

Spiritual Gifts: Giving and Mercy **A Series on Spiritual Gifts: Part 11**

Giving

The Greek verb translated for “giving” is “metadidōmi,” and is mentioned as a spiritual gift only once.

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives (**metadidōmi**), with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom 12:6-8)

“Metadidōmi” is a compound term made up of “meta” and “didōmi.” “Didōmi” means “to give,” and the Greek preposition “meta” adds the nuance in meaning of “beyond giving” as in sharing or giving from one’s personal possessions. This can be seen in the following uses of “metadidōmi” elsewhere in the Bible:

And he would answer and say to them, “The man who has two tunics is to share (**metadidōmi**) with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.” (Luke 3:11)

For I long to see you so that I may impart (**metadidōmi**) some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine. (Rom 1:11-12)

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share (**metadidōmi**) with one who has need. (Eph 4:28)

Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart (**metadidōmi**) to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thess 2:8)

Associated with the spiritual gift of “metadidōmi” is the Greek noun “haplotēs” (he who gives [**metadidōmi**], with liberality [**haplotēs**]). When used in the context of human relationships, “haplotēs” refers to the quality of one’s heart, and Paul is indicating that the spiritual gift of giving is wholehearted, with goodness, kindness, and without hidden motives.

Absent in Paul’s comment of the spiritual gift of giving is any statement about quantity; the spiritual gift of giving is not about how much you give or how much you have. Paul appears to say that anyone with the gift is one who gives sacrificially of one’s personal possessions with wholeheartedness, without any ulterior motives, and for the sake of goodness and kindness.

Mercy

Greek verb “eleeō” means to “feel compassion, show mercy” or “pity.” It has the sense of empathy generated when one encounters another who suffers an undeserved affliction. There is a desire to alleviate some of the pain and suffering of the afflicted.

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The gospels introduce the verb “eleeō” from the perspective of the afflicted person as a plea for God’s divine mercy. Because Jews believed that physical ailments were the consequence of sin, most uses of “eleeō” reflected one’s desire for salvation from physical disabilities.

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As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, "Have (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) on us, Son of David!" (Matt 9:27)

And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." (Matt 15:22)

And He did not let him, but He said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) on you." (Mark 5:19)

And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) on me!" (Luke 18:38)

While the gospels largely present "eleeō" from the perspective of the afflicted pleading for mercy, Paul presents "eleeō" from the perspective of God, the Giver of mercy, Who has a plan for each person's in this world. Leading up to his imperative to exercise your spiritual gift "accordingly," Paul develops the idea that divine mercy is the sovereign prerogative of God that no man can elicit:

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I will have (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) on whom I have (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**), and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy (**eleeō**). For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." So then He has (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (Rom 9:10-18)

Paul informs the church of Rome that God's sovereign act of mercy is the reason why Gentiles can be included in the people of God:

From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**). For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) to all. (Rom 11:28-32)

Peter shared this view as well:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light, for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**), but now you have received (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**). (1 Pet 2:9-10)

Paul's view of "eleeō" is a contrast to the gospels' presentation.

The gospels present "eleeō" from the perspective of people who are pleading with God to have "eleeō," because in experiencing real physical affliction, they know they need mercy.

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Paul presents “eleeō” from the perspective of God Who is the only Person who can provide it, but people are not sensitive to their spiritual affliction and do not know they need mercy to even plead for it. Thus, when God bestows mercy through His Son Jesus Christ, Paul sees it as grace for which he is very grateful.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**) because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found (**eleeō**) mercy (**eleeō**), so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. (1 Tim 1:12-16)

Taken together, the gospels and Paul’s letters present an evolution of the human understanding of “eleeō.” Beginning from a self centered plea for tangible results in the gospels, “eleeō” concludes in Paul’s understanding of Jesus’ atoning death and selfless act for intangible results. Paul’s spiritual gift of mercy encompasses this holistic view of “eleeō.” One with this gift identifies with the physical pain and suffering of the afflicted but serves with an eye towards the intangible. It is consistent with Jesus’ command found in John 13:34-35:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

And it is in this context that one with the spiritual gift of mercy, despite sharing the pain and suffering of the afflicted, serves with “cheerfulness.”

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2-3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).