

Different Gifts

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; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 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. (Romans 12:6-8)

Just as God's grace had made Paul an apostle, so his grace bestows different gifts on other members of Christ's body. Paul proceeds to give his readers a sample of seven gifts, which he urges them to exercise conscientiously for the common good. He divides them into two categories, which might be called "speaking gifts" (prophesying, teaching and encouraging) and "service gifts" (serving, contributing, leading and showing mercy).

The first gift Paul mentions here is *prophesying*, that is, speaking under divine inspiration. The remaining six gifts are more mundane. *Serving* is a generic word for a wide variety of ministries, so whatever ministry gift people have been given, they should concentrate on using it. Similarly, teachers should cultivate their *teaching* gift and develop their teaching ministry. *Encouraging* has a wide spectrum of meanings, ranging from encouraging and exhorting to comforting, conciliating or consoling. Personal *giving* is to be done with generosity, without grudging or with sincerity, without ulterior motives. Diligent *leadership* may apply both in the home and in the church. And to show *mercy* is to care for anybody who is in need or in distress. Moreover, mercy is not to be shown reluctantly or patronizingly, but cheerfully.

This list of seven spiritual gifts in Romans 12 is much less well-known than either the two overlapping lists in 1 Corinthians 12 or the short list of five in Ephesians 4:11. It is important to note both the similarities and the dissimilarities between them.

First, all the lists agree that the source of the gifts is God and his grace, although in Romans it is God the Father, in Ephesians it is God the Son and in 1 Corinthians it is God the Holy Spirit. And being gifts of trinitarian grace, both boasting and envying are excluded. Second, the purpose of the gifts is related to the building up of the body of Christ. Third, all the lists emphasize the variety of the gifts, each seeming to be a random selection. But, whereas students of the 1 Corinthians lists tend to focus on the supernatural (tongues, prophecy, healing and miracles), in Romans 12 all the gifts apart from prophecy are either general and practical (service, teaching, encouragement and leadership) or even prosaic (giving money and doing acts of mercy). It is evident that we need

to broaden our understanding of spiritual gifts.