

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/10/94 PM  
Romans 12:8 "The Gift of Exhortation"

**Intro:** Did you ever stop to compare the church as we know it today in America to the early, New Testament church? There are obviously some similarities. But there are also differences. The differences are many. And unfortunately, they are glaring.

Let's do a little assignment. We have taken a couple of weeks break from our Sunday evening series on "Spiritual Gifts," and tonight we return. Spiritual gifts were given to the local church, and are designed to function in the local church. I think this assignment will be helpful.

Let's make two columns. In the first, we'll record observations of the NT church. In the second, the American church. Obviously, there were many NT churches, so we'll pick one--the Jerusalem church as described in Acts 2-6. Let's research the text, and identify characteristics of the Jerusalem church. Then, we'll compare that list with the American church.

The church was born in Acts 2. Three thousand were saved at Pentecost, and added to the followers of Christ. What was true of this fledgling church?

The Church at Jerusalem in Acts 2-6

What was true of the church at Jerusalem?

- 2:42 Devoted to four activities:
  - Doctrine
  - Fellowship
  - Breaking of Bread
  - Prayer
- 2:43 Characterized by:
  - Fear
  - Wonders & signs (God was real and active)
- 2:44 Togetherness was important/they were a Genuine Community.
- 2:45 Sensitive to the needs of others/Sacrificial giving
- 2:46 Key words which depict the quality of their Church life:
  - DAILY (a seven day a week church! church was a high priority)
  - ONE ACCORD/SINGLENES (Unity was cherished)
  - HOUSE (Household/family oriented)
  - GLADNESS
- 2:47 Vertical Focus ("praising God")
  - "We come to church to GIVE GOD something."
- 3:1 Committed to evangelism
  - Their evangelism approach = "Go to the world." (also 8:4)
- 4:1 Faced opposition from the religious establishment
- 4:32 Unity was real:
  - no room for selfishness
  - shared their possessions with those in need
- 4:33 Committed to giving witness to Christ (see 1:8)
  - Great grace upon them ALL (every member a minister)
- 5:1 Took sin seriously
- 6:1 Decentralized ministry:
  - Membership (deacons) did the ministry (3)

--Leaders committed to prayer and the Word (4)

6:12 Experienced opposition and persecution

There's the church of Jerusalem. Not a perfect church certainly. I would hasten to say we are not to emulate the early church. But we can learn from the early church.

Now let's make some observations about the American church today.

### The American Church Today

In contrast with the Jerusalem church, what is true of us?

(these are generalizations and tendencies)

2:44 Togetherness/community is foreign to us (sit in pews one hour, and leave).

2:45 Our sensitivity to needs is dull

("Let the government take care of single mothers! That's why we pay taxes!")

2:46 Often, Church is a low priority.

--One (maybe two) day a week church.

--We fit church in if it's convenient.

Instead of being house-hold oriented, we are:

--Building-oriented

--Program-oriented

Instead of gladness, the church today is "stressed out."

2:47 Instead of a vertical focus, we have an INWARD focus:

--"We come to church to GET SOMETHING."

--"I expect the church to meet MY needs."

--"I expect the church to make me feel good!"

(entertainment-oriented)

3:1 Our Evangelism approach:

--"Bring the world TO the church." Or worse...

--"Wait for the world to come to us."

4:32 Unity is a rare commodity:

--Denominational divisions

--sensitivity to needs is paralyzed by materialism

Think about it: We have 1/2 to 3/4 million dollars worth of cars in our parking lot every Sunday...

What's the point of this comparison?

First, I must say we need to be careful not to glamorize the early church. Bill Hull is right when he writes (The Disciple Making Church, pp. 61-2): "Many Christians tend to glamorize the first church..."

The early church was not utopia. Nor is the modern church all washed up.

Yet we do have a problem. When we think of "church" today, we think of buildings, parking lots, bulletins, budgets, children's programs, pews, Sunday School classes, and potlucks. There is nothing wrong with these.

But the tragedy is when this is ALL the church is known for! I thank God for His Church today. So do you. By God's grace, the Church today is doing lots of things right, too. Thank the Lord for this.

Nonetheless, a challenge stands before us...

Challenge: Let the church BE the church! The church today needs to recapture a biblical sense of what God intended the church to be. And be that!

Key: If we are to be a New Testament church, we must grasp two principles.

1. God designed His Church to experience **Unity**.

--We must be united in our purpose.

--We must be united in our relationships, so the world can see Christ in us.

2. God has designed His Church to experience **Diversity**.

In what way? Namely, in terms of our focus, diversity in Spiritual Gifts.

God has gifted every child of His. Yet He has gifted us differently. That means that we need each other. God has equipped you to fill a spot in this church that no one else can fill. When seen in this light, diversity is a beautiful thing.

Illust: Colson (Loving God) story of church in Seoul...

Diversity and unity go hand in hand. They complement each other. This is especially seen in the area of Spiritual Gifts.

If you're a Christian, if you have confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of you're life, then God has given to you a spiritual gift. Your gift is a supernatural provision. God gave it to you. And He gave it to you for a purpose.

What does He want you to do with your gift? Develop and use it to minister to others in the Church for His Glory! What a vast potential!

Are we keeping in step with the Spirit at WBC?

J. I. Packer, in his book Keep in Step with the Spirit, warns us of quenching the Spirit's work. He writes, "Only styles and structures that serve the Spirit should stand. Everything bogging us down in lifeless routines or restraining the fruitful use of spiritual gifts or encouraging people in the pews to become passengers should be changed, no matter how sacrosanct we previously took it to be. The Holy Spirit is not a sentimentalist as too many of us are; He is a change agent, and He comes to change human structures as well as human hearts. Change for its own sake is mere fidgeting, but change that gets rid of obstacles to God's fullest blessing is both a necessity and a mercy... How much change are we willing to accept, in order to reach the point where the Spirit is no longer quenched?"

Tran: Having reminded ourselves of the importance of spiritual gifts, let's consider the spiritual gifts in Paul's list in Romans 12:8.

**Review: Spiritual Gifts**

The Gift of Prophecy: It is the ability to speak the Word of God with power and clarity. The gift of prophecy is intended to be used to spur the church into action. It does not primarily refer to prediction, but instead to the communication of God's revealed truth. Prophecy can be used in a public setting (preaching) or in a private setting (one on one).

The Gift of Service: It is the ability to render practical help to those who are in need. All Christians are called to serve one another (Gal 5:13). Yet some are especially grace-gifted for service to the Body. They are often people who labor behind the scenes.

The Gift of Teaching: Teaching is the ability to communicate the truths of the Word of God to someone else in a clear fashion.

The Gift of Faith (I Corinthians 12:9): The gift of faith is the supernatural ability to trust God, and to encourage others to do the same.

And the next gift listed in Paul's list...

### **The Gift of Exhortation--Romans 12:8**

Romans 12:8 "Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation"

Exhortation is the responsibility of all Christians. We're told in Hebrews 3:13, "But exhort one another daily." Exhorting is to be present in all our lives. But God has given certain Christians the gift of exhortation. What is it?

#### A. The Gift of Exhortation: What is it?

Two words of caution. First, we must be careful of equating exhortation with browbeating from the pulpit. Also, we must not narrowly view exhortation as solely a public gift.

Now on the positive side. We can understand what the gift is by examining the word itself. The greek word for "exhorting" is *parakalo*. It's a compound word comprised of two smaller words (*para* = alongside of + *kaleo* = to call). A Paraclete is "one called alongside to help".

In John 14:16 the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete or "Comforter". He is our Helper and Companion in this age, until Jesus returns. In I John 2:1 we're told that Jesus is our "Advocate" who represents us before the Father (same word Paraclete).

The Lord Jesus is our heavenly Paraclete. The Holy Spirit is our resident Paraclete. But notice something very important from Romans 12:8, "Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." God has placed certain individuals in the Church with the gift of exhortation. They are responsible to be involved in the ministry of exhortation. That is, they are to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit as "paracletes" themselves!

**DEFINITION:** The gift of exhortation is the supernatural ability to come alongside of people in order to encourage them.

What is the purpose of this gift? The purpose of exhortation is that one Christian might help another Christian live out their obedience to the Gospel. That's what Paul does in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you (same word--lit. "I exhort you"). As one commentator puts it, the person with this gift has been especially equipped to

strengthen the weak, reassure the wavering, buttress the buffeted, steady the faltering, console the troubled, and encourage the halting.

Paul told Timothy in I Timothy 4:13, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Granted, our church is to be a place where people can learn the Word of God. But we must do more than merely dump information into heads! God wants His Church to be a place where His people are exhorted to put His Word into action.

The gift of exhortation is a great gift. We need it.

#### B. The Gift of Exhortation: How is it to be used?

The ministry of exhortation is two pronged. Exhortation involves the act of encouraging. That's the first prong. Churches are filled with people who need a caring word of gentle encouragement to lift them up, to nudge them on in living for God. Even Christians become disheartened. There is a continual need for a word of comfort.

There's another prong, besides encouraging. Exhortation involves admonishing. Different people have different needs. Some people need to be prodded or even jolted into action. They know what to do. They know what the Bible says. But they are negligent when it comes to doing what they know. They need to be admonished.

Both encouragement and admonishment are involved in exhortation. We catch the sense of both elements in I Thess 2:11-12 "As ye know how we exhorted and encouraged and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God."

You say, "Can you give us a living color example of someone who had this gift?" Yes!

Biblical Example: One man stands out in the NT as the epitome of the gift of exhortation. In fact, it seems that every time we read about this man in the NT, he is encouraging someone. He encouraged people from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Tarsus to Cyprus. His name was Joseph. Ever heard of him? Probably not by that name. But this man helped people so much that the apostles gave him a new name! We're told in Acts 4:36 that the apostles called him "the son of exhortation"--Barnabas.

Barnabas was a big brother, always helping. Let's survey his ministry to get a sense of how the gift of exhortation operates. Four acts of exhortation stand out:

##### *1. He helped needy saints.*

In Acts 4:36-37, we're told that Barnabas sold some property and gave the money to the apostles, to be used to care for the needs of other Christians.

##### *2. He endorsed an unwelcome convert.*

Before his conversion, Paul was a violent persecutor of the early Christians. And then the church heard that he was converted. Most were skeptical (suppose you were a Jew in 1940 and heard that Hitler had converted to Judaism. Would you believe the report?). But not Barnabas. He took Paul under his wing. He was willing to take the flak in order to help Paul get involved in ministry.

##### *3. He accepted alien believers.*

Barnabas lived at a time when the church was comprised of Jews only. But during his life the gospel spread to the Gentiles. When Barnabas heard that Gentiles had been saved in Antioch, he found Paul, and then headed for Antioch. Why? To encourage these new believers, and help them grow.

*4. He restored a youthful deserter.*

John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. But before the journey was half over, Mark dropped out of the ministry. Perhaps he was homesick. Perhaps he was afraid. Whatever the reason, John Mark defected. He went A.W.O.L. When it came time for the next missionary tour, a sharp disagreement arose between Paul and Barnabas over taking John Mark with them. Paul thought of the work. Barnabas of the man. Paul operated on the principle--why endanger the work by the presence of a man who failed us last time? Barnabas thought--Why should not this promising young man be given another chance? We're not told who was right. Years later, Mark did mature into a useful servant of the Lord, largely due to the exhorting ministry of Barnabas.

Did you realize that had not Barnabas used his gift of exhortation we might be missing half the NT books? Barnabas salvaged Mark, the writer of the gospel of Mark. Barnabas cultivated Paul, who would be the writer of 13 epistles.

The gift of exhortation is a valuable gift. It can be used in both public and private ministries. In the pulpit or the pew. It's available to both leaders and laymen.

Discuss: What are some ways this gift may be used?

Permit me to highlight three opportunities for this gift to be used.

1. Writing (Encouragement Cards)

When was the last time you wrote someone with the intention of encouraging them to live for the Lord?

2. Music

There is no "spiritual gift of music" in the strict sense of the word. Music is a general grace to all mankind. But when the lyrics are theologically sound and the musician Spirit-filled, "singing and making melody" (Eph 5:19) is a superb way of exhorting the church in public ministry.

3. Counseling--one on one exhortation

Glaring needs of hurting people are all around us. And God can use you to have a ministry of exhortation in their lives. If you know the Scriptures, and if you are a maturing Christian, and if you can be a friend, you can provide much needed encouragement to a hurting person. The question is--Are you willing to get involved?!