

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 36

September 1-7, 2014

Acts 18:1 – 19:20

1 Corinthians 6:12-15:58

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, reading it like an ordinary book is quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to The Context Bible. This arrangement of Scripture seeks to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John’s gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

Here is the running commentary for week thirty-six, along with the readings for week thirty-seven appended. Join in. It’s never too late to read the Bible in context!

Week Thirty-Six Readings

<p>9/1 Paul to Corinthians – Instructions for Home 1 Cor 6:12-7:24</p> <p>Mrk 10:1-10:12 Ex 22:19 Heb 13:4 Eph 6:1-6:4 Prov 10:1; 27-28 Prov 12:4 Prov 13:1, 24 Prov 15:5, 20 Prov 17:6, 21, 25 Prov 19:13, 18, 26-27 Prov 20:20 Prov 22:6, 15 Prov 27:11, 13 Prov 29:15, 17 Prov 30:17 Prov 18:22</p>	<p>9/2 Paul to Corinthians- Unmarried and Widows 1 Cor 7:25-7:40</p> <p>- Body as a temple 1 Cor 6:12-6:20</p> <p>1 Kgs 8:1-8:30</p> <p>- Food Offered to Idols 1 Cor 8</p> <p>Col 2:20-2:23</p> <p>- Paul and his Rights 1 Cor 9</p> <p>Rom 14:1-14:12 Isa 45:22-45:23 Rom 14:13-14:23</p> <p>9/3 Paul to Corinthians-Living for God 1 Cor 10:1-11:16</p> <p>Num 11 Prov 4:14-4:17 Prov 11:19-11:21</p>	<p>9/4 Paul to Corinthians – The Lord’s Supper 1 Cor 11:17-11:34</p> <p>Luk 22:1-22:23 Prov 24:8-24:10 Gen 14 Prov 22:2</p> <p>- Spiritual Gifts 1 Cor 12</p> <p>Mrk 12:38-12:44 Prov 17:5 Rom 12:3-12:8</p> <p>- Love 1 Cor 13</p> <p>Heb 13:1 Col 3:5-3:25 Prov 23:12-23:14</p>	<p>9/5 Paul to Corinthians- Love 1 Cor 13</p> <p>Eph 4:17-4:32 Prov 25:11-25:13 Prov 22:24-22:25 Pslm 4 Prov 10:12 Prov 15:17-15:18 Prov 17:9, 17</p> <p>- Worship and Maturity 1 Cor 14</p> <p>Heb 5:11-6:12 Prov 19:2</p> <p>9/6 - Christ’ Resurrection 1 Cor 15:1-15:11</p> <p>Luk 24</p> <p>- Resurrection of the Dead 1 Cor 15:12-15:58</p> <p>Mrk 12:18-12:27 Luk 20:27-20:47</p> <p>9/7 Off</p>
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The Acts Narrative

We left Luke's narrative in Acts to consider Paul's letter back to the Corinthian church, a letter we call First Corinthians. Last week's readings led up to 1 Cor 6:11, where the readings for this week continue.

Body as a Temple (1 Corinthians 6:12-6:20; 1 Kings 8:1-8:30)

Instructions for Home (1 Corinthians 6:12-7:24; Mark 10:1-10:12; Exodus 22:19; Hebrews 13:4; Ephesians 6:1-6:4; Proverbs 10:1; 27-28; 12:4; 13:1, 24; 15:5, 20; 17:6, 21, 25; 19:13, 18, 26-27; 20:20; 22:6, 15; 27:11, 13; 29:15, 17; 30:17; 18:22)

Unmarried and Widows (1 Corinthians 7:25-7:40)

In these sections, Paul sets out instructions for the Corinthians to help them live right before God and each other. Paul explains that the body is a temple to God, not something to be disparaged or taken lightly. The Greeks knew temples. There were big important temples up on the hill in Corinth. The Jews also knew temples. The current temple in Jerusalem was the second temple, Solomon's temple having been destroyed by the Babylonians. Nevertheless, Paul, the Jews, and even the Old Testament reading Greeks, would have readily known the care Solomon took to dedicate the temple. It is included in the 1 Kings 8:1-8:30 reading.

The temple dedication was rooted deep in the history of what God had done with the Israelites. It was also centered on the desire of the Israelites to recognize God and live holy before him. All of this is brought out in Paul's analogy of our bodies as temples.

When we became Christians, we left the ways of this world. We are no longer immoral, greedy, drunkards, swindlers, etc. These are not the people in the kingdom. We have been cleaned up, declared righteous, and made holy! That is the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

In an earlier letter, the Corinthians had written to Paul the statement, "all things are lawful." After quoting their letter, Paul replied that their statement did not mean that everything is helpful. It is never a reason to be out of control. We must remember that our bodies serve a purpose in God's kingdom. He will, after all, raise us up bodily. Really our bodies belong to him. Which, by the way, is the reason a Christian should never visit a prostitute. It is taking God's temple and joining it to horrendous sin.

Paul then addressed some sensitive matters of sexuality, and he answered some marriage ideas about which the Corinthians had written him. The Corinthians had said, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." Paul explained that actually the reason people should marry is *because* of sexual temptation. It provides a holy and proper expression for sexuality. In this way a husband can serve his wife and

a wife her husband. So, Paul wrote, if some believed it right to abstain from sexual relations for a time of prayer, it should be limited in time and by agreement. It should end soon so that Satan's temptations do not become too great.

In other letters, Paul wrote more on home life, expounding principles that reach to children as well as parents. In Ephesians 6:1-6:4, for example, Paul explained that children and parents (fathers in particular) are to live carefully with love and Christian virtue toward each other.

So while Paul wrote that it is fine for others to be single like he was, if these are folks who have strong sexual desires, then they should marry rather than be inflamed with passion.

An extended thought that the Corinthians had drummed up concerned those already married. Married people should not try to separate from their spouses under the guise of holiness. Mixed marriages of a Christian with a non-Christian spouse should also be upheld rather than dissolved. This may be a way for the unbeliever to be saved! Some unbelieving partners may leave their Christian mates. If so, the Christian has no choice in the matter and can move on peacefully. But, that should not be the goal of a believer! The goal is to see your spouse saved!

On the issue of circumcision, Paul told the Corinthians to just leave it alone. If they were circumcised, fine. If not, fine. This is a freedom issue. People now belong to Christ, not the nation of Israel.

As to folks engaged for marriage, Paul offered his personal judgment (as opposed to a "Thus saith the Lord"). There were some difficulties in Corinth that make Paul want the people to consider staying in their current status. Those married, stay married. Those single, stay single. That should not be construed as saying it is sinful to marry! That situation was already covered! There will be times the sin might come about from *not* getting married! It is just that things will be more difficult with marriage.¹

Marriage is a lifetime commitment. Jesus taught as much in the Mark 10:1-10:12 passage. It is a wonderful thing. There are times of sexual immorality (Paul's usage of the word "*porneo*" in the Greek goes beyond simple adultery, including things like the Exodus 22:19 prohibition against bestiality), when the fabric of marriage is torn by acts *before* a legal divorce. Those are tragic, but Paul also recognized the effect they have on a marriage.

¹ We do not have the benefit of knowing what the local problem was that Paul was concerned over. That hurts our ability to put this issue into a fuller context.

Singlehood is a wonderful thing too, and in some ways, provides even better opportunities for service for God. While married people properly have the commitment to each other, with all the time and energy that takes, single people are more freed up to serve God with time and energy.

Food Offered to Idols (1 Corinthians 8; Colossians 2:20-2:23)

In the Corinthian letter, Paul addressed a number of specific problems the church was experiencing, giving his apostolic instruction and teaching. Among these problems was a debate over eating food sacrificed to idols.² The Corinthians had written Paul on this subject, which had become a point of dispute among the church there. In the Corinthians letter, they had said, “everyone should know...there is no reality behind the idea of idols...there is only one real God, etc.” These were written in a tone that came across as arrogantly running over the conscience of some of the church. There were some who thought that just maybe by eating the food, they were smart in that they were hedging bets in case there is truth to their lifelong worship of other gods.

Paul saw this in plain terms of love. Love of convenient meat versus love of brothers and sisters in the church. Paul would rather be a vegetarian than contribute to the spiritual harm of someone else. Paul’s drive of love is why this passage differs from that Paul later wrote to the churches of Colossae. Paul knew that regulations of “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” have no inherent value, even though they may give an appearance of holiness (Col 2:20-2:23).

Paul and His Rights (1 Corinthians 9; Romans 14:1-14:23; Isaiah 45:22-45:23)

It’s not that Paul was abdicating the freedom in Christ that he had taught, nor was Paul stepping away from his role as an apostle. Paul had seen the resurrected Christ and if *anyone* should recognize his apostolic authority it should be the church at Corinth where Paul’s role was clear. But Paul is a great example on the point of living for others. Paul had every right to be married, every right to have others pay for his mission efforts rather than moonlighting as a tent maker. (God even forbade stopping working oxen from eating to help us realize it is proper to pay those who work for our spiritual good).

Yet, Paul would never assert such rights because Paul wanted, more than anything, to see the salvation of all he could. Paul would live as a Greek if it helped Greeks see

² We do well to think through the process of the day. Many Greeks took animals needing slaughter not to a butcher, but to a temple. There the animals were butchered as a sacrifice to the gods of the temple. Practicing Jews would not do so, of course, because this automatically made any animal non-kosher. Much of the meat was then sold in the marketplace with the meat dedicated to, and ostensibly blessed by, the gods to whom it had been sacrificed.

Jesus. Paul would live as a Jew if it helped Jews see Jesus. Paul used his “freedom” to serve as many as he could.

The Corinthians hosted the Isthmian games;³ they should consider the actions of racers as a good metaphor. Lots of folks will run a race, but only one comes in first. To do so, the athlete will train very hard and very carefully, using the utmost self-control. If they train hard simply for the earthly prize of winning, how much more would Paul endure to see the eternal prize of winning souls. How could Paul sanction preaching the good news only to live in such a way afterwards as to hurt the very cause he lived for?

Paul made much the same point in his letter to the Romans. In chapter 14, Paul noted that some eat most anything while others in faith were vegetarians. Some considered certain days more spiritually special while others viewed all days the same. For Paul, as long as all were taking their convictions out of faith, those with differing views should not be judging each other. The goal is not to cause others to stumble, nor to disrupt God’s work in peoples’ lives. Peace and mutual “upbuilding” trumped “rights” every time for Paul.

In Romans 14:11, Paul takes a passage from Isaiah 45:22-45:23 where God speaks forth the assurance that all will bow before him. Everyone will come before God and we should live in such a way that when we give an account of our actions, it is an account of actions motivated by and infused with God’s love for others.

Living for God (1 Corinthians 10:1-11:16; Numbers 11; Proverbs 4:14-4:17; 11:19-11:21)

³ These were Olympic type games that occurred in Corinth every second year. We do not know for certain the size of Corinth when Paul visited, but scholars estimate the population around 145,000. (John McRay, *Paul His Life and Teaching* (Baker Academic 2003) at 164.) The games drew great “crowds of people” beyond simply the residents. Those games were a big source of income for the whole city, and the games were well known to all residents. (Strabo, *Geography* Book 8, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1927) translation by Horace Leonard Jones at 8.6.20.) They are also a reason Paul would speak to the Corinthians with sports analogies. Consider 1 Corinthians 9:24-27:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

These were analogies the Corinthians readily understood!

As Paul wrote of this, he used another metaphor from the Old Testament. All of the Israelites had gone through the Red Sea. In a similar sense, all in the church went through the waters of baptism. As the Jews sought the Promised Land, they all ate the manna, much like the church partakes of communion. Yet even as they were blessed on the journey, many of these people displeased God.

What actions displeased God? Paul gives a synopsis but we can read more details in Numbers 11. The Israelites sacrificed to animals with attendant sexual immorality, so God put many to the sword. Paul saw that this should serve as an example to his readers. Temptation is out there – for all of us. God is faithful; and he always leaves a way out of temptation. But the way out is to *flee* from the idolatry, not dabble out of “freedom.” Paul applied this to everyone.

Paul returned to the subject of communion. When the believer partakes of the bread, she/he is partaking of the body of Christ. In contrast to this, Paul considered the Corinthians who were going to a pagan temple and there eating food sacrificed to pagan gods. Now that would not join one to the pagan god as communion joins one to Christ. For Paul knew pagans’ gods were not real. Paul explained, however, that eating in such an environment was not without some effect. Paul explained that demons could pose as gods. The Corinthians who go to a temple and eat the meat there are actually sharing the table with demons! Does someone really want to do that?

Paul understood the import of the work of Christ as a spiritual work equivalent to that of God’s physical work in Egypt earlier. Paul writes extensively about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians. As Paul reminded his readers of the Exodus account, the language Paul used was specially crafted to equate the historical Jewish experience with the current experience of the church.

For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ (1 Cor 10:1-10:4).

Paul saw the Jews passing through the Red Sea as a metaphor for the believers’ baptism into Christ. The manna and miraculous water in the wilderness Paul placed into the language of the Lord’s Supper.

Later in the same chapter Paul returns to the Lord’s Supper distinguishing the Christian experience from idolatry. In this context, Paul has been discussing why the Corinthians had no business going to pagan temple feasts. Paul contrasts attending the pagan cult with the Christians’ participation in the Eucharist:

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Cor 10:14-10:22).

As we consider Paul's argument in context we note something significant that he imparts to his understanding of the Lord's Supper. The communion is not simply a fellowship experience for the church; nor is it simply a commemorative service done in the memory of Christ. Rather, it is also a fellowship experience with Christ himself. The sacred experience is a unique sharing with God himself. We see this in Paul's contrast where he argues against eating the fellowship meal of the pagan temples as a participation experience with demons. Instead, we have the Christian experience where we participate with Christ.

This echoes back to the words of Christ in instituting the supper when he told his disciples, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luk 22:16). The meal is a real participation of and in Christ through the church, the fulfillment of God's promised fullness of his kingdom.

This same idea of God's presence in the meal was in the concept of the Passover. Not only was the sacrifice in the Temple, but Moses also instructed the Jews that the meal was God's, "It is the Lord's Passover" (Ex 12:11). We see this outside of Biblical thought not only from Paul's reference but also from other contemporary documents unearthed by archaeologists. We read of a number of gods inviting people to a banquet with the god's presence. An example found in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt is an invitation to such a feast:

The god calls you to a banquet being held in the Thoereion tomorrow from the 9th hour.⁴

⁴ Horsley, G. H. R., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1976* (Eerdmans 2005) at 5ff.

In chapter 11, Paul will again speak about the Eucharist, but there it is much more deliberative. Some of the significance of this chapter 10 passage is that Paul is using the Lord's Supper to make a point about another issue -- eating at idol feasts. In other words, the teaching of the Lord's Supper, while very important, is not the thrust of Paul's point; it is incidental to Paul's point. The British theologian P.T. Forsyth underscored this importance nearly a century ago when he wrote,

The importance of this statement lies in the fact that the reference to the Eucharist is introduced incidentally, and forms part of the discussion of another question. It may therefore be assumed that these words represent not merely the Apostle's own view, but the theory which was universally accepted and regarded as axiomatic to the Christian Church in his day.⁵

Before we leave Paul's passage in chapter 10, we should add another important note that ties his language back to his Hebrew upbringing and experiences. In verse 16, Paul speaks of, "the cup of blessing that we bless."⁶ Fee makes the point forcefully:

The "cup of blessing" was the technical term for the final blessing offered at the end of the meal. This was the cup that our Lord blessed at the Last Supper (cf. 11:25, "after supper") and interpreted as "the new covenant in my blood." Hence the early church took over the language of this blessing to refer to the cup of the Lord's table.⁷

This was no longer a question of "everything is lawful" as the Corinthians had written. This was much more serious. Paul's bottom line was simple and practical: don't eat at temples; eat with a clear conscience what you buy in the market without worrying where it was slaughtered, but when you are told it is meat sacrificed to idols, leave it alone and don't hurt those who are still too sensitive on the subject.

A related subject needing addressing concerned the roles, actions, and place of men and women. God is the head of Christ. Christ is the head of man. Man is the head of woman. When men pray or preach, they never cover their head (physically with a hat, or symbolically through "covering" Christ and praying directly to God without do so through Jesus and in His name!) By the same token, no woman in Corinth in that day would ever be seen with her head uncovered while praying, preaching, or even walking about! This is also true physically and spiritually. A woman physically wore long hair and a head covering and spiritually a woman never approaches God through her "head," her husband. A woman approaches God through Jesus just as a man does.

⁵ Forsyth, P. T., *The Church and the Sacraments* (Longmans, Green & Co. 1917) at 161.

⁶ We applaud the ESV translation of Paul here against that of the NIV. The NIV gives this as "the cup of thanksgiving" robbing it of its Hebrew emphasis.

⁷ Fee, Gordon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans 1987) at 467-468.

This is born out from the way God has made things from the start. Woman proceeded forth from man in the Garden of Eden. Yet every living man came from a woman in birth. So Paul instructed the Corinthians to live accordingly. This is living to God's glory, not man's desires, just like Paul would! It is living in recognition of the excellent wise advice given in the proverbs added for reading.

The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-11:34; Luke 22:1-22:23; Genesis 14; Proverbs 24:8-24:10; 22:2)

As we continue in Paul's writings on the Eucharist, we come to 1 Corinthians, chapter 11. Here Paul writes in more detail, purposely targeting the Lord's Supper and the manner in which it is taken⁸:

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

⁸ Interestingly, Paul's language in the Greek echoes much of that as Luke reported the words of Jesus in Luke 22. This is not surprising to the extent Paul and Luke were travelling companions for a part of their missionary journeys, and one can readily see them having a common set of notes on what was said by the Savior.

But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come (1 Cor 11:17-11:34).

From this passage we can garner a good bit of information about the communion theology of Paul. Here we consider three points for consideration from this passage.

1. Considerations of the cultural context (the “*Sitz im Leben*”).

We need to note two aspects of the culture into which Paul wrote. First, as indicated earlier, cultic practice and Jewish practice both consistently viewed certain meals as a part of worship. Jews would bless God at each meal regardless of location, whereas the general pagan cults considered the gods present at meals at temples and other holy venues. Paul and his readers understood that God was the source of all good things and every meal, but Paul is singling out the Lord’s Supper as a special meal with special considerations. The Corinthians certainly understood that this meal was special and a part of worship. A second cultural aspect arises in the context of how the communal elements of wine and bread were taken in conjunction with a fuller meal. This is not something ordinarily done in churches today, but it was a part of the practice of the early church. Many commentators and scholars call this meal an “agape feast.” (“Agape” was a Greek word for love emphasizing the care for another, as opposed to a selfish love.) Paul’s concerns in this passage are best understood as we realize that a full meal was taking place at the same time and place as the Lord’s Supper.

2. The Lord’s Supper for Paul served several functions.

The Supper pointed the participants in three directions. First, it was a commemorative supper. As Paul quoted Jesus, it was to be done “in remembrance” of Christ. This harkens the finished redemptive work of Christ as the Passover lamb. It is in Jesus that God passes over the house and removes the visitation of death.

The Supper also pointed to the present. It was a time to “discern the body.” Scholars differ over what Paul meant by this phrase. He could be telling them to consider the church, or to consider what Christ has done, or he may be asking the church to consider their own bodies, i.e., themselves. Either way, Paul is pointing the church to consider the current implications of the crucified Savior on life both in a community and in a personal sense.

The Supper also pointed to the future (the “eschatological aspect”). The supper proclaimed the death of the Lord “until he comes.” The supper is not simply a

memorial, nor is it just a time of reflection in the moment. It is also an anticipation of the future. This world and its food are not our finality. We have a home that goes beyond this life. We are part of a resurrected Lord and we eat the meal he set out in anticipation that he will come again and take us to himself!⁹

3. The Lord's Supper was open to abuse.

We do not know exactly what the abuses were at Corinth, but we can be certain there were abuses! We also get a bit of insight into some of the abuses as we consider the social and cultural situation surrounding the Eucharist (mentioned above). The abuses were serious enough that Paul scolded the Corinthians, "I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse!" (1 Cor 11:17).

Paul's concerns were the divisions occurring during the supper. Most scholars think these divisions were conveniently built around the architecture of the homes of that day. The dining rooms (*tricliniums*) would have held a dozen at most. The remaining folks would have gathered in the atriums and other places in the homes. That allowed the higher social classes to dine together in the nicer places while the slaves and lower classes were likely in lesser places getting lesser foods. Paul was not happy over this! Christ did not come to reinforce human lines of divisions. Christ's death erased such lines and placed all believers on equal footing as children of God and the body of Christ.

Paul saw the failures of the people to properly consider and partake in the Supper as the cause of various bodily illnesses. For Paul understood that this was not simply a Christian version of a McDonald's drive-through. This was to be a serious time of dining in the presence of God himself. This was a time where people acknowledged who God was, what God had done, and what God was going to do. If people failed to do that, Paul reasoned, God would get their attention! God would not let this abuse continue lightly!

Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12; Mark 12:38-12:44; Proverbs 17:5; Romans 12:3-12:8)

Multiple classes can be taught on the subject of spiritual gifts using Paul's letter to the Corinthians as well as his letter to the Romans. In the interest of being a little fuller than one might use for a one-week class, I am providing a more extensive discussion,

⁹ Interestingly, the same communion elements were shared by Abram with Melchizedek in Genesis 14, with the high priest blessing Abram and God for the past deeds of God, the present time, and the projection into the future as well.

allowing each teacher (or student for those getting the handout) to decide how much time to spend on this.

In 1 Corinthians chapters 12 -14 we find the “single largest block of Spirit material in the Pauline corpus.”¹⁰ From this section of Scripture have come the building blocks for proponents of the charismatic revival in the 20th century. Yet from these very same biblical passages have come the arguments advanced by those challenging the authenticity of the charismatic movement.

Needless to say, a ten-page plus paper is not going to resolve the issues that have galvanized millions for decades on this important aspect of the life of the individual and church. Nor is it going to help a family make a decision about travelling to a location where there seems to be a “break out” of working of the Holy Spirit, whether in Africa or Toronto. But our hope is to put the issues into some frame of context and provide the building blocks for personal study as those who choose to pursue the subject in greater depth on their own.

We should also add here that nothing in this paper should be taken to impugn God and his work of his Spirit in any way. Such can be found in writings on the subject from both sides. God is God. His ways are not ours and we cannot know his thoughts. He has formed the world and it exists as a speck in his hand. Yet even on this speck he has taken huge personal interest in billions and billions of people, knowing not only their names, but also the thoughts of their minds, the words on their lips and the desires of their hearts. We cannot speak for God; we can only seek to understand his self-revelation through Scripture and life in the church.

1 CORINTHIANS 12

Context

Perhaps more so than any passages of Paul we have studied in some time, it is important to put 1 Corinthians chapter 12's writings on the *charisma* gifts into the context and flow of Paul's overall letter. This is partially so because much of 1 Corinthians is not simply Paul writing on issues, but also is Paul responding to letter(s)

¹⁰ Fee, Gordon, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Saint Paul* (Hendrickson 1994) at 146. Fee is one of the top scholars on Paul in general, but specifically on 1 Corinthians. His Greek knowledge is strong, and he was selected to write the New International Commentary series book on 1 Corinthians. He has also published several other books covering Corinthian material. *God's Empowering Presence* is strongly recommended reading on this subject. The nearly 1,000 pages thoroughly dissect Paul's writings in a clear and scholastic manner.

received from the church. It is further true because Paul's subjects span multiple chapters often with interludes of other thoughts.¹¹

We know Paul is responding to Corinthian correspondence from passages. This is clear from passages like 1 Cor 7:1, "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.'" Paul is quoting from the Corinthian letter in an effort to clarify or respond to their concern or idea. Paul begins his section on spiritual gifts likely referring to matters subject to the Corinthians' prior letter to him:

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

As we consider the passage, we will note places where statements on their face seem very "unPaul." Some scholars resolve these difficulties by suggesting that those are statements where Paul is quoting the Corinthians from their letter. (Much like the statement above in 7:1 "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman" is understood not to be Paul's opinion, but Paul's quoting from the Corinthians' letter to more clearly frame his response.)

In light of the fact that Paul is answering and addressing matters brought up by the Corinthians in a letter we cannot read, we have a challenge in understanding Paul's letter. It is as if we are hearing only one side of a telephone conversation. Some of what we hear would make a bit more sense if we could hear the other end of the conversation! So with Paul, we will need to keep the context in mind, with confidence that it will help shed light on the occasions that have prompted his letter and instructions.

As noted earlier, context is also important because of apparent interludes. The spiritual gift material spans chapters 12 -14, but stuck in the middle is the famous chapter 13 that speaks of love. How (and if) that fits into Paul's train of thought is the subject of much scholarly debate. Once we make it through chapter 13 Paul zooms in on the issue of the Corinthian abuse of speaking in tongues. Chapter 13 seems to relate to the subject ("If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a

¹¹ Paul writing in this way has led some scholars to believe that 1 Corinthians is actually a composite of several of Paul's letters that some early church editor combined into one.

¹² Paul has a Greek phrase he uses, *peri de* (περι δε) that the English Standard Version translates "Now concerning." Scholars point to this phrase as the one which Paul uses when citing or referring to the letter from the Corinthians. See, for example, 7:25, "Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." 8:1. "Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up."

clanging cymbal.”) but it goes on a diversionary path to expound the wonders and beauties of God’s love.

When Paul reaches the full point and the climax of his discussion in this section, it is about how the Corinthians are abusing tongues, establishing guidelines for their proper use and prohibitions to guard against further improprieties in worship. This is the clear point of chapter 14.

So we can fairly understand chapter 12 as the set up for Paul’s discussion of the abuse of tongues in chapter 14, and must place it into that context. In other words, Paul is writing chapter 12 (and 13) to lay the foundation for his conclusions and instructions in chapter 14 on the proper use of speaking in tongues. We need to read the gift section in chapter 12, understanding why it makes sense with Paul’s ultimate point on the role of tongues.

Noting then the importance of context, let us place these chapters. Paul started writing about matters of worship in chapter 8. Against the framework of idolatrous worship, Paul explained that the Corinthians should not participate in pagan feasts, eating the foods offered to idols. Paul then wrote of the Corinthians’ own worship, specifically the head coverings of women, praying and prophesying, and the Lord’s Supper. Paul is still in matters of worship as he begins this discussion of spiritual gifts.

Chapter 12:1-12:3

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

Almost immediately after bringing up the subject of spiritual gifts we find Paul writing something that scholars struggle to understand. It makes sense that Paul would speak of the mute idols, especially as he prepares to write of speaking in tongues as a gift from a God who speaks. But why does Paul insert into this discussion this seemingly bizarre addition about some saying “Jesus is accursed” and others, “Jesus is Lord”?

The early church commentators saw Paul as laying out a yardstick, a measure of comparing. Recognizing that Paul is about to discuss the proper role of gifts in the church, and then specifically the proper role of tongues, several early church commentators suggest Paul is laying out rules for discerning and measuring proper gifts of the Spirit.

If two yardsticks are compared with each other, their straightness is in agreement. But if a distorted piece of wood is compared with a ruler, the crooked one will be at variance with the straight.¹³

Similarly Origen wrote:

There are so many different kinds of spirit that without the gift of discernment, who can know which is which?¹⁴

More recent commentators have urged the difficulty in imagining that anyone in Corinth would suggest “Jesus is accursed” and that if they did, Paul’s condemnation would have been harsh, and not simply in passing as it is here. Thiselton lists twelve different explanations for this passage!¹⁵

Fee points out that, without knowing the full reasons for Paul’s comment, we can determine that simply inspired utterance is not proof that God’s Spirit inspired the utterance. There could be examples of inspired utterances that are clearly against what God’s Spirit might say.¹⁶

Regardless of what we do with the statement, “Jesus is accursed,” Paul’s thrust must surely be that, “The ultimate criterion of the Spirit’s activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord.”¹⁷

This brings us to the next section.

Chapter 12:4-12:6

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

Paul writes these three verses in a special form in the Greek. They are worth noting for the impact it gives, especially within the later theological development of the Trinity.

¹³ Quoting Basil (c.330 – 379) in the Ancient Christian Commentary series, Bray, Gerald, ed. *1-2 Corinthians* (IVP 1999) at 188. For more on Basil, see Church History Lesson 23 at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

¹⁴ Bray quoting Origen (c.185 – c.254), *ibid.* For more on Origen see Church History Lesson 15 at cite in note 5.

¹⁵ Thiselton, Anthony, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Eerdmans 2000) at 918ff.

¹⁶ Fee at 157.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Paul uses the same structure three consecutive times to place these three statements parallel. In Greek word order Paul says:

Varieties of gifts¹⁸ there are – but same Spirit

Varieties of ministries¹⁹ there are – but same Lord

Varieties of activities there are – but the same is God

Paul speaks of gifts, ministries and activities as sourced from God as Spirit, Son and Father.²⁰

Paul's direct point is that there are *varieties*, even while the source (and ultimately we will see the goal) is unity. The Corinthians were to understand that God has not put out a litmus gift that all in the church are to have and maintain. God gave them diverse gifts that work together and complement each other.

Paul does so in a way that sets out God as the same. Certainly there is one God. Paul knew that and repeated it multiple times each day since childhood. All good Jews for over 1,000 years had repeatedly said the *shema*. In fact, even today Jews are charged to repeat it in morning and evening prayers. The *shema* was the Deuteronomy 6:4ff passage beginning:

Hear²¹, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

So with that full knowledge of God's unity deep in the history of his DNA as well as his own practice, Paul writes of the One God as three – Spirit, Lord and God. There is diversity in the source of the charisma gifts, even as there is unity. Likewise then in the gifts, there is diversity in gifts that are united in purpose.

With that we move to the actual *charisma* gifts Paul sets out here.

Chapter 12:7-12:11

¹⁸ Paul uses *charismata* here.

¹⁹ Paul uses *diakonia* here, also translated “service.” It is one of the *charisma* gifts in Paul's list in Romans 12 discussed in the last lesson.

²⁰ We should add that the words Paul uses as “Lord” and “God” are the ones he consistently uses in reference to Jesus the Son and God the Father. See Rom 1:7 (“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”); Rom 15:6 (“that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”); 1 Cor. 1:3 “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”; 2 Cor 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”) etc.

²¹ In Hebrew this is the word *shema*, hence the name for the section of Scripture.

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, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Before we consider the gifts individually mentioned, we should consider two things: (1) Is there any significance in the way Paul ordered the gifts? Are they most important to least important, or the other way around? Are they random as they popped into his head? Are they sorted by some categories? Is there some combination of these options? (2) Are these exclusive lists or merely illustrative lists? In other words, do we consider that Paul has listed precisely the limited gifts there are, or is Paul listing exemplars with the idea that God has many gifts, of which these are noteworthy examples?

In response to the first question, we would reference the catalogue of ideas set out by Fee.²² There may be some ordering, but it may be no more than the order that occurred to Paul as he dictated his letter. In other words, he thought of gifts that pertain to speaking (“utterance of knowledge” and “utterance of wisdom”) and then others as they came into consideration. It does seem that Paul saved tongues for last because that is the point he is leading up to. As noted earlier, discussing their use and abuse is an ultimate goal of this section.

In response to the second question, it seems rather clear that these gifts are illustrative and not an exclusive listing. Paul will again offer listings of gifts in 12:28-12:30; 13:1-13:3, 8; 14:6, 26, as well as in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4:11. The lists vary one from another, and all seem to be representations of ways where God is setting out gifts for the believers to use in their ministry and church life. Ultimately here we agree with James that

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (James 1:17).

This does raise the question of whether a gift is different from a talent. That will be discussed more fully after we go through the gifts Paul lists here.

Each of these gifts are used for Paul as *charismata* gifts. As we have continued to emphasize, Paul’s meaning of his word *charisma(ta)* is not rooted in the idea of a

²² Fee at 165.

miraculous gift. It is rather a gift that is a concrete expression, an objective tangible gift. Accordingly we can look at all the gifts Paul lists here and see them as concretely visible. These are gifts that one could readily observe in their use.

The utterance of wisdom

Paul's first listed *charisma* gift is the "utterance of wisdom," literally – *logos sophias* or "a word of wisdom." It is fascinating that Paul sets this out first as it contrasts with an earlier statement Paul made in this letter. In chapters 1 and 2 Paul dismissed the apparently misplaced spiritualism of the Corinthians as they attempted to thrive with "wisdom" which Paul rejected as something God would destroy. Instead, Paul noted the "folly" of the cross. In chapter 1 verse 17, Paul specified that he did not come in "words of wisdom" (*sophias logos*). Yet here he lists the same phrase.

The key here is Paul's further elucidation earlier in the letter. Paul explained that the wisdom of the world was nothing before God. God's wisdom was indeed the cross, which the world deemed foolish. So Paul recaptures a phrase, "words of wisdom", that the Corinthians knew and even abused, and brought it into its correct usage. There is a speaking of wisdom that proceeds forth as a gift of God. But it is not the lofty words that the world might perceive as wisdom. It is a firm confirmation of the cross as the center of message and conviction. It is this wisdom that Paul preached. It is this word that is of the Spirit that confesses continually the Lordship of Jesus. As words lift up Christ crucified, those words are concrete manifestations of God's giving.

The utterance of knowledge

Paul's second gift mentioned is the "utterance of knowledge," literally – *logos gnosis* or "a word of knowledge." Paul has used the same phrase as before, inserting "knowledge" in place of "wisdom."

Paul does well keeping this in line with the gift of wisdom because "knowledge" was another key word the Corinthians were abusing. In chapter 8, Paul had repeatedly challenged the Corinthians' claims to "knowledge." In almost sarcastic fashion, Paul quoted the Corinthians as he set out to correct their arrogance:

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. (1 Cor 8:1-8:2).

"Knowledge" is also a gift that Paul will list later in this letter in 13:2, 8-12 and in 14:6. Scholars debate whether there is a real difference between a word of wisdom and a word of knowledge. Some see wisdom as more theoretical while knowledge is more practical. Others see it as simply parallel ways to say that God has given some words to

express insights. More of this discussion is found in Thiselton's commentary on the Greek referenced in footnote seven.

Regardless of whether there are fine distinctions between the two, we clearly have Paul rescuing yet another term from its abuse in the Corinthian community. For Paul, a word of real knowledge is going to be a word that is centered in Christ and builds up the community. That is what marks out a word as a *charisma* gift, from some other trivial or even destructive word of "knowledge."

In the exercise of both the gift of uttering wisdom and uttering knowledge, there has been a discussion for centuries over whether Paul is writing about a special utterance given by God over which the person has little or no control, or whether the utterance/words are ones given where the person exercises control in expression. We suggest that Paul does not provide this insight in his letter. It seems that for Paul the key to the gift is the content, not the form or timing. That is surely part of the implication of how Paul set out his discussion giving a measuring stick for determining God's speaking. In contrast to unspeaking dumb idols, God does speak, but through his Spirit and gifts. And the subject that lets one know it is the voice of God is the core message of Jesus as Lord.

Faith

We should begin this discussion by noting that most every scholar is in agreement that Paul is not here talking about *saving faith*. That is not, scholars assert, a diverse charismata gift given only to certain ones in the church! That is something all Christians share by definition. Paul is here writing of "a special endowment of faith for a special service."²³ Some link this up to the next set of gifts, arguing that it takes one with a special measure of faith to do healings, etc. Others look to passages like Hebrews 11, which list heroes of the faith as examples of those, whose exemplary faith in the face of tough situations is a gift. Fee states,

It probably refers to a supernatural conviction that God will reveal his power or mercy in a special way in a specific instance.²⁴

We note this to be a *charisma* gift because it refers to that person who has the God-given manifestation to point in faith to the Lord in situations where many believers might lose sight of God's hand. This might be seen in a jaw-dropping miracle, but also simply in the confidence to walk on turbulent waters in the darkness of night, seeing Jesus holding out his hand and knowing that all will be okay.

Gifts of healing

²³ Bruce, F.F., *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Oliphants 1971).

²⁴ Fee at 168.

On my prayer list are a number of people who have life threatening diseases -- cancers, Alzheimer's and more. As I pray for these, the biblical passages flood my mind. Jesus healed with words and touch. Jesus gave his apostles authority over disease, sometimes it worked, other times they struggled without success. Paul healed, although he admittedly had trouble with his own thorn in the flesh. Peter healed. Paul wrote of a gift of healing. I know that all believers have access to God through Jesus, and that God wishes all his children to pray for all their needs.

So I pray for those I can. But is there a special gift beyond common prayer of believers? Are there those that have a special dispensation of faith enabling healing beyond what a common Christian might seek in prayer? Is Paul writing of a gift that exceeds that which an ordinary believer might have? Are there those that can send the Holy Spirit and his healing into someone's body through a touch, a breath, or a shout?

Paul does speak of a gift of healing as a *charisma* gift. The fact that it is *charisma* means that it is a concrete expression of God's giving. Yet this gift was spoken of in an age where doctors were not the practitioners of science we have today. While there were rudimentary treatments, medical science itself was not really very accurate. Were God to heal someone in Paul's day, it most certainly would have involved something directly intervening in what we consider a supernatural way.

Today God is certainly not limited in his power. He can certainly intervene supernaturally any time in any way he chooses. He is, after all, God! Today we also have science that has come a long way. Science itself, a Christian understands, is a gift from God. This world, its resources, its laws and principles, are all gifts and emanations from God himself. I would suggest that a doctor's administered treatment is no less a cure from God than divine intervention.

Now that is not to say that God does not treat and cure from prayer without doctors. But it is naïve and not fair to fail to give God credit for the cures brought about by medicine and modern science. For those are God's cures too! That Paul does not bring this into perspective does not mean it is not so. It simply means that Paul did not live in an age where God was working through medicine as he does now.

So where is this gift today? Wherever God places it. But I would suggest that we see a *charisma* gift, a concrete expression of God's giving in the healings of medicine as well. I would suggest that among those with a *charisma* gift of healing are those doctors who treat, through medicine and prayer, giving glory to God for the tools, the medicines, and the victories. As Jesus is lifted as Lord, the expression and the healing is a *charisma* healing of God.

Miracles

There are times where there seems to be no explanation for an event in the eyes of the world. There are also things that happen that the world might deem a coincidence, but

the event or occurrence is almost bizarrely just the right thing at the right time. Is that what Paul is referring to in this part of his list?

The phrase Paul uses for “miracle” is *energemata dunameon*, meaning “workings of power, strength, ability, or energy.” Some scholars see here the ability to exorcise demons. Some see this as an inclusive gift of healing and other supernatural matters. Fee notes,

The present context suggests that it covers a broad range of supernatural events that ordinary parlance would call miraculous.²⁵

Regardless of how we understand this gift, we must see that many people work to the glory of God out of a power that is not their own. There are those who have an ability to tap into God’s power to bring forth manifestations of him that glorify Christ. As such, we would be remiss to relegate this as simply a human product. Certainly any manifestation of God’s power in the life of an individual that brings about works magnifying Christ as Lord is manifesting a concrete expression of God’s giving. It is a *charisma* gift!

Prophecy

In the New Testament, we read of prophecy as including predictions of the future,²⁶ 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.”²⁷

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.²⁸

²⁵ Fee at 169.

²⁶ 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 21:10-21:11 “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.’”

²⁷ Moo, Douglas, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans 1996) at 765.

²⁸ Quoted by Bray, Gerald, *Romans* (IVP 1998) at 311. See also the other early church citations of similar understandings at 311-312.

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].²⁹

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.

The ability to distinguish between spirits

This is an area where scholars disagree over what exactly Paul was referring to. In 1 John 4:1, for example, we read, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Is Paul writing about testing spirits in that sense? Or is Paul referencing the “weigh what is said” idea he sets out later in 1 Corinthians 14:29?

Whether Paul means either (or likely both) we still reach the same point. One’s insight into what is from God, is itself a manifestation of God’s gift. It is only through the working of God in our hearts and minds that one can discern what is from him and what is not. God has given to some more than others this *charisma* gift of discernment. It is manifested in those that correctly perceive and recognize the message of God, whether in a prophecy (1 Cor 14:29; see also 1 Th 5:20-5:21) or in a situation.

Tongues and interpretations of tongues

Here Paul finally reaches the controversial gift that is his point for correction in chapter 14. A full understanding of Paul’s position on this requires further study in detail of chapters 13 and especially 14. At this point we can simply note the implications of the passage here. God has given to some the manifestation of his giving in a concrete way as these people are able to speak in a language or interpret a language that is not natively their own. Sometimes this seems to be an unknown language, as Paul details in chapter 14; sometimes it is a known language as we read about in Acts 2. Either way, it is a manifestation of God’s *charisma* gift.

What would Paul have us do with it? That is the question he handles in 14, but the roots of his answers have already been provided here in chapter 12. Paul is concerned about the body of Christ, the church. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians, just as he did in

²⁹ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Book 6-10*; translated by Thomas Scheck (The Catholic University of America Press 2002) at 209.

Romans, that God is giving these gifts because God wants Jesus glorified. It is not a question of who is more important, who has the better gift, whose toy is shinier, newer or brighter. It is a question of how God has divided up the body into various parts among the members of the church to see that the church brings all together into God and his purpose.

We should remember, man is not the center of this dialogue. The concern is not about what we want, what we do, or about us at all. The heart of the matter is the Lord Jesus. God gives concrete manifestations of his giving to build up the church and to bring the unbelievers into the church. The focus is on his kingdom, his will. That is our focus even as he taught us to pray, “thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth.”

Now we consider Paul’s list from Romans.

ROMANS 12

In Romans 12, Paul is writing in ways to confirm and encourage the unity of the Roman church.³⁰ Paul confirms the unity in diversity of the church using gifts God gave to the church as his teaching tools. 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” (many gifts, one body).

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.”³¹ 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 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*.³² In the book, Oakes first surveys the life of common people in Pompeii³³ at the time of Paul, with evidence documented by the findings in the Pompeian excavations. Then, Oakes considers how

³⁰ 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.

³¹ Jewett, Robert, *Romans: A Commentary* (Fortress Press 2007) at 745-6.

³² Oakes, Peter, *Reading Romans in Pompeii* (Fortress Press 2009).

³³ Pompeii was a city about 130 miles south of Rome, destroyed by the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius in 79 AD.

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.”³⁴ 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 earlier, 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.”³⁵

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.”

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 it is 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.³⁶ Paul also uses it

³⁴ Oakes at 105.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ 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

when describing others' ministry to the church.³⁷ 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 15:30-15:31).³⁸

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.³⁹

The root of the *diako-* words in the Greek held a meaning of waiting on someone at the table, or serving someone.⁴⁰ It was thus used of household servants, waiters, messengers, retail sales people, and priests.

John Collins recently published a groundbreaking study on the biblical usage of the word.⁴¹ 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.

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."

³⁷ 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."

³⁸ See also, 2 Cor 8:3-8:4 "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."

³⁹ 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 Phm 13.

⁴⁰ 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."

⁴¹ Collins, John, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford 2009).

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 (Mrk- 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.”⁴² 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.”⁴³

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 12:28-12:29 and Eph 4:11). Moo makes the point that “teaching” is distinguishable from “prophecy” in that,

“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.⁴⁴

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.”⁴⁵

⁴² Origen at 210 (Book 9, Ch. 3, v. 11).

⁴³ Moo at 767.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Bray at 312.

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,⁴⁶ as well as expounding on the glories and mysteries of Christ.⁴⁷ Paul certainly used the word also when speaking on what we would term “theological instruction.” In Galatians 1:11-1:12, 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 Th 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 2:17-2:24).

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.”

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.”⁴⁸

Origen defined it thusly:

⁴⁶ 1 Cor 4:16-4:17 “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.”

⁴⁷ Col 1:28 “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”

⁴⁸ Moo at 767.

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.⁴⁹

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 early Christianity.”⁵⁰ 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 Th 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.

⁴⁹ Origen at 210 (Book 9, Ch. 3, v. 12).

⁵⁰ Jewett at 751.

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.⁵¹

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.”⁵² 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 Th 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 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 (Matt 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

⁵¹ Bray at 313.

⁵² Moo at 768.

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!

Love (1 Corinthians 13; Hebrews 13:1; Colossians 3:5-3:25; Ephesians 4:17-4:32; Psalm 4; Proverbs 10:12; 15:17-15:18; 17:9, 17; 22:24-22:25; 23:12-23:14; 25:11-25:13)

After all we have considered on spiritual gifts, is it possible for someone to get the *superstar deluxe greatest* gift of all, to really shine as brightly as possible? Yes! Might any want to know the way to that gift? It is the way of love!

Without love, talk is noise (regardless of the language used!). Without love, preaching, knowledge, even faith is useless. The greatest human deeds, if done without love, are wasted.

Paul speaks here of a godly love, one that is patient and kind. One that doesn't boast, or is self-centered, is not arrogant or rude. This love is truly caring and is pleased with God's truth. A love that hangs in there, even when it is hard to do so, knowing the God of love will work things out.

This love is not temporary; it is eternal. All the other gifts are temporary, but God's love is eternal. Now, we may not see it fully, but there will come a day when we can clearly see God's love pervades everything. To think otherwise is simply a sign of immaturity. Paul would say, Do you want the greatest gift? Get love!

Worship and Maturity (1 Corinthians 14; Hebrews 5:11-6:12; Proverbs 19:2)

In conclusion on spiritual gifts, the showy gifts are fine, as long as getting love is the real pursuit! Some seem caught up in, for example, speaking in some incomprehensible language (at least to most!). These folks risk missing the point. Spiritual gifts are for the church.

A gift of speaking in an unknown language is not useful to the church when compared to, for example, a special word from God. If there is someone who understands the unknown language and can translate, then maybe there can be a mutual benefit, but absent that, no! One might say that the unknown language is personally edifying to one's soul, but the same one should be seeking to consciously know what is being said! This is not only true with praying, but also with singing or anything else. Engage not just your spirit but also your mind!

There is a place for speaking in tongues, but not in front of others! Better to say five words folks can understand than ten thousand they cannot! Think of it from an outsider's view. If a visitor comes to church and hears the people speaking in unknown languages, is not likely the visitor will think the Church nuts? But if that visitor comes in and hears the gospel – he might fall down in worship perceiving the sins of the heart and the need for God!

Worship needs to be orderly. People should use their gifts for the common good. Don't have too many speaking, certainly not at once! If there is going to be any tongues, then there better be someone who knows what the words mean so they can translate for the congregation! Part of orderly worship needs to discourage the vocal Corinthian women who are disrupting things with questions they should be asking at home. The way they are speaking out and disrupting the assembly is shameful.

This allows one to grow past the immaturities cited by the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 5:11-6:12. We see in Christ the greatest act of love, and we mature as we learn to work and love serving the saints he died for.

Christ's Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-15:11; Luke 24); Resurrection of the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:12-15:58; Mark 12:18-12:27; Luke 20:27-20:47)

Before Paul closed, Paul reminded the Corinthians of the core of our faith. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and resurrected. This is the good news in which we stand and by which we are saved. It is not rumor. It is not speculation. It is fact. Paul saw the resurrected Jesus, as did more than 500 others, most of whom were still living and subject to cross-examination!

Because Christ was raised from the dead, all believers can have the confidence that we who are in him shall also be raised after our deaths. This is core to who we are and what we believe. If there is no resurrection, if Paul were not utterly convinced he had interacted with the real risen Jesus, then his life and that of any believer is an entire waste of time.

But time is not wasted because Jesus is real. He will come again and destroy even death. Jesus promised this in Luke 24. He will raise those who have died in him (Luke 20 and Mark 12), and put all enemies under his feet. There will be a change, a transformation. In a moment, a twinkling of an eye, the dead shall be clothed with immortal bodies. We shall bear the image of heaven!

Death has lost its ultimate power over believers! Amen!

Questions for Discussion

Consider building questions around these passages:

1. What issues do you see in the churches that are matters of opinion rather than matters of faith? How can we show the love of Christ in the way we treat others on these issues?
2. What do you think about when you take communion?
3. What talents and gifts do you have from God? How do you use them for his kingdom?

Week Thirty-Seven Readings

<p>9/8 Paul to Corinthians – Paul’s Plans 1 Cor 16 Prisca – Prov 31:10-31:31</p> <p>9/9 A Riot at Ephesus Acts 19:21-19:41</p> <p>Trusted Companions Phil 2:19-2:30 Eph 6:21-6:24 Rom 16:1-16:23</p> <p>Paul in Macedonia and Greece Acts 20:1-20:16 Pslm 126</p>	<p>9/10 Paul Writes Again to Corinthians – God of All Comfort 2 Cor 1-2:4 Pslm 31 Pslm 34</p> <p>9/11 Paul to Corinthians Again – God of All Comfort 2 Cor 1-2:4 Pslm 41 Pslm 46 Pslm 61 Pslm 10 Luk 19:28-19:44 Prov 13:2-13:3 Prov 18:14</p>	<p>9/12 Paul to Corinthians Again – Forgive the Sinner 2 Cor 2:5-2:11 Luk 15:11-15:32 Luk 19:1-19:10 Ezek 33</p> <p>-Divisions In the Church 2 Cor 2:12-3:23</p>	<p>9/13 Paul to Corinthians – The New Covenant 2 Cor 4 Ex 34 Neh 10 Luk 14:25-14:33 Job 24-25</p> <p style="text-align: center;">9/14 Off</p>
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