

Introduction

I'd like to begin by asking you a question. Who are the ministers of our church? The answer is, "**You are.**" Each and every one of you is a minister of our church. If you're like most Christians though, you think that isn't so because you think you don't have what it takes to be a minister. You don't have a Masters Degree or any formal training in that regard. It's preposterous, therefore, to think you're a minister.

But it isn't preposterous. The fact is that you do have what it takes. That's because what it takes is giftedness and the Holy Spirit has given each of you, without exception, just that. You are gifted to minister and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

You Are a Minister

In the opening line of verse 3, Paul mentions "**the grace given to me.**" The word "**grace**" refers to the leadership and authority God gave him over Gentile churches, including Rome's. He claims he's exercising that leadership and authority in writing what he does in verses 3-8.

In verse 4, he draws our attention to the human body and makes three observations about it. First, it's "**one body.**" It's a unified whole. Second, it has "**many members.**" A variety of parts make it up: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, feet, and more. And third, each of its members has its own particular "**function.**" If I ask you to turn your hymnal to page 82, you won't do that with your nose or feet. You'll do it with your hands. Or if I ask you to look at the power point, you won't do that with your ears or mouth. You'll do it with your eyes. Each part of the human body has its own particular function to perform.

Having made those observations in verse 4, Paul contends in verse 5 that the church is just like the human body in those three ways.

First, the church is "**one**" church just as the human body is one body. Denominations and local congregations are nothing more than structural components of a unified whole, the universal church of God.

Second, the church has many **"members"** just as the human body does. Those members are individual Christians. You and I are to the church what the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, and feet are to the human body. We make up the church just as they make up the body.

And third, each member of the church has his or her particular **"function"** just as each member of the human body does. That's what the word **"faith"** in verse 3 refers to, the particular functions or "ministries" that God gives individual Christians, like the following: (1) William - evangelize the unsaved; (2) Harold - discern and communicate the great things God wants to do; (3) Michael - communicate information about God and His kingdom; and (4) Ruth - heal the sick. Those are samplings of **"functions"** or ministries that members of the church have.

Now, notice what Paul says in the last line of verse 3, **"God has allotted to each a measure of faith"**, **"faith"** meaning **"ministry."** The words **"to each"** show that He gives every Christian a function or ministry to perform. Each of you, in other words, is a minister.

I don't mean of course a professional minister as we define it now. A little boy came home one day in the middle of a pastoral call. He saw his mother but not the minister as he hurried into the house. He was holding a dead rat by the tail and excitedly declared: **"Mom, mom, I caught this rat behind the garage. I beat its brains out with a bat. I stoned it. I spit on it, and, and . . ."** - just then he saw the minister, whereupon he bowed his head and reverently finished, **"And the dear Lord called him home."** That's the way it is with professional ministers. People think they aren't normal and act differently around them. So when I say you're a minister, I don't mean a professional one. I mean something far better, as Paul defines it in verse 3, a God-called one. You're just as much an ordained (God-called) minister as I am.

You Are Gifted

But God doesn't give you just a ministry. Look at the opening line of verse 6, **"Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace**

given to us.” God doesn’t give you a ministry and then leave you in your own competence to carry it out. He gives you gifts as well that equip you to carry it out.

Paul discusses those gifts more thoroughly in 1 Corinthians 12 and gives us the following insights about them. First, they are **“spiritual gifts,”** verse 1. Second, it’s the Holy Spirit who gives them, verse 11. And third, each member of the church (each individual Christian) has them, verses 7 and 11. Putting those three things together, the Holy Spirit has given each of you, without exception, spiritual gifts that equip you for the ministry or ministries to which God has called you. You aren’t only a minister, in other words, but a gifted one at that.

My brother Harold, for instance, never went to college and was never professionally trained, but he’s a gifted minister of God. One of his two ministries is to discern and communicate the great things God wants to do. The Holy Spirit has given him the gift of faith to do just that. When my home church had 60 people, he stood up in services and testified that it would someday have hundreds – which it eventually did, over 800 in fact. Now, he stands up and prays, **“Lord, Van Wert County has 35,000 people. Help us win each and every one of them to you.”** Ask the professional ministers who came and went at Trinity Friends Church. They’ll tell you. Harold’s ministry and giftedness were an essential and vital part of its growth.

Each and every one of you, like Harold, is a gifted minister of God.

Spiritual Gifts

Now, since **“gifted”** means that you have spiritual gifts, let’s learn generally and particularly what they are.

Generally, spiritual gifts are supernatural abilities that the Holy Spirit gives to each member of the church (each individual Christian) to use in building it up. Note two things here.

First, spiritual gifts are supernatural abilities. Christians have natural abilities like everyone else does. But we shouldn’t equate them

with spiritual gifts. Don't misunderstand me. They are sometimes linked. The Holy Spirit sometimes takes a natural ability in an unbeliever and transforms it into a spiritual gift when he or she decides to follow Jesus. Even then though, the spiritual gift is more than just a souped-up natural ability. It's a new and supernatural ability instead.

Note a second thing. As Paul teaches us in Ephesians 4:12, spiritual gifts serve to build up the church, the body of Christ. The ministries to which they're directed build it up numerically, by leading people to become disciples of Jesus. They also build it up spiritually, by training and nurturing those disciples. You can see then that they operate both inside the church with disciples and outside it with non-disciples.

A Christian I knew in Barberton, a factory worker named Bill, led two co-workers and a neighbor to Jesus – in the same week. Scores of people over the years have decided to follow Jesus as a result of his witness. He has the supernatural ability to evangelize unbelievers, which has led to the numerical growth of the church.

Now that we know what spiritual gifts are generally, let's learn what they are particularly. Paul identifies seven specific ones in verses 6-8. **Prophecy:** the supernatural ability to receive and communicate an immediate message from God to others. **Service:** the supernatural ability to identify and meet needs involved in a task related to God's work. **Teaching:** the supernatural ability to communicate information in such a way that others are able to learn and apply it. **Exhortation:** the supernatural ability to minister words of comfort, counsel, consolation, and encouragement so that others are helped, inspired, and/or nurtured. **Giving:** the supernatural ability to contribute material resources to do God's work and meet the needs of others. **Leadership:** the supernatural ability to set and communicate goals to achieve God's purposes in such a way that people voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish them. **Mercy:** the supernatural ability to feel empathy and compassion for those who are suffering and to translate that empathy and compassion into action that alleviates the suffering.

The Bible contains three pericopes or extended discussions of spiritual gifts. They are Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 and Ephesians 4:7-16. Those pericopes and other scattered verses together identify at least 27 spiritual gifts. I say **“at least”** because there are others that the Bible doesn't identify. Anyway, each of you has at least one of those spiritual gifts and most likely more than one.

Think Sanely About Yourself

So do what verse 6 commands, **“exercise them accordingly.”** Use them, in other words, to minister. In Part II of this sermon and in the discussion next Sunday night, we'll assist you in doing that. We'll assist you in discovering and using your spiritual gifts.

In verse 3 though, Paul teaches something that doing that requires of you. You must **“think so as to have sound judgment.”** I enjoy the J.B. Phillips translation of that line, **“Try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities.”** **“Sane”** means based in reality. See yourself as you really are, in other words. Discovering and using your spiritual gifts requires that of you. You must think sanely of your self.

Paul defines what that means in the preceding line of verse 3. It's **“not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think.”**

I knew a Christian who had the gift of intercession. She prayed extensively and effectively, seeing frequent and specific answers to her requests. But that very fact seemed to create a burgeoning pride within her. For one thing, she expected everyone else to pray as extensively as she did and condemned them for not doing so. For another thing, she interpreted her effectiveness in prayer as making her a special kind of humanity, separate from and superior to **“normal Christians”** as she sometimes called them.

Christians tend to exalt certain spiritual gifts over others - like intercession, teaching, healing, prophecy, and tongues to name a few. And if they're not careful, those who have those gifts can acquire an inflated sense of their own importance as a result.

But the truth is that no one spiritual gift is above any of the others. The church needs all the spiritual gifts just as the human body needs all its parts. There's no basis in reality, therefore, for Christians who have certain ones to think they're superior because they do. It's that very attitude, in fact, that Paul identifies and tacitly condemns in verse 3.

To think sanely of yourself means a second thing that's inherent, by way of contrast, in the first. It's to think as highly of yourself as you ought to think – not **more** highly but **as** highly as you ought to think.

Humility is a virtue, but like all virtues, it can be distorted. Some Christians are wrongly humble, thinking so lowly of themselves that they're virtually useless to God. In a sermon he preached at L'Abri, Francis Schaeffer described the attitude of some Christians this way: **"It is wonderful to be a Christian, but I am such a small person, so limited in talents – or energy or psychological strength or knowledge – that what I do is not really important."** Christians who think that way are thinking insanely, in a way that denies reality.

The reality is that your spiritual gifts and thus you are essential to the body of Christ, which makes you a vitally important person in it. To belittle yourself by denying or denigrating your spiritual gifts is to impugn the Holy Spirit's work. So don't be wrongly humble. Be realistic instead. Think as highly of your spiritual gifts and yourself as you ought to think.

Conclusion

I close with an observation. Many schools have special programs for what are called **"gifted children."** You realize what they imply. The children who aren't in them aren't gifted. But it's different in the body of Christ. If it had that kind of special program for gifted Christians, each of you would be in it. That's because each of you is a minister to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts. Not long ago, a mother proudly said to me about her son, **"He's gifted."** Understand something. God proudly says the same thing about you, **"You are gifted."**