

So What?

How the Apostle Paul instructs us to live out our life as members of the body of believers.

Part 2: Serving—Romans 12:3-6

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

Speakers of the English language tend to be less precise with their use of words than are speakers of many other languages. For instance, whereas we have one term for the second person singular and plural—you—many languages have two or more terms for you—such as tu and vous in French. The French have over 20 words that translate our word “love” with each clarifying the type or the intensity of the emotion. It is not surprising, then, that English speakers have created a massive dictionary of slang. By using slang, English speakers create new meanings for existing words—rack, crash, zzzz’s, bo-peep, and 40-winks all mean “sleep.”

Language also changes over time. In the 1960’s in America, a popular children’s T.V. program, The Jetsons, had a ditty that ended “we’ll have a gay old time!” Today, that phrase would not be used. In order to discover the intended meaning of an author, etymologists—those who study word sources and meanings—cross reference the term as used by other writers at the time. For instance, to discover what the term “gay” meant to a person in the 1960s, scholars would look for the term in other documents of the time to see how it is used. They would discover that “gay” in sixties meant “light-heartedly upbeat.”

In the passage above, the Apostle Paul introduces a Greek term new to this work, *pneumatica*. It is translated to English as “gifts.” In America today, when we say someone has “gifts” we are usually trying to say they are highly skilled— “she is a

gifted artist” or “he is a gifted basketball player.” Did Paul mean “skills” in the passage above, or did he mean something different or more. To gain a better understanding of the Greek term *pneumatica*, we would need to see how contemporaries of Paul used that term.

In the first century AD, the Egyptian capital city of Alexandria was the intellectual center of Hellenistic (Greek) culture. Its massive lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, guided ships across the Mediterranean so that scholars could study under great minds who based themselves in and around the Museum University and its massive library. It was a center for the Greek language, as well, much as Oxfordshire in England and Tours in France are centers for the English and French languages, respectively. Much of the Bible as we know it, commonly called the Septuagint, was translated or written in the Greek language of Alexandria.

During the same time as when Jesus and Paul walked on earth, God brought to life a brilliant mind in Alexandria. Hero, a mathematician, and engineer, is said to be the greatest experimenter and inventor of the ancient world. Scholars believe Paul and Hero were born in the same year, AD 10, and died in the same year, AD 70. We might think of the “green movement” of harnessing renewable energy as a somewhat modern development; actually, Hero could today be awarded a Nobel prize for his pioneering works involving wind and steam. Hero was fascinated by pneumatics—the power of wind and water. He invented the syringe, the windmill, the steam engine, and the water pump. Hero had a flare for the dramatic and, as an agnostic, had fun at the expense of naïve adherents to religion. He invented a coin-operated vending machine to dispense Holy Water at the doors of temples. He also created a secret forced-air system to blow through trumpets imbedded in temple walls to trick worshipers into thinking a supernatural force was present.

Modern-day students seeking advanced degrees in physics still read Hero’s extensive publications. One of those works is entitled *Pneumatica*. The work is a description of machines powered by air, steam or water pressure. An English translation of the work can be checked out of the M.I.T and Cal Tech Libraries. The title of the work in English? *Spiritual Gifts*.

So when Paul writes of gifts, or spiritual gifts above, he is not referring to our natural skills or aptitudes. He is referring to something powered by air or water. He is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Prior to Jesus coming to earth, the Spirit of God only came upon certain people at certain times. People like Moses, Sampson, Debra, King David, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all received super-human abilities from a supernatural source—God himself in the form of his Holy Spirit. As the Spirit of God worked in their lives, these people were given new abilities such as leadership, unusual strength, seeing into the future, or a special message. In the Bible, the work of God’s Holy Spirit in the lives of people is described in pneumatic terms—rushing wind and flowing water.

When Jesus the Messiah came, he ushered in our present age—the age of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, John’s Gospel says that “until that time (the time when Jesus came), the Spirit had not yet been given.” Yet all four of the Gospels quote John the Baptist as saying, “I baptize you with water but the one who is coming will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Luke 11:13 tells us that “the Father in heaven will give the Spirit to those who ask him.” During Jesus long soliloquy and prayer during the Last Supper as recorded in 14th to 16th chapters of John’s Gospel, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will

come. Fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, these prophecies of the coming of the Spirit of God came true (as recorded in Acts, chapter 2):

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

When we say to the Father we are sorry for the wrong choices we have made and are making, we ask for forgiveness, we receive Jesus as our Lord, Messiah, and Redeemer, two amazing events take place in our lives. The first is that we become a member of Body of Christ, the church (*"so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others"*). The second is that the actual Spirit of the Living God comes to live in and through each of us (*we have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us*). Indeed, the Bible teaches that our very bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit! And when the Holy Spirit comes upon each believer, each receives *pneumatica*—spiritual gifts.

A spiritual gift, then, is that what we do empowered by the Spirit of God. That is why Paul writes above, *"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you."* Since after our conversion to Christ, our abilities are a function not of our skills but rather a function of God working through us, to think highly ourselves makes no sense. Or as Paul writes, "it is no longer I who lives but it is Christ who lives through me."

So what? So what are we supposed to do now that we are Christians? Summing up the first 6 verses of Romans, Chapter 12, this is apparently what we are supposed to do:

1. Render ourselves entirely over to God.
2. Renew our minds by asking the Holy Spirit to direct our thoughts.
3. Ask God to let us know His direction—His will—for our lives.
4. Understand ourselves in a new and humble light—God living through us.
5. Allow God to flow through us by his Spirit, empowering us with new abilities.
6. Use these new abilities to form and serve in a new body—the church—to carry out God's purposes on earth.

In coming segments of this work, we will look more closely at the specific spiritual gifts listed in several new testament passages.