



Biblical Stewardship



Bible Study Series

Using What God Gives Me to Help Others - Biblical Background -

ROMANS 12:4-8

Just as each of us has one 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. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Romans 12:4-8 NIV

Introduction

A couple of years ago I complimented a friend on the new house he and his family had just built on some rural property here in northeast Missouri. "That sure is a beautiful house you guys built out there south of town. So spacious, too." "Thanks," he replied. "We really like it. But you know, one of the reasons we built it was so we could use it for church get-togethers." And over the years they have. Whether a Sunday School cookout supper, a Saturday night youth raccoon hunt and campfire, or just church folks coming over for a meal, their house has been a perfect place for groups in the church to gather. My friends see their place as a gift from God to be used by them and shared with others. They are fulfilling what the apostle Paul was talking about when he wrote today's passage of Scripture.

1. Christians form one body in Christ. (Romans 12:4-5a)

We Christians all come from different backgrounds and neighborhoods; we possess different levels of income and education; we have different tastes in music and clothing, and even root for different sports teams. We're as different as eyeballs and elbows. And yet in Christ we share a oneness, a bond that overcomes all our differences. The Holy Spirit, who is present in every Christian, works supernaturally to bring a sweet unity that can be found nowhere else in the universe. The church is the body of Christ, and Jesus is the Christian church's true and sole source of union and unity.

Unity is not sameness. As the apostle Paul reminds us, within the human body "all the parts do not have the same function" (Romans

12:4). Just so in the church every person plays a different role. Many different functions must be fulfilled for something as complex as the Body of Christ to work properly, and God has graciously provided for each one. He has blessed His church with a multitude of different talents and resources within its members, and we should celebrate the rich variety of gifts, abilities, and callings that God has placed within its members. An even greater cause for celebration is that in all our differentness God has brought us together in one body.

2. Christians are individually members of one another in the Body of Christ. (Romans 12:5b)

In the same sense that roots and leaves on a plant are interconnected and dependent on one another for their own survival, so each Christian belongs to all the other members of the Body of Christ. God has given each one of us a measure of talent, strength, and opportunity. He wants us to enjoy these as wonderful gifts from Him. But just as certainly, He wants us to use them in ways that help others and glorify Him. As we use our God-given resources for the good of other Christians, we create connections that tie us together. We transform isolated cells into a unified body, individual Christians into a church. We build up the visible Body of Christ and make it stronger. The Holy Spirit at work in each of us creates a sense of oneness and a unity of purpose. Friendships grow as words of encouragement and comfort are shared in our relationships with other

Christians. As we give of our time and energy in service to fellow Christians, others are helped and we are warmed by their sense of gratitude. When other Christians help us during our times of need, we sense God's love flowing to us; we are humbled and filled with appreciation, and the connections become even stronger. In all this God is given the thanks and praise He deserves.

3. Each Christian possesses gifts that are a manifestation of God's grace. (Romans 12:6a)

Because all human beings are made in God's image, each one possesses gifts that are in some way a reflection of the greatness of God. Even non-Christians have God-given abilities, and these are good because the One who gave them is good. But these abilities are not what the apostle Paul is speaking about in this verse.

In this verse, Paul is speaking about gifts that are given uniquely to Christians. Every Christian has received from God a collection of gifts "according to the grace given to us." These are unearned expressions of God's love for us, and we received them when we became Christians. The most prized grace gifts are eternal salvation and the forgiveness of sins, both of which were purchased by the blood of Christ. But salvation and forgiveness are not the only gifts of grace that God has given us. The Lord has endowed Christians with a variety of other gifts as well, each with a special purpose; and it is on these

latter gifts that Paul focuses here.

4. Christians should use their God-given gifts for the benefit of the Body of Christ. (Romans 12:6b-8)

God wants the church to have all of its needs well taken care of. Because He is God, the Lord could have chosen to meet all the church's needs without any assistance from people. But He didn't want to do it that way. Instead, it was God's good plan to work through individual church members to supply what is needed for the Body of Christ. So God has graciously given each Christian one or more gifts uniquely suited to helping the church become more effective for God. Christians are given these gifts, but for a very specific purpose, so they can share them with others within the church.

Like a human body the church has complex needs, and no need can be neglected without it creating a problem. Within this passage Paul mentions seven distinct gifts to be used within the church. These "magnificent seven" are meant to address needs in every part of the Body of Christ.

Just as a human body cannot grow or maintain its strength without nourishment, so the church requires spiritual nourishment for vitality. To help meet these needs God gives some members in the church the ability to prophesy, to speak forth the word of God boldly. Paul says that those given this gift should "use it

One of the most valuable human resources the Lord has given His

according to the standard [KJV, 'proportion'] of faith." Other members of the Body of Christ are equipped to teach, to provide accurate instruction in the word of God. Especially in this age of Biblical ignorance, the gift of teaching is vital for the church. Likewise the gift of "exhortation" is greatly needed by the church today. The term translated "exhortation" is a rich one: it was used in the New Testament to describe the bold preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 3:18), but it can also be translated as "comfort" (Matt. 5:4).

The church also needs people who can perform acts of "service." These can be as basic as sharpening the pencils in the pew racks or as challenging as drawing up blueprints for an addition to a church. They can be performed to help a single member—mowing a widow's yard, or for the benefit of many—doing the cooking for an association-wide mission trip. All of these are expressions of God's gift of service to the Body of Christ.

God gives some the gift of being able to provide significant financial resources for the church. The Bible encourages all Christians to give a portion of their income for the benefit of other Christians, but some Christians can responsibly give amounts far beyond what most others could afford. As people share their wealth with the church, they open up vast new possibilities for the advancement of God's work.

church is that of leaders. God gifts some of His people with the ability and talent to provide strong, clear-

sighted leadership. These people help turn visions into realities. Their combination of spiritual insight, social skills, energy, and determination make such persons the spark plugs that fire the engines of progress in God's kingdom.

Seventh on the list, but no less important than the other gifts, is that of "showing mercy." When speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus called mercy one of "the more important matters of the law." (Matt. 23:23). This gift

relates especially to acting compassionately toward Christians who are easily neglected in the fellowship: the homebound, those in poor health, and those in financial distress.

What has God given you that you can use to help others? Use it to help other Christians, and someday you will experience the joy of hearing God say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"