

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 59

Gifts - Part 2

Recently, we took several of our children and went out of town. We stayed several nights at a hotel that offered a breakfast buffet. It offered several stations of food. There was the healthful station with fresh fruits, yogurts, juices, milks, and cereals. There was the mega-calorie station with its varieties of cakes and sweet breads. There was also the basic Americana station with pancakes, waffles, and fresh eggs cooked to order. Then, there was also the Cardiologist Job Security station with sausages, bacon, hashbrowns, and other assorted fried/high fat goodies.

The kids loved the breakfast, and I certainly lodged no complaints. It was interesting to watch what was chosen during each of the three breakfasts we ate. With only one or two variations, the kids (and I as well) picked out basically the same foods each morning. We quickly established ourselves as “rut eaters.”

Our choices were not necessarily made by what was most nutritious. Nor were they made by what would serve us best during the day, as far as supplying energy or keeping us going until the next opportunity to refuel. Our choices seemed dictated more by what pleased the palate most and to a lesser degree what was most attractive. Becky and I were also influenced a little by what would minimize the guilt associated with eating the food (*i.e.*, run from the Cardiologist Full Employment station). The children’s choices seemed to be a bit influenced by treat foods offered there that they never get at home (*i.e.*, cereals where the first five ingredients are different words for “sugar”).

This experience comes to mind in preparing this lesson on the charismatic gifts. If we lined up all the gifts of God that he gives to believers into a smorgasbord for our personal selection, then which would you choose? Would you take certain gifts you know you have or might you gravitate to those you “don’t get at home?” Would you head for the practical station and garner gifts like service and giving? Would you head for the spectacular table and go for something pretty miraculous like speaking in tongues or healing the sick?

Have you ever asked God for certain gifts? Certainly, we pray for God to act, seeking comfort for the hurting, healing for the sick, ways out of sticky situations, and other such needs that arise. But have you ever specifically asked for the bestowal of a certain type of gift or ability from the Lord? I suspect if we were truly able to make buffet choices of our gifts, we would all tend to take at least one item from the Miraculous station.

Yet Scripture, and especially Paul, teaches that God gives gifts as God sees fit, not as part of our buffet choice. While we might have our wish list of gifts, the actual ones we receive are determined by the giver based upon his unfathomable knowledge of us and how we fit into his plan for the world and redemption. Our choice comes in whether to use the gifts he gives, not in picking out which ones we want him to give us.

Last week, we set out Paul's general writings as they pertain to God's gifts. This week we refine our focus and narrow down to the area of what we term "charismatic" gifts.

A QUICK REVIEW FOR CONTEXT

Paul used multiple words for "gift," several of which have certain nuances in meaning. We explored these and refer back to that lesson for details.¹ One of the words Paul used with great frequency seems to have its Christian origin from Paul, at least in Christian writings.² This was the Greek *charisma*(*ta*) (χαρισμα).

While many today consider *charisma* to be the "charismatic" expression or gifts of the church, we saw that Paul's meaning did not align with such a limitation or definition. For example, in Romans 6:23 Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the **free gift** (*charisma*) of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul is not writing of the "free gift" as a charismatic gift in the sense that a 21st century believer uses the word "charismatic." Similarly in Romans 5, Paul used *charisma* to speak of gifts that were not "charismatic."

Paul here contrasts the earned wages that are due from the act of sin (death) with the concrete expression of God's gift in Jesus Christ (eternal life). As we consider Paul's vocabulary, we once again are reminded of our cultural blindness if we limit the meaning of Paul's *charisma* writings to matters we today call "charismatic."

But the **free gift** (*charisma*) is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift (*dorea*)³ by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift (*dorea*) is not like the result of

¹ See the lesson on gifts available on the class website www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

² See the evidence and argument of Kasemann, Ernst, *Commentary on Romans* (Eerdmans 1980) at 333 where he concludes, "It is by no means certain that there is any pre-Christian use of the word." Within the church, as noted earlier, Paul uses it exclusively save for one passage in the later written 1 Peter.

³ As noted in our previous lesson, Paul interchanged his words for gift here writing also of a *dorea* gift – the official, formal type gift.

that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the **free gift** (*charisma*) following many trespasses brought justification.

Thus, a study of all Paul's usages of *charisma* shows that the modern Anglicized usage of "charismatic" does not fully represent Paul's terminology. Paul uses it in ways we do not consider "charismatic" today. Paul took a Greek word for "favor," "grace," or "kindness/goodwill" toward another (*charis* – *χαρις*) and changed it into a noun that refers to a concrete expression of such favor, grace, kindness or goodwill.⁴ We better understand Paul's use of the word if we do not view it as a miraculous gift bestowed on a believer, but instead, see it as a concrete expression of God's giving.

That said, there are some passages where Paul uses the word *charisma* meaning spiritual gifts that are today labeled by church and biblical students as the "charismatic gifts." There are two main passages where Paul writes of these gifts.⁵

- **Romans 12:6-8** "Having **gifts** (*charisma*) 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."
- **1 Corinthians 12** "Now there are varieties of **gifts** (*charisma*), but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom... to another **gifts** (*charisma*) of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles... And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then **gifts** (*charisma*) of healing, helping, administering, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess **gifts** (*charisma*) of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher **gifts** (*charisma*). And I will show you a still more excellent way."

⁴ Fee, Gordon, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP 1993) at 340.

⁵ We should note that there are other passages that some take to be referencing the charismatic gifts: 1 Tim. 4:14 "Do not neglect the gift (*charisma*) you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you." 2 Tim. 1:6 "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift (*charisma*) of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." These passages were considered in our prior lesson.

How shall we understand these passages? In a post-industrial age of science and reason, we immediately key our eyes to those gifts that seem to us “miraculous” compared to the others which seem to be natural manifestations of God’s gifts. Before we dissect the passages, it might be useful to explore why we are so intrigued by the supernatural gifts, compared to those more mundane and everyday.

WHY?

If you were to ask me whether I would like a miraculous gift of healing, then I would quickly concede “yes.” As I type this, I am on a break from my preparation for a trial starting Monday. I represent a fellow who was driving a heavy piece of equipment with a history (unknown to my client) of transmission problems. My client climbed into the machine and drove it, but midway through the job, something happened throwing my client around the cab and bucking the machine up and down off the ground. The incident paralyzed my client from the waist down. This wonderful 40-year-old gentleman will never walk again. He cannot consciously do anything with his body from the naval line down. I cannot tell you how much I would rather say to my client, “In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk” than to try his case. I assure you, my client and his family would rather have working feet than anything I can recover for them in court. Alas, though, that does not seem to be a spiritual gift I have, at least not in the way we read it being exercised in the New Testament.

In this example, I hope I have some altruistic reasons for wanting the miraculous gift of healing. But are there some deeper reasons we want these gifts? Perhaps sometimes we want them to have “proof” that God is there and that he is real. Perhaps we need that faith booster for others, and perhaps we need it for ourselves.

In our more honest moments, we might even admit that having such gifts would establish us firmly as truly spiritual believers. In an opposite way, perhaps some of us do not want the miraculous gifts to be real because *we have not personally experienced them*. To have them real, when they are not anything we possess or experience, might seem to indicate our inferiority of faith or practice.

Some have made a diligent study of the scriptures and decided that these gifts no longer exist in the miraculous form. Some have made determinations that the reason for the gifts in the first place was to bear testimony to the gifted person’s authority from God. In other words, “You better listen to Paul, he must be authentic because God has given him a miraculous gift of healing.” This reasoning typically continues to note that once the church had the Scriptures, this need was no longer there. (This position is held by many, even though for 1500 years over 99 percent of the world was illiterate and without a readable Bible.)

One further reason that seems prominent among those who have reticence to the modern exercise of these gifts comes from simple observation of the world. Many of the “miracle workers” seem to turn out to be charlatans, often with an economic motive. Without a ready and confirmable visibility of these gifts in practice, many look for biblical explanations for the extinction of the gifts.

In fairness, we might also examine the reasons why some people are insistent that the gifts must be real and existent today. Some have experienced something they consider miraculous and to deny it would seem a denial of God. Others might have the need to justify the faith of their childhood or earlier in life. No doubt, there are many more motives.

On both sides of the coin, however, I have left out a motive that is important. It is this motive that drives our study today. Scripture teaches on this subject, and we should seek to understand the Scriptures and then stand under them.

So, we turn to these passages and try to understand them. This lesson focuses on Romans 12, and the next lesson on 1 Corinthians. As we study, we cannot put on blinders to our own experiences, for they have a place in our understanding of God, the world, and the interpretation of his word. However, we can certainly make sure our priority is to understand what God has delivered in ways that might illuminate our own understanding and perhaps even bypass some of our motives that may not shine as brightly as we would like!

ROMANS 12

In Romans 12, Paul is writing in ways to confirm and encourage the unity of the Roman church.⁶ Paul confirms the unity in diversity of the church using, gifts God gave to the church as his teaching tool. Paul points out that everyone has God’s grace (Greek *charis*) yet everyone has different gifts (Greek *charisma*). Here, Paul makes a Greek pun that adds punch to his illustration of many yet one.

Paul then sets out a list of seven gifts, seven being “Israel’s holy number implying perfection and totality” and here conveying “the sense of exemplary universality.”⁷ In other words, this is not an exhaustive list of gifts. It is, rather, a list that applies in the church and makes his point of the diversity of God’s gifts. Hence, we see in

⁶ This makes sense in light of the overall purpose of Paul’s letter to the Romans. As we assert in earlier lessons, Paul was helping the Roman churches deal with the re-integration of the recently returned Jewish part of the churches with all the attendant problems. See the lessons on Romans found in the New Testament classes available at www.Biblical-Literacy.com as well as the lesson on Romans found in the Life of Paul section at that website.

⁷ Jewett, Robert, *Romans: A Commentary* (Fortress Press 2007) at 745-6.

Ephesians 4 another list from Paul of gifts for the church where some of the same gifts are recognized while others are listed that Paul does not use in Romans 12.

As we examine these gifts, we do well to dig into the meaning within the framework of Paul's original letter. Recently, the New Testament and Roman history scholar Peter Oakes wrote a fascinating book, *Reading Romans in Pompeii*.⁸ In the book, Oakes first surveys the life of common people in Pompeii⁹ at the time of Paul, with evidence documented by the findings in the Pompeian excavations. Then, Oakes considers how the ordinary person in Rome would have understood and read Romans, recognizing Paul wrote it to house churches and "ordinary" people in Rome.

Oakes approaches the gifts Paul sets out in Romans 12 as a "practical challenge to household hierarchy."¹⁰ Oakes explained that Paul wrote his discussion in a way that contravened the norm. Normally, the "householder" allocated the tasks to be done. It was the householder who told each their chores and responsibilities. Oakes believes it a reasonable extension of Roman practice that in a house church, one might expect the members to take role assignments from the householder, the one with highest authority in that house. Paul does not leave that an option.

Paul explains that these are *charisma* gifts. As discussed last week, that meant that these were concrete expressions of God's giving. God assigns the roles; God gives the tasks and abilities to meet those tasks. This is "a 'charismatic' process under the control of God, not a person."¹¹

Within that framework then we see these as "charismatic" gifts. These were expressions of God's dispensing of gifts and roles. They demonstrated the wonderful ways that God has designed for the church to both need each other and minister to each other, as one body.

Within that framework, let us consider each gift in Paul's list in Romans 12:

Prophecy – Paul writes that one with a gift of prophecy should exercise it "in proportion to our faith."

⁸ Oakes, Peter, *Reading Romans in Pompeii* (Fortress Press 2009).

⁹ Pompeii was a city about 130 miles south of Rome, destroyed by the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius in 79 AD.

¹⁰ Oakes at 105.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

In the New Testament, we read of prophecy as including predictions of the future,¹² yet this was not the core meaning. New Testament prophecy, “involved proclaiming to the community information that God had revealed to the prophet for the church’s edification.”¹³

The early church fathers understood the gift of prophecy similarly. Diodore of Tarsus (died c.390), whose writings exist only in fragments, explained,

Prophecy means primarily the explanation of things which are unclear, whether future or past, whether present or hidden.¹⁴

The key for Paul, however, was not the impressive nature of the gift, but rather how the gift was used and how God purposed it. Origen (c.185-c.254) emphasized this in his commentary on Romans,

So then, for Paul, “prophecy” is mentioned when anyone speaks to men for their edification and consolation [referencing 1 Corinthians 14:3].¹⁵

Paul emphasizes that those gifted with prophecy should use it “in proportion to our faith.” Scholars differ over whether Paul is speaking of the faith of the believer (the *act* of believing) or what the believer believes (the *subject* of belief). Either and both make sense in light of Paul’s purpose. The Prophet should speak only as the prophet has faith, and the prophet should speak only of the matters of the faith.

Serving – Paul writes that one whose gift is “service” should use it “in our serving.”

Here, we leave the apparent “miraculous” and return to *charisma* gifts that do not seem to be so troublesome to find in use today. In a way, however, that makes these gifts even more important for study. For now, we need to discern what is it

¹² See, *i.e.*, Acts 11:28 “And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius);” and Acts 21:10-11 “While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, “This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”

¹³ Moo, Douglas, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans 1996) at 765.

¹⁴ Quoted by Bray, Gerald, *Romans* (IVP 1998) at 311. See also the other early church citations of similar understandings at 311-312.

¹⁵ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Book 6-10*; translated by Thomas Scheck (The Catholic University of America Press 2002) at 209.

about things like “serving” that makes them a *charisma* gift rather than simply a talent or discipline.

We have seen the word Paul is using for serving in our studies on church structure (*diakonia*). It is the same word that is used for “deacon” in the Greek. The word can also be translated “ministering.”

Paul uses the word many times in his writings. Aside from using it to describe a position in the church, Paul uses it to write about his own ministry.¹⁶ Paul also uses it when describing others’ ministry to the church.¹⁷ When Paul was collecting money for the church in Jerusalem, he considered it such an act of ministry/service:

[S]trive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints. (Rom. 15:30-31).¹⁸

It was through “service” or “ministry” that people came to Christ. Paul used this word in 1 Corinthians 3:5, writing:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants (*diakonoi*) through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.

Too often, we think of service in simply the English consideration of “doing something for someone else.” In doing so, we must not lose the emphasis that Paul puts on the gift/act. For Paul, the term was very much ministry oriented.¹⁹

The root of the *diako*- words in the Greek held a meaning of waiting on someone at the table, or serving someone.²⁰ It was thus used of household servants, waiters, messengers, retail sales people, and priests.

¹⁶ See, for example, Rom. 11:13 “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry.” 2 Cor. 5:18 “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation”; and 2 Cor. 6:3 “We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry.”

¹⁷ Col. 4:17 “And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.’” 2 Tim. 4:5 “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

¹⁸ See also, 2 Cor. 8:3-4 “For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief (*diakonias*) of the saints.”

¹⁹ See also his use in 1 Cor. 12:5; 16:15; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6, 7, 8, 9 (twice); 4:1; 6:4; 11:15, 23; Eph. 3:7; 4:12; 6:21; Col. 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Tim. 1:12; 4:6; 2 Tim. 1:18; 4:11; and Phlm. 13.

John Collins recently published a groundbreaking study on the biblical usage of the word.²¹ Collins exhaustively considered usage of the word contemporary to the New Testament and showed that it retained the core meaning of its origin. In this sense, we see the word still meaning to run errands for others, to speak or act for others, or to attend to others in some task. It is in this sense that we can get a fuller understanding of how Paul used the term. It was a gift from God to be able to tend to others' needs in this way, whether it was in collecting and taking money or in presenting God's word. For Paul, this was all ministry, for it all, when done for the right reasons, brought glory to God and pointed people to Christ himself.

This is magnified when we realize that the gospel writers used this word as describing the work of Christ:

For even the Son of Man came not to be *served* but to *serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45).

When Paul adds the comment that those with a gift of service are to use it in serving, he underscores the motivation as well as the focus of the ministering. This is the emphasis understood by Origen who wrote that many who received this gift, "having become puffed up in arrogance or set into loose pleasures, have plunged headfirst into destruction."²² Moo notes, "The gift of 'service' should not become an occasion of pride but should be the foundation for heartfelt and sacrificial 'serving' of others."²³

As we put these pieces together, we suggest Paul properly writes of "serving" as a *charisma* gift, rather than simply a talent, when one is called and enabled to use it in ministering and advancing God's kingdom. That is a concrete expression of God's involvement in one's life. For none of us advance the kingdom without God's Spirit.

Teaching – Paul writes that "the one who teaches" should do so "in his teaching."

Unlike "serving," "teaching" makes each list of gifts Paul gives in his writings (see 1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Eph. 4:11). Moo makes the point that "teaching" is distinguishable from "prophecy" in that,

²⁰ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford 1966). It is used in this sense in Luke 17:8 "Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and *serve* me while I eat and drink."

²¹ Collins, John, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford 2009).

²² Origen at 210 (Book 9, Ch. 3, v. 11).

²³ Moo at 767.

“Prophecy”...has a revelatory basis: the prophet speaks the words that God “puts into his mouth.” Teaching, on the other hand, involves the passing on of the truth of the gospel as it has been preserved in the church.²⁴

Apollinarus of Laodicea (310 – c.392) wrote on this passage and fragments of his commentary survive today. He stated similarly that, “teachers are the interpreters of the prophetic word [here we today would include Scripture], because they have heard and understood it with their ears and seen it with their eyes.”²⁵

Romans 12 is not the only place where Paul uses this word “teaching” (*didaskon*). As we consider his other usage, we see that he includes advice on ethical treatment,²⁶ as well as expounding on the glories and mysteries of Christ.²⁷ Paul certainly used the word also when speaking on what we would term “theological instruction.” In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul distinguishes the gospel he preached as one not “taught” but one received “through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Paul “taught” not only in spoken words, but also in writing. He instructed the Thessalonians to, “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thess. 2:15).

Earlier in Romans, Paul used the word as a reference to expound upon the Old Testament Scriptures. In Romans 2, he challenged those who called themselves a Jew, who relied on the law and then taught it, failing the whole time to heed their own teaching! (Rom. 2:17-24).

As we consider Paul writing of the *charisma* of teaching, we see him speaking of imparting understanding of God, his word, and his purpose in ways that give instruction, enlightenment, direction, and a moral compass. Paul urges those who have this gift to do so “in his teaching.” Certainly this mandates that the teacher listen and behave consistently with what he is instructing others! This stands in contrast to the concerns Paul gave in Romans 2 of those who, using a modern idiomatic phrase, “talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk.” The Message translation picks up this emphasis, “if you teach, stick to your teaching.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Bray at 312.

²⁶ 1 Cor. 4:16-17 “I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I *teach* them everywhere in every church.”

²⁷ Col. 1:28 “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and *teaching* everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”

Exhorting – Paul writes that the “one who exhorts” should do so “in his exhortation.”

If one were to consider this passage in other translations, one would see the word the ESV translates as “exhort” translated “encourage” (NIV); or “encouraging guidance” (The Message). The actual word Paul uses (*parakalo*) is akin to the word used in Modern Greek today to say “thank you.”

The Greek at the time Paul is writing is closely akin to teaching. Moo distinguished it in this passage as “the activity of urging Christians to live out the truth of the gospel.”²⁸

Origen defined it thusly:

Exhortation is a form of teaching and of the word, by which afflicted souls are relieved when passages of the Holy Scriptures are prudently applied and assembled together. For often a sense of hopelessness comes to a soul through excessive trials; it cannot be repaired or restored easily by whatever kinds of words, no matter how polished and plausible they may be. But if words that have the power of God’s grace would be applied, then they penetrate the person’s heart and provide consolation.²⁹

Paul considered this as a *charisma* gift. When one properly took the soothing consolation of God’s word and faithfulness, and gave it to those hurting and in need, it certainly arose to the level of God’s concrete expression of his love and giving in the life of those encouraged. This was no less true of encouragement for holy living as well as encouragement to those hurting.

Contributing – Paul next lists the *charisma* gift of “the one who contributes.”

The church’s understanding of this passage has generally fallen under two lines of thought. One, expounded by John Calvin and others, is that Paul is speaking of the person(s) within the church who were charged with the responsibility to dispose of church property, distributing the resources of the church to those in need. A second view is that Paul references those who share his or her own resources with those in need. (There are also two sides in this debate over whether the sharing is with those in the church or including those outside the church).

Jewett believes that the particular emphasis Paul has on giving here referenced the “contributions to the daily love feasts that formed the center of the common life in

²⁸ Moo at 767.

²⁹ Origen at 210 (Book 9, Ch. 3, v. 12).

early Christianity.³⁰ If he is right, then we have greater understanding of Paul's frustrations with the Corinthians for their refusals to share or even wait for others before over consuming their own food and drink (1 Cor. 11:21).

Certainly, the idea behind this gift is that of one sharing what they have (directly or indirectly) with others. "Sharing" is the core meaning of the word Paul uses (*metadidomi*). We see that in his other uses of the word. In fact, earlier in Romans, Paul speaks of his desire to see the Romans so that, face to face, he might *share* (translated "impart" by the ESV) some *charisma* or concrete expression/gift of God to them (Rom. 1:11). Paul also wrote of sharing not only the gospel, but also his own self to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:8).

Whichever way one understands the "contributing," Paul gives emphasis that it is to be done with "generosity." This emphasis is found in the sermon of an early church father. John Chrysostom (347-407) preached on this passage teaching that Paul's concern was the way in which the sharing was done:

In giving Paul looks for liberality; in showing mercy, for cheerfulness; in caregiving, for diligence. For it is not just with money that Paul wants us to help those in need but with words, deeds, in person and in every other way.³¹

Jewett adds a caution to understanding generosity noting that Paul's word also speaks to motivation. One can generously contribute with motives of selfishness, calculated rewards, haughtiness and pride. Paul's word precludes that. He wants sharing with a generous result, but also a generous heart. As one can share with the heart of Jesus, one is not simply sharing, but is manifesting the *charisma* gift.

Leading – Paul writes that, "the one who leads" should lead "with zeal."

Moo points out that the word is most directly translated as "one who presides."³² Scholars debate over the exact meaning of Paul. Did he mean one who presides over certain aspects of the church? Was Paul speaking here, as he did in other places where he used this word (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17) of "leaders" in the local churches?

The type of leader is not Paul's emphasis. Paul is instructing the Romans that God has given certain people a *charisma* gift of leading the church. Those people with that gift are to use it with zeal. They are to eagerly pursue their role with a heart

³⁰ Jewett at 751.

³¹ Bray at 313.

³² Moo at 768.

of diligence. Like all the other gifts set out, this is given as *charisma* gifts. That means the leader is not self appointed, nor elected by the church. God gifts the leader for that endeavor and he should not view himself haughtily, with pride, with self-importance, or as God himself. The leader is not a ruler or authoritarian. It is a servant of God seeking to help guide others in service to him.

Acting with mercy – Paul wrote that “the one who does acts of mercy” should do so “with cheerfulness.”

Paul wrote of mercy often, but only here as a verb for actions of human beings. This is the same word that is used in the gospels to translate the Jewish practice of giving alms to the poor (Mt. 6:3), leading some scholars to think that Paul is speaking here of such actions. It seems limiting, however, to think that Paul is using only this Jewish act.

Calvin and a long string of scholars have understood Paul to be writing of any act of mercy, whether caring for the poor, sick, downtrodden, bereaved, or otherwise. In this sense, Paul is emphasizing this as a *charisma* gift because, as we tend to the needs of others through mercy, we demonstrate that God is working through us. God is the truly merciful one. God is manifesting himself through such acts. People see Jesus when they see his people acting with his compassion.

For that reason, it is important for Paul that one acting in mercy does so with cheerfulness. What place in the church is there for a *charisma* gift of God that is begrudging or bitter? None!

CONCLUSIONS

Paul gives the *charisma* gift list in Romans 12 and while one of the gifts is seemingly “miraculous” today (at least in part), the others take on their miraculous character only in the sense that God is manifesting himself in ways that minister to the church. The same gifts, outside of prophecy, might be found in people who are far from God and Christ, but not in the way that those gifts are exercised for the people of Christ. Both in attitude and result, these are particular manifestations of God’s giving in a concrete, objective and visible way. Thus, they are *charisma* gifts.

Interestingly, Paul writes another similar gift list in Ephesians 4, but never uses the word *charisma* when referring to those gifts. Paul also writes a gift list in 1 Corinthians 12 which we plan to consider in detail next week.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “...*having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them*” (Rom. 12:6).

God has given his people concrete expressions of his love and his caring. He has given them for his purposes and as he wills. It is not a buffet or salad bar where we walk, picking and choosing what we might consume for our use today. It is in his hands, for he is the giver. Therefore, let us set aside our theological discussions to any extent they impede us from first looking to him to see how he has fitted us for service in his kingdom. As we discern ways we are able to serve, sometimes defined by our interests, sometimes by the opportunities he sets before us, let us serve in the heart and spirit of ones empowered by the loving omnipotent God. Let us not do so thinking highly of ourselves, for we are merely his vessels. The acts are his acts, the mercies his mercies. They are, after all, *charisma* gifts, not simply human talents!

2. “...*faith...generosity...zeal...cheerfulness*” (Rom. 12:6-8).

Paul gives us good guidelines for using our gifts. The attitudes behind exercising the gifts (and to some degree the gifts) seem to bleed together not unlike the colors of a rainbow which do not have clearly defined edges. So really all the gifts need to be exercised with faith, with generosity, with zeal, and with cheerfulness. We should not begrudge what we do for others, for we are doing it for God! Jesus said it plainly, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

3. “*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.*” (1 Cor. 12:1).

In 1 Corinthians, Paul delves deeply into gifts we consider front and center as charismatic gifts including such things as speaking in tongues, healing, and distinguishing between spirits. Decide now to come back next week as we unfold the lessons in 1 Corinthians!