or pastor in the church.

[33 : 35] So that you can look at the passage there and you can see that at the end of verse 2 an elder or an overseer is required to be able to teach. Have to be able to teach.

It doesn't mean that they have to be able to preach and exhort in this way, the way that I do every week, but they have to be able to communicate the Word of God faithfully and accurately to other people of the church.

Whether that's in a small group setting or in a counseling type setting or in more of a preaching type setting like this. All those called to the office of elder must be capable, must be able to teach.

But they also have to be leaders. Look down just a few verses in verse 5 in your copy of the Scriptures and you'll see that they need to know how to manage his own household. And if he can't, how can he shepherd, pastor God's church?

That word manage is the same word that we see in Romans chapter 12 for leading. It's the same word. Now Paul says that those who lead ought to lead with zeal. They ought to have a kind of passion about them.

[34 : 32] They ought to desire and want to lead, not be a begrudging leader, which is why Paul begins these qualifications in 1 Timothy chapter 3 by saying, if anybody aspires, if anybody desires to be an elder, and then he lists the qualifications.

There's a kind of zeal in leadership, a desire and a wanting to lead that ought to be present in all pastors, in all elders. They ought to be able to lead, they ought to be able to teach, and some of them will even excel at exhortation.

I say that because if you just glance over a few chapters to chapter 6 in the same book, you can see where Paul says to Timothy at the end of verse 2 that he ought to teach and urge these things.

What things? Doctrine. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words so that these gifts as Paul lists them in Romans chapter 12, they'll be found in different ways throughout the church.

You'll have some people, some within the church who simply have the gift of teaching. They have the gift of teaching. Maybe they're more gifted at teaching children, maybe adults, maybe ladies called and gifted to teach other ladies.

[35 : 44] We're going to see this gift operative in different ways within the church, but you'll see some that simply have the gift of teaching. Others who are good leaders within the church but don't have the gift of teaching and so won't be elders, but they will be good, strong leaders within the church.

You'll see others who have the gift of exhortation and perhaps aren't great teachers, but they can encourage you and motivate you to live your life in obedience to the Word of God. They overlap, they converge many times in certain individuals that Paul calls, particularly the elders of the church.

but we're going to find them in different measures and we're going to find that Paul expects us to use them with the measure of gift that we have and in terms of leading with great zeal and passion and desire to lead within the church.

Let's look real quickly at the rest of the gifts that Paul mentions here because he mentions not only service but things closely related to service. Take a look in verse 8 in the middle.

He mentions the one who contributes or the one who gives should do so in generosity and then of course leadership and then finally the one who does acts of mercy ought to do those with cheerfulness.

[36 : 58] So let's consider the giving and the doing of acts of mercy. Contributing is exactly what you think. It's giving other people things that meet their physical needs whether that's money or food or clothing or housing or any number of things.

That's what this gift is. And all of us are called to be generous people aren't we? Just like all of us are called to serve. So all of us should be those willing to give to others and to help others but there will be some within the body of Christ who have a special God-given gift to simply give freely to other people.

And he says that when they give the ESV translates it as with generosity or in generosity. Literally what the word means is in simplicity. Now that seems strange.

How do you give in simplicity? I think it means that you give without mixed motives. You don't give expecting anything in return. You don't give hoping that others will notice how much you give.

No. If you have the gift of generosity then you simply give. Expecting nothing in return. Expecting no commendation from others.

[38 : 12] It's just your gift and you delight to do it. And you find that God has gifted you through the power of the Holy Spirit an ability and a willingness and a desire to give to others in ways that the rest of the church cannot.

This is perhaps one of those gifts where we are most likely if we have it to be judgmental of others. Because it's also something that's morally praiseworthy.

Right? To be generous to be giving is morally praiseworthy. And so when we see others who aren't as generous as us we can be tempted to be prideful or to look down upon them but it may simply be that God has given you a measure of grace he has not given to them and you have the gift of giving.

So don't give with those mixed motives. Don't give judging others who don't. Don't give expecting something back in return. Do not give expecting to be praised for it. Give because God's called you to be one of the givers.

And then lastly the last gift that we need to look at very similar he says the one who does acts of mercy ought to do them with cheerfulness. Acts of mercy I think here is so closely related to giving but I think it goes beyond that because acts of mercy can't include giving but acts of mercy really just means helping others out in their troubles and their afflictions.

[39 : 37] And that may mean that you're the kind of person you've never given a label to it you never knew it had a name you didn't recognize it as a gift of God but you're just the kind of person who naturally saddles up next to the people who are going through difficult things and who are hurting and who are in trouble and you're the kind of person that just comes to their aid.

You have the gift of mercy giving. It's a great gift to have. And the church is poor if we don't have those within the body who can do that. But like the gift of giving it comes with the temptation to be judgmental of others.

To think more people in the church ought to be doing this all the time. But the reality is God gifts and calls certain individuals to do it in greater measure.

Yes everyone in the church should be merciful for we have received great mercy. Everyone should be generous because all that we have comes from the Lord. But there will be those among us who seek to honor and glorify Christ through the primary means of giving financially or coming alongside of those who are in pain and in turmoil.

And we need them as a church. We need all of these gifts and so many more that God generously gives to the church. Because when we see these gifts operative in the church we see diversity in the church and when we see diversity within the one body God is greatly glorified by that.

[41 : 07] God has designed all of the workings out of history for Him to be magnified and glorified in the oneness in midst of great diversity.

Look at the book of Revelation. What happens at the end of it all? What is the picture of the heavenly choir singing? It is people singing praise to Jesus Christ from every nation, from every tribe, from every people, from every tongue.

There is unity in the song and great diversity among the people. And we ought to have that even in a small local church like our own. Unity in the gospel.

United in believing that God has sent His Son to die in the place of sinners and those who trust in Him have eternal life. Unity in the gospel. Unity in so many other doctrinal beliefs that we have.

Unity in our love for Christ. Unity in our love for one another and a great diversity in how we express and show that love to one another. Let's pray. Let's pray.