

Both Muscle and Mouthpiece

Divine Design – Finding Your Fit in the Body of Christ – Part V

Romans 12:7

Introduction

Yesterday, my family had a birthday party for me. They gave me gifts, and naturally, wanted to see my reaction. They watched to see if I wanted the gifts and would use them.

Gifts are meant to be used, right? You have discovered that truth, haven't you?

The day after Christmas, your kids are going to inspect the shower and ask, "Hey, where is that Old Spice soap-on-a-rope, Daddy? Aren't you gonna use it?" Or, "Hey, Daddy, when are you gonna put that cologne on?" Or, "When are you gonna wear that tie I gave you?"

You know that the only time you could wear that necktie and get away with it is on Halloween. The good news is – your kids get older and buy things for you that you can actually wear in public!

To neglect someone's gift brings grief and hurt, right? When I buy flowers for my wife, I expect her to put them in a flower vase and put them on display. I would never expect her to put the flowers on a shelf in the closet or set them out in the garage – unless I am in more trouble than I thought!

The truth is, gifts are meant to be displayed; to be put to use. There is great delight when the gift giver sees the recipient using their gift.

I cannot help but think – imagine the joy God has when He sees His children using the gifts He has given them; when He sees them displaying their gifts and putting them to good use! However, imagine the sorrow and grief He has when He sees His children

setting their gifts on a shelf or in a closet and neglecting to use them as He wished.ⁱ

A few months ago, a magazine to which I subscribe printed an article entitled, "The Church, Why Bother?" The article cataloged recent data from a research group that revealed through a nationwide survey that some ten million self-proclaimed, born again Christians have not been to church in the last six months, apart from Christmas or Easter. Note this – these are people who say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is important to them today, and believe they will "go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior."ⁱⁱ

Now, I am not going to stop at this point and preach a sermon on this flawed theology, although it is tempting. There is no such thing as making a commitment to Jesus Christ without a commitment to the church of Jesus Christ and to the cause of Jesus Christ.

This is the same as if I said, "I'm committed to my marriage; I am committed to Marsha, my wife, but I never spend any time with her. Well, maybe once or twice a year I run by the house for an hour, if the seat is comfortable and the climate suits me and I don't have any trouble parking. But the truth is, I never talk to her privately; I don't tell anyone about her; in fact, I don't even support her because I don't care about her needs. She writes letters to me, but I never read them; in fact, I never even open the envelope. I know she wants to talk to me and spend time with me, but I don't really care and I don't want to take the time. But don't be mistaken, man, I am committed to her."

That is ludicrous, right?!

The writer of Hebrews said we were born again and our sins were forgiven; the blood of Christ has cleansed our conscience so that now, we can go and serve the living God! (Hebrews 9)

I said I was not going to preach about this, and yet, I have started! My larger point from this data is the fact that either ten million people are self-deceived and truly not born again, or they are born again, but are bringing great grief to God, who called them to faith in Christ, who indwells them by His Spirit, who endows them with special gifts to serve the body of Christ and advance His glory and His cause through His church.

Think of millions more who actually sit in church Sunday after Sunday, but bring great sorrow to their Lord. They grieve the Spirit of God as His gifts to them are never used; are set aside on some shelf; remain unopened, unwrapped, and unused.

However, according to the apostle Paul, the believer who is . . .

- radically renewing his mind after the scriptures,
- pursuing purity with passion,
- seeking to please God above all things,
- coming with an attitude of humility to the assembly,

. . . then asks the divine Designer how He wants him to serve Him by serving others.

We have learned this from Romans, chapter 12, where we have discovered direction in this process of opening our gifts and finding our fit in the body of Christ.

Spiritual Gifts of Service and Teaching

In verse 7 of Romans, chapter 12, Paul introduces two more gifts to us. They are the gift of service and the gift of teaching.

Frankly, these two gifts are different.

Service is the . . .	Teaching is the . . .
private demonstration of Christianity;	public declaration of Christianity;
illustration of truth;	explanation of truth;
portrayal of Christ;	proclamation of Christ;
backstage performance;	center stage presentation;

often unnoticed act;	recipient of all the applause;
muscle.	mouthpiece.

The truth is, since a body has more muscle than mouthpieces, the predominant gift of Christ to the church is the gift of service.

Take a closer look at what Paul said in Romans, chapter 12. Let us begin with verses 6 and 7.

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;

The gift of service

Do not overlook the order – the gift of service is listed before the gift of teaching.

The Greek word that is translated “service” is “diakonia”. This word literally means, “servant or service”. It appears in the New Testament, in one form or another, more than one hundred times.

In Paul’s day, this was a word that immediately meant, “lack of position; lack of status”. Yet, it would be *the* word chosen by the Lord to define His own ministry, as He said,

. . . the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve [diakonia] . . . (Matthew 20:28)

It became such an honor to be identified with the passion of Christ’s lifestyle, that this word would come to be the word that defines our work. We refer to it as Christian service.

It became *the* special word that identified only one of two offices in the New Testament church. The office occupied by men of wisdom and faith that is known by this word “diakonia,” is the office of those who serve the body as deacons.

What the world devalues as a lack of status, Jesus Christ elevates as an honorable lifestyle and position.

I traced this word “service” or “diakonia” throughout the New Testament. In more than one hundred appearances, I discovered it used in a multitude of scenes. These included:

- meeting needs in the church body (I Peter 4:10);
- helping Christians with their personal duties (Hebrews 6:10);
- sending relief funds to a needy church (Acts 11:29);

- performing menial physical tasks (Philemon 13);
- meeting the physical needs of widows (Acts 6:2);
- sharing the gospel (II Corinthians 8:19);
- waiting on tables; literally, supervising meals (Luke 10:40).

Most of these take place behind the scenes. They are the hidden muscle that moves the church forward.

One of the problems we have in the church is the prioritization of the gifts. We get it all wrong. We tend to think that the gifts which are seen are the most significant!

People may not say it directly, but their words imply the misconception, as one author put it, that, “only the visible gifts are vital to the body.”ⁱⁱⁱ

You might hear this misconception in the way Christians talk in the hallway. For example:

- “I’m just an usher; you’re the pastor.”
- “You’re the soloist on Sunday morning; I just hand out curriculum to the second graders.”
- “You’re the class leader; I’m just the guy who puts out the folding chairs.”
- “You’re the Bible study leader; I just stock the kitchen with coffee cups and spoons.”

All of these statements, whether verbalized or thought, reveal the misconception that the gift of service is lower on the “food chain” than the gift of teaching or leading.

We have an unwritten view that the gifts are on a vertical ladder and that you get promoted one rung at a time. So, you start by parking cars in the parking lot, in the summer, and you think, “Okay, if I don’t cause anyone to have a wreck out here, they’ll promote me to an indoor usher.”

Then as an usher, you think, “If I don’t knock anyone over or drop an offering plate; in fact, if the offerings go up 2%, I’ll get promoted to Sunday school.”

Then we think we will go on to class leader, then teacher, then deacon, then elder, and then, “Stephen, I’ll get your job.”

You cannot have it! I spent two years in the parking lot to get in here!

In the body of Christ, there are no promotions; there are placements by the divine Designer.

Gifts do not have to be seen in order to be significant. They do not have to be visible in order to be vitally important to the body of Christ.

Do you know what I would recommend doing that would help in rewriting this misconception in the body of Christ? Begin a ministry of giving thanks for the myriad of servants in the church.

When you pick up your child in the church nursery or classroom, stop long enough to identify the teachers and the workers and say, out loud, “Thank you so much for serving.”

Watch them look at you with utter amazement.

Thank someone that you recognize from the choir and orchestra for the hours they rehearse and then spend in leading worship.

There are nearly two hundred volunteers in this church this Sunday morning who work with the infants through the pre-schoolers. They do that so you can spend a few minutes with older people in church to worship God in English. Thank them.

Thank the usher who hands you the bulletin. Whisper in his ear, “Thanks for what you do.”

He will probably just stare.

Next Sunday, when you arrive in the parking lot, thank the traffic control guys, waving their orange wands. Roll down your window as you drive by, and say, “Even though I’m going to ignore where you’re telling me to park, thank you for what you tried to do!”

One ministry of service is the service of prayer. That is the invisible work which recognizes it is not just asking God to bless the ministry, it *is* ministry.

One speaker was referencing the fact that the world of missions looks to William Carey as the father of modern missions. In fact, William Carey changed much of the history of India.

The speaker was bemoaning the fact that there are too few Carey’s today, changing the course of their nations for God.

He went on though, to reveal that William Carey had a sister who lay paralyzed in bed for fifty years, unable to even articulate her words. Propped up in her bed, she wrote lengthy letters of encouragement to Carey and prayed throughout every day for her brother’s work.^{iv}

Perhaps we do not have more William Carey’s who serve like that because we do not have more sisters who pray like that.

We need to shrug off the idea that the gift of service, in whatever form it takes, is the sort of gift that you have if you cannot think of any other gift. We should not think, “Well, I guess I’ll just serve. I’m not really special anywhere else, so I must have the gift of service.”

Without the gift of service and the volunteers who use it, every single thing that is happening this Sunday and throughout the week would be severely limited or even impossible. Even the fact that you can hear my voice right now in any volume is because of volunteer technicians. And because of volunteers, it is being recorded digitally into a computer. From there, other volunteers will begin to edit it and eventually, it will be heard on the radio in five continents. Imagine that!

As a result, Wisdom for the Heart gets a letter from a widow in Virginia who says, “I get under my blanket at night and listen to the program and God’s Spirit gives me joy”; and from the policeman in another state who wrote, “I am growing in Christ because of it”; and from the pastor in Africa who writes, “it is helping me as I re-teach it to my congregation”; and from the prison inmate who wrote a few days ago, “the program is traveling around our prison like a torch.”

It would not be possible without volunteers.

Servants are the muscle of ministry. The gift of service moves the gospel of Jesus Christ forward in more ways than we could ever calculate. Do not ever begrudge the gift of service.

The gift of teaching

Paul goes on to add another gift. Not only is there the muscle in the body of Christ, but there is the mouthpiece. Notice, in verse 7 of Romans, chapter 12, he writes,

if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;

John Phillips is a British author and Bible teacher who is now well into his seventies. I have all of his commentaries. In fact, he was in our worship service a few Sundays ago with his family – unannounced. Frankly, I am glad I did not know until afterward. It would be a little like playing golf with Jack Nicklaus watching you. When he came to the visitor’s reception after the service, I asked him to come and preach at our church in the future, and he agreed.

Phillips’ commentary on Romans made this comment on the first three gifts:

- prophecy was the inspiration of truth,
- service is the incarnation of truth,
- teaching is the interpretation of truth.^v

He is right.

Another author defined the gift of teaching or “didaskalos; didaskalia,” as the art of taking an unchanging message and making it understandable to the unlearned.^{vi}

That means a teacher must first understand the truth for himself, before he can make it understandable.

It is no wonder that one of my former teachers, Howard Hendricks, warned our class that the minute you stop learning, you stop teaching.

If you are a teacher, then you are, first and foremost, a student. This is one gift that, when exercised in public, demands time in private.

Understand that this word “teaching” can be expanded to mean much more than one person teaching many people. It can also mean one on one.

It can mean teaching biblical truth to a neighbor who asks a question about God or the Bible. It can mean one teacher to a child or to a small group of neighborhood children.

It can mean teaching outside the cubicle or in the shop with co-workers who want your opinion on some current event. When you interpret the event in light of biblical truth, you just became a teacher!

It can mean teaching a group of teenagers or a class of women or men. It can mean teaching on a Sunday morning to a Sunday school class of any age, or to an auditorium filled with people of all ages.

The gift of teaching is simply taking biblical truth and discovering what it meant to its original audience, and what it means today.

It is the mandate of Christ to the church to, “Go . . . and make disciples . . ., baptizing them . . .,” and what? “Teaching them!” (Matthew 28:19-20a)

It is not an option, and it should not be an exception!

I remember spending a week in Kagoshima, Japan, with our global staff members, the Petites. I was to preach that Sunday morning to a congregation of mostly deaf Japanese men and women. My sermon would be interpreted into Japanese for the hearing, and then into Japanese sign language for the hearing impaired. It would be a slow, careful process.

I worked for hours on my sermon, handing my manuscript early to Bill Petite to review. He changed a number of phrases that would have been confusing and asked me to clarify other points.

That Sunday morning arrived. It took nearly an hour to communicate the message.

After the service, several men and women came to me, bowing politely. They then said, or signed something that I did not understand, of course.

Eventually, Bill pulled me aside and said, “Stephen, they are paying you the highest compliment that you can receive in this culture.”

What were they saying to me? Two words – “I understood.”

For any teacher of God’s word, that is enough.

For those of you who teach, to hear your class or your student say, “I understood what God said. I now know what He meant, and what it means in my life,” – that is your objective. Teach so those who hear can understand and obey the word of God.

Conclusion

Neither of these gifts is easy; they are both demanding – whether it is the muscle of servant hood or the mouthpiece of teaching. They are not something you do; they are who you are. Are you willing?

I have learned in recent days that for seventy-five years now, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, soldiers have guarded the Tomb of the Unknown soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Guards are rotated every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, three hundred sixty-five days a year.

The guard on duty is carefully instructed on how to walk and even on how many steps to take. He takes twenty-one steps as he marches beside the Tomb of the Unknown soldier. Why does he take twenty-one steps?

It alludes to the twenty-one gun salute, which is the highest honor given to any military or foreign dignitary.

At the end of his walk in one direction, he stops and hesitates for twenty-one seconds before turning and walking back. This, again, is a physical symbol of a twenty-one gun salute.

His gloves are moistened to prevent losing his grip on the rifle he carries. There are no wrinkles, folds, or lint on his uniform. He spends five hours a day preparing his uniform for duty.

For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be at least five feet ten inches tall, yet not taller than six feet two inches. His waist size cannot exceed thirty inches. That eliminates me!

He must commit two years of his life to guard the tomb and live in a barracks under the tomb. In the first six months of duty, a guard cannot talk to anyone, or even watch television. All off duty time is spent studying the records of the cemetery; studying all one hundred seventy-five notable people laid to rest there. The guard must memorize who they are and where they are interred.

That is not all that I learned. A guard cannot disgrace the uniform or the tomb in any way.

After two years of faithful service, guards are given a wreath pin that is worn on their lapel to signify that they served as guards of the tomb. But the guards must obey these rules for the rest of their lives or give up their wreath pin. There are only four hundred living guards today.

Isn’t that great?! What dignity and discipline, what honor!

It is amazing to think that there are people so dedicated to their position that they spend hours in obscurity and live such regimented lives of discipline and study; so committed to never disgracing the tomb that for the rest of their lives they limit their liberty. They want to keep the wreath and not disgrace the tomb.

How honorable is that? How admirable and principled is that?

I could not help but think, “*How convicting is that?*”

Are we not soldiers of the cross? Do we not serve the Creator and Commander and Chief of the universe?

How disciplined are we? How committed to purity and devotion to our cause are we?

Would to God that we would honor Christ’s cause with that kind of passion for purity and devotion to His name; that we will consider it our greatest honor to serve Him, and to represent Him, and speak for Him for the rest of our lives! And never forget that the tomb we represent . . . is empty!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/28/2005 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ William McRae, The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts (Zondervan, 1976), p. 29.

ⁱⁱ “The Church, Why Bother?,” Christianity Today, (Jan. 2005), p. 42.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, He Gave Gifts (Insight for Living, 1992), p. 28.

^{iv} McRae, p. 48.

^v John Phillips, Exploring Romans (Moody Press, 1969), p. 194.

^{vi} Alva J. McClain, Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace (BMH Books, 1973), p. 211.