

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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How to...: How to discover our own gift

It was always our delight as parents to watch our children receiving their gifts at Christmas time, on birthdays and other special occasions. They would gladly and thankfully take the wrapped present, examine the label to identify the giver and then remove the wrapping. More often than not, a shriek of joy or gasp would meet the revelation of the gift. It would be quickly taken from its packaging and be used for its unique purpose. Spiritual gifts should be received in the same way.

In this broadcast, we will therefore consider:

- When the gifts were given;
- The people to whom the gifts were given;
- The manner in which they were received;
- The identification of the gift;
- The purpose of the gift; and,
- The use of the gift.

Firstly, we must consider the occasion on which these spiritual gifts were given.

In Ephesians 4:7-8 we read: *But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.* The verse tells us that gifts were given following the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to heaven after His death and resurrection. This is called His ascension. He is now seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. This is the place of divine favour and power. He is there as a Prince and a Saviour; but also as Lord. He has optimum authority. As we shall see, the gifts in this chapter are actually "kinds of people" and they are given to the church.

However, the whole of the Godhead is involved in the giving of "gifts". In Romans 12, the special gifts (or abilities) given to individual Christians have their Source in God. In James 1:17 He is described as the "Father of lights". We read: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* In 1 Corinthians 12, we find the gifts to Christians are given by the Holy Spirit Himself.

It is important to realise that the gifts were given at a point of transition from the dispensation of law to that of grace. The coming of the Holy Spirit following the ascension of Christ brought about a new beginning in God's way of dealing with mankind. Many of the gifts accompanied the preaching of the Gospel confirming that it had all the authority of God behind it. These are called "sign gifts". Now that we have the full revelation of God in the Bible, including the records relating to the signs of the early days as proof of its authority, then the importance of sign gifts has declined and may only be used in rare circumstances by God today.

Secondly, we pinpoint the people to whom these gifts were given.

As indicated already, the people to whom these gifts are given were Christians. Now Christians are those who believe that God is the perfect being who is a tri-unity of Persons, namely, God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed in Matthew 28:19 where we read: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...* One name, but three distinct persons!

Furthermore, Christians believe that God the Son became a man - being born of "the" virgin called Mary. They acknowledge He was sinless in Himself, yet was made sin at Calvary's cross where He suffered the judgement of God against sin. They know that Christ was delivered for their offences and raised again for their justification. They also recognise that they are saved through grace alone and that their own supposed "good works" have no power to save. Additionally, they realise that Christ is now a glorified man in heaven and that, through Him, they have forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

All those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, form His church. If we could gather all true Christians into one area, then that group would be properly called the church, a word that literally means “an assembly of called out ones”. The church has been called out from this world and separated to God for His possession, purposes and pleasure. It is also called, among other things, the “Body of Christ”, the “Bride of Christ” and the “House of God”.

Thirdly, we look at the manner in which the gifts are received.

As previously mentioned, a child will receive a gift and unwrap it in order to identify it. We often hear of Christians asking themselves, “What is my gift?” They have at least one, but haven’t identified it. So how does a Christian “unwrap” his gift?

- Firstly, he must ask the Lord to reveal the gift (or, in some cases, gifts) to him.
- Secondly, he should study the scriptures to see what gifts have been given.
- Thirdly, he should examine himself in a sound-minded way noting his strengths, skills and abilities.
- Fourthly, he should regularly attend his local, Bible-believing church and participate in its activities.
- Finally, after regular attendance, he should ask the elders of the church what they think his gift may be.

By “elders” I mean men who are experienced in the Lord’s things, mature Christians who have an excellent grasp of the scriptures, men who oversee matters in the church and who clearly do the work of a pastor. In other words, an elder is both a shepherd and a bishop. This five-pronged attack should result in any gift being identified. However, this should be confirmed by consulting the Lord again, thanking Him for showing the gift, but also asking Him for opportunities to use it.

Fourthly, we examine the kinds of gifts that are given.

In Ephesians 4:11 we read, *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers...* These gifts are people who Christ gave to the church – the whole church! They were not limited to what we call a local church. Let’s consider these.

An Apostle is a sent one and conditions for apostleship are found in Acts 1:21-22 where we read, *Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection...* This verse tells us that there are no apostles in the primary sense today. The original Apostles were chosen of God and had divine authority in the church. Their doctrine was inspired by God (God-breathed) and, along with the prophets, they formed the foundation of truth upon which the church is built - Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone.

The exception to this rule was Paul who was an apostle called by Christ as "one who was born out of due time". But he actually saw the Lord on the Damascus road and was given a special commission of suffering and of preaching to the Gentiles.

The closest people that we have to apostles today are missionaries. Those who are sent by God to proclaim the Gospel and establish churches in the regions where Christ has not been named. In scripture, the self-sacrificing and devout Barnabas is an example of a sent one. If the Lord has given you a love for souls, an itch to travel and a gift for languages, then He may be leading you in this way.

Prophets would speak the mind of God to the saints in such a way that it applied to their current circumstances and provided certain guidance. What they said may or may not have included predictions. However, prophets in the primary sense spoke words that were literally the word of God. They are no longer with us; but we do have prophets in a secondary sense today. Those who are able to apply the scriptures to particular Christians in specific circumstances (without having prior knowledge about those circumstances).

Evangelists are, literally, “heralds of good news”. They are itinerant preachers not confined to one local church. In Isaiah 52:7 we read, *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!* Such is the character of an evangelist. In Acts 8 we find an evangelist in the primary sense. He was called Phillip. He preached gospel with miracles confirming his word. Souls were saved and baptised. He listened to the voice of God. He had a clear understanding of the scriptures. He had the ability to teach.

Today, an evangelist is a person who has a heartfelt love for lost souls and seeks to gather them to Christ. He, therefore, goes out from his local church into areas where the Gospel is needed. He will then direct the newly saved to

a reliable Bible-believing church, where this is possible. Billy Graham was an example of this kind of evangelist. Unfortunately, they are few and far between in this country.

Pastors are men who do the work of a shepherd. They have an earnest care for the flock of Christ which is certainly needed today. It is mainly a personal and private work with individual Christians. The pastor works “behind the scenes”. His work applies to all Christians everywhere.

Teachers are also needed today. They are Christians with a special ability to understand and explain the scriptures in a clear and concise way. They may be based at a local church, but are used for the benefit of the whole. Of course, their teaching may be in spoken, recorded or written forms.

In 1 Corinthians 12 we have a set of different gifts that are given by the Spirit of God. They include: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, helps, divers kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues. These gifts may be split into three groups that are indicated by the word “another” meaning “another of a different kind”. This word occurs between the 2nd and 3rd gifts and 7th and 8th gifts.

So the **word of wisdom and that of knowledge** go together. These were specific gifts for the early days of Christianity before the complete revelation of God by the apostles and prophets. Wisdom was required to solve problems. Knowledge was needed to inform. In Acts 5:3-4 we see Peter exercise such a gift in revealing the heart of Ananias. It seems that God had miraculously shown Peter the motives behind the giving of Ananias and Sapphira, and also the judgement that would come upon them both. Today, we are exhorted by scripture to judge actions but not motives. Hence, these gifts are not prevalent today.

Faith comes next and is linked with the gift of healings, miracles and prophecy. This is not just the faith that trusts in God for salvation and life in general; but a special faith that can move mountains! It is the faith that was lacking in the Lord's disciples as far as the demon-possessed boy was concerned. Yet, it is the kind of faith that marked people like George Muller.

The gift of **healings** refers to the ways in which people were cured of illnesses. The gift not only shows the loving care of God but, primarily, confirmed the word that was being preached as being God's word. It was a sign gift in the early church. It petered out with time because Paul's thorn in the flesh, Timothy's stomach problem, Trophimus' sickness and Epaphroditus' illness were not cured. On rare occasions today, the Lord may still use this gift to confirm His word; but this would be where the Gospel has not been heard before. Today, the norm is for the prayer of faith to be used to bring about cures for the sick.

Then we have a gift that is highly classed among these gifts. It is called “**helps**”. The word has the idea of “bringing relief”. These are those Christians who have a special objective to support those who are weak, sick and needy. In Acts 20:35 Paul writes, *I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.* So all Christians are encouraged to do this work, but some have a special gift for it.

The **workings of miracles** were a gift to Christians that also confirmed the witness of the early church as being of God. The raising of Dorcas from death, smiting Elymas with blindness and the casting out of demons were demonstrations of this gift. With the coming of the full canon of New Testament scripture, this gift has also faded.

Prophecy we have dealt with already.

The gift of **discerning spirits** comes next. In Acts 16:16-18 we find that a girl pronounced what seemed to be true concerning the apostle Paul and his companions. After a while, Paul discerned that she was actually demon-possessed. Today, we have scriptural guidance to determine the truth (1 John 4:2-3).

The gift of **tongues** has led to much discussion in the church but, on close examination, the gift seems to relate to human languages spoken by Christians who had never learned them. In the church, there must be an **interpreter** (who is a person who has the God-given gift to explain what is being said). If there is no interpreter then the one with the gift of tongues must remain silent. Furthermore, the speakers must follow one another. They are not to speak at the same time. This order is found in 1 Corinthians 14.

The same applies to prayer spoken in the church meetings. If someone prays in tongues then the prayer must be interpreted before any “Amen” can be added by others. Tongues were a sign to those who did not believe and especially the Jews living in lands of the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 14:21). Then again, 1 Corinthians 13:8 tells us that tongues would cease. It is probably for this reason that we need translators of the scriptures today who are able to

provide the Bible in many languages. I would therefore suggest that this gift would only be used of God in very rare circumstances today, if at all.

Romans 12:6-8 provide a further list of gifts that include: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, rule and shewing mercy. The emphasis in the chapter is that we are all members of the body of Christ (His church). As such, we depend on one another. Just as the parts of a body having different roles, so we as members of Christ have different functions, but all are needed for the body to live.

Prophecy and **teaching** have been dealt with already, so we'll look first at what is meant by "**ministry**". The word means to "attend as a servant" whether teaching or taking practical care of the fabric or organisation of the local church.

Exhortation is the ability to draw near to encourage and advise.

An interesting gift is "**giving**". It means "giving with generosity". In 2 Corinthians 9:7 we read, *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.* Here, the word "cheerful" means "hilarious". It shows that the gift of giving speaks of a giving that is sacrificial.

Then we have "**rule**". This means to "preside over with earnestness". Hebrews 13:17 states, *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.* Christians who are spiritual leaders have this gift. They lead by example and guard and keep Christian souls from danger.

There are members of the body who are recognised for "**shewing mercy**". This means that they are "liberally compassionate". In 1 Peter 3:8 we read, *Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.* So we are all called upon to be compassionate, but the gift of showing mercy is having an *abundance* of compassion.

Fifthly, we note the purposes of the gifts.

In Ephesians 4, the gifts are given to bring about spiritual maturity in believers, to fulfil the service of God and to build up or strengthen the body of Christ. The gifts are for the benefit of all Christians, not the individuals exercising them.

In 1 Corinthians 12 the gifts given reveal that the Holy Spirit is working and that every Christian is brought together for blessing. This we find in verse 7: *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.* This is emphasised in verse 12, where we read, *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.*

This leads us into Romans 12, where the gifts (or functions) are to provide an active dependence of one member on another so that there may be complete unity in the body of Christ. The splitting of the responsible church into denominations is a denial of this truth. All Christians in the true church should be actively working together. This is not an excuse for ecumenism at any price either, because believers should be of one mind and gather with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart, following after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness (1 Timothy 6:11).

Finally, we'll explore how the gifts are used.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 we find the following, *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

In these verses, the apostle Paul is emphasising that gifts have to be exercised in love. Love is that nature or attitude that always seeks the best for the good of its object. Without love, there is no benefit to believers. We simply become a loud noise! Without love, we have no authority and, without love, we will be of benefit to no-one!

Summary

We would suggest that the following are definitely found in the church today: those who are pastors, teachers and evangelists, those with great faith, those who support and relieve the weak, sick and needy; those who are exercised to serve their fellow believers in a variety of ways; those who draw near to encourage and strengthen fellow believers;

those who give sacrificially, those who lead in the local church - guarding and guiding it; and those who are abundant in compassion.

Christians called to missionary work are “sent ones” in the secondary sense, as are those who have a prophetic ministry based on the scriptures.

It may be that you can fit yourself into one or more of these categories. So, we leave you with the advice in Romans 12:3, *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”*

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