

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

In the last time, we looked at how we are to offer "spiritual and reasonable worship" to God. We also learned that we are to live our lives as living sacrifices by not conforming to the world and not compromising. Today we come out about how to live together in the community of the church. For this purpose, the Holy Spirit has given us various gifts to support and grow together. Such a Christian life can be lived in abundance.

Verse 3: "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you."

Here, "by the grace given me" describes the Apostle Paul's apostolic authority as grace. Paul counsels each one of the believers in Rome with his apostolic authority. Also, it is better to understand 'in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you' as 'the kind of gift by the Holy Spirit' than to interpret it as the amount of faith. In Jesus' parable, the one, two, and five talents are not to be understood as the number of talents, but rather as the difference in the gifts received from God (Matthew 25). As this parable shows, God wants us to live our lives abundantly making the best of the talents and gifts He has given us. 'Faith' when describing the gifts is a little different from 'faith that saves by faith' as we understand it, but this saving faith is the same in that we receive it as grace from God, not by our own righteousness, strength, or works (Rom. 5:15-16).

Each of the talents that can support the church and also contribute to society are unique because God has given us different ones. Therefore, it is not good to overestimate or underestimate them. Please look at verses 4 and 5 together.

Verse 4 "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function (4), so in Christ we, though many, from one body, and each member belongs to all the others (5).

The Apostle Paul likens the different 'gifts of faith' in the church to the body, each organ part of which may be different, but which work together to support the one body. In this way, we who are united to Christ support one body, the church of Christ.

The fact that the church is the body of Jesus Christ is mentioned throughout the Bible. The Apostle Paul met Jesus Christ on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. At that time, Jesus called out to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Before his conversion, Saul persecuted the churches, but that was to persecute Jesus Christ (Acts 9:4).

Thus, **Jesus Christ is the head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18)**. Each of us serving the church is serving Jesus Christ. **1 Corinthians 12:27** says, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." And we are to grow with one another as the body of Christ, which is the church. **Ephesians 4:16**: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." We are the parts of the church that complement and grow together as one body.

Now, what gifts does God give us?

Look at verse 6. "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith."

As I said at the beginning, each of us has been given different gifts. These gifts are given to us by God through grace. We have different gifts and talents that God has given us, but these are the same root that we have received from the Holy Spirit. **1 Corinthians 12:4-5**. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord."

Those who have received the gift of prophecy should prophesy according to their faith. In the Bible, prophecy means to receive the Word of God and proclaim it. However, unlike prophecy in the Old Testament era, prophecy in the New Testament era has the role of encouraging the congregation and enhancing the virtue of the church. **1 Corinthians 14:3-5** says, "But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort."

I have been prayed for in prophecy by an elderly lady from Grace Church in King George station when I was returning to Canada in September 2014. She prayed carefully for about 5 minutes in Korean which I could understand clearly. To be honest, I don't remember the details of the prayer. At the time, I had to return to Japan with my two small children, ages 11 and 9, with no relatives at all. I was seriously in frustration, anxiety, sadness, and fear. However, I was encouraged a lot by her prophetic prayer. It was filled with God's hope, grace, and love.

The prophecy, as the word said, encouraged and comforted the believers who were facing hardships like mine. Now I am praying for an appropriate prophecy to be given by God to friends and church's members of mine at church. I really want to encourage them who are depressed and in sufferings. But I don't know how to encourage them. Therefore, I am praying and reading the Bible, looking for just the right words of comfort from God.

Verse 7: "If it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach;"

If you have the gift of service, devote yourself to service. Here, 'diaconus' in Greek is translated to 'servant' in English, which in Japanese is translated as "shitsuji(deacon)". We have people who serve as deacon in our churches.

Those who teach should devote themselves to teaching. Here, "those who teach" refers to those who lead the messages and Bible studies. The typical job of a pastor is to teach the Bible. There is an interesting record in Acts 6:2-4. 'So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

In the early church, roles based on gifts had not yet been defined, and even the Apostle Peter, who was the leader of the church, helped prepare meals for guests when they came. Mary or Martha might have said to Peter, who was concentrating on the Bible and writing down his message, "Peter, we are short of tofu, so please go buy some right now." Peter might have been filled with the Holy Spirit and concentrating on the message of worship, but he might have been disturbed by helping with the meal. Whenever I read this passage, I laugh when I think that even the Apostles Peter and John might have prepared the meal in this way. After all, those who teach should concentrate on teaching. That is why the early church appointed seven deacons. One of them was deacon Stephen, the first to be martyred. Both the deacon and the teacher had all of great faith.

Verse 8: "If it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."

So, we see the person who encourage, the person who gives, the person who leads, and the person who shows mercy. What gifts have been given to you among the gifts listed here?

It is not clear exactly what the roles of "encourage" and "lead" are. It means those who encourage, comfort, now that would be the realm of Biblical or Christian counseling to the congregation. And 'to lead' are in the realm of church polity. It is a practical role that determines various policies of the church.

We Christians are good at "almsgiving and charity." There is a Kim's Mart near the Nikkei Volunteer Corps, Tonari Gumi in Vancouver. There is a Japanese supermarket above it. Near there is Pastor Kim of Hope Church who has been doing homeless ministry for over 30 years. Pastor Kim continues that ministry even in his old age. My mother had been helping him as a volunteer once a week for several years. She has said that after her foot surgery, she would like to serve there again when she is well again. I heard that Pastor. Kim gives generously to the homeless every day. If they don't show up that day, he goes out to distribute

meals to them. My mother always told me that it was very moving to see how willingly he do that charity. Some of the homeless people do drugs, and there have been many times when he was in danger, but he has been doing this ministry for over 30 years. This would not have been possible without the gifts of charity and mercy from God. I think it is something that cannot be done by human's wonderful personality and power alone.

What is the reason God has given us gifts? **Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."** God has given us gifts so that we may live by doing His good works. The joy of parents is to see their children grow up. Parents rejoice when their children grow up and work in their society. In the same way, God wants us to work with Him. That is the work of supporting and saving people's lives and spirits.

Through today's words we have learned to live together in the church. We do not be puffed up, but we care for one another in the measure of our faith. And we support the body of Jesus Christ together, each with our own personality and gifts. Through such a church, many people will believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. And also saved Christians grow up into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for the grace that has saved us through the atonement of Jesus Christ. We also thank you for the gift of supporting God's Church in this world. Bless each of us that we may use the gifts God has given us to serve the Lord. If there are brothers and sisters here who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, I pray that they will believe in Him today and be saved. Amen.