

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Discerning Giftings According To God's Grace

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present the bodies of y'all a living and holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, your reasonable service of worship. ² And do not conform (for yourselves) to this age, but transform (for yourselves) by the renewing of your perception, so that you may test-and-approve what the will of God is, that which is beneficial and well-pleasing and mature. ³ For I say through the grace given to me to everyone among you not to think beyond what is necessary to think; but to think unto sound thinking, to each one as God has apportioned a portion of faith. ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ But having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or the one teaching, in the teaching; ⁸ or the one calling-alongside, in the calling-alongside; the one giving, with singleness; the one standing-before, with diligence; the one showing-mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Romans 12:1-8

We are going to take a little tour of the passages that talk about spiritual gifts. **There are basically four passages in the NT that address the issue of spiritual gifts directly: Romans 12:1-8; Ephesians 4:7-15; 1 Peter 4:7-11 and 1 Corinthians 12-14.** I think it would be beneficial to work our way through each passage. All four of these passages have some common themes, and each has some unique perspectives to add. Together they give us a more complete understanding of what spiritual gifts are about, and some sense of what to be looking for, as well as how we are to utilize them in our interactions with one another. Let me hasten to say, however, that they also leave a lot of unanswered questions, and do not give us as much detail as we may like, or hope for. Books have been written on the subject of spiritual gifts, and oftentimes many of the descriptions given for certain giftings are not coming directly from the text of the biblical writings, but are supplemented from the imaginations or observations of the writers in their own experiences. **I think that the words used to describe the various giftings are meant to be somewhat nebulous and undefined because God desires to uniquely express Himself through you.** He does not desire to have “gifts” that all look alike, or all operate the same way. He gives us generalities, not specifics; categories, not “this always looks or operates this way”. **There is enough information to help us understand and perceive what He is doing in us, but the information given allows for great latitude of expression. He wants us to look at what He is doing *within us*, not to try to compare ourselves with some external pattern.** That said, let's look at Romans 12:1-8.

Romans 12:1 introduces the concept of the Body of Christ as a compilation of individual people dedicated to God to become a unified organism together to serve God in unique ways as a team. Individually, we are to present ourselves to God to become *together* a single “living sacrifice”. This is a concept that is difficult for Westerners, in general, and Americans, in particular. We are so individualistic in our thinking, that we have difficulty seeing this larger corporate reality. Basically, **God is calling us to devote our individual lives to become part of a team.** Even that illustration, however, fails to convey the image Paul is describing, because we know that a “team” is a plural reality, ...a group of individuals working together. Paul is attempting to go beyond that: He is saying that we are dislocated parts that become a whole when we are combined together in a functional way. **We are incomplete without this composite unity. Yet, to experience this “larger-than-life” life, we each have to buy in.** We have to present ourselves, ...literally, “stand ourselves alongside” one another to become something *together* that we could never be on our own. In light of all that God has done for us, this is only a reasonable response, ...but understand, it will mean that we are *not* our own person, in some ways. **We are being called to something larger than ourselves, ...something that will demand something from us, but also something that will significantly benefit us and others.**

The second verse exhorts us to stop conforming ourselves to this age, ...to the patterns, pressures, and expectations of the world around us. Instead of “going along to get along”, **we are to choose to see and perceive things in new ways.** We are to ask God to open our perception, and remake our way of seeing the world around us in light of God's word, ...the insights and revelations of the Holy Spirit, ...and the helpful sharing and encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ. **The word used for transformation is *metamorphomai*, which refers to change that happens from the inside-out.** The inner thoughts and new perceptions will help to transform our inner life. As a result of those inner workings, we will find that our outward appearance and behavior, our interactions with the world around us, will also change (2 Cor. 3:18). **We are to focus on the *inner work*, not the *external appearance*.**

The purpose of this renewal of our perception is to help us to *try new things* in our attempt to discover the will of God in our individual lives, as well as for our larger “Body” or team. The word in Greek for this discovery process is *dokimazō*. It means to “test out by experimentation to discover something”. In this case, **we are looking to**

discover what is the beneficial, well-pleasing and mature development of the desire of God for us as individuals, as well as a group. This process implies that there will be many failed or imperfect attempts. We will learn and become more proficient as we attempt new things. It is okay to fail, if we learn from our attempts, and don't give up. **God has designed experimentation, improvement and growth into this process. We will discover more of what God wants for us as we apply new insights and understandings into our attempts.** It is like learning to walk, or ride a bike. **There is no substitute for trying, ...and proficiency comes through practice and incremental improvements.**

The third verse challenges us not to "think beyond what is necessary to think, but to think with sound judgment". I think it is interesting that Paul felt it was necessary to say this to "every one being among y'all". **This must be a common pitfall, ...a tendency to not see ourselves accurately, or maybe a tendency to "over-think" about this.** We are to think with sound or healthy thinking. What does this mean? **We are to think according to the apportionment of faith we have received from God.** So, Paul is telling us that we *have received* something from God *already*, ...an apportionment of faith, a measure of grace that is in accordance with our spiritual gifting and function in the Body of Christ. This is saying that **God has already given us a spiritual gifting.** It is part of who we *are*. **We are to direct our thinking to consider and discern what God has already put within us. We are to watch for and think about that, ...not to focus our attention and look for things He has not given to us.** We don't have to *get* spiritual gifts; we need to perceive accurately and learn to operate effectively in the grace and faith apportionment God *has already* put within us.

The next two verses use our physical bodies as an illustration of how our spiritual gifts are meant to work in the Body of Christ. **In our bodies are many parts, with a great diversity of functions, ...and yet, together all these diverse parts comprise a larger organism.** The health and vitality of our bodies is dependent upon the healthy function and interaction of the individual parts. At the same time, the health and vitality of the individual parts also requires the healthy functioning of *other parts* of the whole. **The parts are inextricably bound together with the entire body, and with the health and function of the other parts. The parts are interdependent.** This is a great illustration of the Body of Christ. **We are members of one another. Our lives are interdependent. This is not just a dream, or a goal, ...this is a truth. This is how things are!** I need you to grow, mature, and be at your best, so that I can be at my best. And, you need me to grow, mature and be at my best so that you can experience the potential that would come from my life.

Paul begins verse six with. "*Having gifts according to the grace given to us differing...*" **Focus on that for a moment: We have spiritual gifts of different varieties, and they came in accordance with the grace of God that was given to us.** Again, if you are a Christian, ...if you are born from above by the Holy Spirit, having taken Jesus as your Lord..., **you have a measure of faith, and apportionment of grace, which includes a spiritual gift assignment and function in the Body of Christ.** It is who you *are*, and it is what God has placed *within you*. **And you are not "supposed to be" like anybody else in the Body of Christ. You are to learn to discern, develop and deploy your gift in accordance with the inworking grace of the Holy Spirit within you.**

Then, Paul mentions seven giftings, but his comments about them are frustratingly limited. **Basically, he tells them to operate within the measure of faith they have, ...doing what they are gifted and enabled to do..., with whole hearts, earnestness, and joy.** "Having differing gifts, according to the grace given to us..., whether prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith" that person has. "...whether service in the service..." The word for "**service**" here is not referring to specifically religious service. It is the word, *diakonia*, which refers to hands-on, practical service. "whether the one **teaching** in the teaching..." "...whether **the-one-calling-alongside**, in the calling-alongside...". Here is an example of a word with a wide range of latitude. The idea is someone who invites another into interaction to help them. It could be someone who comes alongside to encourage, or console, or comfort, or to help in some way, or even to exhort. They have a knack for inviting someone aside to offer counsel, or to have a meaningful talk that is helpful to the other person. They usually take the initiative to invite the person aside. "...the one **giving**, in single-heartedness..." This is *their* gift. They seem to have an unusual generosity, and often give above and beyond what others would, ...because they have a special grace-empowering from God to do so. They are to do this with a whole heart, a heart that is not shaded with double-mindedness. The next one is literally, "**the one standing-before**". This term either meant a leader (as one who stands in front of a group), or one who is standing before someone to serve them. In either case, they are to do their ministry with earnestness. Finally, "**the one expressing-mercy** with cheerfulness". This is not just someone who just *feels* compassion for the poor, or people in need, but they have a compassion-that-acts. They are to express this action with cheerfulness or joy. **All these people are encouraged to act in accordance with the grace-gifting and prompting of God within them.** Can you see your experience in any of these descriptions? **Begin to ask God to show you your function in the Body of Christ, and act on the promptings of God's grace inworking inside of you. As you take risks to try, God will show you more.**