

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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OF
GRACE
IN LIFE**

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The gifts mentioned in Romans 12 are the gifts of grace in life. Romans 12:3 says, “For I say through the grace given to me to everyone among you, not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to be sober-minded, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” In this verse we come to a very practical point. Every one of us thinks highly of himself. Outwardly you may appear to be humble, but inwardly you think quite highly of yourself. This is a problem to the church life. If we are to have the proper church life, the first thing that must be torn down is the high opinion that we have of ourselves. We need “to think so as to be sober-minded.” If you think highly of yourself, your mind is not sober or normal. It means that you have an abnormal element in your mind. Your mind needs to be adjusted and renewed, and all the negative elements in it need to be swallowed up by the life of Christ. Then your mind will be renewed and sobered.

Furthermore, we need to think “as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” It is not

difficult to understand the meaning of “a measure of faith.” How much God has transfused and infused Himself into you constitutes your measure of faith. Your measure of faith equals the amount of God’s element which has been transfused into you. That is the faith which God has allotted to you, and you need to consider yourself soberly according to that measure.

DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS

“For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another” ([vv. 4-5](#)). We need to realize that the many members of the one Body have different functions. Two young sisters may be very close to one another in age, but still have different functions. What one sister can do the other sister cannot do. If we would all realize this, we would not think so highly of ourselves, but would respect others.

The different functions of the members of the Body are illustrated by the human face. Look at your face: you have eyes, ears, a nose, and lips. The face illustrates what is true of the entire body: we have many members and each has a different function. This is the way it should be in

the church life. As I see the members functioning in the meetings, I am very happy because they can do what I cannot do. Of course, it is also true that I can do what they cannot do.

COORDINATION OF THE MEMBERS

Verse 5 says, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.” This means that though we are many yet we are one Body. We are many members, not many separate units. As members, we have to coordinate with each other that we may be a living, functioning Body. If we do not cooperate with each other, then we are detached members, and the Body life cannot be practically realized. When it says in verse 5 that we “are severally members one of another,” the word “severally” does not mean separately; it means differently. It means that you are one kind of member and that I am another. Perhaps you are a nose, I am an eye, and another sister is an ear. Hence, we are severally members one of another. This needs a full cooperation.

GIFTS ACCORDING TO GRACE

We need to read verses 6 through 8. “And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them accordingly: whether

prophecy, according to the proportion of faith; or service, in the service; or he who teaches, in teaching; or he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, in simplicity; he who leads, in diligence; he who shows mercy, in cheerfulness.” In [verse 6](#) Paul says that we have “gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.” What is grace? Grace is simply God in Christ as our enjoyment. When this grace, this divine element, which is the divine life, comes into our being, it brings with it certain skills and abilities which are the gifts. The gifts, the spiritual abilities, come from the divine element which we have enjoyed. As you enjoy God, receiving and assimilating His divine element into your being, out of this divine element proceeds some gift, skill, or ability. These gifts differ according to the divine element which we have enjoyed and which we have assimilated into our being. The grace given to us refers to the grace we have enjoyed and assimilated. Therefore, the gifts mentioned in [Romans 12](#) are the gifts of grace in life.

This can be proved by other verses in the book of Romans. [Romans 5:17](#) says that “those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life.” This verse indicates that grace is related to life. Furthermore,

in 5:21 Paul says that “grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” These two verses from Romans 5 prove that grace is related to life. What is grace? It is the divine life for our enjoyment. When the eternal life of God becomes our enjoyment, that is grace. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul said, “I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” The grace of God which was with Paul was the divine life within Paul as his enjoyment. Thus, he labored more than the other apostles, although actually it was not Paul himself, but the divine life which he enjoyed. Thus, grace in Romans is a matter of life.

The gifts in Romans 12 are according to grace. This means that the gifts are granted according to the measure of life. If you have enjoyed the life of God to a high degree, you will receive a higher gift. However, if your enjoyment of the life of God is limited, your gift also will be limited, for the measure of your gift is limited by the extent to which you have enjoyed the divine life as grace within you. The gifts enumerated in Romans 12 are not the miraculous gifts which come to you suddenly. No, the gifts in Romans 12 are like the abilities of the members of our

human body. The measure of ability depends upon the amount of life in the body. If the body is mature with considerable growth of life and with a great amount of life, it will have an abundant overflow of life, and this overflow of the inner life of the body will produce abilities. These abilities resemble the gifts in Romans 12. All of the items included in [verses 6 through 8](#) are gifts of grace in life. We may list seven of them: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy. We need to remember that each of these seven items, including the showing of mercy, is a gift.

Many Christians seem to think that the only gifts are speaking in tongues, interpretation, healing, and miracles. However, it is quite strange that none of these gifts is mentioned in [Romans 12](#). In [Romans 12](#) Paul says nothing about speaking in tongues, interpretation, healing, and miracles, but he does speak about the gifts which are necessary for the Body life. Please notice that [verse 6](#) says, “having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us,” and that it does not say, according to the so-called baptism. I need to repeat once again the definition of grace: grace is the divine element coming into our being to be our life for our enjoyment. Grace is not outward; it is the

element of the divine life that is wrought into our being inwardly and which gives us some skill or ability. Let us now consider the gifts of grace in life in more detail.

Prophecy

If you consult various versions and translations of Romans you will find that most of them agree that prophecy in [Romans 12](#) does not mainly denote prediction. Even in the Scripture as a whole, the word prophesy does not mainly mean to predict. In both the Old and New Testaments to prophesy means: (1) to tell for, that is, to speak for others; (2) to tell forth, that is, to speak things forth; and (3) to foretell, that is, to predict, to speak things before they happen. The whole book of Isaiah is a book of prophecy. It is not only composed with foretellings, but the more with tellings forth and tellings for. It is true that Isaiah does contain some predictive prophecies, but the majority of the oracles and utterances in that book are the speaking forth of the prophet on behalf of God.

Hence, the meaning of the word to prophesy is mainly “speaking for” and “speaking forth.” What is prophecy? It is the speaking for God under His direct inspiration. In his *Word Studies*

in the New Testament (Vol. 3, p. 156) Marvin Vincent says this about prophecy: “In the New Testament, as in the Old, the prominent idea is not prediction, but the inspired delivery of warning, exhortation, instruction, judging, and making manifest the secrets of the heart. See [1 Corinthians 14:3, 24, and 25](#). The New Testament prophets are distinguished from teachers by speaking under direct inspiration.” Thus, the main idea of prophecy in the Bible is not prediction, but speaking for God under His direct inspiration.

Service

The word “service” in [verse 7](#) denotes the service of the deacons and the deaconesses in the local churches (See [Rom. 16:1](#); [1 Tim. 3:8-13](#); and [Phil. 1:1](#)). The deacons and deaconesses are the serving ones in a local church. They must have a serving spirit and a serving attitude. They have to keep themselves always in service. The practice of the Body life needs this kind of service.

Teaching

What is the difference between teaching and prophesying? As we have seen, prophesying is speaking for the Lord under His direct inspiration, that is, to speak according to the revelation

the Lord has imparted. Teaching is different from that. Teaching is the speaking based upon prophesying. Some brothers may take what is given in others' prophesying and teach people according to it. This is teaching. The teaching ones have to keep themselves in the exercise of their teaching gift.

Exhorting

What then is exhortation? How does it differ from prophecy and teaching? Prophecy, teaching, and exhortation are all speaking gifts. However, exhortation is based on both prophecy and teaching. Perhaps during a special conference or training a brother prophesies under the direct inspiration of God. Some brothers receive the revelation given in that prophesying, take it back with them to their locality, and teach others according to it. That is teaching. Then, based upon the direct speaking under God's inspiration and the teaching according to this inspiration, some others may exhort. That is exhortation. These three kinds of speaking are for the building up of the Body: they minister the life supply to the saints that they may grow together by God's Word. The exhorting ones also have to keep themselves in the exercise of their exhorting gift.

Giving

The ability to give in simplicity is also a gift of grace in life. This denotes the giving which supplies and takes care of the needy ones in the church. In the church we need such givers. We need those who are able to impart material possessions to help the needy ones, to speed the Lord's work, and to care for the church's practical needs. Therefore, we need many saints with such a measure of life that they may have the giving gift and be able to give in simplicity.

Leading

“He who leads” signifies the leading brothers in the church. Whoever desires to be a leading brother must first learn to be diligent. If you are sloppy, you cannot share in the leadership. I would call the attention of all the leading brothers to one thing: that the first quality of leadership is diligence. A leading brother, that is, an elder, needs to be diligent in everything and in every way all the time. The elders' ability, function, and gift in taking the lead depend upon their diligence.

Showing Mercy

The ability in life to show mercy is also a gift.

To show mercy in cheerfulness is not a matter of natural generosity. Some people have a naturally generous character; they were born that way. However, to show mercy in cheerfulness is a quality that is formed in us by transformation. When you grow in the life of Christ and come to love the Lord more, a certain quality will be formed in you, and you will be burdened to take care of others and show mercy to the unworthy ones. This is not a characteristic of your natural birth, but a quality developed in you by your growth in life through the process of transformation. Hence, to show mercy is also one of the gifts in life. To show mercy means to help with sympathy. Whenever you truly help one by sympathizing with him, it means that you are showing mercy to him.

If you put together all seven gifts mentioned in [Romans 12](#), you will discover that they are the gifts that are necessary for the practicing of the Body life for the local church. In the local church we firstly need the speaking for God under His direct inspiration. Based upon this inspired speaking we may have teaching, and based upon both prophesying and teaching we may have exhortation. Along with this we have the leadership of the elders and the service of the deacons.

In addition, we have those that are able to give material things to the church, care for the needy, and further the Lord's work. Finally, there are those who show mercy to others. In an age filled with difficulties and troubles, they can sympathize with others and show mercy to them. These seven gifts are adequate for practicing the church life. Paul was marvelous. He was an expert in the church life, presenting all these matters in a very simple but inclusive way. How we should worship the Lord for such an apostle!

We all need to be impressed with the fact that in [Romans 12](#) the gifts of speaking in tongues, interpretation, healing, and miracles are not mentioned. Such gifts are miraculous gifts, but in [Romans 12](#) we find the gifts of grace in life. An example of a miraculous gift is the speaking in a human language by Balaam's donkey. Although the donkey did not possess a human life, it spoke a human language. Undoubtedly, that was a miraculous gift. The gifts listed in [Romans 12](#) are not miraculous gifts; they are the gifts of grace in life. As you enjoy God as life and grow in life, you find that, corresponding to your growth in life, you have a certain skill or ability. This is what we call a gift of grace in life. The donkey did not need to have growth in life in order to speak a

human language. It did not matter whether the donkey was small or big, young or old. The gift was miraculous; it did not depend upon the donkey's growth. However, to be an elder in the church does not depend upon a miraculous gift. Do not think that after being saved a short while you can pray for several hours, receive the so-called baptism, and suddenly become an elder. If a person could become an elder in this way, it would mean that eldership is a miraculous gift. But to be an elder you do not need miraculous gifts; you need the gift of grace by growth in life. You need to grow day by day and year by year. If you do not exhibit the growth in life, you cannot be an elder. You cannot be an elder if you lack the adequate measure of life. I hope that everyone who reads this booklet is now able to differentiate between these two categories of gifts—the miraculous gifts and the gifts of grace in life.

Many of the gifts mentioned in [1 Corinthians 12](#) are miraculous gifts. However, even there some of the gifts are not miraculous. For example, neither the word of wisdom nor the word of knowledge is miraculous. As we have seen, in [Romans 12](#) none of the gifts are miraculous; all of the gifts found there are the gifts of grace in life which require the growth in life. Your growth

in life gives you a certain measure of life, and out of that measure of life your skill or gift will be manifested. This will qualify you for a particular ministry or service in the church life.

The gifts of grace in life are necessary for the practice of the Body life. If you neglect the gifts of grace in life and concentrate on the miraculous gifts, the church will be divided in a very short time. Be assured that we could never be one by stressing miraculous gifts. The miraculous gifts tend to divide, while the gifts of grace in life build up. Paul was very experienced in the Body life, and he knew that the gifts of grace in life are necessary for the building of the church. Therefore, in [Romans 12](#) he did not list the miraculous gifts among the items necessary for the church life. No one can deny the wisdom of the Apostle Paul. Although he mentioned speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians, he did not include it in the book of Romans. There certainly must have been a reason for this. Paul, an expert in the church life, knew from his writing of 1 Corinthians that the miraculous gifts had been the cause of divisions there in Corinth. Even in 1 Corinthians we can see the fact that speaking in tongues and the other miraculous gifts had a divisive effect on the church. Therefore, Paul did

not include these gifts in the book of Romans. Paul was both wise and careful, recognizing the fact that the miraculous gifts were helpful to individual Christians. In 1 Corinthians Paul said that speaking in tongues builds up the individual who exercises it, but that it does not build up the church (1 Cor. 14:4). He told the Corinthians to care for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 14:12, 26). In the book of Romans his concern was not the building up of a particular individual, but the building up of the Body. Thus, he did not include the miraculous gifts in this book. I know that this word may not be pleasant to those who have had a background of tongue-speaking. Nevertheless, I ask you to be patient and to consider what is best for the church life in the long run. If you mean business to practice the church life, you should not appraise the miraculous gifts so highly, but rather pay your complete attention to the gifts of grace in life that will build up the church.

The book of Romans was written soon after 1 Corinthians. Both of these books were written while Paul was on his third journey of ministry. While Paul was staying at Ephesus on his third journey of ministry, information came to him about the confusion and division that were

rampant in Corinth. Thus, from Ephesus he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians adjusting them for the abuse of the miraculous gifts. After writing that letter he visited Corinth personally. While he was staying in Corinth he wrote the book of Romans. These are facts of history. First Corinthians was written either in A.D. 56, 57, or 59, and Romans was written approximately a year afterward. In 1 Corinthians Paul adjusted the abuse of tongue-speaking and of the other miraculous gifts. Soon afterward, when he wrote the book of Romans, he said nothing about the miraculous gifts, probably because he was keenly aware of the confusion they had wrought in Corinth. Remember that he wrote the book of Romans from Corinth, the scene of confusion and abuse regarding miraculous gifts. We should not neglect history, for it has many lessons to teach us. It is quite significant that the book of Romans was written from Corinth. At that time Corinth was the hotbed of miraculous gifts, yet Paul did not say a word about miraculous gifts in the book of Romans. This is very significant, and it deserves our attention.

I want to speak a little more about the gifts that proceed out of the growth of life. Before Paul talked about the gifts in [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [14](#),

he spoke strongly about the growth in life in chapter three. Paul said to the Corinthians, “You are God’s farm, God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9). The farm grows the materials for the building. All the materials that are necessary for the building of God’s house are the product of the growth on the farm. Then Paul said that as a wise master-builder he laid the foundation and that we all need to be careful how we build thereupon (1 Cor. 3:10). We should build with gold, silver, and precious stones and not with wood, hay, and stubble (v. 12). If you put together all these verses from 1 Corinthians 3, you will see that Paul was telling the Corinthians the proper way to build up the church in their locality. The proper way of building the church is not by miraculous gifts, but by the genuine growth in life which will transform the saints into precious materials for God’s temple. Furthermore, Paul said that he fed and planted them and that Apollos watered them (1 Cor. 3:2-6). The feeding, planting, and watering are all for the growth, the growth which will cultivate the talents and gifts that are useful in building up the house of God with the proper transformed materials.

Consider a newborn child. At the time of birth the child has every necessary organ. However, few

of the organs can function at the time of birth, because the child lacks the necessary measure of growth in life. The more the mother feeds her child, the more the child grows. After a certain length of time, the child will be able to walk and after another period of time, he will be able to speak. Eventually, he will be fully grown, and all of his talents will have been completely cultivated for practical use. When he has matured, he will have the required skills, and these skills are the gifts that come out of the growth in life. This is what Paul meant by gifts in [Romans 12](#).

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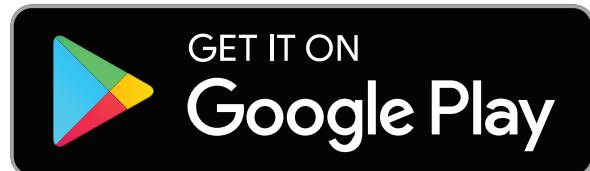
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