

A Prophetic Body Builder by Jeff Strite

Romans 12:1-12:8

Have you ever heard of a TV personality from years ago named Merv Griffin? Back in his heyday Mr. Griffin hosted a TV talk show called "The Merv Griffin Show" where he would have guests who would sit down with him and talk about their lives and the passions in their lives. One of those guests was a body builder.

During the interview, Merv asked, "Why do you develop those particular muscles?"

The body builder simply stepped forward and flexed the muscles of his chest his arms, his legs... even his calves.

The audience applauded. And he sat down.

"What do you use all those muscles for?" Merv asked.

Again, the guy got up and flexed his biceps and triceps. The audience applauds again, and he sits down again.

"But what do you USE those muscles for?" Merv persisted.

The body builder looked at Griffin and said nothing. He just had this bewildered look on his face. He didn't have an answer.

Here in Romans 12, Paul is telling us that we are a BODY of believers.

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." Romans 12:4-5

In other words the church is not a collection of people rattling around inside a church building.

We are ONE BODY. We belong to each other. Even if this building ceased to exist, we would be the church – one body of believers.

And just like the parts of OUR physical body work together so that our body functions properly, so also we need each other and our various gifts/abilities so that the church functions properly.

In this passage in Romans 12, Paul gives us a list of 7 "gifts" that God has given us individually so that we can help the church be ALL that it can be. These gifts are like the muscles of the body-builder's physique. And we need to know how these "muscles" function so that we can use they can work together to make the body function.

These 7 gifts are these:

Prophecy

Ministry (Serving)

Teaching

Exhortation (encouragement)

Giving (Contributing to the needs of others)

Ruling (Leadership)

Showing Mercy

This morning we're going to be dealing with the first of those gifts this morning: Prophecy.

Now, take a look this graph on the screen.

If you'll notice there are two lists of gifts here.

There's the list of gifts found in Romans 12 and another list from I Corinthians 12.

Notice how different they are.

The list in I Corinthians 12 tells of these gifts:

- * Apostles
- * Prophecy
- * Teaching
- * Miracles
- * Healing
- * Tongues
- * and Interpretation of Tongues

With the exception of teaching and prophecy the lists are entirely different. And the 1st question that comes to my mind is

"WHY ARE THESE LISTS DIFFERENT?"

Notice the gifts for the Corinthians are fairly flashy and they are very impressive. Most of these gifts are what scholars call "miraculous gifts". They're not normal things that most common people would do – they're showy.

By contrast, the gifts listed in Romans 12 seem kind of mundane.

The contrast between these two sets of gifts strikes me like the difference between a person who dresses to go to a formal white tie dinner... and a person who dresses for work.

It's like the list in Romans 12 is set of work clothes gifts.

They're the "roll your sleeves up and get things done", get your hands dirty kind of gifts.

So why does Corinth get all the flashy gifts and Rome doesn't seem to have them?

Well, one of the best explanation is that the "flashy gifts" were very likely imparted by the laying on of Apostolic hands.

Paul, for example, told Timothy: "... I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." 2 Timothy 1:6

In the book of Acts you see this kind of thing show up in a couple different chapters.

In Acts 8, for example, a very godly deacon named Philip went into the region of Samaria and preached the Gospel to the people there. His message hits home and people respond by the hundreds, believing in Jesus and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

But then the text tells us there's something about the Holy Spirit that is missing in their lives. Something that even a godly man like Philip cannot give them. And so they send down to Jerusalem and Peter and John (two Apostles) come to them – lay hands on them – and something powerful and mystifying happens as the Spirit comes upon them.

Philip couldn't lay hands on them to get that done... only the two apostles, Peter and John.

Later, in Acts 19, Paul is in the region of Ephesus when he encounters disciples of John the Baptist. He asks if they've "received the Holy Spirit" since they've believed. They reply that they haven't even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul then asks what they've been baptized into – John's baptism they reply.

Then Paul begins to preach to them the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. They respond positively to the message and he baptizes them into Christ. THEN Paul lays his hands on them and "... the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." Acts 19:6

There were certain gifts that were imparted to believers by the laying on of hands of the Apostles. No one else seemed to be able to impart those gifts in any other way.

Which brings us back to the gifts listed in Corinth.

Paul had been to Corinth. In fact, he started the church there and spent more time there than at any other congregation that he had fostered. He undoubtedly laid hands on many of them and gave them these flashy kinds of gifts. But Paul hadn't been to Rome yet. In fact, it's doubted that any of the Apostles had gone there yet.

In the first part of Paul's letter to the Romans he says this:

"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong"
Romans 1:11

Paul wanted to physically go Rome so that he could lay hands on Christians and impart gifts to them as he had at Corinth.

So these gifts in Romans 12 aren't like the gifts in I Corinthians 12

Why? Because no Apostle had come there to lay hand on any of the Christians there.

These gifts in Romans 12 weren't the showy, miraculous kind of gifts Corinth was known for. But these gifts are just as important (if not more) than the flashy gifts.

Those miraculous gifts would have died off with the Apostles... because it was through the laying on of their hands that the gifts would have been given.

But these 7 gifts in Romans 12 would still exist today.

They are in every church that belongs to Christ.

Many believers have more than one of these gifts, but the likelihood is that every believer has at least one of these gifts.

Now, it's interesting – the FIRST of these 7 gifts in Romans 12 is "Prophecy".

This would not have been the miraculous "gift of prophecy" we commonly would identify with prophets. That kind of prophecy is the kind of thing which allowed prophets to predict future events.

But – if you take prophecy out of the list here in Romans 12 you find that the other gifts in the listing are not what you'd call "miraculous" in nature. Instead, you'll find that they're gifts that motivate people to do a particular kind of ministry.

It's like God has placed a passion or a drive inside of believers to exercise these gifts.

For example, a person who had the gift of giving would be MOTIVATED to give away money and other things to those in need.

A person with the gift of mercy would be MOTIVATED to show mercy to those who are hurting.

A person who had the gift of teaching would be MOTIVATED to teach and to share truths about God's Word.

These are the kinds of gifts that create a 2nd nature – an instinct – to do what the gift leads them to do. People with these gifts seem driven and focused on what that gift enables them to do.

That's why many scholars call these the "Motivational Gifts" because they are gifts that Motivate people to specific kinds of ministry.

If that's true, what would have been the driving force in this gift of Prophecy?

If this kind of prophet wasn't the type who predicted future events... what did they do?

If you pay close attention to prophets throughout the Bible you'll find that these folks had one central message they focused on. That message?

REPENT.

You all have been sinning and messing up!

Stop it!

Quit it!

Repent, turn around, live differently.

For example, we have John the Baptist.

John was a prophet, and he had two messages.

- 1) The Messiah is coming (and)
- 2) You need to repent.

In Matthew 3:7-8 we're told "...when (John) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with REPENTANCE..."

What's he saying?

He's saying: "you all have messed up! Quit it! Repent!!!"

Peter was another man with a prophetic nature.

Seemingly every time he stood to speak he had that same message: REPENT

In Acts 2 Peter stood before the crowd at Pentecost and said:

"God has made this Jesus, whom YOU CRUCIFIED, both Lord and Christ." Acts 2:36

The audience was convicted of their sin and they cried out: "What shall we do" Acts 2:37

And do you know what Peter told them? Do you remember the first word in his answer?

REPENT

"REPENT and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness

of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38

A few days later, Peter and John are on their way to the Temple at the hour of prayer. They heal a lame man. And that man begins to leap around praising God... and drawing a crowd. Now Peter has an audience and he takes the opportunity to start preaching again.

And guess what he says:

"... the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. YOU HANDED HIM OVER TO BE KILLED, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go." Acts 3:13

Then he says: REPENT, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" Acts 3:19

What's he saying?

He's saying: "You all messed up. God sent you the promised Messiah... and you killed Him. REPENT!"

Peter even took his message before the Sanhedrin. These were men of power and prestige and money. They had the power to crush anyone they disliked. And yet Peter told them the same message he'd told others. In fact, he was so adamant in his declaration that they were guilty of sin that they protested:

"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are DETERMINED TO MAKE US GUILTY of this man's blood." Acts 5:28

You've all messed up.

You killed Jesus.

You need to repent.

That's the message prophets all had.

And people who had the gift of prophecy mentioned in Romans 12 were the types of folks who were very "in your face" about sin. They have no problem telling people:

You've sinned. You've messed up. You need to change your life... You need to repent.

ILLUS: I know of one man whose cousin was once part of the church. She'd been baptized into Christ and was living for Jesus.

But then one day she decided to begin living with her boyfriend and things went downhill from there.

My friend loved his cousin and so he went to her frankly told her that what she was doing was wrong. He told her this in love... but he was very blunt about it. It was wrong and she needed to quit doing it or it could jeopardize her relationship with God and her salvation. The rest of the family was aghast that he would have the gall to say that to her but my friend was undeterred.

Now, why did my friend confront his cousin?

- 1) Because he loved her
- 2) And he had this Romans 12 kind of gift of prophecy.

His gift led him to call for his cousin (whom he loved) to change and repent.

Now, what's interesting to me in Romans 12 is that prophecy is the first gift in the list.

If I make a list of things that I want to do what do I put first?

I put the most important item at the top of the list.

This first item is something I believe I really have to get done first.

In this list in Romans 12, prophecy is the 1st gift God presents to us.

Why FIRST?

Well, the answer is very simple.

A church that doesn't take a firm stand against immorality is worthless to God.

SOMEBODY has to stand up (once in a while) and say "THIS IS WRONG!"

Somebody has to have the willingness to say "You need to repent."

And God has given some people this kind of gift...

Its 2nd nature to them to oppose sin and repentance.

The church NEEDS folks like this.

Now I don't think I have this kind of gift.

It's not in my nature to confront people right off the bat about their sin.

I have to get up a full head of steam before I'm ready to do this confrontation thing.

But those with this gift will see a sin-problem and instantly be ready to confront it.

Years back, someone has put together some observations on what they think would be characteristics of people who have this gift of prophecy:

(<http://www.mulock.org/media/Gifts%202012.pdf> p. 12)

- They have a need to express themselves
- They make quick impressions of people and situations
- They are alert to dishonesty
- They have a strong desire for justice
- They are very open about their own faults
- They are wholeheartedly involved in the things of God
- They have a loyalty to truth vs. loyalty to people
- They are willing to suffer
- And they have a persuasive way of defining truth.

But people with the gift of prophecy have some weaknesses they need to watch out for.

- They tend to expose sin first without a desire to restore the sinner
- They tend to jump to conclusions
- They can often react harshly to sinners
- They can be unforgiving
- They tend to condemn themselves more than God intends
- They can be impetuous
- They face the danger of cutting people off who fail
- They often lack tactfulness when rebuking others

- They tend to dwell on the negative.

The point is this: if people with a prophetic nature aren't careful they can hurt people and damage their own witness... and damage the church.

The gift of prophecy is a very POWERFUL gift.

And it is a very IMPORTANT gift in the church.

But it can also be very DANGEROUS gift ... if not made subject to the will of Christ.

CLOSE: But Prophecy is important because it is the one gift that confronts people with their sin and warns them of the consequences.

We live in a world where people hide their sins.

Do you remember what Adam and Eve did when they sinned against God.

That's right – they hid.

Many people in this world try to hide their sin the bushes of someone else's fault.

They'll try to tell you that their bad behavior was their parents fault, or their spouse's fault, or their bosses fault... and on and on and on.

One person once said: "Often we change jobs, friends, and spouses instead of ourselves."

Akbarali H. Jetha, Reflections (Combined Edition. Bombay)

But the prophet stands up and says "NO" it's not someone else's fault.

It's not your spouse's fault, your friend's fault, your job's fault.

IT'S YOUR FAULT.

Change, repent, live differently.

ILLUS: A woman wrote of taking her mother for a drive and it was an extremely irritating experience. Her mother scolded her for all her driving habits. If she rolled through a stop sign or went over the speed limit her mother nagged her until she couldn't stand it anymore.

Unfortunately a police officer noticed the same behavior her mother was scolding her for. He turned on his lights and pulled her over to the curb and issued her a ticket.

After the policeman went on his way the woman complained to her mother that that the officer should have let her off with a warning.

"Joan," her mother said, "I gave you the warning. He gave you the ticket."

(Reader's Digest 9/93)

The mother had given a warning that could have saved her from judgment (a ticket).

And that's the purpose of a person with the gift of prophecy: to give the warning.

Not to give the ticket.

The prophet's job is to give the warning, so that people might be saved from the ultimate judgment before the judgment seat of God.