

APRIL 17, 1994

USING GIFTS TO SERVE

People who work in industry or business and have responsibility for portions of the operations usually have resources of money, equipment, and people available to them to get the job done. If they don't use the resources, then the job does not get done and there should be accountability for the one who was given the responsibility. In some cases we have heard of people not only not using the resources to accomplish the desired purpose but of misusing the resources for their own personal gain. It is easy for us to recognize such behaviors as unacceptable. Even in the political arena, elected official sometimes use the money and influence available to them for personal gain. Again, most of us find that unacceptable.

What about the church? Oh, I'm sure that we would be quick to recognize the impropriety of a pastor using church funds or staff personnel to fix up his home or something else for his own personal gain or not getting the best efforts from the staff because of neglect or failure to do his job. Such things are easy to see, but, what about the rest of us in the church? Do we have responsibility for resources to be used to "get the job done?" Before you say, "No," think of such resources in a spiritual sense rather than material or physical resources. The resources given to each Christian are typically called "gifts." Of course, if we recognize that we are "not our own, but have been bought with a price," then even our personal material possessions and our very own body and soul belong to God. These too are resources available for us to use to "get the job done."

ROMANS 12:1-2 Christianity calls for us to take what we have been given into our daily lives and then to take it to all the world. We all realize that Christianity involves our being born again and being a new creation in Christ. The purpose of this salvation is so that we can carry out the good things that God wants done (Eph 2:10). We are to **go**, we are to **be**, and we are to **do**. Paul challenges us to not neglect the "action" component of our Christianity. Even Jesus had warned the disciples of the foolishness of "hearing without doing." I see the first verse complementing and supporting what Paul wrote in Eph 2:8-10. He reminds us of the mercies (grace) of God by which we have been saved and he calls us to action (good works) because of that grace. I also see a close tie in with Jesus' call for us to "deny self and take up our cross daily" in Paul's call for us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. This gives focus to the daily dying to self -- it is an offering to God for the purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God. It is using one of the resources to "get the job done." We can **misuse** this resource (our body) that really belongs to God (if the Spirit of Christ dwell in you, He shall quicken your mortal bodies) by **doing nothing** or by **abusing** it with chemical substances or overfeeding it. Our body is to be kept "holy" or in a condition of being "set apart" for God's service. To Paul, this was only logical since the life we have is from God. If we wait to give our bodies to God only at the point of death, then we become as the servant in the *parable of the talents* who buried his talent. That inaction was unacceptable.

To accomplish what God wants is an on-going process. Once a person has been born again of the Spirit of God, then it is necessary to implement a transformation of the mind **from** a mind set that is oriented to the world **to** a mind set that is oriented to God's kingdom. We can no longer view events from the same perspective as we had before we became new creatures in Christ Jesus. Events around us are **not** to be viewed with respect to personal gain or loss but with respect to how they help us become transformed into the image of Christ. This is the meaning of Romans 8:28-29. By believing it, we can then see and, therefore, "prove" or experience the outworking of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God in our very lives.

ROMANS 12:3-8 One of the problems the Israelites had in executing their trusteeship of God's plan of salvation was that of pride. They saw themselves as "God's chosen people," which they were. However, it seeing this, they concluded that somehow they deserved it rather than it being a result of the grace of God. Now this grace and mercy of God includes not only biological Israel but all who will believe. We need to be diligent and watchful to not let the same kind of pride come into our lives. What we have, we have by the grace of God and these resources were chosen by Him and given to each person for a specific purpose in accomplishing the will of God. The conclusion is that the gifts (resources) that God has given us are not because we deserve it or even choose it. And these resources are to be properly used to carry out the purposes of God -- not our own. God has the oversight of what He is doing in the Church and He has preordained the "good works" that need to be done. He has given to each Christian a measure of faith and a corresponding job in which to exercise that faith. Let us, then, be about doing the job we have been assigned to do.

Paul recognized several jobs that are necessary for the functioning of the church: prophecy, helping others, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing compassion. These are the functions of ministry in the church.

ROMANS 12:9-16 There is both function and form in ministry. There is the question of "what" to do and of "how" to do it. Paul had already begun to touch on the question of form in the previous verses. Our giving should be with simplicity (rather than fanfare), our leading should be with diligence and the outworking of our compassion should be with cheerfulness.

If we are going to show love to someone it needs to be sincere. People are turned off by insincerity. We have to learn that we cannot be effective in ministry for the cause of Christ if we have do not take a stand against wrong in the world and take a stand for what is right. A preacher who will not speak out against abortion, pornography, illegal drugs, illicit and perverse sex, and other obvious wrongs and will not speak out in favor of the right and good is not going to be effective in bringing people into the kingdom of God.

In the church, we are to recognize each other as part of God's family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ and ought to treat each other with genuine unselfish love. This kind of love leaves no room for jealousy with regard to the recognition others receive. In fact, we ought to be part of the process of recognizing and reinforcing the good that others do.

The things we do outside of church speak of the influence the Christian life has on us. It is a witness which will be either good or bad. Being lazy and slipshod in the way we conduct our lives does not speak well of us. Enthusiasm in what we do as we serve the Lord will make life more enjoyable for ourselves as well as those with whom we are working.

The way we respond to various situations has an impact on our ability to effectively minister to others. If we are upbeat and joyful we project to others that we really do believe the promises of God. If we are patient in times of testing it shows we do believe God is in control. If we share what we have with others in need it shows we do believe that the earth is the Lord's and that we are stewards of the abundance of His grace. If we go the second mile and turn the other cheek, bless and not curse, then we show we believe that Jesus was "on target" in His Sermon on the Mount.

The form and function of our ministry to others must flow out of our relationship to Jesus and the gifts and ability He provides. When we do this it proves not only to the world but to us the rightness of God's righteousness.