

# The Church: God's Team

## Romans 12:6-8

February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011

### Scripture

***"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 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."***

Have you ever watched your favorite sports team, and afterwards realized they didn't play up to their potential? Normally, the outcome isn't good when that happens. They do not achieve their objective, which, at that moment, was to win the game. The head coach of Murray State University, Billy Kennedy, is a member here, and I kid him often. I shake my head and say, "Billy, I would hate to know that my livelihood depended on 19 to 23 year old kids!" As Billy has been with us several years, the basketball teams at MSU are beginning to take on the personality and demeanor of Coach Kennedy. One of the reasons why is because Billy gets to recruit his own players. Recruiting is a key to being a college coach. When he and his assistants are on the recruiting trail, many times they recruit according to positions to be played. In basketball, there are five positions, two guards, two forwards, and a center. But there are two positions for the guards, point guard and shooting guard. The forwards have two as well, a small forward and a power forward. The center is the big man. Once Billy recruits those players and begins to coach them, he must first teach them to improve the natural abilities they have. Then he must motivate them to

come together in a game and play to the best of their ability, not just as individuals, but as a team. In basketball, we have seen too many teams that have not truly come together. We have seen players seemingly play just for the name on the back of the jersey, rather than the name on the front.

## **Our True Potential**

Paul describes the Church as the body of Christ, or the bride of Christ, but since we are in a basketball rich state, I want us to think about the Church as being God's team as we study Romans 12:6-8. I have seen coaches on the sideline being frustrated that their team wasn't playing up to their ability. I wonder if God ever gets frustrated with His Church. I wonder if He ever looks, particularly, at Hardin Baptist Church and sees that we aren't living up to our true potential as God's team in this area. The Church, as God's team, should take on the demeanor and the personality of God Himself because He personally recruited each one of us. You didn't just happen to join here. You didn't just happen to come into the family, or stumble upon the Gospel. God, through His Word and through the power of His Spirit, called us to salvation. At the moment of our salvation and baptism into Jesus Christ, God made us a part of His team. He personally recruited each one of us. Just as a college coach recruits according to position, when God recruited you, He had a specific position in the body of Christ that we would play. The difference is that God didn't recruit us according to natural ability. When He recruited us when we were sinners; we were dead, we were separated from Him. When He saved us, he "abilitized" us. He gave us a spiritual enabling so that we could take our place on His team and contribute to the objective of the team. I have wondered how many times Coach Kennedy has wished that he could live his life through some of those players. That is exactly the advantage that God has. We have not only been personally recruited by God with a position to play in the Church and an ability that helps us carry out the place that God has given us, but He personally, through the Holy Spirit, lives His life in and through each one of us. Yet still, I believe there must be times that God looks at His body and gets frustrated with us. Paul knew that was a potential the Church at Rome had. So he tells them to make a

sober assessment of themselves and come to their true net worth. Before he talks about personal responsibility in the Christian life, he talks about our responsibility to the brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are God's team. We are one body, yet we have many members, many different parts.

## **Spiritual Grace Gifts**

In verse 6, Paul tells the Church that having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them in proportion to our faith. Then he lists seven gifts. Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:13-14, Ephesians 4:11-16, and 1 Peter 4:10-11 teach about spiritual giftedness. You can come up with a list of biblical gifts from these verses, which generally break down into three categories:

1. Sign gifts
2. Speaking gifts
3. Service gifts

As Paul addresses the Church at Rome, he does not mention any of the sign gifts like he does in 1 Corinthians, only the speaking and serving gifts. I personally do not believe that you can take all of those passages put together and get an exhaustive list of spiritual lists, though some opinions differ on that. I believe the gifts mentioned are illustrative of spiritual gifts. When you study 1 Corinthians 12:13-14, the word used for 'gifts' is a word that refers to the Holy Spirit and how He is the one who bestows spiritual gifts to us at the moment of salvation. In Romans 12:6, the word "*gifts*" is not the same word that was used in Corinthians. The word used here is where we get our English word charismatic; it is ***charisma***. It is literally translated into English as, 'having grace gifts.' It means a grace gift, a gift that you didn't earn or deserve. It has been given because of the grace of God. Paul is redundant because he doesn't want us to miss the emphasis. *Having grace gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.* Paul is trying to say that in the body, though we are one body, there is a diversity among the body parts because of God's grace. God's grace doesn't gift everyone the same way even though each gift is a grace gift. You have a

gift that has been given to you by God and He determined the gift because He determines your place in the body of Christ.

Now, this is foreign to us. I really can't remember the last time I got a gift that was just truly a gift. Most of the time when we give gifts today, we think about the person and give them a gift in relation to who they are and what they like to do. We buy gifts for their birthday, anniversary, or special occasion, and we want them to like the gift. We want it to be something they will use or enjoy. As a matter of fact, in my family we don't even surprise anybody anymore. We just call them up and say, "Hey it's your birthday next week, what do you want me to get you?" Christmas is the same way. You try to think really hard what you want for Christmas, and when you open the present, you go "Wow," like you didn't know what it was! It is exactly what you wanted. Some of you even went and picked it out, took it with you and wrapped it! Because of that, I think we struggle with spiritual giftedness.

- **Using Your Gift**

Your spiritual gift in this body has nothing to do with your naturalness. God didn't say *I wonder if they would like this, or to do that*. When it comes to God's team and the body of Christ, when God looked at you He saw the whole picture. When He began to build the body, He brought you into the body, but He was thinking past you. He was thinking to the whole, not the part. That is why spiritual gifts are a humbling experience and a humbling doctrine. It shouldn't do what it did in the Church at Corinth and make us haughty, prideful, and divisive. It should make us understand that we are who we are in the body of Christ because of the grace of God. I have value because God knew this body needed me. I have watched UK play several times this year and thought boy, if they just had so and so! It just seemed like they were missing that one piece! As a local body, the Church can never say boy, if they just had so and so, because God always gets His man; God always gets His woman. We have who God wants us to have!

The question is are we playing up to our potential? It really isn't that, it is are we using them? Because in this passage, Paul says, "*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.*" Can you

imagine a group of carpenters coming to your house to work and never opening their toolbox? They never use a tool, they just hang out all day, then clock out and come back the next morning. You would be furious; and that is what some of us are doing. We are assembling with the body and never opening our toolbox. We are never using the spiritual giftedness that God has given us. God has given us gifts in this body, and it wasn't given to you for you, it was given to you for us, the body, "*Let us use them;*" underline that, circle it, and put a star by it! Every member of this body has a giftedness and every member should be using their giftedness. If we are going to stick to Romans, in particular, if you have a speaking gift, you had better be speaking. If you have a serving gift, you had better be serving.

Paul said, "*In proportion to our faith.*" We are to use our gift in proportion to our faith (ESV). A lot of people interpret that in the subjective sense, so they say the more faith I have in God, the more I use my gift, and the less faith I have in God, they less I will use my gift. I don't believe that is correct. The ESV says "*our faith,*" talking about the body of Christ. Because the apostolic ministry of the early Church, the Church at Rome had been given sound Christian doctrine. Many times that doctrine is referred to as 'the faith, or our faith.' It wasn't your individual faith that you have in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but our faith; what binds us together. He is saying that if you have been given the gift of prophecy, you are to prophesy in proportion to 'our faith,' meaning the standard has already been set. All we do now is live up to that standard that has been set, because we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. When it comes to the Church at Rome, there is no new revelation. They have the Gospel; they have doctrine.

## **Seven Spiritual Gifts**

Paul begins to expound on seven gifts. Some of you are going to say that you don't have one of these gifts. That's ok; Paul is just using seven. The key is, whatever your gift is, use it, starting today. Whatever excuse you are making, quit making it, because this body will never reach its true objective until each part is doing its part. I know some of you have been hurt or injured. I know some of you have had some things happen in your life. I understand that bodies will get hurt. You will break an arm or a leg every once and a while, but those things heal. When they don't heal, we

amputate, and we don't want to amputate! If you need to heal, heal. There has to come a time where you have to get over your past. It doesn't matter who hurts you, inside or outside the Church, you have to get over it. We don't have time for you to have a pity party for the rest of your life. You are part of something bigger than you, and don't let Satan rob you of that joy. Get the guilt and criticism off of you because you are important to this body. You are a big part and we need you. Your gift will probably fall under a speaking gift or a serving gift because I think we are probably more like the Church at Rome.

## **1. Prophecy**

There are three speaking gifts, and the first is prophecy. If you want the best example of prophecy, read Exodus 4-7. I don't know how I missed this, but it is really cool. God breaks into the life of a guy named Moses and tells him that he is going to stand before Pharaoh, and he doesn't want to do it because he's not gifted. He isn't eloquent, he can't speak, and he gets tongue-tied. He has all kinds of problems! So God says *I'll tell you what, I'm going to be your God; I'm going to give you a prophet. I'm going to make you as God, and I'm going to give you Aaron.* Wow! Moses had his own prophet! In chapter 7, Moses is getting ready to go stand before Pharaoh and God said *I will make you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your prophet.* That means when Moses stood by Pharaoh, he had his own personal prophet who would stand in his place and speak on his behalf. That is what a prophet is, someone who speaks on behalf of another. In the days of the New Testament, the Church had people who had been spiritually anointed, spiritually gifted, by God to stand in His place and speak to the people. But when they spoke, they had to speak according to the revelation of faith that had been given to the Church. That is why in 1 Corinthians 14 there are limitations on the prophets. When the Church came together, you couldn't have six or seven guys prophesying at the same time. They were to only have two or three and they had to do it in order. What they said had to be weighed. That is why the Bible teaches there has to be an understanding of gifts because some would claim to be a prophet and they really weren't. Prophets were judged by the revelation

that God had given to the Church. The point is that if your gift is to stand on behalf of God and speak, then you had better start speaking.

## **2. Teaching**

If it is teaching, then teach. This is the second speaking gift. The Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. When the apostles spoke, you didn't question it, but when a prophet spoke, you tested it. Today, test what preachers say. Don't be blind or ignorant. Don't think that pastors and preachers are infallible. They are not, but the Word of God is; so we weight, we test. But alongside of those men who spoke on behalf of God are men and ladies who are called to teach. They take the revelation that God had given to the Church and break it down where the members and the people in the community could understand it. They would stimulate the mind with the truth of God. I read some estimates that some scholars and pastors believe that at least 33 to 40% of the Church has the gift of teaching. I read that in some of our mission endeavors, missionaries are praying for God to quit saving people; it blew me out of the water! I wanted to call the guy home until I understood what was going on. In some parts of the world, so many people are being saved that there aren't enough teachers to teach them. The missionaries were throwing up their hands, saying enough is enough God! We can't imagine that! But can you imagine how our preschool and children directors feel when every Sunday they put in the bulletin that another teacher is needed and it is still in the bulletin the next week because no one will step up and use the gift God has given them? Don't tell me how busy you are. You live your life on the basis of your priorities, and in truthfulness, your spiritual giftedness and the body of Christ is not a priority in your life. I hope being in church on Sunday morning is, but you aren't using your gift.

When a friend of mine came to know the Lord and he started teaching, I got tickled at him. He got saved and believed he had a gift from God to teach, and this guy had never really been to church and he didn't know anything. I thought *how in the world are you going to teach?* He said, "Surely there is someone in this church that knows less than I do!" So, we started him out in the first grade...It reminded me of The Cosby Show. Do you remember when Rudy was going to drop out of school and Bill has her

at the kitchen table and she is giving all of the reasons why she doesn't need to go to school. Finally, Bill gives that expert counsel to counter her argument and said, "Rudy, what do you want to do when you grow up?" She said, "A school teacher." And she wanted to quit the third grade! Bill thought he had her and he said, "How are you going to teach if you quit the third grade?" She said, "I'll teach the second grade."

I would hate to stand on the Day of Judgment knowing I had been gifted to teach and I didn't. Do you remember those old western movies where the bad guy came to town and robbed the bank and then ride off. There was only a sheriff, and he was old and he didn't want to go after him by himself. So he would round up some cowboys and deputize them all. Now they had the same authority as he did to go after them and arrest them. That is exactly what God does in His body; he 'abilitizes' you to teach.

### **3. Exhortation**

Paul switches and uses participles. "*The one who exhorts;*" he said the one exhorting...keep on exhorting. This word is the Greek word ***parakaléō***, which means 'one called alongside to give aid, help, counsel, or encouragement.' It is the same word used in John 15 for the ministry of the Holy Spirit when Jesus said I will go away but will leave you another comforter or helper. When the Bible was translated from Greek to Latin, the Latin used this word to speak of an advocate in 1 John 2:1, which also refers to a lawyer. Some of you have been given the gift of exhortation, a divine enabling that after the preachers have preached and the teachers have taught, you come alongside and motivate the Church! You don't inform the mind, but you stimulate the passions, the emotions, and the will. You just have that ability to get everyone on board and get us all going forward; where are you?!! How can we let ministry after ministry lack people? It is because the exhorters aren't exhorting! Where would Paul have been if it wasn't for Barnabas? Would he have had such a past? The early Church didn't want anything to do with Saul. They didn't believe he really got saved, and Barnabas, son of encouragement, the exhorter, came along and put his arm around Paul and stood in front of the Church and said this guy is for real. That is what we need you to do if you have this gift.

## 4. Serving

This is the first serving gift and the second one mentioned in this passage. It is a noun with a verb, "*If service, then serve.*" It is where we get our English word **deacon** from; in Greek it is **diákonos**. It is the word picture of waiting tables, to be a servant, and to have dirty feet. In the biblical world, slaves didn't wear shoes, sons did. The people who served in the community either had dust on their feet in the dry season, or mud in the rainy season. These people got dirty serving others. The Bible says there is a spiritual enabling of serving, and rolling up their sleeves and pants legs and getting in grime and the dirt, and they love it. It's not because that is who they are naturally, it's because that is who they are supernaturally. These people are vital to the Church as you can read in Acts 6. As the Church began to grow, there came a point where needs of the members were being neglected, and a ministry of service had to be started. The apostles told them to choose seven men because they realized they couldn't minister in the Word and prayer as they should without others rising up and helping them with other responsibilities.

In Ephesians 4:11-16, the pastors equip the saints and the saints do the work of ministry, and ministry edifies the body. It isn't my preaching/teaching that edifies the body, it is the ministry of this church that does. If you don't believe that, you can ask those who have left this church. Yes, some have left because of me, but most have left because they had a need that didn't get met. When you are wise enough to filter through what people are saying, there are people that God brought into our body, and because we didn't have people to rise up in ministry, we failed. It is ministry that builds up the Church; that is the Word of God. The Word of God preached should equip you to do the work of ministry and it builds up the body. But we have people gifted to serve who won't serve because they haven't made a right assessment of themselves. You are either thinking too highly of yourself, or you are thinking too lowly of yourself. When you think right, you see your place in the body of Christ.

## **5. Giving**

He says that if you give, give generously. I remember the first business meeting we had when I came to this church. There weren't many there, but doing something for the youth came up. They recognized there were some people in our church that were serving and giving their best to the youth. We voted on whatever it was and afterwards a man came up to me and said, "Bro Ricky, I don't have the gift to teach, but God has gifted me to make money. My gift is giving, so if there is ever a need that the youth have in this church, come to me and I will supply the money." He never asked what it was, never vetoed me, or never made a judgment. That is exactly what Paul is talking about here in Romans. You may be one of those guys who just need to work because God has given you the ability to earn money; you are smart, you are wise. You have that ability to turn everything you touch into gold. God didn't give you that ability to have the biggest business in town, or win another award; He gave it to you to give. When you give, give generously. If we didn't have people like that, there is no way we could do all that we do. The word, "*generously*," literally means 'with no ulterior motive.' Like the man in the business meeting, no one ever knew this guy's name but me. No one but the treasurer and I ever knew the money he gave for the youth.

## **6. Leadership**

If you have been gifted to lead, lead with zeal. This word, "*zeal*," means 'speedily.' We need people who have that ability to lead. This word, "*lead*," in my understanding, is probably better thought of as a manager or administrator. Leadership is about doing the right things, and management is about doing things right. To be honest, I feel like I am a leader, but I am not a manager or administrator. Therefore, in my tenure as pastor, we have done the right things, but we haven't always done things right. It's not my fault! I was just supposed to get us there. Once we got there, administrators or managers were supposed to step up, immediately, quickly, and with zeal and diligence. They were supposed to assess the situation and step forward and say, "Here is the plan." Then you not only do the right things, but you do the right things right.

We are at a place in this body where administrators must step forward and take responsibility and serve in the Church, just as you serve in your place of business. Some of you are the best administrators in your business at work, and you do nothing in the body of Christ! As a matter of fact, if you look at yourself, you didn't get that gift from your mother or daddy. You got it spiritually at the moment of your salvation, and you are using it in the community, not in the body of Christ. Shame on us...

## **7. Mercy**

Paul said that if you have been gifted to do acts of mercy, do it with cheerfulness. I think this is referring to one-on-one individual stuff. Have you ever went to visit someone, and inside you thought, *I dread this*. Most of the time, the person you are visiting knows that you dread it. You would be better off to stay home. That is the last thing someone suffering with cancer needs. That is the last thing someone who has just lost a child needs. If you have been 'abilitized' by the Holy Spirit and by God's grace, and you have the spiritual gift of showing mercy, when you show up, show up with cheerfulness.

The Greek word here is where we get our English word, *hilarious*, from. You know who you are; you love to bake that pie, write that card, or make that visit. Why aren't you doing it? Instead of wondering if the pastoral staff has taken care of it, just do what comes supernaturally. Just do it! You would be doing it because you have given your body to God "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him, which is your reasonable service." Don't let the world squeeze you into its way of thinking and living. Be transformed as you renew your mind, so God can live out, through you, this thing called the Christian life.

It isn't about the name on the back of our jersey, it is about the name of the front of the jersey. That is God's team; we are saints of God! We are God's body and all glory goes to Jesus Christ. When we follow the name on the back of the jersey, we start following men and stop following God. You have a gift, use it. It's time to get off the bench and get in the game.