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Sermon

Spiritual Gifting

Romans 12

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The scripture readings set for this day are some of the most exciting and important in the entire bible. Most of you have probably heard numerous talks and sermons on subject of Spiritual Gifting. There is and has always been much debate and vigorous discussions on the various gifts noted in the scriptures. There is also at times, confusion and even skepticism about spiritual gifts.

When the Vicar asked me if I would preach today on spiritual gifting, I thought I would do a little bit of a survey, so over the last 2 weeks, I brought up the topic of gifting with a few friends, and, without exception, each one discussed other people's gifting, and did not consider themselves gifted. That is quite a concern, and needs to be addressed, so in this brief talk I am not going to speak on the various gifts as described in the scriptures, but rather discuss the vitally important topic of Spiritual Gifting itself.

We all have just come through the festive season of Christmas, where we celebrated the birth of our Lord Jesus. Lots of family gatherings, presents, and of course, lots of food. We all are familiar with Daylight saving and a few months ago, we all turned our clocks back. Well I heard of a suggestion the other day, that at Christmas time, with so much yummy food, we should all turn our scales back 2 or 3kg as well!

Christmas brings a lot of excitement for children in particular, and a mysterious expectation in regard to presents. Will they get what they wished for? Eager eyes looking under the beautifully decorated Christmas tree, hoping that the largest present is theirs. Then there is the gift they have purchased for their Parent, brother, sister etc. Eager eyes once again watching the gift they chose being opened. They had of course spent lots of time to wrap and maybe even disguise the present. Such a wonderful time for all.

In our spoken scripture this morning, we hear that our Lord has given us all wonderful and exciting gifts as well, but the question I am asking you all today is "Have you unwrapped your gift from God yet"?

God Gave You Gifts.

A question: "How many *ministers* does St Stephen's have"? There is Ian and Tony, there are a number of "retired" clergy in the congregation, but the question is, "how many ministers are there?" The answer, "Everyone". Nowhere does the Bible teach that the "pastor" is the only minister. The Bible actually teaches that all Christians are ministers, as we see in 1st Peter 4:10: *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.*

"Each one" received a gift from God. God has given each one of us 3 gifts, the moment, we committed and trusted our lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour and asked to be filled with His Spirit he gives us 3 gifts.

So what are these 3 gifts?

1. God gives us **eternal life**. When we open our life to Jesus, we are given eternal life. The scripture says, "The wages of sin is death, but the **gift of God** is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." There is no need to worry about the future; As a Christian we can be assured that we are going to Heaven. Our future is solid and secure.
2. God gives us His **Holy Spirit**. It's a Gift from Him to each of us. When we ask for God to fill us with His Holy Spirit, and commit our life to the Lord, He gives us His Spirit to live inside of us. He gives us His Spirit, to fill our hearts with His love. And He assures us that He will never leave us nor forsake us and that we will never be alone.

Most of you here know of these two gifts. We receive **Eternal life** and we receive His **Holy Spirit**, however, there is a third gift that God gives us when we are filled with His Holy Spirit

3. God actually gives us a specific gift to use for His purpose. This is a **spiritual gift**. A gift chosen by God specifically for us.

When we commit our lives to Jesus, we become a "follower" of Jesus Christ, and, He will never ask us to do something that He hasn't given us the ability (Gift) to do. So at that time we commit our lives to the Lord, He gives us a New Life, a new purpose and He bestows on us, a special gift or gifts to fulfil that purpose. The Bible teaches that every Spirit filled Christian, has at least 1 God given specific Spiritual Gift. This Spiritual Gift differs from our natural ability. Everybody has natural abilities. But only Spirit filled believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour have spiritual gifts.

What is a Spiritual Gift?

Often when I hear a discussion on "Spiritual Gifts", I sense that there is a great deal of misunderstanding and fuzzy thinking on this topic. Many people get confused and think that a Spiritual Gift is the same thing as a natural talent, like playing the guitar or piano, or maybe playing a particular sport extremely well.

I have just started to learn to draw Portraits in pencil, some people may look at my work and say that I have been spiritually gifted to draw, no I am developing a natural talent through lots of trial and error and many hours of practice. I also am regarded as a good cook. That is through many years of practice and edible errors.

Another confusion can occur with people when they believe that a spiritual gift refers only to those who "speak in tongues". Wrong! Because there is and has always been so much confusion, a precise definition is very important, so this is a definition I shall use for this message.

"A Spiritual Gift is a God-given ability which enables a believer to effectively serve the body of Christ."

Note that every part of the definition is very important. Spiritual Gifts come from God, they are **God-given**. We see this in Ephesians 4:7. The scripture says that you "receive" your spiritual gift. You do not earn it or have to apply for it. A Spiritual gift is an **ability**, which means it qualifies you to do something you wouldn't otherwise be able to do.

Spiritual Gifts are for **believers** only, and this is why they differ from natural talents that all people possess. They are given to **enable** the believer to effectively **serve** the Body of Christ. There are of course many people who serve, and do a great job, but are they actually gifted in their area of service, because if not, they will not be effective, but those who are filled with the Holy Spirit, those who unwrap and use their spiritual gifts, they will serve extraordinarily effectively in the body of Christ, and the fruits of the Spirit become very obvious.

So often we see people in church put into positions that they are not suited (gifted) for, and eventually they get disgruntled, personality issues manifest and cause disagreements, and consequently, can culminate with these good, well-intentioned people, leaving to find another place of worship.

Availability does not mean eligibility.

Does Every Believer Have A Spiritual Gift?

There are many sincere Christians who hesitate that they have any spiritual gifting. They see no place where they can effectively serve Christ. But the Bible leaves no doubt on this key question. Let's look at three fundamental verses:

1. Romans 12:6—"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us."
2. 1 Corinthians 12:7—"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."
3. Ephesians 4:7—"To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." Notice the repeated expressions—"We have different gifts," "To each one," "To each one of us."

In Romans we see the word "**gifts**," in I Corinthians we see the "**manifestation of the Spirit**," in Ephesians we simply see "**grace**." But Paul is talking about the same thing each time.

Spiritual gifts are grace gifts which manifest the Spirit's working in a believer's life. And they are given to each of us. Therefore we can say without the slightest doubt that spiritual gifts are given to every believer. If you are a Spirit Filled Christian, you have a spiritual gift.

As a matter of fact, you probably have more than one. I think Paul had several gifts—apostleship, prophecy, teaching, tongues, evangelism and leadership. One commentary notes that in Acts 6 Philip has the gift of service and later in Acts 8 he exercises the gift of evangelism. On that basis, I think it's likely that most of us will have one or two dominant gifts and several other less dominant gifts. We are therefore on safe ground talking about a "gift mix" where one believer might have the gifts of giving, teaching and faith while another would have evangelism and leadership and used together they effectively build the church.

It is very important to remember that Spiritual Gifts are to be used "together" just as it is beneficial for natural talents to be used together. A bit like a jigsaw puzzle, when the pieces come together they create a beautiful picture. Spiritual gifts used together, build God's church.

"A few years ago, two students graduated from the Chicago-Kent College of Law. The highest ranking student in the class was a blind man named Overton and, when he received his honour, he insisted that half the credit should go to his friend, Kas-pry-zak. They had met one another in another school when the armless Mr. Kas-pry-zak had guided the blind Mr. Overton down a flight of stairs. This acquaintance developed into friendship and exhibited a beautiful example of interdependence. The blind man carried the books which the armless man read aloud in their common study, and thus the individual deficiency of each was compensated for by the other. After graduation, they planned to practice law together."

This combination of physical gifting to strengthen each other is also very relevant to our Spiritual Gifting as when we work our gifting together enable each other to serve the body of Christ more effectively than if we tried to use our gifting single-handedly.

III. When Are The Gifts Given?

The Bible does not directly address this question, but an analogy is helpful. We receive our natural talents by virtue of our natural birth into our earthly families. It makes perfect sense to believe that we receive our spiritual gifts as part of our spiritual birth into the family of God. That is, the spiritual gifts are given at the moment of our salvation.

Someone may ask, "Is it possible to have a gift for years and never know it"? The answer is yes. It is very possible to neglect a spiritual gift as in I Timothy 4:14 we read "Do not neglect your gift". Spiritual gifts are like seeds—some come up earlier and some later. But the seeds were there all along. They just needed water,

So why are the gifts given?

This is no doubt the most important question for us to answer. The definition I used this morning suggests that the basic purpose of spiritual gifts is to **enable us to effectively serve the body of Christ**. That's essentially what Romans 12 says: "Just as each of us has a body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." (12:4-6)

Your spiritual gift is given to enable you to fulfil your God-given role in the Body of Christ. This is why there are so many gifts as we heard in our Gospel reading this morning, Teachers, Givers, Helpers, Healers, and Evangelisers etc. All vitally important but none more important than the other.

Therefore the question "What is my Spiritual Gift?" is so important. Unless you know the answer, you will never be 100% effective in your service to Jesus. You may spend your whole life doing something for which you were not gifted and so become frustrated and ineffective.

To those who have a gift of evangelism for example, going door to door is effective, but to others without that particular gifting, just the thought of it can make them even throw up. Then you can take that same person in charge of finances, and, because they have a gift of administration, they are incredibly successful. Then there are others who could not get up and teach a class and yet be able to effectively run an Alpha course as they have the gift of pastoring.

I firmly believe that this "Gift discovery" is a vital obligation of the leaders of our churches, that is, to teach people to discover their own Spiritual Giftings. Then once they discover them, to find a place to use those gifts in the Body of Christ, and that I believe is one of the most important responsibilities of church leaders. It is the only way in which a church can ever reach maximum effectiveness for Jesus Christ.

Availability does not mean eligibility.

So I would encourage you to speak to your home-group leaders or others in Church Leadership and either do a Spiritual Gift discovery course or they may be able to direct you to some self- study material.

In conclusion. I want to suggest three things you can do:

- 1: **You can read.** That's simple. Most of us can achieve that. Take your Bible and read for yourself what it says about Spiritual Gifts. The 4 key chapters are Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and First Peter 4. I am not asking you to just take my word on this vitally important topic. Go back and read it for yourself. Also there are many books available on Gifting and I am sure that there are some on our bookshelf out in the foyer available for borrowing.
- 2: **You can pray.** Ask God to show you what spiritual gift or gifts He has given you. You might pray "Open my eyes and show me where I fit in the body of Christ".
- 3: **You can ask.** This is the most interesting step of all. Simply go to several friends who know you well and ask them to tell you what spiritual gifts they think you have. You may be quite surprised at their answer. Your friends may have seen evidence of a spiritual gift at work in your life that you never even considered.

And when you discover your Spiritual gift, use it, that's what God has created you for.

The great violinist, Nicolo Paganini, willed his marvellous violin to Genoa—the city of his birth—but only on one condition, that the instrument never be played upon. It was an unfortunate condition, for it is a uniqueness of wood that as long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear. As soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay.

The exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case, valueless except as a relic. The decaying instrument is a reminder that a life withdrawn from all service to others loses its meaning.

The gifts that Our Lord has presented to each of us are to be used. This is such a vitally important part of being a Christian.

So unwrap your gift and use it as God intended it to be used.