



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

1st Corinthians 12:28 & Romans 12:7-8

Topic

Paul presents certain areas of service to the Lord as both responsibilities every Christian has and supernatural abilities some Christians are gifted with

Title

“In His Majesty’s Spiritual Service”

Introduction

Jesus once stooped to wash His disciple’s feet. It was the job of a low servant and, so, it startled them. It shouldn’t have, however, because He had demonstrated for three-and-one-half years that He had come to serve and not be served.

After washing their feet the Lord told His disciples He had given them an example to follow. They were to “wash one another’s feet.” Not literally, but in the sense that as His disciples they ought always to stoop to serve one another.

Commenting on the symbolism of Jesus’ footwashing, Kent Hughes writes,

Jesus got up from supper, even as in his incarnation he rose up from his throne in Heaven to come to earth. He laid aside his outer garments as he prepared to wash the

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disciples' feet, even as he laid aside his glory in Heaven to come to earth. Jesus wrapped a towel around himself, even as he took the form of a servant in his humanity. He took the towel and basin, even as he came to earth to serve us. Then he poured out the water on his disciples' feet, even as he poured out his blood for our salvation. Finally, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, even as he now by grace and through the Holy Spirit cleanses his children from all sin.

When we follow the example of Jesus and serve one another we are representing Jesus as God's servant who came to offer Himself as our Substitute as a sacrifice on the Cross at Calvary. We are proclaiming to one another and to others that God became a man in order to serve us.

"Make me a servant" is something every Christian has asked of the Lord. As we come to study what can be called the serving gifts I want us to have the sense we are asking the Lord to "make me a servant." When we allow Him to answer that prayer, we give others a glimpse of Jesus stooping to forgive and cleanse them.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Ask The Lord, "Make Me A Servant," Then Tend To Your Responsibilities, and #2 Ask The Lord, "Make Me A Servant," Then Find Your Specialties.

#1 Ask The Lord, "Make Me A Servant,"
Then Tend To Your Responsibilities

We've paused during our chapter-by-chapter study through First Corinthians to take a look at the various gifts of the Holy Spirit. We've taken a look at what we labeled the speaking gifts and the sign gifts. The remaining gifts can be called the serving gifts. They are helps, administrations, ministry, giving, and mercy.

What is fascinating about these is that, in each case, every believer has a responsibility to serve the Lord but some are specially gifted to do so in extraordinary ways.

So here is what I'd like to do in studying these gifts. I'd like to take a look at how they impact each of us as disciples before we see how some of us might be specially gifted.

We were in First Corinthians twelve, studying verse-by-verse, when we came to Paul's list of gifts in verses eight, nine, and ten. He reiterated the list in verse twenty-eight but added "helps" and "administrations."

This list, and the other lists found in the Bible, are not exhaustive. They are representative of the kinds of enablings the Holy Spirit gives. In this list, "helps" and "administrations" clue us in that in addition to speaking and sign gifts there are gifts of serving one another.

"Helps" is a gift given to some and not all by the Holy Spirit but all of us are called upon to serve the Lord by helping one another.

Jesus established that helps was a general responsibility when He told the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The man who had been beaten and robbed needed help. The Samaritan put himself at risk to stop and help the man. He sacrificed his time and even his resources to see that the man was properly cared for. It wasn't that he was gifted; it was that he had a responsibility.

All of us are therefore called upon to help one another - whether we're gifted in that way or not.

Think of it this way. In many professions there are general practitioners and there are specialists. When it comes to Christianity, we are all general practitioners. We are all called upon to help whenever necessary and should stoop to the occasion.

"Administrations" is next on Paul's list. This gift is called "leadership" in Romans 12:8. The KJV calls it "governments."

Most of you, at one time or another, will be in some position of administration or leadership. This is true if you are a husband; this is true if

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you are a wife; this is true of all parents; this is true in the church; this is true of many occupations.

The world portrays leadership as telling others what to do. The leader is the supervisor.

That's not the Jesus-style of leadership. He stooped. He was (are you ready?) the 'stoop-ervisor.'

Everyday the Lord gives all of us opportunities to stoop and show our understanding of His servant leadership. We can stand, like the world, to show our supposed position of superiority. Or we can stoop and represent what Jesus would do if He were still on the earth.

We need to consult Paul's list in Romans twelve for the next serving gifts.

Romans 12:7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; Romans 12:8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

We looked at "teaching" and "exhortation" as speaking gifts. "Ministry... giv[ing]... and show[ing] mercy" are the serving gifts in this list.

"Ministry" simply means *servicing*. It can describe any individual act of serving. It is thus similar to "helps" but a different Greek word is used. Some commentators thus say that helps and serving go together. Helps is the attitude and serving is the attitude in action.

Action. Movement. Rolling-up your sleeves. All of us are called upon to get things done for the Lord. Pitch-in and serve whenever and wherever you can. If you can do something, then do it - no matter if you think it might not be your gift.

"Giving" is next on the list. It's a gift some believers have but it is also a responsibility all believers share.

We have a fundamental philosophy here that “where God guides, God provides.” Thus we don’t talk a lot about money and giving until it comes up in the text we are studying.

Tithing or Tipping? was the name of an article I came across. In it the author criticized Christians for their failure to tithe to the church on a regular basis. Rather than tithe, he says they tip – giving a little here or there when they feel they have been treated to a good service.

Someone I was discussing the article with pointed out that “tithe” means ten percent, whereas tipping is now up to fifteen percent! Maybe we should encourage more tipping!

The latest research indicates the average amount a Christian gives to the work of the Lord is 1.5% of their income. Many believers give nothing at all of their money.

We don’t teach the “tithe” or tipping. Our standard is grace-giving. Because God has been gracious to us, we are to seek Him on how much to give Him from what He provides for us.

But that doesn’t mean believers are encouraged to give less! In Second Corinthians Paul will explain that each Christian has a responsibility to seek the Lord as to how much to give to His work through their local church. To help you he explains you are called upon to give regularly, sacrificially, and joyfully.

Is your giving regular? Is it sacrificial? Is it joyful? Those are the standards for every believer.

Giving is often discussed in the context of meeting certain needs in the church. Well, for sure the church always has financial needs. But something more important is going on with giving.

In His Sermon on the Mount, in chapter six, Jesus mentioned three fundamental priorities for disciples. He said, “When you pray... when you

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fast... when you give.” In other words, He assumed you would understand those were givens. Praying, fasting, and giving are the marks of a disciple.

We have no problem giving our assent to prayer as a discipline. We may not do it enough, but we have no qualms about it's priority.

If you are like me, fasting is probably not a huge priority. Fasting is somewhat of a lost discipline. We need to rediscover it. Jesus said, “when,” not “if” you fast.

Giving needs to be just as important a priority to us as prayer. If our giving is not regular, sacrificial, and joyful, then we are unbalanced as disciples.

Add to that the biblical principle of sowing and reaping. If you sow sparingly of your physical resources, you will reap sparingly of spiritual resources.

“He who shows mercy” is the next exhortation we read. Jesus commanded you, in Luke 6:36, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Since God is merciful - not giving you what you deserve - you will be merciful if you have His nature in you.

We each have the capacity to look on every other human being as an eternal soul that needs Christ. Since God is willing to show them mercy at the Cross, we must show them Christ in order that they might receive the forgiveness of their sins. All of us must be seated in the heavenlies with the Lord when it comes to our judgments on the earth.

Right or wrong, evangelical Christianity has come to be associated with what we are against rather than Who we are for. Your first citizenship is in Heaven. You are an ambassador for Jesus Christ. Show His mercy.

What does a servant do? He or she has a desire to help others and puts that desire into practice regularly by serving wherever and whenever needed. He or she takes the lead by stooping down. He or she gives

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regularly, sacrificially, and joyfully. He or she treats every person in such a way that they understand God has shown them mercy at the Cross.

Some servants specialize in those things!

#2 Ask The Lord, “Make Me A Servant,”
Then Find Your Specialties

Being gifted in these things doesn't mean you do them more than others. For example, someone might give more money quantitatively than the person with the gift of giving.

As always, being gifted means the Holy Spirit super-enables you in these things.

Since they appear related, let's take “helps” and “ministry” together. One definition of these gifts reads like this: “The gifts of helps and ministry are the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to identify unmet needs involved in a task related to God's work, and to make use of available resources to meet those needs and help accomplish the desired goals.”

If you are gifted to help and to minister you will be available, willing, helpful, reliable, humble, and supportive. You're never looking for public acknowledgement. You'd rather do the task yourself than find someone else to do it. Things that are routine or mundane or tedious don't bother you. You go the extra distance.

Timothy is an example of a person with the gifts of helps and ministry. He became Paul's traveling companion and essentially tended to Paul's needs. The apostle could send Timothy to accomplish a task, whether physical or spiritual, and trust it would be done.

“Administration,” or leadership, is the supernatural enabling to manage the affairs of the Church with both diligence and compassion.

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The church has often gone wrong at this point. Often we look for a measure of material success in someone's life as the indicator they are a leader or administrator. While financial or occupational success does not disqualify you for leadership, it does not necessarily qualify you, either. Like the other gifts we must keep in mind that it is the supernatural enabling of the Holy Spirit that is needed to properly govern the Church and not the methods and machinery of human business and government.

Having said that, there is nothing wrong with being organized or task-oriented. A person with this gift will be thorough and efficient.

Nehemiah is a fantastic Old Testament example of a spiritually gifted administrator. God put a burden on his heart to rebuild the walls surrounding Jerusalem. When he had the opportunity, he organized an amazing project and raised the walls out of the rubbish in record time.

Joseph is another Old Testament example of administration. God told him exactly what to do during the seven years of plenty in Egypt in order to be prepared for the seven years of famine. Then, during the famine, he administered the distribution of food with supernatural skill.

There is a gift of "giving." In Romans twelve Paul qualified the gift of giving by using the term "liberality." The gift of giving is the enabling the Holy Spirit gives some of you to contribute your material resources with great liberality in order to support and further the work of the local Church. You are not bound by percentages. You have boundless generosity.

Barnabas had the gift of giving. In the Book of Acts, he is reported to have sold a piece of property in order to give all the proceeds to the church for the needs of the ministry. The apostles did not ask him (or anyone else for that matter) to do so. The Holy Spirit put it upon Barnabas' heart and he responded.

One modern-era believer with the gift of giving is quoted as saying, "The question is not how much of my money I give to God, but rather how much of God's money I keep" (R.G. LeTourneau).

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The gift of “mercy” is given to certain members of the church as the Holy Spirit sees fit to do so. You will be drawn to people who are in distress and you will desire to express God's love and forgiveness towards them. One author described this as "joyful compassion; getting on the inside of another person while bringing a cheerfulness to their wounded heart; the ability to empathize with another person going through difficulties and help them realize the great love and forgiveness God has for them."

If you have the gift of showing mercy you will be extraordinarily patient with people. You'll be willing to serve them in difficult circumstances. You will treat them with dignity as a person made in the image of God despite their hardships. You will desire to meet not just their physical needs but their spiritual and emotional issues.

A disciple by the name of Onesiphorous was Paul's example of someone who showed him mercy. In Second Timothy 1:16-18 we read,

2 Timothy 1:16 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain;

2 Timothy 1:17 but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me.

2 Timothy 1:18 The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day - and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.

Onesiphorous showed mercy to Paul by visiting him while he was under arrest at great risk. Paul was praying he and his household would experience God's mercy.

“Make me a servant” is a prayer on each of our hearts. It has to be if you are a Christian because Jesus came to serve and calls upon us to follow His example.

Some of you are gifted by the Holy Spirit in these areas of service. All of us are called upon to serve in these areas.

Think of this study as a performance review of your discipleship:

- Make any necessary changes or adjustments.

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- Keep doing the things you are doing well.
- Start doing anything you are neglecting.

In all things be encouraged by these words of your Lord:

John 13:16 Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.

John 13:17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

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