

## 065 What Are You Doing For God's Sake?

### *Romans 12:6-8*

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 2/5/17

#### **Introduction**

This afternoon most Americans will be glued to their TV sets to watch Superbowl 51 as the New England Patriots battle it out against the Atlanta Falcons at the NRG Stadium in Houston, TX.

Falcon quarterback Matt Ryan will face legendary Tom Brady. A lot is riding on their abilities. I'm not going to predict which one will win the game, but I do know they aren't going to do it by themselves. It's a team effort. We often hear, "May the best team win."

It takes every single player, and coach doing their part to be a winning team.

Just like having a good football team relies on every member of the team doing his part, so a healthy church relies on every member stepping up and playing the role God has called him or her to.

One of my friends in town recently finished a new building on the other side of town. They built it hoping that being in a new location with a new building will result in their congregation growing.

I hope so – for their sake, and for the sake of the expansion of the Kingdom of God in this place.

But, in the overall picture of building a church, how important is the erection of new facilities? It's a lot like a football franchise building a new stadium and thinking that will turn them into a winning team.

In the past thirty years there has been a lot of research on how to build a church. Pastors fly to conferences from all over the country to hear the church growth gurus tell them how to grow their churches. We buy their books and subscribe to their newsletters. Can learn some valuable ideas, some of which actually work in our given situation. Often, however, what works one place doesn't work in a different setting.

Are there any theories on church growth that are essential and universally applicable? Are there some fundamental principles that apply across time and culture on how to build a healthy, vibrant, growing church?

A good place to start our investigation is to ask Paul, who started churches in the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. In his letters to those churches, Paul lays out **three essentials** for building a church God's way:

**1. Gifted leadership.**

**2. Participation in ministry by all believers.**

**3. The right purposes, goals and objectives.**

Last week we looked at **Romans 12: 4,5** – one of the places in Scripture that Paul uses the analogy of the human body to describe the church. We talked about the unity and mutuality of the body and emphasized what Christians have in common.

Now today we're going to switch and talk about how we **differ**, looking at some of the different spiritual gifts and what their specific role is in the Body of Christ.

Friday in our New Members class I shared our organization chart.

At the top is **Jesus Christ**. He is the living Word and the head of the church. He's the one who calls the plays and assigns the players their respective positions.

Next is **The Bible**. The written Word of God is our guide to faith and life. It sets out the rules of the game. You could say it is our playbook.

Subservient to the Bible and Jesus Christ is the **Body of Christ** – both the church universal and local. Jesus and the Bible tell the church what to do, how to operate, not the other way around.

The local church elects **elders** and calls **pastors** to give leadership and oversee the various ministries of the church.

We have categorized seven areas of ministry in which the members can be involved: Worship, Christian Education, Community Outreach, World Outreach, People Support, Facility Support and Administrative Support.

**Introduce the “team”** – have elders then all volunteers who serve in any capacity to stand. What you see up front on Sunday mornings is only a small part of the life of the church.

**Romans 12:6-8** *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*

Paul begins today’s section by announcing that each person has received grace as Christ dispensed it.<sup>1</sup> When Paul refers to **“the grace given”** he’s not talking, as he has done previously, about the grace of salvation.

In this context grace is the ability to perform the role and tasks God has given each believer.

When look up **“gifts”** in Dictionary of New Testament Theology, not to be found under “gift,” but under heading of “grace.”<sup>2</sup> That because the term for **gifts - charismata** (plural) **charisma** (singular) comes from the root **“charis” - “grace.”**

**Romans 12:6-8** *We have different gifts (charismata), according to the grace (charis) given us.*

In normal secular usage, the definition for a **charisma = gift given out of goodwill. It is a personal endowment with grace.**<sup>3</sup> I always liked John Wimber’s way of referring to gifts as **“gracelets” of the Spirit.**

Each one of us, no exceptions, has received grace, giftedness, in the exact measure God has chosen that enables us to do our part in the building up of the body.

From his abundance we have each received just the right gifts, those for which we are most suited. No one is left out – we all have a special part to perform.

E.g. Toni Spry comment to Connie, *“my spiritual gift is writing books. What’s yours?”* Took Connie aback, later in

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ephesians 4:17 *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*

<sup>2</sup> Other words for “gift” include **doron, dorea, dorema** - idea of **“present”,** and **prosphora** – **“offering, gift.”**

<sup>3</sup> It occurs 17 times in the New Testament (16 Pauline, other is **I Peter 4:10**).

relating it to me she was crying, *“I don’t have any gifts!”* Assured her she did, just weren’t the same one Toni had!

As we saw last week, unity is not the same as uniformity. We have **different gifts. (slide with “different gifts” highlighted and cookie cutters).** Church unity isn’t attained by stamping out cookie cutter Christians that all look and act the same way. In fact, the very opposite is true! According to Paul, unity is found in variety!

Aren’t you glad for the differences among us! How boring it would be if we were all exact replicas of one another, clones stamped out on an endless assembly line.

The gifts Christ gives are listed in five different passages in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> None of them are exactly the same. There are about twenty mentioned in all, but that’s not an absolute number. They are representative, not exhaustive lists.

In isolation, some components of the body may not seem to be very significant. But if the body is going to enjoy good health and function as it should, each portion of the body must contribute what it is designed to do.

Just like there is nothing in the human body, not even the smallest cell, that doesn’t have a vital function, so there is no such thing as an insignificant or useless Christian in the body of Christ.

**The gifts are distributed as God decides, and not to be misused or neglected.**

A person doesn’t decide what he or she is to do in the church. The “gracelets” we have received are gifts from the Supreme Power of the Universe – the risen, sovereign, all powerful, all wise Son of God.

God himself is the one who issues the call and assigns the tasks to each of us.

Be careful of imposing “your” gifts on others, evaluating them by how much they are \_\_\_\_\_. Faithful service does not look the same for everyone.

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<sup>4</sup> Here and I Corinthians 12:8-10; 12:28-30; Romans 12:6-8; I Peter 4:11.

**God** is the source, and as the head he directs the entire body. The arm isn't to tell the leg what to do, or the nose tell the eye what to do!

Too often, a person sees a need and says, "*Someone needs to do something – I'll volunteer (even if I really haven't heard the Lord speak to me about this, someone has to do it.)*"

Or, "*that really looks like fun! I think I'd like to give that a try! I've always wanted to be a \_\_\_\_\_. I think I'd make a good \_\_\_\_\_.*"

Neither is it the church's business to call, let alone bring pressure on someone to do something.

In our zeal and enthusiasm, overwhelmed by the pressing needs, we get mixed up sometimes and think it is our business to call people to take on tasks in the church.

Too often churches end up trying to force square pegs into round holes. It starts like this, "*we really have a need . . .*" and then pigeonholing someone and badgering them into saying, "*okay! Okay! I'll do it!*"

But the Bible is clear - neither the presence of a need or natural abilities are of themselves enough of a reason to get involved in a ministry.

Listen to what Jesus said, **Matthew 9:37-38**. "***Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. [There's the need] <sup>38</sup>Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."***

We don't call and thrust forth workers into the harvest. God does so – all we do is pray to him to send them. There are many people in the pastorate or on the mission field because someone persuaded them that was what needed to be done. I've met quite a number of such people. All we're doing is setting them up for failure and disillusionment and burnout.

Two little caveats: (1) The church does have a role in assisting people discover their spiritual gifts, and in testing/proving the call.<sup>5</sup> God has given checks and balances,

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<sup>5</sup> Biblical example of a call: **Acts 13:2,3** in the church in Antioch, "*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me*

and protection. When a person feels a call he or she should bring it to the body to consider and pray, and either confirm, provide caution, or disallow the course of action.

(2) Since the gifts are given by Jesus, they are to be used for the purposes he intended them. We must not hoard or hide them (cf. parable of talents), or use them for personal gain or fame, but put them to use to build his church.

We remember with horror the greed of powerful individuals and institutions who misappropriated funds for selfish purposes and triggered a economic downturn a few years ago. Something much more tragic though is the misappropriation of spiritual gifts for selfish purposes. If people use their gifts to draw attention to themselves, expand their personal influence, or increase their bank accounts, they will have to answer – not to the U.S. Congress, but to the Lord of the universe.

Let's look now at the seven important gifts for building a church that Paul mentions in this passage

**1. Prophecy - *If a man's gift is prophesying let him use it in proportion to his faith.***

Before the New Testament was written the prophets were much more prominent. They spoke with authority when prompted by God, beginning their message with, "*thus saith the Lord.*" They were literally God's mouthpiece, and their words were to be taken as though directly from God.

**Prophets** were very active and prominent in the early church. The New Testament mentions several specifically, including the four daughters of Phillip the Evangelist.<sup>6</sup> In **I Corinthians** Paul describes church meetings where both men and women prophesied.

Though their message might include a predictive element, that was not the main thrust of their ministry. God

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*Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'* <sup>3</sup>So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."

<sup>6</sup> Acts 21:8-9

spoke through them to people who needed specific direction or exhortation or encouragement in their particular circumstances.

Today our primary knowledge of God's will comes through the Scriptures. Part of the role of a preacher or evangelist is to proclaim God's written Word in penetrating and convicting ways.

But that does not, I think, rule out the spiritual gift of prophecy – I myself have been greatly blessed on a few occasions by someone speaking words of “prophecy” over me by the Holy Spirit's enabling.

## 2. **Serving – *If it is serving let him serve.***

Sometimes this is referred to as the gift of helps or helping. The word translated “*serve*” was originally used of waiting on tables. We get our word *deacon* from the Greek word *diakoneo* used here. If you've ever noticed a waitress or waiter in a busy restaurant, they are working hard.

In contrast to some of the other gifts, this one rarely is in the spotlight. It's behind the scenes.

You may remember the story where James and John come and ask Jesus for the two positions of power at his right and left hand in his glory. Jesus gathers all the disciples around him and tells them, **Mark 10:43 *whoever wants to be come great among you must be your servant . . .*** And then he referred to himself, **Mark 10:45 *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.***

Song, *If you want to be great in God's kingdom, learn to be the servant of all.*

Our ultimate model and example is Jesus. In the upper room, after stripping off his outer garments, he knelt down and washed his disciples feet, telling them, **“*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed our feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup>I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup>Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them”*** John 13:1-17.

## 3. **Teaching – *Romans 12:7b If it is teaching let him teach.***

The word “*teacher*” or “*teaching*” always have the same self-explanatory meaning in the New Testament.

The importance of teaching is obvious. It is included in the Great Commission: **Matthew 28:19-20 *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”***

Notice that the purpose of teaching is not just the transmission of knowledge, but a change of behavior - ***teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you***

Teaching is not limited by venues or size of audience. Can be Sunday School classes, small group home Bible studies, can also be one-on-one.

In Ephesians 4 Paul refers to pastor-teachers. That's what I am. All pastors are to be teachers, but not all teachers are pastors.

## 4. **Encouraging – *If it is encouraging let him encourage. Exhortation*** in some translations. Derived from *parakaleo* – to call alongside as a helper. Mirrors the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus referred to as ***the Counselor*** he would send (**John 16:7**).

Exhorters are great at coming alongside and mentoring other believers. Like the Holy Spirit they tell the truth, and even when called on to do the tough job of in-your-face confrontation of wrong they can do it without the person they are ministering to taking offense.

## 5. **Giving – *If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously***

While all believers are instructed to be generous, there are some who go beyond the normal measure. They may be wealthy (I've known a few such as Jack Kough from Morgan Hill), but not necessarily. Often it is people of ordinary means that give a disproportionate amount of their resources, their time, their expertise. They are “supernatural” givers.

They don't do it for public acclaim. Not interested in having a building named after them, or plaques or portraits hanging on the wall of the foyer.

**6. Leadership – *If it is leadership, let him govern diligently***

Those who possess unusual abilities to provide leadership, guidance and administration to a group – they get things done, delegate.

**7. Mercy – *If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.***

People who possess and exercise an extraordinary ability to sense the need of those who are hurting. Know what to say and how to say it, and when to not say anything at all (sometimes just your presence is what is most needed).

Know what Scriptures will bless those they are talking to, are truly the presence of Christ delivering the ***peace that passes understanding*** in his name.

**Conclusion**

These verses aren't only information to absorb, they are a call to action. ***1 Peter 4:10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.***

Church is meant to be much more than just a spectator sport on Sunday mornings. Not only does the whole church suffer if there are passive members, but the individual members suffer, just as the muscles in your body will atrophy if they aren't exercised.

We can choose to remain stubbornly aloof and resist His work, or we can tune into what He's doing and participate in the process of building a healthy body and transforming our community.

Opportunities abound. And let me close with the sermon title question: "*what are YOU doing for God's sake?*"