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**Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith**  
**Message: Gifted for Service**

**Transcribed Message**  
**November 27, 2022**  
**Romans 12:6-8**

There are always questions that are good to ask. I think there are three that come to mind that we probably ask ourselves on various occasions, maybe in different ways than these but the essence of it might very well be the same. We often think of the question of “who am I” as to our identity. How is it that I see myself? How is it that God sees me? Where do I belong? That sense of security, that finding a place where we fit in, where we sense that we can contribute. What am I supposed to do? Speaking perhaps to the matter of significance. Paul answers all of those questions in Romans 12.

That first one “who am I” Paul in verse 3 says step back and accurately think about who you are. Get a proper appraisal of yourself. Don't think too high. Don't think too low. Think in terms of the heart of humility. That second question. Where do I belong in this matter of security? Paul said God has given us all a gift. He's given us all something to fulfill and to contribute towards and that we looked at that last Sunday in verses 4 and 5. Then this matter of significance. What is I'm supposed to be doing? God has given you a specific spiritual gift or gifts and He wants you to contribute. He wants you to use those within the body of Christ. As we do that, then of course we see the fullness of God on display within the church of Jesus Christ.

This is actually our last study in Romans for 2022. Can you believe that? Next Sunday Lowell is going to launch us into the advent and then on the 11<sup>th</sup> we'll have the Christmas Celebration. On the 18<sup>th</sup> we'll do our family Christmas and on Christmas Eve the 24<sup>th</sup> we'll meet instead of Christmas Day Sunday morning. So we have a change there but this is our last look at the book of Romans for 2022. As we do that, we want to see that God meets the needs of the church through spiritual gifts. That's what Paul is addressing in this opening section of Romans 12. Every one of us has a contribution to make. Every one of us is important. Every one of us is vital to the health of this church. I

think you can just look at that and say to the extent that we aren't using our gifts, to the extent that we aren't doing the things that God has gifted and called us to do, to that extent our church is lacking. We're missing out on that.

Quick review by way of what we looked at last Sunday. Spiritual gifts are given to us by God. Spiritual gifts are given to us by God. That's the source of these gifts. We've said a spiritual gift is a God-given ability. God is the one who gives it to us. He has gifted us and we do these things that He has gifted us to do with ease, effectiveness, and enjoyment. But the point is that they are gifts that God has given.

Secondly, we noted that spiritual gifts are a manifestation of the Spirit. They're a manifestation of the Spirit. This matter that Paul refers to as the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts, the grace gifts. They are in essence the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is using these gifts in our life as a demonstration and manifestation of His work in our life.

Then thirdly, spiritual gifts are given to build up the church. That's their purpose. God has given the gifts to build up the body of Christ and so we want to be a part of that. We look this morning at gifts and the body, reminding ourselves of that analogy that Paul used in those verses we looked at last week, thinking in terms of our physical body. How our physical body functions and how it works together. Each part is important. Each part contributes. He just takes that physical picture and he brings it into the spiritual realm and he says that's the way the body of Christ is supposed to function. We are to function in that same way. The spiritual body of Christ, the church of Jesus Christ, is mirrored in this physical body analogy.

Notice first this is a description of the gifts that we have been given in the New Testament. Remember there were four passages. Two of those passages were found in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of certain books and two of those passages were found in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of certain books. Since we're open to Romans 12, I've already given you one of them. Romans 12 is one of those. The other book in which we find the spiritual gifts listed in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter is 1 Corinthians. Then we have two 4's and the first of those 4's, if we just go through the way that we have the books of the Bible, is going to be found in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ephesians. We just read that, so you had that by way of a clue. The last 4<sup>th</sup> chapter is in 1 Peter. So there you have it. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians

12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. So when you look at those lists, and by the way, there is a copy of all of the spiritual gifts listed in those four chapters on the table in the foyer along with the service opportunity brochure. There is a method to that madness because you're supposed to pick up that list, figure out what your gift is, and then match it to the service opportunity booklet. Grab some of those on your way out this morning. But when you look at those lists, it becomes apparent that no single list is exhaustive. We have four lists. Romans, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4. You look at the list in each of those places and none of those lists have all of the gifts listed and in one single place.

It is often asked are these all the spiritual gifts that there are? Depending on how you count those lists by way of matching up those that might be the same, there is anywhere from 18 to 21 different gifts that are listed in those four passages. People have looked at those gifts and they have said but are those all of them? Are there more gifts than just the ones that are listed here? The answer to that is we don't know. We don't know. The Holy Spirit has given us these. We don't know if there are other ones that for whatever reason the Spirit of God didn't give to us. But my question always to that question is what other spiritual gifts would you think of? What other gifts might be on the list? I don't know exactly what those might be. I tend to think that what we have here is that the Holy Spirit has given us the gifts that He wants us to realize that the church has been blessed with and find the ones that God has given to us.

The other thing to note if you look at those lists is the order. The order of those lists of gifts varies, so in each of those four passages the list is always different. I don't think we need to make a big deal out of that. I don't think that's the point that we are to draw from that, but it is interesting to make just a couple of observations. As you look at those four lists, apostles are always at the top. In any of the list where apostles are mentioned, they're always mentioned first. Of course, we remember that Paul said in Ephesians 2 verse 20 that the apostles and the prophets, as we're going to see in just a little bit, were given as the foundational gifts. It kind of makes sense that the foundational gift of apostleship, I believe, is no longer operational. I don't believe that there are people who have the gift of apostleship functioning in the church today in the way that they did in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. I believe the canon of Scripture, that the Word of

God is sufficiently revealed to us so that gift is no longer operational. The gift of prophecy, when it's listed, is always listed within three of those four lists. Three of the four lists include prophecy. We'll look at that one this morning ourselves. Tongues is listed last. The gift of tongues is only mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and it is at the end of those lists in that chapter. It's with that the gift of interpretation of tongues. It might very well be that what Paul is trying to do, as you know in the book of Corinthians, there was kind of a distortion of these spiritual gifts and there was an imbalance. Maybe in Paul's mind to say listen, yes, this is a gift and it needs to be exercised. It needs to be used but let's keep it in perspective. He literally puts it at the end of every one of the lists in that 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1st Corinthians.

Let's move to Romans 12 and look at the verses 6 through 8 this morning. Let's begin by just thinking of the definition. Defining these gifts. We're going to do that specifically with the ones that are before us. We noted last week in those opening verses 4 and 5 that the most important thing that Paul wanted us to see was this matter of mutual cooperation. Look again at verse 4: "For in one body we have many members, and the members do not have all the same function so we though many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another." Paul puts forward two things about this matter of mutual cooperation.

First of all was that idea of diversity. Within the body there's diversity. We look around again and we realize that within any given body of believers, there's this beauty of diversity. There are these differences that are there inherently by God's providence and design. He wants us to embrace the idea that we're all different. We have different experiences, different backgrounds. Even as I was thinking about this week just knowing many of your stories, knowing many of your spiritual journeys. Some of you came to Christ at a very young age. You heard the gospel at a very young age. Some of you are so young that you don't even exactly know when that happened. You came to Christ early and by your own testimony you and your family were in church every Sunday that the doors were open; or for that matter, any other day of the week that the doors were open. That was your life. That's what you look back on. That's your story. That's your testimony.

Then we have people who are among us who came to Christ later in life, and some even very recently. The gospel opening up to them the wonder of the grace of God much later in their life maybe after a whole variety of experiences in which God in His providence finally brought them to understand and see the gospel. Maybe their story is they never went to church. They grew up without ever going to church. That is one little slice of differences among us. You can multiply that by a hundred other things that speak to this matter of mutual cooperation within this picture of the beautiful diversity that God has created in the body of Christ.

But then of course there is this matter of unity. That is the other thing that Paul underscores. Here we all are. Paul's point in verse 5 is here we all are and we're all in Christ. This commonality that we share, this bond that holds us together, whatever those differences are, whatever that diversity looks like there is this beautiful commonality of being one together in Christ. To the extent that the church operates in unity and overcomes those differences, to the extent that we operate in unity, then I think we're fulfilling the charge of verse 3 – to view ourselves properly, to see ourselves the way God wants us to see ourselves, to walk in the spirit of humility. I think the other is also true to the extent that if the church doesn't walk in harmony, it's because it's very likely we've got a false view of ourselves and there is a spirit of pride. I don't think there's any church that has ever experienced difficulty and the lack of harmony in which the spirit of pride is not a part of that equation. That's why it's so important the way Paul begins to develop this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter for us.

Now in verses 6 through 8 we have these two ideas: mutual cooperation and yet we have individual participation. I just want to emphasize again how those go together. Those two go together. Mutual cooperation individual participation. My individual identity in Christ is really brought to the forefront and put on display when I'm serving you. the same is true of you. your identity in Christ. Who it is that God has made you and created you to be is brought into its beauty and fullness when you find your gifting and are serving others. That's how these work together. There's this mutual cooperation, but there's also this matter of individual participation.

Let's look at verses 6 through 8. "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our

serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” So I say first of all, everybody has a spiritual gift. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift. That's the point of verse 3 when Paul speaks of this matter of each of us. That's what he is underscoring in verse 6. That is the same things he says over in 1 Corinthians 12 verse 4 and then again in verse 7. He says that the Holy Spirit has given to each one of us. He underscored that. He emphasizes that. Everybody needs to know that they have a spiritual gift. Every believer has a spiritual gift. I think Paul is emphasizing that as often as he does because he wants this to be very clear that there isn't anybody sitting here that can go I missed out. I did not get a gift. No, you have a gift. It's up to us to learn and discover that. Everybody has at least one gift. I think it's probably true that most of us have more than one. Maybe 2, 3, 4. There's no reason to think that you have only one. You have one, but it's very likely that you have more than one.

But the other part of that equation is this. No believer has all the gifts. Nobody can look at Paul's analogy of the physical body and say I don't have need of anybody. I have all the gifts that could possibly be needed. Of course not. Just as in the physical body one part can't say to another part I don't need you. No, the body needs each and every part. We all have at least one, probably more than one, spiritual gift but nobody has all of them. That's that sense of interdependency that he's been talking about.

Now let's look at his third point. every believer is to use their gifts for the common good. What Paul does in verses 6 through 8 is he gives us a small sampling of seven gifts. Of these seven gifts that are mentioned here in Romans 12, four of them are not mentioned in any of the other places where we read about spiritual gifts. We'll have at least four that are unique to Paul's list in Romans 12. We're just going to work our way through briefly these seven different gifts, describe a little bit of their function, and then hopefully awaken within you the possibility that maybe you have that gift. Maybe this is one of the ones that God is given to you.

We began with this matter of prophecy. “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy; in proportion to our faith.” You could really translate that statement this way. If prophecy, in proportion to and there's a

definite article in front of the word faith. So you could really say if prophecy, in proportion to or in relationship to or in agreement with the faith. It really is the faith. There's a definite article in front of the word faith. I think it's underscoring the fact that which is believed is the faith, the body of truth. This body of truth is revealed to us in the Word of God. There is a word of prophecy that is given. It is given in relation to the body of truth that God has given. In other words, it must be in agreement with. It must be in relationship to this that God has given us.

The gift of prophecy, as you're probably very well aware, is understood in more than one way. Everybody pretty much agrees that the gift of prophecy was given originally as a means for God to tell His people both things about the future and things about the present. We know that there is the gift of prophecy all through the Old Testament and largely in the beginnings of the early church as well. God was giving His people insight in some cases about the future. That was prophetic foretelling, actually telling what was going to come. But there is almost a greater emphasis in some respects on simply the matter of foretelling. God through His prophets saying "thus saith the Lord".

When you think of the gift of prophecy even in the Old Testament, those Old Testament prophets weren't just always predicting the future. They did that on occasion but most of the time they were calling God's people to His truth and to repentance for that matter. The prophet was one, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:20, with the apostles as laying the foundation for the church. How many times do you lay a foundation? You lay a foundation one time. So if the apostles and prophets were laying the foundation of the church by giving to the church God's revealed truth that at that point in the 1<sup>st</sup> century had not been completed, they didn't have the 66 books of the Bible like we do. So the gift of prophecy was essential for God to say "thus saith the Lord" through those with the gift of prophecy. That revelation is now complete. We have God's Word given to us. There are some who believe that the prophetic gift is still functional, still operational today and that God is still speaking to certain gifted people with the gift of prophecy what He wants them to share with other people or within the church. We don't have time to go into all of that this morning. I don't believe that that is the case. That is my personal opinion. I think the gift of prophecy is with the gift of apostleship no longer

functional, at least certainly not in the way of giving God's revelation that is equal to the Word of God.

The second gift that he mentions is this matter of serving. If prophecy is a speaking gift, then we come to this second one, to a gift that really engages activity. It is an action gift. It is the word here for serving. *Diakonea*. Just listen to that word. There is an English word hiding in there. It is a word that we're very familiar with. Deacon. Deacon is the idea of this word *diakonea*. It is the word for serving. If you're a deacon, you have the gift of serving. You don't have to be a deacon to have the gift of serving, but I can't imagine that a deacon would not have the gift of serving because that by definition is what he is talking about here. This is a non-technical use of that word. When we first read of a deacon it's in Acts 6. The apostles were being distracted from the study of the Word and doing the responsibilities that God had given to them and God raised up this group to come alongside and to take on and do many of the duties and the things that needed to be done.

I remember many years ago a very godly deacon in our church brought a word of exhortation in my own life that I've never forgotten and it was very helpful. He said Carlon, God has raised up deacons in this church so stop trying to do the work of the deacon. You go and do the work of an elder. That was a good word. I needed to hear that because I liked to get involved in these projects that these guys are doing and he sent me back to the office and said I don't want to see you out here again. No. But that's what deacons do. Deacons engage but you don't have to be a deacon to have the gift of serving.

Think on any given Sunday. When we gather, think of the fact that before we even get here people have prepared our facility for us. It's been cleaned. It's been prepared. It's been set up for us to be able to come and do the thing that we do together. Then when we're here. Think about the fact that we drive onto the campus and there are people who engage us right in the parking lot. Then we come to the doors where there are people who greet us. Then we come in here and there is a hospitality team that's working. Can you imagine a Sunday morning without coffee and donuts? No, don't go there. I know it's not a good thing to think about. But then there are 40 to 50 people working back with the children and the nursery allowing us to be in here really



unhindered from a lot of the other commotion that would be a part of the morning like that. Just keep working your way through the day from community group leaders all the way down to the end of our morning and there are people that are serving the body of Christ every time we come together. There isn't any church that could function well without a whole bunch of people having the gift of serving. It's probably one of the more primary gifts that God has given to the church and with good reason, with good purpose. Serving is often behind-the-scenes. Sometimes they don't get a lot of recognition but they're absolutely essential to the function of the church. We think of our worship team, our tech team, and the list just goes on and on of those who are serving every time we come together.

The third gift that he mentioned is the gift of teaching. Making the Bible clear and understandable. Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy. He said Timothy, what you need to be doing is you need to be preaching and you need to be teaching the Word of God in season and out. That's your job. That's your calling. That's what God has gifted you to do. Elders are to be able to teach. When you look at the list of qualifications between elders and deacons, they're very, very similar. Elders are to be able to teach. The elders at Covenant are teaching in some format some way, some place. The great need in the church today is for teachers.

Ray Stedman is of the opinion that there are again, just like with the gift of serving, that the gift of teaching is a very common gift in the body of Christ. Think of all the different ways that this happens. Think of Paul writing and commending Lois and Eunice for teaching Timothy the gospel and the truths of God's Word. A mom. A grandma. A dad. A grandpa teaching their children and grandchildren. It happens in a big group. It happens in the small group. It happens one-on-one. It's simply a matter of taking the things, as Paul said, that have been entrusted to us and passing them on to others so that they can faithfully pass them on to others as well. The gift of teaching is a very important gift in the body of Christ. If you have the gift of teaching, almost certainly you love to study God's Word. You can't be a teacher of the Word and not love to engage the Word yourself and study the Word of God. Someone said if you have the gift of teaching, people have the gift of listening. If you have the gift, or if you think you

have the gift of teaching, and people don't have the gift of listening, then you probably don't have the gift of teaching. I guess that would be one simple way to test that.

The fourth gift is that of the encourager, of the exhorter. This is often linked with teaching because in teaching the Word you're trying to exhort people to obey the Word. Very often they go together. It's the word *parakaleo*, which means to come alongside. Who was called the *parakaleo*? The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is referred to as a *parakaleo*, one who comes alongside, one who exhorts, one who encourages, one who counsels. Again, you can see how this gift is used in so many different ways in the church. It is used obviously in one-on-one settings. It's used with somebody just coming alongside somebody and exhorting them, encouraging them. The idea is always with a view to obeying God's Word, to following the right path. The idea of encouraging, yes, but exhorting with a view to obedience. That is what is in view when we think of this gift. To warn, to advise, to challenge, to encourage, to counsel – all of these things are in view.

It reminds me of the cartoon of these two guys that are walking along. One guy has a frown on his face and he turns to the other guy and he says, "do you ever have one of those days where you just feel like you just need to exhort somebody?" Well, that's not necessarily that you have the gift of exhortation. That could be just that you're in a bad mood. But an exhorter is designed again to encourage people in their walk with God towards the truth.

Then the fifth one is giving. We're all to give, but here he says those who have this gift of giving are to do so with generosity. You know in so many of these gifts, you don't have to have the gift to do this. We don't say I don't give because I don't have the gift. No, we're all commanded to give. We're all commanded to serve. We're all commanded to encourage. There are all kinds of ways that we do these things. Those people who have this spiritual gift do so with ease, effectiveness, and enjoyment. But everybody is to be a giver. Here however is somebody who actually has the gift of giving, which when I think of that I think of the idea of liberality and generosity. Jesus told the parable of the very rich man who had so much that he decided he would tear down his small barns and build even bigger ones. Within that context, Jesus was driving home the point about generosity. It's true if you have the gift of generosity you have the

ability given by the Holy Spirit to possess the things that God has entrusted to you and you do so with open hands. That's the gift of generosity. That's the gift of giving with liberality. We see that within the body of Christ so often as people demonstrate this open handedness with the things that God has entrusted to them. There's real cheerfulness in that Paul says in 2 Corinthians.

Then, the gift of leading and probably with that gift is the gift of administration. This would be an example where you have two gifts that are listed leading and administration. They may very well be the same gift in some sense or they may be two different aspects of this gift. But the gift of leading is someone who knows what needs to be done and they know how to do it. They have a sense of vision. They manage people. They work well with people. They lead in this vision of what needs to be done and they challenge other people to join them in it. You see he says do it with zeal. Do it with zeal. Do it with energy. Do it with enthusiasm. It's the attitude that says we can do this. It's fun to follow those kinds of people.

The last one he mentions is mercy with cheerfulness. Notice that. Those of you with the gift of mercy. That special capacity, that special giftedness to step into people's lives at points of heartache and hardship and pain and all those things that come with some of the difficult circumstances of life. We see this gift in the life of our Lord as the gospel writers would often say He would look on some person and He would be moved with compassion. He would be moved by mercy. That's the gift of mercy that somebody has and they do it with cheerfulness. Why do you suppose he adds that idea of cheerfulness? I don't know for sure but you almost wonder if it isn't because those with this gift they're stepping into hard things. They're often finding themselves stepping into needy situations. I suppose there would be a sense in which it would be easy to be drained out with that gift, and yet here is the encouragement to continue to do so with a sense of cheerfulness.

Here are seven gifts out of all the ones that are listed in the New Testament. There are seven Paul steps into in Romans 12. Let's just briefly this morning talk about how we discover our gifts. We aren't going to be able to spend a lot of time here, but let me just real briefly run down just a few ideas. Let's start off with what not to do. The first thing not to do is not just simply take a test and say okay, those are my gifts. I've taken

a test and that's all I need to know now. I've got my gift list here and these are the ones that I have. You realize when Paul and Peter wrote and gave us these lists, they could have said find a spiritual gifts test and take it. They didn't do that. That's something that has developed with the modern church. Most of those tests, while they're helpful, there's a bias that's just built in. Take the test if you'd like, but realize that's not the only thing.

Secondly, don't respond to a plea to serve out of guilt. You're not necessarily going to find your spiritual gift when you're responding out of a sense of guilt. If I'm making the plea, then go ahead because that would be helpful. No, if you're just responding out of guilt, you're probably not going to find a lot of ease, effectiveness, and enjoyment because that may not be your area of gifting.

Then the third thing not to do is don't think you have to commit to a ministry for life. Some of the things that we'll talk about in just a minute step into an opportunity realizing that you're just trying to figure things out. and you can step back out again. I think that's one of the things that is true at Covenant, that we don't necessarily say to you once you've volunteered you have to stay there forever. Now it's amazing to me and I love it that we have people with gifts that are just doing it year after year after year. Why? Because they do it with ease, effectiveness, and enjoyment. That's great, but don't feel like if you've volunteered to try something that you'll never escape and you're there for life.

What should we do? Wrapped in all of these of course is prayer. You're praying and you're saying Holy Spirit of God, You have given me a spiritual gift. I'd love to know with greater understanding what that is. Then what do you do? Gain as much information as you can. Be familiar with the gifts themselves. Get that list. Grab it from the foyer and just look it over. Ask what needs and opportunities there are. There you go. Pick up that service brochure and just work your way through it. You might see something that interests you, something that you'd like to know more about.

Then maybe most important of all, you just engage. You get involved and you serve. That's probably the most important way. You can't know what your gifts are to the degree that I think God wants you to know what they are unless you're involved. You can't know what your gifts are if you're in isolation from the rest of the body. You're part of the spiritual body of Christ. You're connected. You're interconnected. There is mutual

cooperation but there's individual participation. But you've got to be a participant. To discover your gift, you've got to do it. Even if you don't know at the time that you're using that gift, you may very well be using the gift that God has given you. That will become more apparent as you go on. Every person is needed to have a vital, healthy church body.

What do we take away? Being connected to a local church and using your spiritual gifts to build up the church is God's will for your life. There are not many times that I can necessarily stand up here and say I know God's will for your life. This is one of the times when I can because God's will for every one of us is that we come to understand what our spiritual gift is and then we step into that area of use and ministry and we use it. That is God's will for all of us. So then I simply ask: what are you doing with the gifts that God has given you? I believe we're all going to give an answer with regard to the things that we have been given and entrusted with. We're going to have to have an answer. What did you do with your gift? Did you bury it? That's not a good answer. Did you use it? That's what God expects and wants from us.

Let's pray. Father God, we're so very thankful for the church of Jesus Christ here at Covenant. Lord, we're thankful and grateful for all of the ways that You have gifted this body. We know that there are even greater opportunities, greater expressions of what You want us to be doing and to be doing well because You have equipped everybody here with gifts that they can utilize and use with ease, effectiveness, and enjoyment in building up the body of Christ and reaching our community for Christ. Father, we pray that You give us that heart, give us that passion, give us that desire, give us that spirit of obedience to do what You've called us to do and to step into Your will for each of our lives. I pray in Jesus's name, amen.