

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 12:1-8 – Use What’s Been Given to You Sermon Notes



Introduction

Among other things, today we're going to be talking about spiritual gifts. This subject is a controversial one and has been the cause of more than one church split. The first thing we need to understand is that there are two different types of spiritual gifts. There are sign gifts (miracles, healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues) and non-sign gifts (administration, discernment, evangelism, exhortation, faith, giving, helps, hospitality, knowledge, leadership, mercy, serving, teaching and wisdom). Some Christians believe that the sign gifts are no longer needed in the church and so have become inactive.

The purpose of this message is not to understand what all the gifts are, that subject is covered in detail in [1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14](#). And our purpose is not to weigh-in on whether the sign gifts are in use today. The purpose of Paul's teaching on the gifts here in the book of Romans is to help us understand the attitude in which these gifts are to be used. He actually introduces the topic by saying that we shouldn't be like everyone around us. Instead, the crux of Paul's message here is to let God use us where we are.

Every Christian is to function in the body of Christ as God chooses. We all have spiritual gifts and they are to be used within the church. Their purpose is to build up the body of Christ (the church). But, and this is supremely important, we don't get to choose which gift or gifts we receive. It is God who determines which gift we have been given, just as it is God who determines who is chosen for salvation and who isn't.

According to Paul, in this passage, each of us is to present ourselves before God as a living sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the sacrifices that the Jews brought to the temple were not presented to benefit the giver in any way. They were presented for God and for the benefit of others. Paul tells us that we are not supposed to be shaped, or even influenced by the world around us. Instead, we are to be shaped by God (transformed) to be used by Him for the benefit of others.

He also teaches us that we are not to become puffed-up by our gifts, rather we are to use them with humility, knowing that we do not control our gifts, we are simply to use them.

And, to reiterate the purpose of spiritual gifts, they are not to be used for our own personal benefit, they are to be used for the building up of the body of Christ (the church.) When we use the spiritual gifts we have, we don't get the glory, these gifts are used to bring glory to God!

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I exhort you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good and pleasing and perfect.

In Scripture, whenever you see a “therefore” or “wherefore,” you need to determine what it is *there for*. So, we have to ask ourselves, “what has Paul been teaching us in the first eleven chapters of this letter?” The answer is “doctrine.” He has been teaching the doctrines of: Salvation by Grace (we did nothing to earn our salvation), Justification by Faith (we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone), Election unto Salvation (we are saved because God chose us to be saved), and the Perseverance of the Saints (we can’t lose our salvation.)

Therefore -- because our salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, because we were chosen to receive this salvation through no merit of our own, because we can never lose this salvation, we who have received this marvelous gift should be immediately humbled at God’s feet with gratitude in our hearts, willing to do whatever He asks of us. And – Paul now tells us what it is that God asks of us. He says, “**present your bodies a living sacrifice.**” This implies that this offering is a free and voluntary one. This type of sacrificial offering is at the expense of the one offering it and it is to be destroyed or, as in the case of the drink offering, poured out before God so as to no longer be useful to the one offering it. Here’s what Albert Barnes says about this offering in his *Notes on the Bible*:

It implies that he who offers it presents it entirely, releases all claim or right to it, and leaves it to be disposed of for the honor of God. In the case of an animal, it was slain, and the blood offered; in the case of any other offering, as the first-fruits, etc., it was set apart to the service of God; and he who offered it released all claim on it, and submitted it to God, to be disposed of at His will. This is the offering which the apostle commands the Romans to make: to devote themselves to God, as if they had no longer any claim on themselves; to be disposed of by Him; to suffer and bear all that He might appoint; and to promote His honor in any way which He might command.

We are to present our physical bodies in this way, as a living sacrifice. The word translated “**present**” is the Greek word, *parastēmi*, which means “to stand beside.” This word describes bringing and presenting a sacrifice before an altar and standing beside it. We are not to be slain in God’s presence; rather we are to continue to live. However, we are to do so recognizing that we no longer have any right of ownership to our physical lives. We are to offer our living existence to God for His use in whatever manner He chooses. If God chooses to have us suffer persecution for His sake, it is His choice and we should glorify Him in it. If He chooses that we should be in an accident and become paralyzed, it is His choice and we should glorify Him in it. We no longer have any claim whatsoever to our earthly existence because we have offered ourself totally to Him.

Wow! That’s a tall order! Who can do this? None of us can under our own power. We need to prayerfully offer ourselves to God and seek the power of His Spirit to keep us submitted and committed to Him and Him alone.

Meanwhile, we are not supposed to look or act like the world around us. Instead, we are to be “**transformed.**” This is from *metamorphoō*, from which we get our English word metamorphosis, meaning not simply to change in outward appearance, but “to completely change form.” This transformation is one of the mind, from being worldly minded, selfishly focusing on the things of this world, to being heavenly minded, focusing on what God is doing to and through us.

And we should offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices because it is only reasonable that we should serve Him in this way. And - not only should we offer ourselves as God's slaves, once and for all, but we should allow God to reshape our thinking instead of letting the culture in which we live shape it. We should not take on the same appearance, habits, and attitudes as all the people around us. Instead of being conformed, we need to "be transformed." And our ultimate objective is that of giving glory to God Himself. The reason that we are to be transformed instead of conformed is so that God can demonstrate to others what His will is. As we are transformed by God in our minds, we become more like His son. That is, we become more Christ-like in our attitudes and actions, which is, in fact, precisely what God's will is for our lives.

Romans 12:3-5

For through the grace given to me I say to each one among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound thinking, 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,

Paul now makes one of his familiar play-on-words using the word *phroneō*, which refers to "the mind, thinking, or a mindset." Literally, Paul says that each of us should "not over think ourselves beyond what we ought to think, but to think toward sound thinking." Notice, now, that this is really just an extension of the previous verse where he told us we should be transformed by renewing, or renovating, our minds. In other words, we need to completely change the way that we think.

We, in the United States, like the Romans of Paul's time, tend to think of ourselves as a little bit better than others because we are part of a successful, powerful, influential country. And we tend to measure our own personal worth by our position, our income level, our family, and our heritage. Couple that with the fact that we as Christians think of ourselves as better than unbelievers because we know the truth about God and they don't. All this, to say that we American Christians tend to be very proud of ourselves. It's likely that the Jewish Christians in Rome felt exactly the same way about themselves.

Now that Paul has politely admonished us to offer ourselves up to God, recognizing that He is our master and we are His slaves, he tells us to quit being so arrogant! Of course, Paul is not as blunt as that (he's a master of subtlety), but in essence that's what he's saying. Everything we have and are, has come directly from God. Even the measure of faith that we have, as small as it may be, has its source in God alone. Do you see that? This Christian faith which we have was measured out to us by God. We didn't come up with it by ourselves.

When we recognize that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:4), we must submit to the fact that all things are under God's control. And no matter how great we think we are as a nation, as a church, or as a person, we must recognize that, personally, we are nothing more than sinners deserving of Hell, who have been saved by God's grace, not by anything of our own doing. Though we are adopted children of the King of Kings, we are at our best when we recognize that we are lowly slaves of our Master who bought us body, soul, and spirit, and paid for us with the blood of His son.

In other words, as Paul said, we are not to "overthink" ourselves. We are not to think of ourselves as more important or more elevated than we really are. After all, we are only what we are because God has made us this way. Our importance, in fact, our very identity, exists in relation to the body of Christ, the church. Paul uses the metaphor of a physical body to show this. He tells us, "... we

have many members in one body.” In other words, there are many different body parts in the body of Christ, and all these body parts have different functions. Each part is important to the health of the entire body in a different way.

Each one of us has a physical body that is made up of a whole bunch of parts; arms, legs, head, spine, eyes, skin, liver, mouth, heart, sweat glands, lungs, intestines, nasal mucous, fingernails, etc. Some of these are more attractive than others and some are more obvious than others. Some, we don't even notice until they go into hyperactive mode, or quit working altogether, and then we tend to dislike them because they produce unpleasantness. But - they are ALL very necessary and we would be handicapped without any one of them. The same is true of the body of Christ.

This is the crux of what Paul is going to be talking about in the next 12 verses. We each have a place in the body of Christ and God has individually gifted each one of us with spiritual gifts for our unique function. But before we get wrapped up in the discussions about spiritual gifts, let's remember how Paul started out this section.

Therefore I exhort you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

There is no use in continuing the discussion about spiritual gifts if we are not first, totally submitted to our Lord Jesus Christ and totally committed to serving Him in the position and capacity that He has chosen for us! If we have offered ourselves as a living sacrifice, then we no longer have a say in how God chooses to use us.

Paul is using the metaphor of a physical body to teach us something. He said previously that we each have a body with many body parts and not all of them have the same bodily function. And - he started verse four with “for just as we have ...” meaning that he was making a close comparison between the physical body and something else. Now he tells us what that something else is. Just as we each have one body with many members, we the many, says Paul, are one body in Christ.

There is only one head in each body, and the head of the body of Christ (the church) is Jesus Christ, Himself. (Ephesians 1:22-23) We, the many, that is, the members of the body, are united together in a single body with Christ as our head.

Then he says, “and individually members one of another.” Just as each of our physical bodies is made up of many parts (arms, legs, eyes, mouth, etc.) so the church is made up of many parts, and we each have a function to perform within the body. None of us is an isolated member; rather, we are interdependent with each other, just as all of the members of our physical body are interdependent with each other. We are interdependent with all the other parts of the body of Christ for our spiritual nourishment, spiritual protection, and spiritual health. We need each other! Here's how Paul explained the body to the Corinthians:

For also the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has appointed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. (1Corinthians 12:14-18)

Romans 12:6-8

but having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: whether prophecy, in agreement with the faith; or service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with generosity; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Now that Paul has explained to us that the church is like a body made up of many differing parts, he begins to describe some of the functions that these various parts perform and the special enabling that we have to perform these functions. We, the members of the body of Christ, have gifts. These gifts were given to us according to, or as part of, the grace that was given to us. Paul is telling us that these gifts were given to us at that point in time when the grace of God was bestowed upon us, when we were given the righteousness of Christ. In other words, these gifts were given to us at the point in time that we were saved. They are not part of a “second blessing” nor are they gifts that we earn as we become mature Christians. They were given to us once, for all time, just as our salvation was given to us once, for all time.

Remember, as you read through this list of gifts, they were given to us as members of a body, and they are to be used to make the body healthy. They are not given for personal proffit (not even to the phophet ☺), but for the good of the body. At this point many commentaries on these current verses veer off and begin to talk about the various leadership positions within the church (prophet, deacon, teacher, preacher, elder). Notice, however, that Paul is talking about the gifts that God has bestowed on the various members of the body. He is not (in these verses at least) talking about the gifted people. I know it’s a subtle distinction, but Paul’s focus is on the gifts provided by the giver (God) and how they are to be used for the benefit of the body.

The first on Paul’s list is prophecy. This could be a reference to proclaiming something prior to its happening or proclaiming something before a group of people. In the church today, the second of these two is more likely being performed by those who have the gift of prophecy. And, according to Paul, right after prophecy, the top gift is the gift of service. This is the ability to recognize those who are in need, to percieve what their need is, and to willingly humble oneself to the position of servant to assist them. In my mind it is one of the most important gifts within the church but one which few people consider important.

The next gift talked about is the gift of teaching. I am sure that we all have known people who can take the Word of God and open it up in such a way that it becomes clearer to us; someone who makes learning the history and doctrines of the Bible exciting and fun. This is a person who has the gift of teaching in the church. Remember that these gifts are abilities or talents that God has bestowed on individuals. The gift does not require years of education to use it effectively, although often the proper education will enhance one’s ability to use the gift.

According to Paul, these gifts are given to individuals in the church differently as He sees fit. Some of us may have several of the gifts and some may only have a single gift. How many we have or even which one we might have is not important. What is important is that we make use of the gift within the framework of the church. If God has gifted you in a certain area and you are not using that gift within the church, then you are not using that gift as God intended. If you don’t know in what area God has gifted you, instead of asking God for a particular gift, learn all you can about all of them and ask God to show you the area in which He has gifted you. Remember, when you placed yourself on the altar, you turned over all decision making to God.

Even though he refers to individuals, Paul's focus is not so much on the person as on the gift. The next gift he talks about is exhortation, or encouragement. This is one of the words that Jesus used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. He called Him our "Advocate."

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26)

Do you know someone in the church who is like a coach, encouraging and challenging other Christians to commitment and service for the Lord? That's the gift of exhortation at work.

Someone with the gift of giving does so without expectation of receiving anything in return. The person with this gift loves to share the material blessings that he or she has with others. People with this gift are often hidden in the body of Christ because they don't seek recognition.

Have you ever known a Sunday School Superintendent who was gifted at organizing and running a Sunday school program? This person has the gift of leadership. If you don't like to stand up in front of others, don't enjoy planning and organizing, and aren't willing to make the tough decisions, you probably don't have the gift of leadership.

Finally, there's the gift of mercy. Most of us have a tendency to be a bit smug and self-righteous when we see a fellow Christian who is reaping the results of sinfulness in his or her life. We tend to think, "Well, God finally gave him (or her) what he (or she) deserved!" However, a person with the gift of mercy is compelled to reach out to that person and help them get back on their feet.

So What?

As we are talking about spiritual gifts and their use in the church, consider what Paul taught the believers in Philippi:

doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves, (Philippians 2:3)

What Paul has told us in these verses in Romans is that we need to surrender our physical lives to God for His use. And, notice that he says that we are to do so without letting the things of this world influence our thoughts and actions.

Instead, we are to let the Spirit of God transform us to be more like He wants us to be, to be more like Jesus Christ our Lord. And - our attitude should be one of humility, not one of pride. So - don't waste your time and effort thinking about how great you are! Instead, think about how great our God is and how you can serve Him!

Have you offered yourself up to God to be used in whatever manner He determines? Are you a living sacrifice, or are you still in control of your own life? These are important facts to keep in mind as we talk about spiritual gifts. These gifts were not given to us for our personal use but for use within the church. Your spiritual gift is not for you; it is for the church. Think about that!

One day all Christians will appear before the Bema seat of Christ where we will receive rewards for what we have done with what God has given us. My prayer is that each of us will be able to look God straight in the eye and say, "Lord I have used what you have given me to the best of my ability to bring praise to You! You are worthy, O Lord!"

Let's pray