

McGregor Baptist Church  
3750 Colonial Boulevard  
Fort Myers, FL 33912  
(941) 936-1754

James O. Holbrook  
Pastor

4/13/97

Romans 12:1-16

### **“EQUIPPED TO WIN THE BATTLE”**

Last week we learned, from God’s Word, that we are each involved in an unseen war, to take control of planet Earth. Deliberately or unknowingly, we are each on one side or the other. We are either the involuntary pawns of Satan, the god of this world, or we are part of that volunteer army of the Lord God, against which He has promised that all Hell cannot stand.

Last week I challenged you to enlist in the Lord’s army and to get actively involved in the spiritual warfare. This morning I would like to help to equip you, so that you can find your place on the winning side.

I used to read and listen to the recruiting efforts of the U. S. Army. I noticed that they always promised to train you, so that you could be a vital part of the winning team. However, I have heard some stories, which make you wonder if they always got the right man for the right job.

I’ll never forget hearing a preacher tell how he had been born and raised in southern Florida. He had never even seen a mountain. And yet Uncle Sam trained him, of all things, to be a ski trooper on the snowy slopes of some arctic mountains.

Some of you could probably tell us of persona! experiences, which were just as unlikely. It seems counter- productive to give a man a job to do, for which he is not really equipped.

Well, I want to assure you that our Commander-and-Chief, the Holy Spirit of Jesus, is not about to do that. He is not going to put a Florida boy on the snowy mountain slopes of some arctic country.

No, our God has specially designed and “gifted” each one of us, so that we will fit perfectly into some place in His army. And I am here to help you to discover your gift and to deploy it, in such a way that it will be both successful to the Lord’s work and satisfying to you!

Now let me be quick to explain something, which you may have already noticed. All churches do not deploy people into tasks for which they are best fitted.

In our desperation--sometimes--to “fill a post,” we have grabbed anyone in sight and put them into positions for which they were not suited. And, consequently, we have had a lot of “burn-outs” or people who have actually gone AWOL from active service in the Lord’s army.

I believe that this has been done, because people meant well, but they had no conception of God’s teaching on spiritual gifts. And this ignorance has led to much frustration and even guilt, which should not be a part of God’s work.

Some of you may feel just such a sense of frustration and guilt this morning. Well, we are doing this series, in order to help you. I believe that you want to be on the Lord's side in the battle. But we must help you find the position for which you are divinely equipped!

And I have to believe that God will bring to our church the right people for the right jobs, so that we can get the job done.

So let's examine what God has to say about putting the right man into the right job. Let's give you enough information, so that you can begin to figure out, for yourself, how you are equipped to serve and where you might best fit into God's army that all Hell cannot stop.

I'm sure that the first reaction, from many of you, would be: "Oh, I'm not a gifted person. I can't sing. I don't have a lot of money to give. I'd never be able to teach a Bible Study class."

Whoa! Just a minute, my friend. You are confusing natural talents and abilities with spiritual gifts.

That's the trouble with many churches today. They are trying to operate on natural talents and not on spiritual gifts.

That's why they fuss so much. Talented people feel like they are something special. And they get upset, when they are not appreciated nor shown favoritism. After all, they are so talented, and the church should feel lucky to have them.

Wait! This is missing the whole point. These "talents" are not the same as spiritual gifts.

A spiritual gift is something for which we can take no credit. It is an ability, which God gave us, which is to be used to help other Christians and to further the cause of Jesus Christ.

Natural talents, like singing or playing an instrument, are used in the limelight. Spiritual gifts can be used anywhere there is a need. Natural talents benefit one's self, whereas spiritual gifts benefit other Christians and the work of the Lord. Often, talented people want to get paid for what they do, while spiritually gifted people are glad to exercise their gifts whenever there is an opportunity. Too often, talented people are applauded, while people who exercise their spiritual gifts are unnoticed.

Now listen, my brother, if you are a child of God, then you have been given a spiritual gift, which will make you useful in God's volunteer army. Romans 12:6 makes it clear: "**Having then gifts ...**" This assumes that we each have one or more spiritual gifts.

So we must figure out what ours would be, and we must take our place in God's volunteer army, to be used by Jesus, as He builds His kingdom.

This morning...

## I. Let's **DETERMINE How the Gifts Are Differentiated.**

There are three places in the Bible, which mention the spiritual gifts: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. When you add them up, there could be as many as 19 different "gifts." Some are mentioned once, some twice, and some in all three places three places.

They each, however, fall into different categories. So we must try to differentiate between what kind of gifts they are.

A- The gifts, which are listed in Ephesians 4 are definitely **SUPPORT GIFTS, or Training Gifts.** Ephesians states that God gives people, who have these gifts, to the church so

that they might “equip the people of God (saints), so that the saints can carry out the work of the ministry”. They are there to build-up (“edify”), or support and train, the people who are in Jesus’ volunteer army (Ephesians 4:11-13).  
13).

These are definitely specialized gifts for special people, who will be used to train the Lord’s army to fight that spiritual warfare, People with these gifts usually hold some “office of leadership in God’s army. They are trainers.

Ephesians 4:11 mentions “**apostles**” or those who can go forth and start a new work for Jesus, where He has never been known before. “**Evangelists**” are those who are gifted to help people make that first-time salvation decision. “**Pastors**” are the shepherds of God’s local flock of people. And “**teachers**” are instructors in the use of God’s truth and the ways of God’s spiritual warfare.

Obviously, these are **specialized gifts for specially called people**. So let’s put these “offices” on the back burner for another sermon, and let us concentrate more on the gifts which affect every one of us.

B- I Corinthians 12 lists some gifts, which were specifically for the beginning of the church age, when the good news of Jesus first began to spread around in a world, which had been in Satanic darkness. For such a strong campaign, strong weapons were needed. So God gave those early Christians **SIGN GIFTS**, or **miracle** gifts.

These were miraculous abilities, which were used by God to get the attention of people and to prove that His apostles, who came with this new message, truly carried God’s stamp of approval. These gifts were especially needed to convince the Jews that God was going to use a different approach than they had been taught, before the Son of God had come into the world, as Jesus Christ. These were **special gifts for special times**.

Why, Peter and John could instantly heal any type of sickness. They could walk down the street; and, if their shadow fell on a cripple, that man would get right up and walk.

Those early apostles could even speak to people from other countries, in languages (or tongues) which they had never been taught. All of these miraculous “signs and wonders impressed the masses that these men were worth listening to, when they began to tell them about Jesus and His kingdom.

Now many Christians believe that these sign gifts stopped, after the church got rolling and the original apostles died. Others argue that they are still supposed to be happening today. (Although I have never seen any of their pastors go over to Lee Hospital and empty the rooms, by just passing down the hallways!)

Let’s just say that this has become a source of confusion and division. So, again, I’m going to pass over these gifts and let someone else settle that debate.

Instead, I want to talk to you about the exciting fact that you are a gifted person! So, let’s look at **the every-day, bread-and-butter gifts, which each of you can expect to have and to use** in the Lord’s volunteer army. That’s why I chose to read Romans 12 to you (particularly verses 6-8).

C- These are the **SERVICE GIFTS**, or the **functional** gifts. They are the ones, which are needed to get the work of Jesus done in the average church and community, right here and now, in the day in which we live. They are the gifts which should help each one of us to find our place of service.

Each of us (if we have been born again, if we have invited the Holy Spirit of Jesus to come into our lives) should have at least one, and possibly more, of these gifts. They are prophecy, teaching, ruling (administration), exhorting (encouragement), ministering (service), mercy, and giving.

Let us...

## II. Describe What the “Service Gifts” Accomplish. .

(And you be watching carefully, to see if one of them has a familiar feel about it for you.)

“prophecy”-- is “the God-given ability to proclaim God’s truth with power and clarity, in order to help people get right with God and grow stronger in the Lord.”

It is the ability to “tell-forth” the message of God. Too often, we think of a prophet as someone who foretells the future. Some have even gotten on TV and spoken some mystical “word of knowledge, usually bringing embarrassment to us all and disgrace to Jesus. And they called that a “prophecy”. Now most of us know that we can’t do that; so, we figure that we could not have this particular gift.

But wait. Even the Old Testament “prophets” spent most of their time “telling forth” the practical message of God to other people. Their miraculous predictions of the future were only incidental to their main message of how to get right with God. Their spiritual gift was the ability to get the message across...to “tell forth” the message of God.

And you very well may have that gift. I hope I do. I hope some of you, who are coming along, are going to have it. For some of us, who are exercising this gift now, are about to go to the old soldiers’ home, one of these days.

“Teaching”--is “the God-given ability to understand, clearly explain, and practically apply the Word of God to the lives of their listeners.” Whereas prophecy proclaims the truth and presses the listeners to do something about it, teaching basically informs the listener and trains him how to do a certain thing.

By the way, it is a mistake to assume that a good school teacher, with training and a natural teaching talent, will make a good Bible teacher. In some cases, they can do both. But the spiritual gift of teaching” is the divine enablement to understand and apply the Word of God to life. And I’ve heard a lot of college professors, who could teach the Bible as literature, and yet they never had the foggiest notion about what it said for everyday living.

Other people are sincere, but just simply can’t make the truth clear to anyone else. Someone with the gift of “teaching” can.

“Ministering”--is “the God-given ability to see the spiritual value in performing some physical tasks, which are so necessary within the work of God.

This is the same thing, which I Corinthians 12 calls “Helps.” I love that term.

There are people, whom God has enabled to see practical things which need to be done. And they realize that they can do them for God. And they find a sense of satisfaction in doing so.

They notice that someone looks lost, and they offer to help them find their way around the church campus. Or they pitch in and help, when we have to *tear* down the tables after Wednesday suppers. Or they unobtrusively go up to that mother with the crying baby and offer

to help her to find the cry room, or they offer to take the baby over to our wonderful, clean, and friendly nursery.

Our car parkers and valet attendants certainly have the gift of “helps”. And we could not function without them, though they are unsung and unpaid. The people who help to cook and serve on Wednesday nights have the gift of “helps”. That lone usher, who stays to voluntarily pick up the bulletins, which are dropped after the service, so that the house of God will be attractive, has the gift of “helps”.

And how we thank God for them. I don’t know how the army of God would move forward without them!

**“Hospitality”** is mentioned in verse 13. I believe it is a part of “Helps”. I know a lady, who has dinner parties and invites newer people in the church, along with long-time members, in order to help these new-comer feel more at home. How creative! That’s the gift of hospitality at work.

**“Exhortation”** or Encouragement--is “the God-given ability to reassure, strengthen, and affirm those who are weak, discouraged, or wavering in their faith.” The Greek word means ‘to call along side, with the intent of helping.’”

Some Christians have a divine sensitivity to others. They recognize when others are hurting or struggling or drifting, and they seem to be able to say or do something that helps.

I call them “spirit-lifters”. I have received many encouraging notes from such people, which have lifted my spirits when I thought that no one, except God, knew that I was down.

These are the folks who can “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (verse 15). What a wonderful gift!

I think that a good vocal soloist can exercise the spiritual gift of “exhortation,” while he or she uses their natural talent to sing in church. And I hope that we are applauding them for exhorting us with God’s truth and not just because we think that they have such a fabulous voice or can hit really high or low notes!

**“Giving”**--is “the the God-given ability to contribute money and material resources to the work of God, with cheerfulness and liberality.”

Now we are all commanded to give constantly (I Cor. 16:2), liberally (II Cor. 9:6), sacrificially (II Cor. 8:3). But some have a God-given capacity to give out of an inner drive to help others and to help the work of God.

And this is not necessarily the domain of the rich. In fact, some rich people are very tight-fisted.

I hope that I have this gift. My dear mother had it, and she was certainly not rich. She started out as a mountain girl, living in poverty. And she never lived high off the hog. She lived very modestly. Yet, at her funeral, I learned that she had given over a million dollars to world missions. Wow! She had the gift of giving. And the more she gave, the more God gave back to her.

By the way, in verse 8, Paul instructs us to “give with simplicity.” That means: not expecting anything in return, not feeling that you are buying a position nor influence in the church. Just do it as unto the Lord! It also means that we will give consistently, without needing to have someone play on our emotions with pictures of starving children nor with emergency appeals.

“Ruling” or Leadership--is “the God-given ability to understand what makes an organization function and the special ability to plan and execute procedures, which will increase the church’s effectiveness.”

This is called “administration” in I Corinthians 12. It is not “ruling,” like some boss or king. In fact, all of God’s leaders are given servant titles (Pastors are “shepherds” and Deacons are “ministers”) The Greek word for “administrator” is “helmsman”...the one who steers the ship of faith in its progress, toward its God-given destination. And he is responsible to God for their safe arrival at that destination.

God’s volunteer army is not able to operate effectively without some leadership and coordination. Everyone cannot be expected to spontaneously see what needs to be done. The people, who can “see” it and who can get out in front and lead creatively, are the ones with the divine gift of “administration.”

Again, the church can make a mistake to put a businessman or government administrator into such a position, just because they are leaders out in the world. They may or may not have an idea of what it takes to win a spiritual warfare. Some have turned a local church into a small-time business and have concentrated only on finding ways to pay the bills or to keep the grounds in repair. And, as necessary as this is, it is a far cry from moving forward in a bold faith, through which God can do the impossible against overwhelming odds. Such a church can become famous in the community for its fund-raising dinners but not as a life-changing center.

May God give us leaders who are men of faith, as well as common-sense organizational skills.

“Mercy”--is “the God-given ability to minister cheerfully and appropriately to people who are suffering.”

When disaster strikes, we all feel “pity.” But, too often, it is an emotion that soon dies, until the next report of some tragedy.

But the person, with the gift of showing mercy, has a deep-down compassion, given by God. He is drawn to his suffering brother, and he must do something about it.

The gift of mercy involves more than feeling pity. It involves definite action to help.

God has given some people that ability. And often He uses them to rally the rest of us to do what we didn’t see to do.

These are seven “service gifts”--the functional every day abilities which are needed to carry out the work, which Jesus gave to us, and to win the victory over the forces of Hell. Each of us should have at least one. It may need some refinement and development. But each of God’s children should have at least one.

S ...

111. Let’s **DECIDE What We Will Each Do With Our Gifts.**

Romans 12 offers **three suggestions:**

**#1-We must think sanely (soberly) about our gifts.** (Verse 3)

There is always the danger of “thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought,” just

because we have certain gifts. Some think that their gift makes them special, and they are tempted to selfishly capitalize on their gift.

Some use their leadership gifts to run the church, or to be the “head deacon”. Listen, leadership in the church is not a status symbol nor a feather in your hat. It is an awesome, God-given responsibility. It is not the place for a hen-pecked husband to start trying to act like King Kong!

Nor should anyone think less of himself than he should. To say: “I’m a poor little nobody, and I can’t do anything,” is to insult our God, who gives every Christian an important gift. Verses 4 & 5 say that we are all important to the functioning of the body, which Jesus uses today as His hands and feet.

I once read: “I may just be one, but I am one. I may not be able to do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do, by the grace of God, I will do!” I determined that in my late teens, and God has multiplied what I give Him to His glory.

#2 suggestion: **We must each try to do all that God commands**, even if we are not particularly gifted for it. (Verses 9-10)

We are all to try to show loving concern, even if we do not have the gift of “mercy” (vs. 9-10). We are not to be lazy nor un-business-like in the Lord’s work, even if we do not have the gift of “administration” and the ability to see a lot that needs to be done (vs. 11). We are all to be generous and give at least a tenth, even if we do not have the particular gift of “giving” (vs. 13). And we are to be hospitable and out-going to strangers, even if “helps” is not our Particular gift (vs. 13).

Far too many have used the fact that they did not have a particular gift as a cop-out from all responsibility in the army of God.

You may not be gifted to preach or “teach,” but you are still commanded to “be my witnesses.”

You may not have the gift of “mercy,” but we are still commanded to “visit the fatherless and widows” and to “bear one another’s burdens.”

Absence of a particular gift does not cancel-out God’s clear commands. In fact, it is often in keeping His commands that we first discover our gifts. I first obeyed God and went out witnessing. In the process of finding ways to share the gospel, I discovered that I had a gift for preaching and teaching. In fact, it was while I was obeying and witnessing that God called me to my “office” of Pastor-Teacher. And it was in obeying His call that I discovered a gift of leadership.

So keep on obeying the obvious commands of God, and your gift will surface!

#3 suggestion: **Whatever gift we have, we must use it!** (Verses 6-8: “Having then gifts...according to the grace that is given unto us...let us”...use them!) With the gift come a responsibility.

In a ball game, if some of the players don’t show up, the team has to forfeit the game. Listen, we are not in a game. We are in a war...a war for control of our planet...a battle for the precious souls of those, who are slaves to Satan and held in heathen darkness. This is no time for any soldier to go AWOL from his post of service!

The third largest fleet in the world is the famed ‘mothball navy,’ comprised of 768

ships, anchored in U. S. harbors. They are preserved in mothballs, in case of an emergency. A protective coating seals them, and constant electrical current to their hulls prevents their rust and corrosion.

Sad to say, many of the Lord's volunteer army are "in mothballs," while all around the battle rages. Oh, my brother and sister, get into action and exercise your gifts.

(We will need your spiritual gifts more than ever around here, as we start a Saturday night worship service and fully-graded Bible Study. We will need for a whole new staff of workers and teachers to come out of the woodwork, if we are to succeed.

We cannot go through another winter, filled to capacity and turning people away. The cry is being given. Might the Lord's hosts arise to the challenge!)