

God's Program for Gifted People
Romans 12:6-8
#48 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – October 22, 2006

Introduction

Parents can really be something else. Parents can have attitudes toward our kids that are so out of touch with reality that it can be startling. Kids do something wrong, but “no,” some parents will say, “not my child.” A child get an A- instead of an A+ and some parents worry that little Poindexter might never recover from the horrible blow to his self-esteem. Ron and I were talking the other week and he identified a type of parent as the helicopter parent. They hover. They hover because their children are either a) cute so that they need to be on hand to see and hear everything they do, b) unsafe in anyone else's company, c) afraid that their little monster will reveal his or her true colors, or d) all of the above. Then there are those parents who can't just have an ordinary kid. They are “gifted.” In other words, they are smarter than, quicker than, more skilled than, and more advanced than other kids. I have no doubt that there are some kids who are more advanced. But some parents are pushing this in pre-school. While the rest of us have kids that slog through Sandbox 101 and An Introduction to Scissors, their three-year old is studying, “Principles of Piggy Bank Accounting” and “Interpreting Sesame Street in a Postmodern Culture.” I am of course being very facetious, but you know what I mean.

I want into this, and I want it for the church. We need a church for gifted people. And here's the good news: if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are automatically in a program for the gifted. That's what Paul talks about in Romans 12:6-8, and I want to explore what that means in our time together this morning.

Paul's Message in Context

Romans 1-11 gives us the foundational truths of our Christian faith. For those who repent of their sin and trust in Christ, God provides freedom from the penalty of our sin and also from sin's power. The freedom from sin's penalty is absolute. Freedom from sin's power is progressively experienced as we bring our lives more and more under the control of God's Spirit, by saying “no” to what is wrong and “yes” to the way God wants us to live. Throughout chapters 6-8, Paul has argued that this freedom that God provides brings responsibility for us to live under God's authority.

Therefore when we come to Romans 12-16, in which Paul describes what life as a follower of Christ looks like, his opening words call us to a full commitment of ourselves to God that involves a conscious choice to serve Him, to avoid being shaped by the spirit of the age in which we live, and to allowing our minds to be reshaped and molded by God through Scripture.

On the heels of calling our attention to the commitment we have toward God, Paul begins to talk about a sense of commitment toward God's family – the church. What he says in

verses 3-5 is basically this: no matter what reason we might come up with, there is no reason good enough for us to withhold ourselves from being involved in what God wants to do in our church.

I've mentioned several times that Paul writes chapters 12-16 with two expectations in mind. One is that we recognize that the church is God's primary means for providing teaching, fellowship and encouragement and for doing outreach. In other words, in God's mind, the church is vital. The second expectation is that if we Christians we are going to be a functioning part of one. As I've said before, without those understandings, this doesn't make any sense. Therefore one of the challenges or applications that we need to consider today is this: is my view of "Church" consistent with God's view of "Church?" And where it is not, we need to bring our understanding under his authority.

Now when he comes to verses 6-8 there are three main ideas that we can take from this passage. They are as follows:

1. Each Christian has been given one or more special abilities to contributing to what God is doing in and through their church. These abilities are referred to as gifts of the Spirit or spiritual gifts.
2. These spiritual gifts or abilities minister to the needs that other Christians have in a great variety of ways.
3. We are to use our gifts responsibly and wholeheartedly.

I'd like to look at the first two ideas this morning and we'll look at the third next Sunday.

The Gifted Program

1. Each Christian has been given one or more special abilities to contributing to what God is doing in and through the church. These abilities are referred to as gifts of the Spirit or spiritual gifts.
 - a. A biblical understanding of "church." About thirty years ago there was a movement around the country that called for a return to a biblical understanding of how the church functioned. For decades it seemed that the church had functioned more as a spectator sport than a team activity. In fact I think Dr. Howard Hendricks once described the church as being like a football game, where 22 athletes desperately in need of rest are being cheered on by twenty thousand people desperately in need of exercise. I encountered this a year or so ago in a conversation with the man who owns Dunkin Donuts. He's from China and not fully conversant with our terminology. One Sunday he asked me if I was a priest, and I told him that I wasn't, but that I was a pastor. His brow furrowed a bit and he asked me what was the difference between priest and pastor. I explained that there might be some things that were similar, but that my main task was to teach the Bible. He looked at me again and said, "But do you do (waving his hands) *things*?" His understanding of the role of a pastor was that he did the show. And people came to watch the show.

One of the most influential men during that period was Dr. Ray Stedman, a pastor in California who wrote a book called *Body Life*. Stedman argued from Ephesians 4 and other passages that the work of the church was not to be done by the leaders while everyone else watched, but that the leaders were (keeping the analogy of a football game) to teach God's word so that as knowledge of God's Word and understanding of how Christians were to live increased, the people of the church would be equipped to minister to each other. And that's where spiritual gifts come in.

- b. A biblical understanding of spiritual gifts. Dr. Stedman went through each of the passages in the New Testament that spoke about this subject of spiritual gifts and came up with this definition (on your note sheet). A spiritual gift is "*a capacity for service which is given to every true Christian without exception and which was something that each did not possess before he became a Christian.*" (page 39)
 - i. I want you to underline a few key words or phrases: *service*, *given*, and *without exception*. Each of these is important:
 1. service – indicates the purpose of the gift/gifts we are given.
 2. given – indicates that they come from God, not our own choice.
 3. without exception – means that none of us is exempt.
 - ii. That is why Paul says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them." (Rom. 12:6)
2. These spiritual gifts or abilities minister to the needs that other Christians have in a great variety of ways.
- a. Let's look at the this passage again and at the other texts that talk about spiritual gifts.
 - i. Romans 12:6-8
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 12:28-29
 - iv. Ephesians 4:11
 - v. 1 Peter 4:10-11
 - b. Let me ask two questions, and make three observations from these passages:
 - i. Questions
 1. None of these passages provides an identical list of gifts. Therefore, do we have a complete list of all the gifts? I would say probably yes, though I wouldn't be dogmatic about it. It may be that there are other ways in which God gifts people, but I would distinguish the difference between

a capacity to serve and a talent (i.e. trick pool shot ministry).

2. What about those more unusual gifts? Why do some churches practice them and others don't? Those are very important questions that I am glad you asked. ☺ Let me talk about that next week.

ii. Observations

1. It may be that since there are differences in the list of gifts, we ought to think about them in broader terms. I can distinguish at least three groups of gifts, and this seems to be along the lines of what Peter does in 1 Peter 4:10-11.
 - a. Communication gifts
 - b. Organizational gifts
 - c. Interpersonal gifts
2. These gifts identify areas of need in our lives that are critical for our spiritual wellbeing.
3. While some gifts may be more public, everyone's gifts are important. (See especially 1 Cor. 12)
4. God intends for all of us to function. That's why Paul says, "let us use them."

Responding to God's Word

Probably the most obviously practical aspects of this passage await our time together next week. I want to talk then about the ideas of knowing our particular gifts and using them. But let me suggest a couple of questions to allow us to respond to God's word.

1. Are my idea of Church and God's idea of Church the same?
2. Do I acknowledge that it is God's plan for me to bring Him glory through taking part in my church?
3. Am I willing to say to God that I want to be a functioning part of what he is doing in this community of believers?

The right answer to all three questions is "yes." What are your answers?