

Romans 15 - Our Walk in the Service of the Lord (Part 2)

Last week we examined how that, once you are saved, totally serving God is the most possible, reasonable, and regular way of life for the child of God. It is reasonable because Jesus paid for us with His blood. It is possible *also* because Jesus paid for us with His blood in that we are transformed with a new nature. The spirit of God becomes inherent in us. It is not inherent, or inborn, from our natural birth, but from our *rebirth*. It is regular in that the selfless mindset should be evident in our day-to-day, moment-by-moment interactions with those around us. This has placed us in a position of stewardship. The new life we have been given should bring a sense of joy. The life of peace (as much as lieth in us) is not just a good idea. These came at the cost of the blood of Christ which gives us a sense of obligation.

1Cor 4:1-2 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

When we consider our stewardship, we know that we are charged to use our resources, our time, and our talents for God's glory.

1. Gifted -

We are not to just use our *general* walk in our service to God. We are also charged to use specific gifts that God has given us. Along with an inborn nature, God has blessed us with the *stewardship* of spiritual gifts. In a moment we will look at the gifts themselves, but notice first the stewardship we are charged with.

Rom 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Eph 4:7-8 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

8Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. **[After Christ died and before the resurrection, this passage indicates that He led the souls captive in paradise up into heaven.]**

Rom 12:3 tells us that we are to think soberly about the gifts that God gives us. We need to take them seriously, which entails appreciating God's gift and not throwing them aside. If your boss was watching you work and then gave you a tool to use, it would be likely that in his experience you will be able to get the job done better for him with the tool. This is so much more true when it comes to the tools God has given us according to Rom 12:6-8

Rom 12:6-8 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;

7Or ministry, *let us wait on our* ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

The understanding of some of these gifts are a little more obvious than others, but any of them are easily missed especially when you are just doing a quick reading of this passage. This is why we need to give serious and sober thought to them.

- **Prophecy** When we refer to prophecy it is easy to think this is just about having some ability to make predictions about the End Times. Another mistake can make, although closer, is that prophecy is just the ability to preach. When we think of the ministry of the prophets, we extract the characteristic of judgment of sin and righteousness. The gift of prophecy is exercised as a quick ability to recognize right and wrong.
- **Ministry** Ministry is often understood as a reference to someone who is a pastor, as in "he is in the ministry," or when you call on a "minister" to perform a wedding ceremony or a funeral. Those are specialized uses of the word. But, ministry as a gift refers to service in general. The word for ministry is especially used as part of the word deacon. The gift of ministry is often exercised by someone who is quick to engage in the physical work that needs to be done.
- **Teaching** You would expect that someone who has the gift of teaching will be dynamic and very much at ease in front of a class. Perhaps that is more likely, but the gift of teaching is especially associated with someone who is a good student first. As such, they are often more equipped with more thorough explanations.
- **Exhortation** The spiritual gift of exhortation is more readily understood. The gift is often exercised as motivating others to grow spiritually to and serve God.
- **Giving** The gift of giving is not so obvious. It might show up as being generous, but it could also be withholding. Someone with this gift usually has sense of value, stewardship, and financial priorities.
- **Mercy** The gift of mercy is one that is more obvious. It is manifested as compassion and empathy.
- **Ruling** We are looking at ruling out of its order in the text because it speaks of one who is gifted with administration and delegating.

My favorite illustration of these gifts is about seven people who show up to visit you in the hospital. The person with the gift of prophecy comes in and questions whether you were doing something sinful or not that put you in the hospital. The one with the gift of ministry comes in and cleans up some mess from lunch. The person with the gift of teaching comes in and explains what caused your condition, the Latin name for it, and what your treatment options are. The exhorter comes in and challenges you on how you can be up in no time as you follow his physical therapy plans. The giver comes in and wants to know if your insurance was sufficient. Mercy comes to visit and cries a little as they feel your pain. All of these are preceded by the one with the gift of ruling ruler who lets you know he has everything under control because he has organized all the others to help take care of all your needs.

There is a tendency to oversimplify spiritual giftedness. You would think that teaching is limited to someone who has the gift of teaching, or preaching is limited to someone who has the gift of prophecy. Any of the gifts can probably qualify a person for any area of Christian service. A teacher

could be motivated by the gift of mercy or exhortation and not just by the gift of teaching. A pastor could be motivated not just by the gift of prophecy, but the gift of exhortation, ruling, mercy, teaching, or others. Mercy, ministry, and giving are easily able to motivate a food cooker, van driver, piano player, or floor mopper. Other gifts could be great motivators in one way or another even if it is not so obvious. Whatever gift we have, our spiritual growth will involve all the gifts.

Each one of these gifts are worth examining carefully by themselves (which we have done in the past). Although this is a great list, it is not exhaustive. There is a different kind of giftedness described in 1Cor 12.

2. Practice makes perfect

One of the interesting things about spiritual giftedness is that the way you might discover what your gift is is not necessarily by how *well* someone exhibits their gift. Being spiritually untrained, we are more likely to *fail* at the use of our gift at first. The prophet might be harsh and unloving. The minister might burn himself out because he doesn't know how to say "No." The teacher might get caught up in excessive data and trivia that has no application. The exhorter might be more concerned about how training is the answer and overlook the need for repentance. The giver might confuse spirituality with materialism. Mercy might want to overlook sin. The ruler might over depend on programs instead of relationships with God.

Although people start off with a gift, even one that might be part of their personality, they are supposed to grow in their whole spirit. Although there are spiritual gifts that God has given, all these things that are listed as gifts are also given as commands. When someone goes to the gym, they don't just exercise their right arm. Imagine what that would look like! So it is with spirituality. The teacher, the mopper, and the candlestick maker might grow more easily in one area of giftedness, but they need to be balanced by the work of the Holy Spirit in other areas. All spiritual growth is a gift of the Spirit.

Do not imagine, though, that all you need for spiritual growth comes from reading the Bible. If everything could be gotten just from God's divine revelation in His Word you wouldn't be able to carry such a Bible to church. You wouldn't even be able to fit it in the world's largest library. Anyone with spiritual experience will tell you that the Word of God is well understood in the context of living His Word.

Jas 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;
3Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.
4But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Jas 1:22-27 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.
23For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:
24For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.
25But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.
26If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain.

27Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.

One of the great things you can do as you study God's men and women in the Bible is to see how this giftedness appears in their lives.

3. E Pluribus Unum -

The last principle for us to consider for today is that of all these gifts, none of them are intended to make *us* to be more *interesting*. The gifts are not given so we can boast about having some special ability. That is why vs. 3 refers to how we ought not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. These gifts were intended for the church. By church we do not mean a legal entity formed for religious non-profit purposes. The church is the people as the body of Christ.

Rom 12:3-5 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

We need each other. That applies to every one of us.

1Cor 12:22-26 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness.

24For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked:

25That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another.

26And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

We balance each other out. I am used to talking a lot. But, there are many times when Nancy and I are with someone and I know that the person needs to hear from *her* based on *her* experiences. That is pretty understandable, but that is also true the *rest* of the times, not just *some* of the times. Each of us bring God's work in our life to the blessing of others.

There is a mistaken notion that many people have. They suppose that pastors are hired to do the work of the church. Some have thoughtlessly excused themselves from comparison to the pastors as though pastors *have* to serve because they are *paid* to do that. Actually, they are not hired to do any of the work at all. They are hired, when it's possible they are also paid, to train *the members* to do the work. As a member, they might also do the work, but it is not by virtue of their office. There is as much expectation of the members to join in the work as anyone else in the church.

Eph 4:11-16 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and

some, pastors and teachers;

12For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

16From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

One of the most touching things about someone new to church is their desire to not overstep any bounds. They are concerned about what is okay to do or not. There are many things I want to encourage them to feel free to join in with. Every once in a while someone might know if it is okay to invite others to church. That might seem rather obvious to do, but there are actually some churches where that is not so acceptable. In case there is any question, yes, please invite people to church. Thanks to Covid, many churches developed their Zoom skills. Now, there are people who genuinely need the Zoom meetings because of medical issues. Apart from that, we need to be joined together in person to get the work of the Lord done. God has equipped each of us for it. For anyone who has respect for the gift or gifts that God has given them, you are important for His work. Especially as you consider the focus on resolution that comes in the New Year, how would you become active in the service of the Lord at church? How would you be plugged to use your gift.

There is one other challenge that must always be considered. For anyone coming to church has some sort of sympathy about God's work. I want them to know that serving God is truly fantastic. However, it all starts not with just joining in the work, but actually joining God, Himself. Whatever attractiveness you might be looking for in serving God, there is no meaning in church without first surrendering your heart to Christ and letting Him serve you first by taking your sin and judgement and giving you a new life.

John 6:28-29 Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

29Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

Believing on Jesus is the first work of God.

1Cor 4:1-2

1. Gifted - Rom 12:3, Eph 4:7-8, Rom 12:6-8
2. Practice makes perfect Jas 1:2-4,22-27
3. E Pluribus Unum - Rom 12:3-5, 1Cor 12:22-26, Eph 4:11-16, John 6:28-29