

**THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part forty-four**  
**Sunday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 - 5:30 p.m. - Teaching #2169**  
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**GOD'S GIFT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM (Part 2)**

**Romans 12:6-13** - "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; [7] if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; [8] the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

Surely it is a wonderful indication of the *kind* of God we serve that He not only **saves** us, undeserving, sinful, enemies of God that we are, but then **gifts** us for service in His church and kingdom. And we're meant to see any gifts of service we possess through the same lens that we perceive our salvation. That is, we didn't **earn** any of them. Like our salvation, the gifts given to us are **gifts** - there is a **givenness** to them. That's why Paul begins his teaching on the gifts with that great line in **verse 6** - "Having gifts that differ according to the **grace given to us....**"

**Gifts** turn into **selfish aggrandizement** when this is forgotten. And Paul can't even discuss the gifts without this reminder.

Last week we looked at the gifts of **prophecy, service, teaching, and exhortation**. Today we continue with **contributing generously, leadership, and acts of mercy**.

1) **THE GIFT OF CONTRIBUTING GENEROUSLY**

**Romans 6a and 8b** - "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them....[8b]....the one who contributes, in generosity...."

There is a sense in which these are words about **money** and **material gifts** and there is a sense in which Paul is talking about something bigger than the giving and sharing of material wealth. There is something in these particular instructions that apply to the proper kind of **heart** and **attitude** being manifested in **all** God-given gifts to the church. And we'll come to that in just a minute.

There is a reason I have deliberately linked Paul's introductory phrase in **verse 6** - "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...." - repeating it in full as we come to each new gift being discussed in Paul's short list. Especially when we come to the gift of **contributing generously it is easy to get confused with who is actually doing the giving**.

When I disperse some of my own wealth to someone in need I can easily conclude **I** am the **giver** and the less fortunate brother or sister is the **receiver**. And, on the earthly underbelly of things, that's just the way it is. My wallet or bank account - however the money is transacted - is emptier than it was before. I am the donor.

But Paul reminds me this is a limited, and mostly ignorant view. God, being very patient and gracious, will allow me for a time to treat my wealth as my own. I can, for a limited time, manage my wealth as though I were lord of all I possess. But I'm reminded, over and over in the Scriptures, that this delusion is only a temporary concession to my sinfulness. Eventually the lie of material satisfaction catches up with all of us - **1 Timothy 6:7** - "....for we brought **nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.**"

Jesus more than once reminded His closest followers that the true Master and Lord of all will return to His **stewards** and demand an accounting of their **stewardship**.

This is what Paul is putting in a more gentle, loving manner. The capacity to **give** is a **gift itself**. You weren't **born** with a bank account or credit card. And if there is any small voice rising up in your heart saying, "True enough, Pastor Don. But being that **none** of us was born with anything more than our birthday suit, I have made much more of my life than others. **I** did the work. **I** made the investments. **I** worked the long days. This religious talk is all well and good for you preachers when you're hungry for a buck, but I live in the real, self-made world."

And those words seem to build a convincing case. But they're not clever at all. They're profoundly blind and short-sighted. So you worked long days. That's good. In fact, it's Biblical. But work takes strength. Did you also cause your own stomach to digest its food, and your blood system to carry nutrients to your bodies' muscles? Did you, by your own effort, train your body to resist cancer? Did you, by your own effort, stave off dementia or Alzheimer's disease so you could actually read and grasp the financial news of the day? Did you do something

special, by your own effort, so that you *didn't* die in your sleep last night?

Only a proud fool would do anything but bow his or her head in humble, dependant thanksgiving in the face of those questions. The capacity to *give* is nothing but a free, undeserved *gift* from a loving Creator and Lord. And this rock-bottom, granite-like foundation must be what holds up everything else in our mind about giving and generosity.

***There's something else here. I think we know all Christians are to be givers.*** There is something about conversion in general that should ***turn us all outward***. Paul talks about this general giving heart in **Ephesians 4:28** - ***“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”***

The point isn't that we were all thieves before our conversion. The point is that conversion makes the same change in *all* of us as it does for literal thieves. It turns us from the kind of corruption that ***pulls material goods inward*** to the kind of ministering heart that ***pushes material goods outward***.

***But there are people whom God specifically prospers. And we're meant to ask why He does that.*** Does God get glory if He gives me great increase and I consume it totally with more expensive cars and boats and houses and holidays? Materially blessed Christians who are stingy, more than anyone else on earth, make Christ look unnecessary and un-treasured.

Or does God prosper me with the intention that I will ***steward*** these blessings in the direction of His kingdom and its needs? Or, to put it another way, if God blesses me beyond my needs does He do it so I will ***increase*** what I need, or does He bless me so I can ***maintain*** my level of consumption and ***extend*** His kingdom and minister to the truly needy?

One final thought. I said earlier that there was a sense in which the instructions surrounding this gift are about money and a sense in which they were about something bigger than material goods. Now we come to that bigger part.

Paul has an interesting line that he tacks on to this gift of giving with generosity: ***“...the one who contributes, in generosity...”(12:8b)***. Some translations have ***“simplicity”*** rather than ***generosity***. The word is ***“haplotēs”*** (hap-lot-ace), and can refer to any act that is ***single***, or ***simple***, or ***sincere***, or ***moved by generosity***.

And the obvious heart of the issue is the ***attitude*** of the giver. ***The gift itself is to be generous, while the heart of the giver is to be simple - with no mixture of motives.*** The generosity isn't to be ***polluted*** by any form of selfishness or manipulation.

What's particularly important is we know that the teaching of Jesus is ***exactly*** the same as Paul's in emphasis: **Matthew 6:1-4** - ***“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. [2] Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”***

These words from Jesus form the perfect commentary on Paul's remarks in Romans 12 about giving. And the first thing Jesus says is we all have to ***“beware”*** of something deeply rooted in our beings. And very significantly, just like Paul, Jesus pinpoints this problem of a pure or single heart specifically when He addresses the subject of ***giving***. I can give a ***generous*** amount but have a ***shriveled*** heart.

This is what Paul means when he says we must give with no ulterior motive other than sheer, grateful, humble, generosity. I'm not giving anything to ***have a voice*** or ***get my way*** or ***put someone into my debt***, or even to ***get a tax receipt***. There is no other motive than ***single***, or ***simple*** generosity.

So my giving has this wonderful capacity to test and reveal and develop my spiritual heart-muscle. God wants to move me out of myself. And my material goods have a great potential, if used properly, to free my covetous heart.

Now let's tie this in with Paul's chapter them summary in **Romans 12:1-2** - ***“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”***

Remember, it is God's goal, as we've been saying all along, to **unconform** my life to this world (12:2). **Acquisition is the hallmark of the aspiration of the unrenewed mind.** It is the **birthmark** of a worldly mind. It is one of the very first things God wants to change. That's **why** God blesses us materially and **then** places us in a church where others will **not** be as blessed. I can exercise the gift of contributing generously. Remember, when God gives you increased goods - goods beyond your immediate needs - He's not just **blessing** you. He's **trusting** you to use the gift of giving.

## 2) THE GIFT OF LEADING WITH ZEAL

**Romans 12:6a and 8b** - "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.....[8b]....the one who leads, with zeal...."

Ministry doesn't come easily, even for gifted people. That's why Paul describes the offering of our lives unto the Lord as a **sacrifice** (12:1). People have to be recruited and motivated and nurtured. And, in a church of any size, that takes **leaders**.

There are places where we at least get hints of the diversity of the kind of **leadership** needed in the church: **1 Timothy 5:17** - "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." When Paul says "**especially**" those who labor in preaching and teaching he implies not **everyone** who gives leadership does it through preaching and teaching.

In fact, every ministry in the church takes some kind of **leadership**. And Paul tells us something very important about the way the Holy Spirit wants to **equip** and **use** leaders in the church - leaders in Bible studies, leaders in the nursery, leaders among the ushers and greeters, leaders in food distribution. **The leader - any leader - needs to keep his or her passion. He or she can't be in it just as a job or assignment.**

And the reason is clear. In this world, and in any **church** in this world, **leadership only looks glamorous from someone else's perspective.** All who are **in** leadership know their leadership role isn't quite what they thought it would be when they **took on** that role. Leadership, especially in today's world, is something **else**. There are a thousand things happening every week in this church to wear out anyone in leadership. **Keep your zeal.** Keep in touch with the Holy Spirit.

Everyone knows instinctively the difference between someone who is merely **glad-handing** and **marketing** and **doing religious shmoozing**, and someone who has the touch of the life and joy of the Holy Spirit in his or her leadership role. You can't give to others what you don't genuinely have yourself. Be zealous for Jesus - not for your role or position. People will work with you through dozens of other imperfections if they sense you're genuine in your zeal for the Lord.

## 3) THE GIFT OF CHEERFUL ACTS OF MERCY

**Romans 12:6a and 8b** - "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.....[8b]....the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

**I think you can see that all Christians are to be doing all the things Paul talks about in this passage.** It gets very hard to distinguish between **serving** and **showing mercy**. The same with **leading** and **exhorting**, etc. But perhaps we get an additional clue about the nature of special spiritual **gifts** in this description of **showing mercy with cheerfulness**. **I think Paul means we will each have areas where our spiritual inclinations naturally start to bubble.**

We must **all** care about those needing mercy in our midst and within our reach. But there are some people who **glow** when those situations arise. We all are to **care**. But there are others who just can't help but **CARE!** And God made them that way.

And there's a **model** of how this mercy must be shown. God calls us to **love** mercy by the way He has **shown** us His mercy. And he calls Christians to love **showing** mercy just they have loved **receiving** mercy:

**John 13:34** - "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

**John 15:12** - "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

This love is a **merciful** love. It's love for the needy, the guilty, and the broken. This love is the **kind** of love that John says God **is**. This is the kind of love that gets placed into us when God's **seed** abides in us.

Let Cedarview be a place where this kind of love grows. And, as with all these gifts, Lord help us all to remember it isn't **having** the gifts that gets the job done. It's **using** the gifts that brings joy to the church and glory to Jesus Christ.