

Romans
Gifted to Serve (Part 2)
Romans 12:3-8
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

Well, let's turn our attention now to the Word of God as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's Table. I want to come back to Romans 12. We are in the fourth and final major section of Romans; it is, "The Gospel Applied." It begins in 12:1, runs all the way through 15:13. It begins in the first two verses of chapter 12 with, "The Gospel Response to God." We are to present, to Him, our bodies and our minds. The next way the gospel is to be applied begins in the paragraph I just read for you a moment ago, 12:3 - 8, and it unveils for us, "A Gospel Response to Service," a gospel response to service.

Paul begins to lay out the implications of the gospel with our service in the church to the body of Christ. In fact, this is where presenting ourselves as a sacrifice begins. Don't underplay or in some way downplay the importance of your ministry in the church; this is where a living sacrifice begins. God has gifted every Christian to serve, and so we must think about the giftedness He's given us accurately, and we must use it responsibly.

In this text, then, there are two instructions. First of all, we've learned that we are to think about our spiritual gift accurately, that's verses 3 - 5. Just to remind you because it's been a while since we've been in Romans 12, what does this address? Spiritual gifts! The context makes it clear; notice verse 6, "We have gifts that differ." Then he follows in the verses that follow with a list of spiritual gifts. So, the theme of this paragraph is spiritual gifts.

Why does this matter? Because it's a command of Christ! Paul says in verse 3, "... through the grace given to me I [am teaching you this]..." In other words, through the grace given him as an apostle of Jesus Christ. So, what he teaches here is a command, a command from our Lord.

Who does this concern? Every Christian! Notice verse 3, "... I say to everyone among you ..."

What exactly is commanded here? Well, two things. First of all, negatively, don't think too

highly of yourself and your gift. That's the message there in verse 3, "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than ... [is, literally, fitting or appropriate]."

And then positively, think accurately of yourself and your gift. He says, "... think so as to have sound judgment..." "To have sound judgment," as we discovered the last time, we looked at this passage together, is, literally, "to think sanely, to have a sober, clearheaded, accurate assessment" of ourselves and our giftedness.

Now, how in the world does that happen? How can we maintain that kind of sanity in a world that's gone insane about spiritual gifts in the Christian community that seems to be completely out of its head regarding this? Well, it happens in two ways.

One, when you remember that your unique ability to serve is a gracious, sovereign gift of God. Notice verse 3, "... as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

And secondly, as you remember that you are only one member of the body, and your role is to serve the other members; that's the message of verses 4 and 5.

Now, that brings us to where we left off last time; so today, we come to Paul's second instruction for us regarding spiritual gifts here, and that is use your gift responsibly. That's the message of verses 6 - 8, use your gift responsibly. Now, using our gift responsibly is only possible when we first understand the New Testament spiritual gifts. Here in our text, Paul provides us a list, a list of spiritual gifts, and as we will discover this week and next or the next time we're together, almost all the permanent gifts that are given to us in the New Testament are here in this passage. The Holy Spirit wanted the Roman believers and us to understand the spiritual gifts that are available to us, why? So that we would have a biblical understanding of this issue, so that we would be able to identify our own spiritual giftedness, and then know how to use that giftedness in the church.

Now, this morning in the short time that we have because of the Lord's Table, I really want to accomplish two basic goals. I want to make a comprehensive list of all the New Testament spiritual gifts so you can see them.

Secondly, I want to begin to organize those gifts into basic New Testament categories.

Next time we're together in Romans 12, Lord willing, I will finish that organization into categories, and I'll do a couple other things. I want to provide you some basic definitions or descriptions of the gifts that are in the New Testament. And then, I want to give you some practical steps, biblically, to identify your giftedness. So, let's begin today with a comprehensive New Testament list of the gifts.

Romans 12 is not the only New Testament list of gifts. In fact, it is only one of four, so let's look at all four of these lists and put our little list together.

The first one is here, Romans 12:6 - 8, and here Paul lists, for us, seven spiritual gifts: Prophecy, Service, Teaching, Exhortation, Giving, Leading, and showing Mercy. So, there are the first seven spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament.

Now, turn over to 1 Corinthians 12, where we find the second list. First Corinthians 12, and look at verse 8.

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, ... to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues [or languages], and to another the interpretation of tongues [or those languages].

Now here, this list includes nine spiritual gifts. There is the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongues, and the

interpretation of tongues. Now here, there is only one duplicate from Romans 12, and that's prophecy. Apart from that, this is a totally new list. Do you see that, all new gifts? Now I want you to notice the remarkable difference between the list in Romans 12 and this one in 1 Corinthians 12:8 - 10. Romans 12 is almost, apart from one gift, entirely ordinary and non-miraculous; while here in 1 Corinthians 12, this list is almost entirely extraordinary and miraculous. We're going to consider why that's true in just a few minutes, but just kind of file that away in your mind.

Now, the third list of New Testament gifts is here in the same chapter. Go over to 1 Corinthians 12, and look at verses 28 - 30, let's start in verse 27.

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers* of miracles, are they? All do not have [the] gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

Now this list includes nine spiritual gifts: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, administrations, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Now, you'll notice immediately there's a lot of duplication in this list. You'll see prophecy occurs here, but it also occurs in the other two lists we've seen. Teaching is also in Romans 12. Helps is the same as serving in Romans 12. Administrations is the same as leading in Romans 12. And then not surprisingly in light of the problems in Corinth, healings, tongues, and interpretation of tongues occur in both lists in this 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians. So, this list then, is a blending of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. In fact, this second list in 1 Corinthians 12 (listen carefully), adds only one new gift, apostle; the rest of them have already been covered.

Now, let's turn to the last list in the New Testament, go over to Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4, and we read this in verse 11, "... [Christ] gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as*

evangelists, and some *as* [literally] pastor-teachers.” Now, some argue that this list here in Ephesians 4 may not be spiritual gifts, but rather a list of gifted men that Christ gave His church, and of course, in one sense that’s true. However, there are a couple of arguments for taking this as a list of spiritual gifts.

First of all, 1 Corinthians 12:8 - 10, is clearly a list of spiritual gifts, and yet it includes two of these in that list, apostles and prophets. Also, because of that, and some other reasons as well, because of the context here in Ephesians 4, many of New Testament scholars believe this is a fourth list of spiritual gifts. I think it’s likely that they are; and because I want to include all spiritual gifts and make sure our list is comprehensive, we are going to include them.

We could put it like this when it comes to offices in the church, although not all spiritual gifts are offices, all offices are spiritual gifts. Now, in this list, notice there are four. There are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Again, you’ll notice the duplicates, apostles and prophets have already been mentioned in the other list; so, this list adds two, it adds evangelist and it adds pastor-teachers. So, there it is. That is a comprehensive list of the New Testament spiritual gifts. There are none others mentioned in the New Testament.

So, let’s move on, secondly then, to consider the basic categories of New Testament gifts. We have the list, but into what categories do they fall? What is the legitimate way to categorize these gifts? Well, there are many different potential ways to do this, but let’s see if we can follow the New Testament model and pattern. As I hope to be able to unfold, to you, this time and the next time we study Romans 12 together is the New Testament identifies two overarching categories of spiritual gifts.

The first category is temporary sign gifts, temporary sign gifts. Now before we look at these, let me back up and give you a little bit of perspective from the scope of the entirety of Scripture. From the beginning of biblical history, when God gave men, and I’m going to underscore this because there’s been some confusion about this and what I’ve said in the past; not because I haven’t been clear, but because some people, not here, but in other places, haven’t listened clearly. Listen to this, when God gave men the capacity to work miracles, it was always a sign

that they were speaking for God. Because of that, the different eras of miraculous gifts in Scripture were always short-lived.

Now don't misunderstand. God worked miracles directly from time to time throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and I'm not going to put God in a box and say He can't do that today, although I don't think it's normative. God worked miracles directly--Old Testament; miracles directly--New Testament, can still do that today if it pleases Him. That's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is that there were three primary periods in biblical history in which God worked miracles (listen carefully), through uniquely gifted men to whom He gave the power to work miracles as they chose.

God performed miracles directly during the ministry of others in Scripture. In other words, He didn't give them the capacity to work miracles, but He performed miracles directly in them. Samson would be a great example of that. Samuel, God perform miracles directly during the ministry of Samuel, David, Isaiah, and Daniel. However, there is no biblical evidence that these men were given the same miracle working power like that of Moses and Elijah and Elisha. When you examine the biblical record, you find three main time periods with miracle-working men.

The first of those time periods was that of Moses and Joshua. That period lasted from the Exodus in 1445 B.C. through the career of Joshua that ended about 1380 B.C. That's a period of about 65 years.

The second window when miracle-working men were common **during** was during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. That was from about 860 B.C. until 795 B.C., again a period of only about 65 years.

The third time of miracle-working men was that of Christ and His apostles. It began with Jesus's ministry; I believe somewhere around 26, 27 A.D. and lasted at the very longest until John's death in the 90's A.D., or about 70 years.

Now again, throughout biblical history, hear me carefully, God occasionally intervened directly with a miracle. But in thousands of years of history, there were only about 200 years total when God empowered men to work miracles; and even then, miracles didn't happen every day because the primary purpose of miracles, listen carefully, the primary purpose of miracles has always been to confirm the credentials of a divinely appointed messenger, to establish the credibility of one who speaks for God, not someone who teaches God's Word like I'm doing this morning, but one in whose mouth God has put His very words revealed directly from God.

Now this pattern began with the very first miracle-worker, Moses. Turn back with me to Exodus 4; Exodus 4, and notice why Moses received the capacity to work miracles.

Then Moses said, [to God--You remember this is his calling to go and bring God's people out of Egypt.] Moses said [to God], "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" [How do we know you really are speaking for God? How do we know you're really God's representative?] The LORD said to him [verse 2], "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So, he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; ... Moses fled from it. But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail."--so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand--[Now notice verse 5.] "... that they may believe that [Yahweh], the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

God here gives Moses the capacity to work miracles, this and others that unfold during the Exodus, to validate that Moses was, in fact, God's prophet and that his message was God's own words. That becomes so clear as the first five books of the Old Testament unfold.

Then you come to the last book Moses wrote, Deuteronomy, and Deuteronomy 18, Moses prophesied that God would continue to raise up men like Himself to speak the very words of God. Of course, the greatest fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18 is the great and final messenger, our

Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. But, it's equally clear, in Deuteronomy 18, that Moses was describing an institution of prophecy that was already active in his day, and that there would be prophet after prophet who would come to speak for God until the Old Testament revelation was complete 400 years before Christ.

Now Deuteronomy 13, this is a key passage to mark. Deuteronomy 13:1 - 5, says that if God chose to authenticate a prophet, He would empower him to work miracles just as He had Moses. And by the way, we'll look at this the next time, but it wasn't just his capacity to work miracles that validated him, he also had to speak the Word of God in keeping with previous revelation. Nothing he said could contradict what God had said previously; it had to be according to the Scripture in other words. But God says, "If I want to authenticate a prophet, I will empower him to work miracles." So, in the Old Testament, only prophets, only those who spoke authoritatively and infallibly for God, performed miracles because miracles were their credentials.

Take Elijah for example. Elijah states that his most famous miracle, the calling down of fire on the altar of Mount Carmel, that that was, in fact, an authentication of him and his words. Listen to 1 Kings 18:36, "... Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, [Here he is in Mount Carmel; he says,] today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am your servant and I have done all these things at Your word.'" and it's on that basis he asks for God to send fire.

Now just as it was with Moses, just as it was with the Old Testament prophets, the primary purpose of Jesus's miracles was to confirm His credentials as the final and ultimate messenger sent from God. John makes a great deal of this in his gospel. In fact, turn to John 5. John 5:36, Jesus says, "... the testimony which I have is greater than *the testimony of John*; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish--the very works that I do--testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me." [Jesus says, "You want to know if I'm who I claim and if I'm from God? Look at the miracles I perform."]

Go over to 6:14, “Therefore when the people saw the sign, [That is the attesting miracle which he had performed,] ... they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet [the great prophet] Moses predicted who is to come into the world.’” Go over to 10:24,

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the ... [(Messiah), tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them. “I told you and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me.” [His miracles.]

Go down to verse 37,

“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”

The main reason the Spirit empowered Jesus to perform miracles was to confirm He spoke the very words of God.

That’s what Peter said on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:22. He says, “Jesus [was] a man attested to you by God, [How?] with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst....”

Now when you come to the rest of the New Testament, the miracles of the apostles served exactly the same purpose. Acts 14:3, [Paul and Barnabas] spent a long time ... [in Iconium) speaking boldly *with reliance* upon the Lord, who was [(Here it is.) the Lord was testifying to the word of His grace, [through Paul] granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.

The miraculous gifts that accompanied the apostles were intended to confirm that they were God’s genuine instruments of revelation just as it was with Moses, the Old Testament prophets, and our Lord Himself.

Now, listen carefully, since this pattern is consistent throughout the Scripture, it is reasonable to expect that, with the death of the apostles and the end of God's revelation through them, the human capacity to work miracles would end as well just as they ended after Moses and Joshua, and just as they ended after Elijah and Elisha. In the New Testament era then, just as the other times, once their message was accepted as from God, the capacity to work miracles began to die out and eventually left entirely. But how do we know that was God's plan?

You say, "Tom, that sounds good, but how do we know?" Well, think about this. Because it is clear with one of the gifts Christ gave His church. The gift, as you have just seen in the list a moment ago, of apostles, that had to have been a temporary gift. That's clear because the New Testament tells us that apostles had to meet three qualifications.

One, they had to be a witness of the resurrected Christ. That's the message of Acts 1:22, "...beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us-one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." Someone to replace Judas had to have been a witness of the resurrection.

Secondly, he had to be personally appointed by Christ. Acts 1:2 refers to apostles as those whom "He had chosen." Acts 1:24 says to the Lord in a prayer, "... show which one of these two You have chosen."

And finally, they had to be able (to be an apostle), you had to be able to work miracles. Second Corinthians 12:12, Paul says, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you [by him] with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." The signs of a true apostle.

So, there they are: three qualifications of a true apostle, and no one meets those three qualifications today. So, that means that at least one New Testament gift, the gift of apostleship, ceased. Now what does that mean? Think about the hugeness of that.

It means that there is a significant difference in the work of the Spirit between the times of the apostles and today. Because one of the most miraculous displays of the Spirit, the gift of apostleship, disappeared with the passing of the apostolic age.

Here's another important thing to take note of; the gift of apostleship ceased without a crystal-clear New Testament statement that it would. You can't go to a verse and say, "The gift of apostleship will cease," and yet it did. That means that it is neither impossible nor even unlikely that other significant changes happened with the passing of the apostles. Once you agree that there are no apostles today on the order of Peter and Paul, you have admitted that there was a major change in the gifting of the Spirit between the apostolic age and the post-apostolic age because the one New Testament gift most frequently associated with miracles, the gift of apostleship, has ceased. That's one example.

But the evidence shows that the other miraculous gifts declined even during the New Testament era, during the time of the New Testament. Think about this. Pentecost, and the events of Acts 2, happened within ten days of our Lord's ascension.

The second mention of tongues comes in Acts 10:46. That occurs within the next fourteen years before the death of James in 44 A.D.

The third mention in Acts 19:6 of tongues occurs early in Paul's ministry at Ephesus, in the early 50's A.D. First Corinthians, the only book outside of Acts that speaks about tongues, was written about 55 or 56 A.D. First Corinthians was only Paul's fourth New Testament letter following Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. After 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote nine other inspired letters to six different churches, and there is never the mention of the gift of tongues again.

In the pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, the books written near the end of Paul's ministry as the permanent directives for post apostolic ministry in the church, there is no mention of any miraculous gift except for prophecy, and we'll talk about why that is next time. In fact, by the time you come to close to 70 A.D., the authors of Scripture are talking about miracles in the past tense.

Turn with me to Hebrews 1:1,

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many portions and in many different ways, [There's the Old Testament.] in these last days [That's a reference to the time of the Messiah.] in these last days [He] has spoken to us in His Son.... [God's final great revelation came through His Son and His Son's official representatives, the apostles.]

Now, go over 2:3 well let's start at verse 1, just to get the flow.

For this reason [He says.] we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away *from it*. For if the word spoken through angels [He's talking here about the Mosaic Law.] proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? [This new message of salvation that has come in its fullness with the Messiah.]”

Now watch what he says in verse 3, “After [this message of salvation] ... was at ... first spoken through the Lord, [There's where it originated.] it was confirmed to us by those who heard.” [Notice now, you've got three generations here. You've got the Lord; and then you've got those who heard who reported it to us, that's the apostles; and then you've got us, the author of Hebrews.] He says, verse 4, “God also testifying [Notice this.] with them, [That is, with the witnesses who heard, with the apostles.] both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His ... will.”

So, here you have a book written shortly before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. in which the writer of Hebrews, and we're uncertain who it is, says the apostles' word and testimony about Christ and the salvation message He brought was confirmed to us by their working miracles and demonstrating that in powerful ways.

By the way, let me just pause here and say, if you're here this morning, and you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, don't miss the warning in this passage. This was written to people who had heard about Christ but had not committed themselves to Him, had not trusted Him as Savior and

Lord, and the warning is, “How desperately you must think of God, how desperately soft you must think of God, to think that He can give you such a message of salvation by His Son, by His apostles, confirmed to you in the Word that you hold in your hand. That Word was confirmed by miracles, the miracles by Jesus and the apostles. Do you think God is going to take it lightly if you ignore that message?” That’s the warning here. I plead with you not to do so.

But back to the point I’m making here in this text and this text is making, even in the chronological flow of the inspired New Testament history, even before the Scripture was complete, the miraculous gifts had already begun to decline. The miracles that confirmed the apostles, the New Testament prophets and their message, had begun to die out. That is simply the reality of the historical record of the New Testament.

In addition to that, the testimony of the church after the New Testament era was that the miraculous gifts had ceased with the apostles. Chrysostom, John Chrysostom, writing in the 300’s A.D. says, “First Corinthians 12 is very obscure, but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place.” Augustine, writing in the early 400’s, “In the earliest times, the Holy Spirit fell upon them that believed and they spoke with tongues which they had not learned as the Spirit gave them utterance, that thing was done for a sign and it passed away.” So, temporary sign gifts.

With that overview, let’s see if we can assign, identify the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament that were temporary, miraculous sign gifts.

First, let’s identify the ones that were for revelation. You have apostle, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, word of wisdom, and word of knowledge. Those gifts provided revelation of God’s Word in the New Testament era until the Word of God was complete.

The second set of miraculous gifts were primarily for confirmation of that revelation: miracles, healings, faith. By the way, some argue that faith here is not a miraculous sign gift but every other gift that it’s listed with in 1 Corinthians 12 is miraculous: tongues and the interpretation of

tongues. Now there was some revelation, for example, in the gift of languages, but these gifts primarily confirmed the apostles and prophets and the message of revelation received through them as we just saw in 2 Corinthians 12:12, in Hebrews 2.

So, there they are, ten temporary miraculous sign gifts. Through these gifts God gave the early church revelation and confirmation that that revelation came from Him. But our Lord and His apostles was the final word to us. “God has spoken to us in these last days in His Son.”

You now (think about this), you now hold in your hand the completed inspired Scripture that came to us through the revelation given to the Old Testament prophets, the apostles, and the New Testament prophets. And they and their message was authenticated and confirmed to us as God’s Word because God gave them the capacity to work miracles. But you now hold in your hand what Peter called, “The prophetic word made more sure,” thanks to God’s revelation and the confirmation of that revelation through the miraculous gifts. You don’t need the miraculous gifts because you hold the confirmed Word of God in your hand. Next time, Lord willing, we’ll look at the second category of New Testament gifts, permanent, edifying gifts.

But as we turn to the Lord’s Table, just remember that it is our Lord, God’s final word to us, that we celebrate in the Lord’s Table together. Take a moment to prepare your heart as the men come.

Our Father, we do thank you for the amazing gift You’ve given us in Jesus Christ. Thank you for the salvation that You revealed in such clarity and accomplished through Him. Lord, we thank you for the completed, prophetic word made more sure that we hold in our hands. Thank you that we don’t need miracles in our day because You have confirmed forever Your eternal, finished, inspired and inerrant Word. But thank you that we can have confidence in it because You did confirm it, You did authenticate those messengers that You brought from Moses to our Lord and His apostles. Lord help us to trust it, to believe in it.

I pray for those who may be here this morning who are not in Christ. Lord, help them to see that it's a serious thing to disregard Your eternal Word so confirmed and so delivered. May they trust in Christ even today.

Father, for the rest of us, as we turn our hearts to the Lord's Table, we thank you that You have given us heavens best, that You have given us the final Word You had for us through Him and His authorized representatives, the apostles. And it's that Word that we celebrate, the Word incarnate who became flesh, dwelt among us, and who became the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. Lord, it is that that we celebrate this morning.

Prepare our hearts. Lord, forgive our sins against You; don't let us come to the Lord's Table and be treasuring some sin in our hearts. But Father, may we open up our hearts to You, may they be an open book, and may we freely, gladly, confess every single sin of which we are aware, and may you cleanse us from those and those we're not aware of so that we can take of the Lord's Table in a way that honors You.

Receive our worship now through this wonderful reminder of our Lord in whose name we pray,
Amen.