

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (19)
Following Jesus Christ Rightly: #13a. Spiritual Gifts” (part 1)**

Introduction:

We have been addressing the teachings of God’s Word that are critically important for us to understand and observe, if we are to follow the Lord Jesus rightly, that is, if we are to live the Christian life in a manner that pleases our Lord and that will bring His blessing upon us. Among these important biblical teachings, it is important that we understand the subject of spiritual gifts and how we are to employ them in our ministry to one another within the local church. God has given to everyone that comes to Christ for salvation the ability to serve Him and His people. We refer to these divinely imparted abilities as spiritual gifts. Through the use of our spiritual gifts in serving the Lord and His people, we will be better able to follow Jesus Christ rightly.

This study will take up two Sundays, today and next week. The reason for this is that there are several detailed passages that set forth the nature and use of spiritual gifts. But in addition, it is important for us to consider what God says about the cessation of the revelatory gifts, those gifts through which God communicated His word and will to His churches in the apostolic age. We will address this important matter next Lord’s Day, Lord willing.

Let us begin our study by reading:

I. Peter’s instruction regarding spiritual gifts in 1 Peter 4:7-11

Peter wrote,

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. ⁸And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” ⁹Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The Apostle Peter was probably writing in his first epistle to new Christians. He was instructing them on how to live rightly before God as Christians. Peter pressed upon his readers the urgency of the hour, saying, “The end of all things is at hand” (4:7). Some argue that this is a reference to the impending destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which took place in A.D. 70, which was a few years after this epistle was written. This was the view of the well-known commentator of 1 Peter, **John Brown**:

After some deliberation, I have been led to adopt the opinion of those who hold, that “the end of all things” here is the entire and final end of the Jewish economy in the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the holy people. That was at hand; for this epistle seems to have been written in a very short while before these events took place, not improbably after the commencement of “the wars and rumours of wars” of which our Lord spake. This view will not appear strange to any one who has carefully weighed the terms in which our Lord had predicted these events, and the close connection which the fulfillment of these predictions had with the interests and duties of Christians, whether in Judea or in Gentile countries.¹

¹ This is not John Brown of Haddington, I believe. John Brown, *Expository Discourses on the First Epistle of the Apostle Peter*, vol. 2 (The National Foundation for Christian Education), p. 84f.

More than likely, however, Peter was speaking of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Peter wrote of the certainty of Christ's return, suggesting that it might be sooner than later, but obviously, it was not sooner than later, since it is been nearly 2,000 years since Peter penned these words. The Lord had revealed to His people the *certainty* of His coming, though He did not reveal the *timing* of His return. He did reveal that the destruction of the Jerusalem and its temple would occur within a generation of His ministry among them.² But our Lord made it quite clear that whereas they would know when He was about to destroy Jerusalem³, no one would know the hour of His *parousia* (the Greek word for "appearance"), that is, His second coming at the end of the age.⁴ And so, no one knew when the second coming of Jesus Christ would take place, but the manner in which the Lord revealed to them the certainty of his coming was intended to lead all Christians to live in all times in expectancy of His return. He was successful in this.

Now in verses 7 through 11 Peter became specific about how we are to live. But let us remember that these things are to be done within the context of the certainty of Christ's coming and the events that will then transpire. Before us are simply worded statements. In the light of Christ's coming to judge the world, the following should be practiced:

A. We are to be prayerful (4:7). Again, Peter wrote, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers." We are to be prayerful, but in order for this to occur we must be clear-minded and self-controlled (disciplined). The Lord would have us be *serious and watchful*. We are to live with eternity in view. Our awareness of our Lord's return and the judgment of the world should influence how we view ourselves and the manner that we live, as well as how we view others and how we relate to others. We are to be serious about these matters. We are to be "watchful", in other words, we are to be watching ourselves, praying always and fervently and faithfully with view to our accountability and the reckoning that we will render unto Him.

B. We are to be loving (4:8). "And above all things have fervent love for one another." Every true Christian loves other Christians. Paul could write to the brethren at Thessalonica, "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9). Nevertheless he could also write, "But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more" (4:10). In an earlier place in the same epistle he wrote, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you" (1 Thess. 3:12). And to the Philippians he wrote, "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, (Phil. 1:9).

Peter wrote that in all of our preparation for the second coming of Christ, "above all things", we are to be very mindful of how we relate to one another. Again, he asserted, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'"

Peter's reason for having "have fervent love for one another" is because "love will cover a multitude of sins." Not only will our love for others enable us "to cover" or pass over many of their sins, for we all sin, but the manifestation of that love will demonstrate that we are true Christians, when we are examined on the Day of Judgment. Our love for the brethren will vindicate our claim to have faith in Him, and that faith substantiated by our love for others will result in the covering or passing over our sins on that day. We will be delivered from damnation through faith alone in Christ alone, as validated by our love for the brethren.

This is asserted also in Matthew 25 when our Lord taught His disciples about the final judgment, He spoke of the great separation that will take place between the saved and the unsaved of the human race. The determiner that He set forth in that passage is how people treated what he called "the least of these my

² Cf. Matt. 23:33-36; 24:34; Luke 21:32.

³ Cf. Luke 21:20.

⁴ Matt. 24:36.

brethren” (Cf. Matt. 25:40, 45).⁵ The second tablet of the law, our duty before God to one another will be one of the major determiners of the outcome of the final Day of Judgment.

And so, the reason Peter gives for loving others is that “*love covers a multitude of sins.*” This is a quotation of **Proverbs 10:12**. In the light of the coming of Christ and the judgment that will then occur, there is a need for peace and unity among the brethren. “Love covers a multitude of sins” in that strife is less evident where love exists. This occurs for several reasons:

1. When love is present, there is less suspicion of others. Love gives the benefit of the doubt. When love is absent, people will be suspicious and believe the worst of others.

2. When love is present, the motives of others will be assumed to be pure. When love is absent, others will be judged as having wrong motives.

3. When love is present, less offense is taken when others may slight you. When love is absent, offense is easily assumed. “A proud man is quick to imagine insults” (Spurgeon).

4. When love is present, even true offenses are set aside and forgiven. When love is absent, there is no forgiveness, but rather there continues to exist an amazingly detailed memory of offenses.

C. We are to be hospitable (4:9). We should be so without complaining. In today’s world with its endless demands on us, perhaps this word is particularly helpful. We may find ourselves simply tired. We may pull back from extending ourselves to others or inviting them to come into our homes. Or, if we do entertain, we do so with some hesitation, even grumbling. This should not be so. But apparently this was a problem with some in the 1st century otherwise Peter would not have felt the need to give this admonition.

D. We are to be faithful in service (4:10-11). “*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*”

Here Peter expressed the responsibility that every Christian has toward others in the church fellowship. Peter wrote of every Christian: “As each one has received a gift.” “Has received” is a passive voice verb in the English translation.⁶ It intimates that God had imparted a spiritual gift to every one of His people. Each one had “received” it from God.⁷ Now some have argued from this verse that every Christian

⁵ Our dispensational friends err terribly in their interpretation of this verse when they claim the standard will be how we treat Jesus’ Jewish brethren. They claim that this is a judgment of Gentile “nations” determining which ones will be allowed to continue to exist in a future 1,000 year millennium. These Gentiles who refused to treat the Jews with regard and with justice, will not be allowed to continue to exist. No, Jesus’ brethren are those who believe on His Father, who have become His disciples. Cf. Matthew 12:47-50. This is the general judgment of all mankind at the end of the age at which time the saved and unsaved will be separated from one another for all eternity.

⁶ Actually in Greek it is an active verb, but it conveys a passive idea, which is reflected in the translators rendering in English.

⁷ Some of you may have recently heard me argue that the word, “receive”, can be understood as active or passive. In other words, one may *receive* something in the sense of *accepting* it. This would be the idea of something you did. God offered it and you accepted (received) it. This would be an active receiving. Or, one may *receive* something that has been imposed or imparted to someone irrespective of that one *accepting* it. This idea is conveyed in 1 Peter 4:10. God had imparted the gift so that they were passive in its reception. They received it from God, but it cannot be said that they had actively *accepted* it. Now the Greek word translated “received” in 1 Peter 4:10 is the same Greek word used in John 1:12, “But as many as *received* Him (Christ), to them gave He power to become the sons of God.” But commonly, and I would argue wrongly, it is interpreted as saying that as many as “accepted” Jesus as Lord and Savior to them gave He power to be the Sons of God. But it should rather be understood in a passive sense. In the same way that every Christian had received a spiritual gift from the Lord, so every sinner saved by God’s grace had received passively the Son of God, which was solely due to the sovereign grace of God. This is clear from the context of John 1:12 and 13: “But as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” You are

is given *only one* spiritual gift from God. But I would not restrict God's work in this way. I think it is better to understand Peter as saying that God has given every Christian *at least one* spiritual gift which may be employed in service to fellow church members. But some Christians may have received from the Lord more than one spiritual gift.⁸

We read in verse 10 that every Christian is to employ his spiritual gift in that he is to "minister it to one another." What is suggested here is that God did not impart a spiritual gift to you so that you yourself would be built up or edified by that gift, but that by ministering that gift to others they might be built up or edified by you. This is a major principle that governs the purpose and use of spiritual gifts.

If you are a Christian, God gave you a spiritual gift to enable you to serve others for their spiritual benefit, in other words, for the building up of the local church.

The Apostle Paul stated this overtly in 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV): "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." God did not give you a spiritual gift for your edification, but for the edification of others in the church body through you.

Peter exhorted Christians to be faithful in the stewardship of their gift. Again, verse 10 reads, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, *as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" God has graciously bestowed at least one spiritual gift to every Christian. But that blessed gift came with a responsibility. Each of us is a steward of what God has entrusted to us. Each of us is responsible before the Lord to make use of that gift in serving His people. As we read elsewhere, "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). One day the Lord will call each of us before Him and we will give an account of how faithful we were in the stewardship of the gift(s) He had given us to serve His people. You are to focus or concentrate on your gift. This is not to the exclusion of other matters. But your most fruitful ministry will be in the area you were equipped uniquely and specially to do.

It is implied that you should know what your gift is. But even if you do not know your spiritual gift, be busy serving the Lord's people in the manner that burdens you and in the capacity that you are capable, and in time your gift will become apparent to you. "If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies." Regardless of what kind of gift you have, you are to be busy in service to others in such a manner that God is glorified. "That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." As Christians we desire that God be given the credit for all that transpires in our lives.

Again, this is troublesome for some. "*I don't have a gift*", some say. No, if you are a Christian you have been given at least one gift. Sometimes a Christian may not readily recognize the gift that God has given him or her. Be patient and do not be alarmed if you do not recognize what your gift is. Perhaps it has yet to be developed and you will grow into it. It is there and perhaps others recognize it, but you do not as yet. Actually, it is quite common for others in the body to identify your spiritual gift before you do. They are aware of how you have served them, and that service from you has come to them in ways that you were unaware. But in the meantime, ask yourself what concerns you about others, both inside and outside of the church? What do you perceive are their main problems or weaknesses?

-- Maybe you see them as lonely, discouraged, and in need of fellowship. Maybe God has given you a particular gift of encouragement.

-- Maybe the thing that strikes you about others is their helplessness and the fact that they are hurting. Maybe God has given you the gift of mercy. Employ it.

-- Maybe you see people as idle, disorganized, and inefficient. Perhaps you have the gift of administration.

not saved because you actively "received" Christ, but because He sovereignly imparted Christ to you, resulting in your salvation.

⁸ It can be easily shown that the Apostle Paul had more than one spiritual gift. Certainly he had the gift of teaching, but also of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:18). Paul also had the gift of healing (Acts 13:9ff).

-- Maybe you see people as ignorant, and consequently bringing much needless difficulty and pain upon themselves. Maybe you are destined to be a teacher.

Avoid assessing and judging others in the light of your gift. The devil will lead you to do this. Sometimes a Christian will recognize a glaring deficiency in a pastor or a church, and he will develop a critical spirit as a result. But what he does not realize is that he is unjustly judging another according to his own spiritual gift. He assumes that what is so obvious to him should be obvious to them also. But that is a wrong assumption. It may be the Lord's intention to use him to satisfy that need in the church through his gift. Instead, the devil uses it to cause dissension and division.

Peter next identified two areas in which spiritual gifts may be broadly categorized.

1. First, there are those gifts that involve speech. By the way, there is a need in these days to recover biblical speech. Too much worldly vocabulary is used in place of God's Words. Christians will speak about *dysfunctional* lives, but rarely of *sinners*. We could go on and on this matter. I will simply make this point: God uses His Word to perform His work. If you want God to use you then you will need to speak to others in the language of the Scriptures.

2. Second, there are those gifts that involve service. God must give grace in one's service. Going forth in one's own strength is a prescription for burn out and fruitless service. Gifts should never be regarded as making one sufficient; they are only avenues through which God's power is to be channeled.

The motive and goal of our service--the glory of God (4:11c). As Christians we desire that God be given the credit for all that transpires in our lives.

All of these instructions that we have read are to be done with view to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. First, we are to be busy doing these things now for the time may be short; the opportunity to be used of God may be limited. And, second, in the light of our own accountability before our Lord when He returns, we should be diligent in these matters.

II. Paul's instruction regarding spiritual gifts in Romans 12:4-8.

Let us turn and read Romans 12:4-8.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; ⁷or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

The apostle exhorted his readers to experience transformation in their lives through the renewing of their minds. In other words, they were to embrace fully and apply faithfully all that Paul had taught them in the first 11 chapters of this epistle. If they lived according to the truth he had disclosed to them, they would experience and validate that the will of God in their lives is "good and acceptable and perfect."

A. The body of Christ (12:4, 5)

In verses 4 and 5 Paul set forth the metaphor of the human body which illustrates the nature of the church in which we are members. In the church of Jesus Christ the members are vitally connected with one another. The Lord has given a function for each and every one of the members.

⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Here we see that our identity as Christians would be tied to our relationship with other believers in Jesus Christ who are living and serving in the same church. The Lord saves each of us individually, but it is not His will that we remain individualistic. Upon conversion, we are to begin to see our identity centered in the church of which we are a member.

Now many, when they see the expression, “the body of Christ” (v. 5), and believe that the subject must be the universal church, not the local church. But though what Paul says here is also true of the universal church, his emphasis here is the local church that belongs to Jesus Christ. Every legitimate local church is a/the body of Christ. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: “Now you (2nd person plural) are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Cor. 12:27). The point is this, the members of a local church of Jesus Christ are dynamically and spiritually united to one another in one spiritual body.

B. The spiritual gifts of the members (12:6-8)

In **verses 6** through **8** Paul delineates the different ways that different members of the body are gifted by God in order to function within, or to serve, the body.

⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the 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.

This is one of several lists of spiritual gifts that are in the New Testament. These are gifts given to Christians by God’s grace. These are not talents brought over from our pre-Christian days. These are spiritual gifts that the grace of God has given to His people. Again, every Christian has at least one gift. Let us consider these in turn:

1. “If prophecy, in proportion to our faith”

Prophecy was spiritual gift that had a unique role in the early church. The gift of prophecy was God enabling a man or woman to discern spiritual truths or foresee events before they happened. Paul wrote of prophecy, “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge...” (1 Cor. 13:2).

The risen Lord gave some to be prophets in the church. In Ephesians 4:10f we read, “He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He gave the apostles, *the prophets*, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers...” That it was a spiritual gift given to some only in the apostolic age may be seen in its association with the office of apostle, which was clearly limited to the first generation of apostles. We read in Ephesians 2:19ff that the Lord has built the church upon the temporary and foundational offices of the apostle and prophet. Of Gentile Christians Paul wrote,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Christ Jesus himself

being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (Eph. 2:19-21)

Prophets were ones wholly passive in the manifesting of their spiritual gift. God would communicate directly with a prophet, revealing some detail of His will or of some event that was to occur. We read in the book of Acts of several occasions when this spiritual gift was manifested. In Acts 21 we read of Luke's account of staying with Philip and his four daughters who did prophesy and there they met another prophet.

On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹*He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.* ¹⁰While we were staying for many days, *a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.* ¹¹And 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.'" ¹²When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:8-12)

It was Agabus who had earlier foretold through his gift of prophecy of the great famine that came throughout Palestine.

²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸And 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). ²⁹So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:27ff)

Prophecies that were given in the church were not always of the Lord; that is, there were those who claimed to give prophecies as they were moved by the Spirit, but their message was not from the Lord. Each prophecy given in the church was to be assessed as to its validity by other prophets present. Paul gave clear and detailed instruction to the church at Corinth on the right use of the gift of prophecy. This is contained in 1 Corinthians 14. We will not take the time today to examine this passage.

Paul wrote of the temporary nature of the gift of prophecy. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8, "Whether there are prophecies, they will fail." And historically, the revelatory gifts, the ones that communicated the Word of God directly to an individual that was then delivered to the church, disappeared toward the end of the apostolic era.

2. "If service, in our serving"

This would be a special gift to render practical service. I wonder if the Lord has not given me this gift in a measure. He seems to have given me the ability to fix things. I enjoy doing so for people, especially when it seems that He enables me to "see" the nature or identity of a problem and solve it rather easily. Some say I have "the touch"; I would say, it is a gift.

Paul wrote, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: ... *if service, in our serving*..." In whatever way the Lord has gifted us, we are to serve our brothers and sisters in the church using that gift. This should probably be understood as instructing Christians to render practical service to one another. Service speaks of helping others with whatever it is that will bring benefit to them. It may be to provide some practical need or perhaps to serve another in some spiritual need. The Greek word for "service" is the same word we use for a deacon.⁹ It would be natural to see this to be a special giftedness to be employed in the diaconate (and their wives, as they are to serve as a team). But this gift need not be restricted to deacons, of course.

⁹ εἴτε διακονίαν ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ ; literally, "if deaconing, in the diaconate."

Actually, the Greek word for “service” was also used to describe the ministry, even the ministry of the Word. We read in Acts 6:1ff:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to *the ministry* of the word.”

Here the word “ministry” is the same word that is translated “serving” in Romans 12:7.

We also read in Acts 20 the same idea. Here Paul described his commitment to his “service” or ministry of the Word:

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and *the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.* (Acts 20:22-24)

Here again, the word translated “ministry” is the same word translated “service” in Romans 12:7. Here his “service” was “to testify of the gospel of the grace of God.”

The same idea is in **Acts 21:17-19**.

¹⁷When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles *through his ministry*. ²⁰And when they heard it, they glorified God.

In the epistle to the Romans Paul used the word in this same way. Romans 11:13, “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my *ministry*.” Here he said that he magnified his “service” (διακονία).

It may be that Paul was referring to the public ministry of the Word of God. **John Murray** put the matter well:

As far as usage is concerned, there is, therefore, abundant support for the view that the ministry of the Word is intended. In addition, this office follows prophecy and precedes that of teaching in the apostle’s enumeration. If an order of priority occurs here, then we would be compelled to regard the ministry as that of the Word, because no other phase of the church’s ministration could have a higher place than that of teaching except the general ministry of the Word. On this assumption the first four functions would obviously be in the order of rank—prophecy, ministry of the Word, teaching, exhortation. However, reasonable is this view we cannot be certain that this was the function in mind.

1) The term is also used in the more restricted sense of the ministry of mercy with reference to physical need (cf. Acts 6:1; 11:29; 2:25; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13). Furthermore, in this epistle (15:31) the term is used in this sense of Paul’s own mission to Jerusalem, as is apparent from 15:25-27...

2) It is not clear in this passage the gifts enumerated are in order of rank (cf. 1 Cor. 12:8-10). If the order of priority is not adhered to, there is no reason why the ministry of mercy should not be mentioned at this point.

3) Although this term is not used to denote the diaconate, yet the corresponding term “servant” is used in the sense of “deacon” and the verb in the sense of exercising the office of a deacon (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 10, 12, 13).

4) If the ministry of the Word is intended, it would be difficult to maintain the distinction of gift and function which in this context must be supposed. If ministry is understood in the broader sense the function would apply to the prophet, on the one hand, and to the teacher on the other. Hence it would lack the distinguishing specificity which we would expect.¹⁰

3. “The one who teaches, in his teaching”

Whereas the prophet had received new, direct revelation from God, the teacher instructs in what God has already revealed, and that principally through Scripture. The one with the gift of teaching should be busy teaching, just as someone who has the ability to serve, should be serving others.

The gift of teaching implies that there is doctrine to be taught and instruction in living to be given to the church of Jesus Christ. What was to be taught? First, of course the Holy Scriptures are to be taught, which was chiefly the Old Testament when Paul wrote this epistle. But also the “apostles’ doctrine” needed to be taught to the people. We read of the new Christians who had been converted to faith in Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost:

⁴¹Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ⁴²And they continued steadfastly in *the apostles’ doctrine* and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:41f)

There are some matters that we are told in the New Testament need to be taught to our people. We read in Hebrews 5:12, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, *you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God*. You need milk, not solid food.” There are some who need to teach the basics of the faith to new Christians. But there are other more practical matters that need to be taught. Consider these verses:

1 Timothy 6:2. “Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. *Teach and urge these things.*”

1 Timothy 4:1-11. “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. ⁶*If you put these things before the brothers*, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹He saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. ¹¹*Command and teach these things.*”

Paul taught his churches about his own experiences and lessons that he could illustrate to them.

¹⁶I urge you, then, be imitators of me. ¹⁷That 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*. (1 Cor. 4:16)

¹⁰ Murray, *Romans*, pp. 123f.

When Paul gave a charge to Titus to minister on the island of Crete, he told him of the form and nature of teaching that would be necessary in the church.

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. ²Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. ³Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. ⁶Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. ⁷Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. (Titus 2:1-8)

It is a sad thing when Christians within a church go out to those of the world to be taught how and what to think regarding dealing with problems and issues in relationships and in other practical matters. The Lord has placed gifted people within his church sufficient to care for and lead his people. And to some the Lord has given a special spiritual gift of teaching to serve the body of Christ.

4. “The one who exhorts, in his exhortation”

Some people are gifted encouragers of other people. Their presence and their words just seem to influence others for good. They inspire action and promote righteousness in people. They encourage the downcast and warn the indifferent and the careless. Apparently Barnabus had this spiritual gift. They seem to have an unusual ability to influence and affect people for good and godly ends.

Some would see the third gift of “teaching” to be the plain instruction of biblical truth without application, but the gift of exhortation is the ability to apply the word to life. **Matthew Henry** thought that this was so: “Teaching is the bare explaining and proving of gospel truths, without practical application, as in the expounding of Scripture.”¹¹ But the one with the gift of exhortation is the one who applies the Scripture to living. Both gifts are needed within the church. Matthew Henry sees the gift of exhortation to be that of the pastor, who applies teaching to living.

Let him that exhorteth, wait on exhortation. Let him give himself to that. This is the work of the pastor, as the former of the teacher; to apply gospel truths and rules more closely to the case and condition of the people, and to press upon them that which is more practical. Many that are very accurate in teaching may yet be very cold and unskillful in exhorting; and on the contrary, the one requires a clearer head, the other is a warmer heart. Now where these gifts are evidently separated (that one excels in the one and the other in the other) it conduces to edification to divide the work accordingly; and, whatsoever the work is that we undertake, let us mind it. To wait on our work is to let us mind it. To wait on our work is to bestow the best of our time and thoughts upon it, to lay hold on all opportunities for it, and to study not only to do it, but to do it well.¹²

5. “The one who contributes (gives financially), in generosity”

Although all are to give, some have the spiritual gift of giving. I have known a few of these gifted people over the years. They delight in relieving needs and they greatly delight in seeing their stewardship advance the cause of the gospel. The gift of giving need not necessarily be seen in the amount that one gives. Let us remember the poor widow of Luke 21.

And He (Jesus) looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, ² and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. ³So He said, “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in

¹¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Fleming H. Revell), vol. 6, p. 460f.

¹² Ibid.

more than all; ⁴for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.” (Luke 21:1ff)

6. “The one who leads, with zeal”

The Lord gives some of His people the ability to lead others. Paul tells those who have the gift of leadership to lead with zeal. Perhaps that Paul gave this instruction to lead with zeal suggests that leadership sometimes may tend toward laziness. Or, perhaps one gifted with leadership will hesitate to step forward. Most men will let others lead unless they are pressed to assume responsibility. They then rise to the challenge.

Again, we are to lead with zeal. Years ago I heard J. Vernon McGee teach that the great dangers of the ministry is laziness and greed. I will take his word for that. We are to lead by doing and that with enthusiasm. The leader is one who has the ability to see ahead. He knows where the church needs to move forward. He sees the obstacles or obstructions ahead of time, and moves to remove them in a timely manner.

7. “The one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

The one who has the gift of mercy seems to see and feel the hurt of others keenly. I suppose one with this kind of gift could become rather morose, so Paul exhorted the ones who do acts of mercy purpose to do so with cheerfulness. People not only need sympathy in their suffering, needing to be “bound up”, but they need to be cheered up as well.

Of course each of us are to be doing all of these things when the occasion presents itself to us. (1) Are we all to **prophesy**? Paul wrote, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). This should not be understood by us in the sense of giving forth prophecies from the Lord, knowing ahead of time events that could not normally be foreseen, but rather, we should all tell forth the Word of God to others. (2) Should we all be **servng**? “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **serve one another**” (Gal. 5:13). (3) Are we all to be **teaching** others? The writer rebuked the Christians to whom he was writing: “**For though by this time you ought to be teachers**, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Heb 5:12). When we learn of the Lord we are given a trust to pass that along to others. (4) Are we all to be **exhorting** others? Hebrews 10:12f, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but **exhort one another daily**, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (5) What of **giving** of our finances to others and to the work of the Lord? Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come” (1 Cor. 16:2). (6) And what of **leading**? Of course not everyone can be a leader of others, unless you consider that living as an example to before others is a manner of “leading”. What Paul wrote of Timothy could be extended to all others at one point or another: “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). May the Lord help each of us lead others by our example in what they are to believe and how they are to live. And last, (7) are we all to do **acts of mercy**? Of course we are to do so. Our Lord taught His disciples, “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). But though each of us is to manifest the nature of each of these gifts in our dealings with one another, the Lord gives special grace for each Christian to do one of these things especially well and the church is thereby built up.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace,
which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance
among all them which are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)