

October 17, 2021

Created to Do Good Works

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."
Ephesians 2:8-10

"...in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is in teaching, let him teach, if it is in encouraging, let him encourage; if it is in contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is in leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is in showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully..."
Romans 12:3-8



Paul told the Ephesian believers that while we are saved by grace through faith and not by our works we are created through that same grace poured out on us in Jesus to do good works. So, we are not saved by doing good works but we were saved to do good works. And to this the Apostle adds, *"...which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

Paul will use this same reasoning in his letters to the believers in Rome and in Corinth to build the foundational construct of the church as a body of believers and in this body each believer has received specific gifts *"...for the common good."* (I Corinthians 12:7)

Each of us then, has received specific gifts, talents, and abilities to serve in the function of the body of Christ. In his letter to the church in Corinth the Apostle will make it clear that these gifts are from the Holy Spirit, but too often, I think we translate that to mean they are somehow magical in nature. And of course some of them are, or were. I have come to believe that the most functional gifts provided to us through the Holy Spirit are, however, much more practical.

So, in our context for today from Romans 12 Paul will describe these gifts as prophecy, service, teaching, contributing financially, leadership, and showing mercy. How does the Spirit provide these gifts? As is true with most of our individual qualities we were either born with them or we developed them through our training and experience.

All of us came with a set of qualities and characteristics at birth that can all, I think, contribute to our giftedness in the church. All of us were born with a predetermined temperament which will shape much of who we are and what we do. For centuries we have understood that those with certain temperaments will behave in certain predictable ways. In my work as a marriage and family therapist I used this science a lot.

Some of us are very analytical, some of us are very organized, some of us are very imaginative and creative and some of us are very warm and friendly, but none of us is equally all of those things. So, if we are to understand the gifts that we have been given through the Spirit we need, I think, to better understand our own personal temperament.

If I am very analytical and also very organized then my giftedness will lead me toward certain works. If I am very warm and friendly and/or very imaginative and creative those characteristics will in turn lead me toward a different kind of works. I have become convinced that we need to intentionally seek to better understand the nature our own individual giftedness if we are to find and fulfill our function in the body of Christ and understand the works that God has prepared for us to do.

Too often in the church we have tried to mold everyone to do the same things in the same ways. Paul makes it clear in our context for today that all of us have been given specific gifts and in turn each of us is expected to apply those gifts well. Seeking a better understanding of the nature of our gifts will, I think, fulfill the rest of the Apostle's direction in this passage: ***"Do not think of yourself more highly than your ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."*** (Romans 12:3)