

Romans
Gifted to Serve (Part 4)
Romans 12:3-8
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Romans 12. We're studying Romans 12:3 - 8. Let me read it for us again. You follow along in your copy of the Scriptures as I read this inspired Word from the Apostle Paul.

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

This passage, as we have discovered, reminds us that God has gifted every Christian to serve. And in light of that reality, Paul gives us here two basic instructions about that responsibility. Using our giftedness is a priority of the Apostle Paul, but we have to start (before we use it responsibly), we have to begin by thinking about that gift accurately, and that's the message of verses 3 - 5. And having established that foundation, we've looked at that carefully, he goes on then, secondly, to say that we must use our spiritual gift responsibly. That's the message of verses 6 - 8.

We've learned that using that giftedness responsibly is only possible when we first understand the New Testament spiritual gifts. And so, over the last couple of weeks, we've looked at that together. We've studied a comprehensive list of the New Testament gifts. We've looked at the basic New Testament categories of the gifts, the miraculous temporary sign gifts as well as the permanent edifying gifts. Last week, we even looked at some basic definitions for the gifts that

are listed in the New Testament; and then finally, we looked at practical steps for identifying our own giftedness.

Now today, I want us to begin to study these verses in greater detail; and as we do so, we discover a second perspective on using our gift responsibly, and it's this, not only do you need to understand the New Testament spiritual gifts, but then understanding it, you need to use your giftedness as your primary ministry within the context of the church. That's the main message of verses 6 - 8.

Notice how he begins verse 6, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." That first expression in verse 6 is really just a summary of what Paul had already said in verses 3 - 5. That is, all believers have spiritual gifts, spiritual giftedness, and that giftedness differs in kind and capacity based on God's grace that He has uniquely and specifically decided to bestow in our own individual cases. In light of that (notice verse 6 goes on to say), in light of that reality, "... each of us is to exercise them accordingly."

Now, you'll notice the words I just read are in italics in the *New American Standard*. That means the translators added those words; they are not in the original text; they added them to help us understand. And the reason they added this command is because the phrase that's attached to each of the seven gifts here in this list, the phrase implies a command. Notice the first one, verse 6, "... if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith." That expression and the other expressions that occur with all seven gifts, contain an implied command, something like, "Use it," or "Exercise it." And so most translations assume there's an ellipsis, there's something omitted here, and that was a command by the Apostle Paul to use it. That's why the NAS says, "... each of us is to exercise them accordingly." If you have the ESV, the *English Standard Version*, it says, "Let us use them." But either way, what you need to see is this isn't just a list of gifts. It's an exhortation to use your giftedness and to use your giftedness as your primary ministry within the context of the church.

Now, we're going to examine all seven gifts that are listed here. Next time, Lord willing, we'll study the final six gifts, the permanent edifying gifts, and again finish this paragraph. Next

week is the conference, the week after that we'll come back and hopefully finish this paragraph together.

But today, I really need to concentrate on just the first spiritual gift Paul lists here, and the reason for that is because it has caused so much confusion in the church of Jesus Christ today. It is a miraculous, temporary sign gift as we've seen the categories; it is the gift, notice in verse 6, of prophecy. This is the gift I want us to look at today and try to understand. Notice Paul writes, "... if prophecy (If you have the spiritual gift of prophecy, then use it or exercise it.) according to the proportion of your faith."

Now, as soon as we read that, we immediately have a fairly significant problem to face and that is, what kind of prophecy is Paul talking about? What is the New Testament spiritual gift of prophecy? Well, there are four primary views that are circulating out there in Christianity, and I'm confident you have been exposed to all four of them; and when you put them all together, if you've not differentiated them, they can be very confusing. So, let's look at these four primary views about the identity of this spiritual gift of prophecy.

The first view is this, prophecy is continuing revelation from God, that is, it began in the first century, it continues through today, and this continuing revelation is equal to the Scripture. Now, this is the view of a relatively small number of people, a few radical elements in the charismatic movement. They teach that the New Testament apostolic gift of revelation still exists, that those who have this miraculous gift actually receive and speak divine revelation from God. But this view says that the revelation they receive is equal to the inerrant, infallible Word of God that you hold in your hands.

Clearly this is contrary to the spirit of the New Testament and to the finished Word. Hebrews 1 begins by saying, "God used to speak in various ways but in these last days He's given us his final word, His Son, and the apostles of His Son." And of course, the last book of the New Testament concludes, the last apostle writing in the 90's, concludes the book of Revelation with a warning about adding to the prophecy that has been given, not merely the prophecy of the

book of Revelation, but the prophecy that is the total content of the Scripture itself. This is a very small aberrant view that's out there and should be easily and quickly dismissed.

A second view regarding the nature of the gift of prophecy is this: prophecy is continuing revelation from God, that is, He's still giving it, but it is not equal to the Scripture. This is what most charismatics teach. They teach that the spiritual gift of prophecy has continued but not at the same level as the Scripture, but in a sort of second tier level, a second level of prophecy. It's revelation from God, but it's not on the same level of Scripture; and in fact, they would admit that it can be and often is wrong. In fact, if I had time I would share some the quotes with you I read this last week from some of the leaders in the charismatic movement that embraces this modern-day gift of prophecy in which they freely admit, "You know, I've had hundreds of prophecies and many of them have been wrong."

Wayne Grudem popularized this view; it's a man that we appreciate or respect in many ways; he's written some really helpful things, but Wayne Grudem popularized this view of the second level of prophecy, and he is the most quoted defender of today's charismatic prophecies. Grudem admits that the kind of prophecy practiced in the charismatic movement should never be prefaced with, "Thus says the Lord." Instead, Grudem says it should begin with, "I think this is what the Spirit might be saying." While I appreciate his deference to the Scripture in that way, but folks, that's not the New Testament gift of prophecy. Ironically, in Acts 21:11, one of the texts that charismatics use to defend the idea that New Testament prophecy is different from Old Testament prophecy, that it's a sub tier, a second level, sometimes flawed, kind of prophecy, and in fact Grudem argues that.

It's interesting that in that very text, the prophet, Agabus, uses the Old Testament prophetic formula when he says not, "I think this might be what the Spirit is saying." He says, "This is what the Spirit says." Since this idea, this view of prophecy is sort of a "not equal to Scripture, but real revelation from God that might be true, might be false", since it's so prevalent, let me just briefly respond to it with a couple of arguments.

First of all, it's important to understand that the New Testament equates Old Testament prophecy with New Testament prophecy. There is no distinction in the terms or the language that is used whatsoever. In addition to that, in the book of Acts, references to Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, are interspersed, their prophecies are interspersed with that of New Testament prophets. If you want one example that, you can jot in your notes Acts 15:15, refers to one of the Old Testament prophets and verse 32, refers to a modern-day, New Testament era prophet who was alive during the writing of the book of Acts. So, it's just interspersed as if they are equal in every way. There is no difference in them as prophets or in their prophecies. So, New Testament prophecy then, is not and cannot be proven to be a second-level fallible revelation. Instead, just as the Old Testament prophets spoke direct infallible revelation from God, so did the New Testament prophets.

Another argument to use here is that New Testament prophets were to be evaluated against Scripture in the very same way that Old Testament prophets were to be evaluated against Scripture. The reason I say this is Grudem and others make a point. They say, look at those passages in the New Testament where it says that the prophets need to be evaluated; that shows, see, that proves that they might've been wrong. And my response to that is, "No, exactly the same thing was commanded of the Old Testament prophets. Their words were to be evaluated against previous revelation."

That is exactly what Moses taught. In fact, I want you to turn back with me to Deuteronomy. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses tells God's people, remember there's no question but what Moses was God's prophet. He went up on the mountain for eighty days and God's presence was there, there was an earthquake, there God's voice spoke from the cloud, so there was no question but what Moses spoke for God. He was God's prophet.

But Moses tells us in the book of Deuteronomy that there would be prophets who would follow him. And he gives here three criteria for evaluating whether those prophets who came after him were true prophets or false prophets.

Let me give you these three criteria so you understand. Here's how you discern the true prophet from a false prophet.

The first one is found in Deuteronomy 18, Deuteronomy 18. And here's the criterion, a true prophet's predictions must always come true without exception. A true prophet's predictions must always come true. Look at Deuteronomy 18:21 and 22. "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'" How do we look at two men and say one of them is a false prophet and the other is a true prophet? Verse 22,

When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

So, here's the first test of a true prophet. Everything he says comes true. He doesn't have a batting average of fifty percent; or as some of the charismatic prophets even are willing to admit, he doesn't have a batting average of twenty percent. He bats one-hundred percent. That's a true prophet and if anything he says doesn't come true, then what is he? He's a false prophet, or at the very best, he is a true prophet speaking falsely at that moment.

There's a second criteria in Deuteronomy 13, Deuteronomy 13:1 - 5, and I'm going to read it for you in a minute, but I just want you to see the first couple of verses say that a prophet may perform a sign or a wonder, one that comes true, and here we're reminded of a second criterion for a true prophet. If God chooses to authenticate a true prophet, He might choose to empower him to work miracles, just as he has done with Moses. You remember back in chapter 4 of Exodus. Moses had said, "How will they know that you sent me, God?" And God's says, "I'm going to give you the capacity to work miracles." And God often did that with His prophets, those who spoke for Him. And here we're reminded that God might choose to do that. That's criterion number two, if God wants to authenticate them, He'll give them the capacity to work miracles.

Criterion number three is right here in the same passage, Deuteronomy 13:1 - 5. And here it is, the true prophet's message will always completely agree with previous revelation. The true prophet's message will always completely agree with previous revelation. It had to be compared to the Scripture that you already had to see if it matched. If it didn't, it was false prophecy. Look at Deuteronomy 13:1,

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you....” [In other words, he says, “Here's what I'm speaking, and I'm going to confirm to you that I'm representing God by working a miracle, and he works a miracle. But what he said was, verse 2] “Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them.” [Verse 3,] “you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” Instead, verse 4:

You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; [How? By listening] to His (Word that you already have) ...you shall keep His commandments, (you shall) listen to His voice, (you shall) serve Him, and cling to Him. But that Prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt...redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

Do you hear what Moses is saying? He's saying, “Listen, if a guy shows up and says, ‘I'm a true prophet of God,’ and he works a miracle to prove it, but his message is inconsistent with previous revelation, then reject him, he's not speaking for God.” Why? Because the same Spirit is not going to contradict Himself; the Spirit who gave the prophecy.

So, the message of a true prophet is to be compared to the Scripture and if it matches previous revelation, then there's another point of evaluation that fits. This is true in the New Testament.

First Corinthians 14:29, speaking now of New Testament prophets. “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.” Judgment on what? Not how well he spoke, but the content of what he said. Does it match what God has already said? In 1 Thessalonians 5:20 and following,

... do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; [(that which agrees to what God has already revealed, and] abstain from every form of evil.”

In fact, the temporary miraculous gift of the discerning of spirits in 1 Corinthians 12, was an ability to pass immediate judgment on the validity of prophecy that was given in the church. That’s why it’s connected to the gift of prophecy there in 1 Corinthians 12. So, understand, then, that these two views of prophecy simply don’t stand up to the Scripture.

So, let’s look at a third view of the gift of prophecy. The third view is: in the New Testament era, the gift of prophecy included revelation, but today it is exclusively the capacity to teach the biblical revelation in the Scripture. There are many non-charismatics who hold this view. This view argues that, in the New Testament, the word “prophecy” is really used in two ways. First of all, it’s used of the apostles and others in the New Testament era who had the miraculous ability to receive and to speak divine revelation.

And then secondarily, this word “prophecy” is used (they would argue), of those now who have the gift to teach and preach the divine revelation that’s already been received through the apostles in the New Testament prophets. Here’s how one defender of this view puts it, “The meaning (of prophecy that is) is simply that of speaking forth or proclaiming publicly. Since the completion of Scripture, prophecy has not been a means of new revelation, but is limited to proclaiming what has already been revealed in the written Word.” Now, this is the position of many sound biblical expositors, and I need to admit to you that it very well could be what Paul is saying here.

But, I join in holding to a fourth view along with most of those I have read, and that is that prophecy is this, true biblical prophecy in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, here's the fourth view: "In both the Old Testament and New Testament, true biblical prophecy is always revelation directly from God." Whenever you encounter the word "prophecy" or 'prophet,' that's what we're talking about.

Now, understand that the Greek word for "prophet" and "prophecy" is actually not a translation but it is a transliteration. In other words, the English word comes from the Greek word. The Greek word is "prophétés". It comes from two Greek words, "pro", which means before, and "phami" which means "to speak". So, a prophet is one who stands in front of someone and speaks for him. This concept of "prophétés". occurs one-hundred and forty-four times in the New Testament; one-hundred and twenty-three times it refers to the Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah. Twenty-one times, it refers to New Testament prophets, those who ministered during the New Testament era.

So, what exactly does it mean to stand in front of someone and speak for him? Well, I don't think there's a better illustration of it than, not the first time the Hebrew word occurs in the Old Testament; that would be in Genesis of Abraham, he's called a prophet.

The second time the word "prophet" occurs, it occurs in Exodus 7. And in Exodus 7, God is equipping Moses to go to Egypt. You remember back in chapter 4, Moses said, "God, you know I can't speak, I'm not eloquent, I need somebody to speak for me." God says, "Fine, I'm going to send Aaron." And in chapter 4, God says, "You will be like God to Aaron and Aaron will be like your prophet." When you come to Exodus 7:1, God reiterates that. He essentially says this, "You tell Aaron what to say, you put your words in his mouth, and you will be like God in this case, and he'll be like your prophet."

Now, what I want you to see is this, a prophet is one who is God's messenger. For Aaron to be Moses's prophet, he had to speak only the words that Moses gave him to speak. That's why you have references like this one in Jeremiah 1:9: God says to the prophet Jeremiah, "... I have put My words in your mouth." That's what it means to be a prophet. Or, you have Acts 3:21,

“...God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets.” You have Hebrews 1:1, “God ... spoke ... [through] the prophets.”

So, a prophet is one who spoke a message directly from God. He was merely a mouth for God’s words. Prophecy then (listen carefully), prophecy, Old and New Testament, is revelation directly from God. It is not explaining existing revelation; a prophet brings new divine revelation as we defined it last week. The New Testament gift of prophecy then was an ability to be a channel of direct revelation from God, primarily in local churches, and of course, this was absolutely crucial until the completion of the New Testament.

Apostles were a source of revelation, but their ministry tended to be churchwide, the church at large. Prophets were typically assigned to local churches as in Acts 13, there were prophets in the church in Antioch.

But the key (listen carefully), the key and primary characteristic of prophecy, it is always new revelation. So, that invites the key question, “Are there still prophets today? Is the prophetic gift that was operative in the early days of the New Testament church still a spiritual gift available to Christians in the church today?” And the answer is, “No, it is not.” The New Testament is clear that it was, like the gift of apostle, a foundational gift.

Turn to Ephesians 2, Ephesians 2, as Paul talks about this new entity that God has created, verse 14, of chapter 2, of Ephesians. “He ... [has brought] both groups into one.” Verse 15, “He ... [has made] the two [Jews and Gentiles.] into one new man.” That’s the church, and then he goes on in verses 19 and following, to the talk about the church. And he calls us, “fellow citizens with the saints;” he calls us “God’s household;” and then notice how he refers to the church in verse 20, “[The church, and notice the verb tense here.] having been built.” It’s something that’s already happened, and it has continuing results on the foundation (Of what?) the apostles and the prophets. That is the New Testament apostles and their teaching, and the New Testament prophets and their teaching. The church is built on the foundation of truth revealed from God through them.

Now, who are these prophets? Well, because of the importance of it, some charismatics try to argue here that it's talking about the Old Testament prophets; the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the Old Testament prophets. Why would they say that? Because, that allows them to make the New Testament prophets that second category, that second-tier. It doesn't have to be equal to the Scripture.

But that can't be what Paul means here. Here in Ephesians, Paul has to be referring to New Testament prophets because look down a few verses later in 3:5, he says, "(I'm teaching the mystery of Christ, end of verse 5 which) has now (Notice the word, 'now.')

been revealed to His holy apostles and (Whom?) prophets." Now revealed, not Old Testament revealed. So, he's talking about New Testament prophets.

Other charismatics reword Ephesians 2:20 to say, "Having been built on the foundation of the apostles which are the prophets...." But again, the context is clear. They were talking about two separate groups. Chapter 4:11, "... He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets," two groups.

So, what is Paul teaching here in Ephesians 2:20? Let me summarize it this way. The new revelation in the New Testament era that came through the apostles and through the New Testament prophets has become the foundation of the church. His point is that the foundation of the church was being completed in the first century, and now the superstructure is being erected on that already completed foundation. Once the revelation God gave through the apostles and the New Testament prophets was complete, their work was completed, their role was done. I mean, clearly that's true of the apostles, right? They no longer exist. And here in Ephesians 2, Paul says the role of the New Testament prophets was foundational and is complete as well.

Once the New Testament was completed, brothers and sisters, there was no more need for apostles or prophets. God has provided His complete revelation in a Book, the Book you hold in your hand. We don't need new prophets. We don't need new revelation. It's all right here for us to understand. You hold in your hands the complete revelation of God, all the revelation

you need. So, that's the gift of prophecy, new revelation directly from God given to God's people, no longer in place for the church today, only for the New Testament era.

Now, go back to Romans 12, and notice verse 6. He writes to those in the Roman churches who had this New Testament era gift, this miraculous gift. He says, "... if [you have the gift of] prophecy [in the church there in Rome, then use it or] ... *exercise* it ... according to the proportion of ... [your] faith." Literally, the Greek text says, "According to the analogy of the faith," or "according to the analagia" of the faith."

There are two ways to interpret this expression. It could mean, "Make sure your prophecy agrees with the rest of Scripture." In fact, if you're familiar with the principle of hermeneutics or interpretation called "the analogy of faith," that simply means when you go to interpret a passage, make sure your interpretation is consistent with the rest of the teaching of Scripture. That expression, "the analogy of faith," comes from this verse. Many scholars think that Paul is here insisting that the prophets measure what they say against the rest of Scripture, and of course that's true, that was required of them, it's required of teachers today.

But, there's another way to interpret this expression that I think may be more likely and that is Paul is simply saying, "Limit your prophecy to only what God has communicated to you." With this view, that word "analogy" or "analgia" has its normal mathematical sense and it means, as our translators have translated it, "in proportion." In proportion, not to the faith, but in proportion to your faith. That is, only say, "This is what God said if that's what God revealed to you in this miraculous gift of revelation." Regardless of which of those two views, of that phrase you take, this was to limit New Testament era prophecy. It was to limit it to only what God had revealed to the prophet and only what agreed with what God had already revealed to others before him,

Now, you might be tempted to say, "Tom, okay great. But why are we spending so long on a gift that's not available to us today?" Let me bring out two implications that make this important. They complement each other. The first is this, there are no more prophets; there is no more prophecy. Get that in your head; there are no more prophets; there is no more

prophecy. There is no prophecy equal to Scripture with the same inspiration and authority as Scripture, and there is no continuing revelation that's some sort of at second tier where God is saying to people for them to say, "Well, I think this might be what God is saying." That's not the New Testament gift.

A second implication, and this one is the big one for most of us. In the copy of the Scriptures, you hold in your hand, you have God's complete, final, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient, revelation. You don't need anything else. Don't be looking for some experience. Don't be looking for some new word from God. You've got God's final Word to us. Here is everything you need to know in order to be saved! Isn't that what Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15, "[You have the Scripture] which [is] able to give you the wisdom [which] leads to salvation." Here's how you know how to be right with God. And, He goes on to say, "[This] inspired ... Scripture is [sufficient to make you] adequate ... for every good work." It's able not only to tell you how to be saved, how to be right with God, but also to tell you how to live, how to grow in your likeness to Jesus Christ. Don't look for anything else. This is what you need, that's the point!

In fact, it's far better than something else. Go to 2 Peter; I'll end here, 2 Peter 1, 2 Peter 1:16. Peter writes, "... we did not follow [That is that the apostles did not follow] cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." [We saw Him.]

And then he references in verses 17 and 18, a specific event, the Transfiguration. Peter says, "Listen, I was there! I saw Jesus glorified! I heard the Father speak from heaven and say, 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.'" Verse 18, "... we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain." But, verse 19, "... we have the prophetic word ... more ... [certain]." That's what he says.

He says, "Listen, if you had to choose between being one of the apostles and being on the Mount of Transfiguration and having that amazing experience of seeing the glory of Christ and of and hearing God speak from heaven, or you could have the finished revelation you hold in

your hands, it's not even a choice! We have the prophetic word more certain, more sure. And then he says, "... to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

In other words, just keep on clinging to the Scripture. Know this, first of all, that no prophecy that's in Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. That is, of one's own origination; it didn't come up from some private idea. Rather verse 21, the prophecy that's here in the Scripture, it was never "made by an act of human will, but [it only came as men, and here's a great definition of prophecy.] men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." That's what you hold in your hand, and that's all you need. It is this more sure Word that tells us who Jesus Christ is. It is this more sure Word that tells us what the gospel is, how we can be made right with Him, and it is this more sure Word that tells us how we can remember who He is and what He accomplished for us in the Lord's Table.

Take a moment and prepare your heart as the men come.

Our Father, we thank you for the complete and final revelation we have in and through Your Son and His apostles and the New Testament prophets that we hold in our hands, Your finished Word, Your finished revelation to us. What a treasure! What a gift!

Father, forgive us, forgive us for having such a treasure and not being immersed in it more. Lord, help us to resolve to be men and women of the Word, a more sure Word. Help us to do well to pay attention to it.

Father, as we turn our hearts toward the Lord's Table, we come seeking forgiveness. We come seeking cleansing. You've told us that when we come to the Lord's Table, we are examine our hearts, to examine, first of all, if we're in the faith, but beyond that to examine and judge our sin before You so that we would not be judged by You. And so, Father, each of us individually now, as we come to the Lord's Table, from our own hearts we acknowledge, and we confess our individual sins to You. Lord, we acknowledge those sins that we are painfully aware of, and we

seek your forgiveness, and not just Your forgiveness, but renewed resolve to turn from those sins and to walk in the path of obedience.

Father, we also know that there are sins we don't even know we commit because we are sinners by nature, redeemed, and yet still having the flesh. Lord, forgive us, cleanse us, help us to come to the Lord's Table with clean hands and pure hearts. We love You, and we want our worship to be pure.

Receive the worship we bring now, we pray in Jesus's name, Amen.