

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 12: 6

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We will continue reading Romans chapter 12, verse 6.

Today, when saints mention the church, they usually start with the church's gifts—for example, who the pastor is, who leads the worship team, or how many ministries the church has developed. It seems the church's gifts and activities are its business card, a symbol of its identity and status. But Paul has a completely different logic. In his view, the most important aspect of the church is that all the saints present their bodies as a living sacrifice. Secondly, the saints must come together, set aside the influence of worldly trends, and in a renewed mind and transformed life, seek and discern God's will together.

In this process, every saint must be humble, not thinking of themselves more highly than they ought, but soberly regarding themselves as a member of the body according to the measure of faith God has given. Under the headship of Christ, members are joined to one another, supplying what is lacking, forming a healthy body that bears witness to Christ in the place where the church is. Only after this full understanding does Paul begin to address the church's gifts. That is, once the preceding conditions are met, the church's gifts naturally emerge, rather than chasing the superficial by exalting gifts to attract people.

Next, in Romans 12:6–8, Paul lists seven gifts as examples. Of course, the church can have many other gifts. For instance, two years before writing Romans, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, where he also mentioned church gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:28–29, Paul specifically mentions working of miracles, gifts of healings, and tongues—gifts leaning toward the miraculous—which Paul does not mention again in Romans.

Four years after writing Romans, Paul wrote Ephesians, also mentioning gifts God gave to the church. In Ephesians, Paul emphasizes that all churches constitute

Christ's body, focusing universal Church. Thus, the gifts he mentions are condensed into trans-local gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. We will not delve deeply into why the gifts Paul mentions in these three epistles differ—some are specific to individual churches, many overlap, meaning every church has them. Today, we will only consider the text of Romans to understand what gifts are and how the seven gifts mentioned in Romans apply to our local church. Today, we will read only verse 6.

Verse 6: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.”

At the outset, Paul says the gifts we have received differ—this is the Chinese Union Version's translation, which, regrettably, is inadequate because it omits the most critical information. The NIV renders it: we have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts. Paul first tells us where gifts come from. Here, grace is singular, while gifts is plural. Our gifts come from the grace God has given us; the same grace from God, manifested in different people, develops into different gifts.

What is the grace God gives? How does grace develop into gifts? If the saints recall, in Romans 5:15–16, when we fellowshiped, Paul used three special Greek words to describe gifts: dorea, dorema, and charisma. In that passage, we clearly saw that grace is Christ; receiving Christ means receiving eternal life. How do we receive eternal life? Through regeneration—being born again of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit enters to quicken our spirit and dwells in our spirit. When the Spirit comes, He brings eternal life; at this point, we receive dorea, the gift of life. The Spirit not only indwells but continuously supplies life to our soul. Our spiritual growth is the Spirit gradually spreading into our soul. Of course, this growth process involves experiencing various circumstances, causing our mind, emotion, and will in the soul to be gradually possessed by the Spirit, willing to obey the Spirit's leading. As a result, dorema—the mature gift—manifests in us. Dorea is related to

the beginning of life; dorema is related to the maturity of life. Both gifts are related to life.

This is the parable Jesus told in Luke 19:12–26. In this parable, when Christ returns, He will judge individuals based on their mature gifts (dorema) and give different rewards according to the size of dorema. Charisma is the operational gift, not only related to our life but also based on our natural talents. However, natural talents cannot be used for service; they must be redeemed to be used by God.

God gives us opportunities to serve precisely to help our life grow, so our natural talents can be fully redeemed. This is like the parable Jesus told in Matthew 25:14–30: the one who received five talents gained five more, the one with two gained two more. When Christ returns, they all receive rewards—and the same reward. Christ's reward is not based on the size of our ministry but on our life's growth.

With this understanding, we return to Romans 12:6. Because of the grace given to us by God, we have different gifts. The gifts here are charisma—operational gifts. Because each of us has different talents, the grace God gives us is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit must enter our soul to redeem our talents, becoming the Lord of our talents, so we can use these talents to participate in service—this becomes our operational gift. The Spirit's redemption process is our learning-to-serve process.

I believe most saints, when first participating in service, experience two extremes. If the service aligns with what we are familiar with, we become presumptuous, praying little, committing little, and serving with our natural ability, getting the job done. Perhaps praised by others, we feel proud, yet inwardly lack joy and peace.

If the service is unfamiliar, we feel anxious, pray much, prepare extensively, and after serving—regardless of results—feel filled with joy and peace. This shows our natural talent's sovereignty has shifted, now usable by the Spirit for service—this is charisma, the operational gift.

When we first serve with charisma, we need a learning process until our natural talents fully submit to the Spirit's sovereignty. Then, this service becomes our constitution, our commission, and we become a gifted person. Thus, the gifts Paul

mentions are those every saint, through a learning process, eventually receives as their commission. In Romans, Paul lists seven gifts; today, we look only at the first: “if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.”

The first gift Paul mentions is prophecy—the most important gift after the church is built. We may have inaccurate ideas about prophecy, thinking it predicts future events. Indeed, Old Testament prophets’ role was to prophesy, conveying God’s instructions to His people. These prophecies often included warnings or promises, pointing to future events to testify to God’s faithfulness, righteousness, and love. The five major prophets and twelve minor prophets comprise nearly 30% of the Old Testament. The central theme of Old Testament prophecy is the Messiah’s coming, fulfilled in Christ’s birth.

Christ is the Word that was in the beginning; Christ Himself is God’s speaking. When Christ came, He brought God’s speaking and began the New Testament. When the apostle John finished Revelation, God’s speaking was complete. Thus, John concludes Revelation 22:18–19, “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” John clearly tells us prophecy is complete—nothing can be added or removed.

Thus, in the New Testament church, prophesying no longer focuses on future events but on unveiling what God has already spoken—the entire Bible. New Testament prophesying is speaking for God and speaking forth God. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” The Chinese Union Version translates prophesying as “prophesy” (or “speak as a prophet”), and Paul encourages saints to especially desire this gift, meaning it can be pursued.

What is prophesying? How do we practice it? The English word prophecy derives directly from Greek. The Greek word for prophecy is a compound: pro (beforehand)

and phemi (to bring to light by asserting a statement)—meaning one first receives revelation in the light, then declares it. For New Testament saints, we have the Bible—God’s complete speaking. When we read the Scriptures and receive the Spirit’s illumination, seeing new light, we speak for God according to that light—this is prophesying or speaking as a prophet.

Paul continues, “let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.” The Greek word for proportion is *analogia*, from which English analogy derives, meaning comparison or proportion. Faith is the faculty in our soul that substantiates the Spirit’s illumination and impression. That is, what we see in the spirit, through a process of analogy and reasoning, our mind translates the spiritual image into words people can understand—through faith’s analogy, then conveyed to others. This is New Testament prophesying or speaking as a prophet.

Brothers, if you desire the gift of prophesying, I personally believe five practices are needed. First, you must be familiar with the Scriptures. New Testament saints are blessed; God’s speaking is fully recorded in the Bible—this is our basic equipment for speaking for God and the objective boundary; what we say cannot contradict the objective truths already recorded in the Bible.

Second, pursue life’s growth. Life growth expands the measure of our faith. Of course, this is relative, with no absolute standard. We do not wait until our life is mature and faith sufficient to begin practicing prophesying; rather, practicing helps our life grow and increases our faith. However, subjectively, we must be genuine, not exceeding our measure of faith. Speak only as much as your faith allows; do not treat preaching as a performance or show, but reflect the genuine state of your faith. Some saints trained in performance may deliver a speech with rich expressions and tears, but that is acting, not prophesying—it is unreal.

Third, seek the Spirit’s illumination. When preparing a message, bring the Scriptures into prayer and repeatedly seek the Spirit’s shining. Often, the Spirit, based on our life experiences, gives us light—scattered here and there, not yet a complete picture, but sufficient. Thank and praise God for the Spirit’s illumination.

Fourth, take time to form, form the seen light into a picture—this is the mind's work. Analogize the illumination and Scriptures, and according to your burden, paint a complete picture. Every key part must have scriptural confirmation; finally, turn the picture into language and text.

Fifth, before speaking for God, cleanse yourself and fully consecrate yourself to the Lord, fully under the Spirit's control, becoming the Spirit's outlet. During delivery, avoid excessive personal chatter; let the Spirit come forth through your words to directly touch people. If brothers are willing to practice this way, I believe after some time, the gift of prophesying will develop.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You! You gather the saints into the church and give the church many gifts. Every gift is according to the grace the saints receive, using their talents, redeemed, to serve the church and the saints. Every saint in the church is a member of the body, with an indispensable function. Lord, bless my church; help every saint enjoy experiencing grace and develop their own gift. Those who prophesy may speak for God according to their measure of faith. May God's speaking not be scarce in my church; may many saints rise to practice, supplying the church through God's word. Bless my church and its church life. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.