

A Biblical View of Spiritual Gifts
For The Common Good
Chapter 3
The Speaking Gifts

And He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. **Ephesians 4:11-13**

The Apostle Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to adjust their focus from the more showy sign gifts, to the more important speaking gifts, in order for the church to be edified. He instructs the misguided Corinthians to "eagerly desire the greater gifts" (**1 Corinthians 12:31**). Some have suggested that this passage actually carries a negative connotation, and therefore should be translated, "but you are covetous of the greater gifts". Thereby, insinuating that in their zeal to outdo one another, the carnal Corinthians were desiring for selfish reasons, spiritual gifts that would enable themselves to appear more spiritual than their counterparts within the body. While this would be an accurate depiction of the Corinthians, I do not believe this to be the intention of Paul's statement here, because he repeats the phrase again in **Chapter Fourteen** and it is obvious by its context that Paul is pleading with the church to concentrate on the spiritual gifts that will build up the whole, rather than the individual (**1 Corinthians 14:1**).

The Apostles desperately desired that the fledgling church be able to discern which gifts were indeed the most useful and which were to be used in a supporting role of these greater gifts. Paul leaves no doubt that the speaking gifts (Apostolic, Prophecy, Teaching, Pastoring, and Evangelism) are by far the most important among all of the spiritual gifts. The serving gifts were intended to be used in support of the speaking gifts. While the sign gifts were to be used as "proof" of the message being proclaimed by the speaking gifts. In short, without the proper authority being placed upon the speaking gifts, the church was destined to fail, for it is the message that would bring hope and salvation to a fallen world, not service, nor the miraculous.

The truth of the gospel must be effectively preached, taught, and intentionally presented in such a way that those who will hear, can find the grace of God through the cross of Jesus Christ. Apart from this, the church will find no meaning. The church has certainly been commanded to serve others, but if the gospel message is absent from the working of the church, then the church simply becomes another service organization. As I once heard a preacher say, "If we merely feed the hungry and clothe the naked, but don't give them the message of the cross, then we are only sending them to hell with new clothes and a full stomach". It is the gospel message then, that is our foremost priority. So, it stands to reason that the spiritual gifts that are utilized in presenting that message would therefore be a priority as well.

Paul is so passionate about the Word of God being taught in the churches that he goes on to say to the Corinthians, "**...I would rather have you speak five intelligible words to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.**" (**1 Corinthians 14:19**). The speaking gifts must be the prominent feature of a healthy church. Every decision we make as church leaders must take into account then, how we will be able to present the gospel in every circumstance. If we are having a church social, great. How will we present the gospel? If we are feeding the homeless, wonderful. How will we present the gospel? If we are helping people to overcome addiction, noble. But, how do we present the gospel?

When everything is viewed through the lens of the gospel message, then the church becomes a vibrant, living, breathing body of Christ. Our Lord did many things while on this earth; healed the sick, raised the dead, fed the hungry, and performed many miracles, but all these things were done in order to bring credibility to His message. If we are truly the body of Christ, then we too will function in like manner. It is with this in mind that we take a closer look at the speaking gifts, and their vital role within the body.

The Apostolic Gifts

First, let me start off by saying there are NO apostles that are still living in this day and age. Yes, I am fully aware that many in today's church circles still refer to themselves as apostles, but they are sadly mistaken. The word "apostle" literally means "one who is sent", or ambassador. The Apostles were the "*founding fathers*" of the church. All of them had personal, physical contact with Christ Himself while he was on the earth. With the exception of Paul, who only met Jesus after His resurrection (**Acts Chapter 9**), all of these men walked with Jesus during His three year earthly ministry. They saw him arrested. They anguished over His death, and were all able to physically touch Him upon His resurrection. He then designated them to be His Apostles (the word means delegate), to establish the church throughout the world.

The Apostle Paul, refers to himself as an apostle "abnormally born" (**1 Corinthians 15:8**). The word used in the text for abnormally born actually means to be aborted or born dead. Paul was, no doubt referring to the fact that his becoming an apostle was very different from that of the other apostles, because he had so persecuted the church before his conversion that all he was had to die in order to become a follower of Christ. This explains why his named was changed from Saul to Paul upon his conversion. Paul went from being the "anti-apostle" to a devoted, true apostle. When he met Jesus face to face on the Damascus road, he was never to be the same again.

In any case, the Apostles were sent personally by Christ to establish the church. And by inference of the scriptures, these men were in fact, "super-Christians" who possessed not just some, but ALL of the spiritual gifts! Because it was their assignment to plant churches everywhere, they were in fact, fully capable of serving in every capacity that a church needed in order to function properly. These men were "one man churches" if you will. They could ALL preach, teach, evangelize, administrate, serve, and work miracles. There is no one in the church today like the original Apostles of Jesus Christ. Just as it would be foolish for someone to run for president of the United States, while claiming to be one of the founding fathers of the country (those guys have all been dead for quite some time), it is equally foolish for someone today to be called an apostle, unless they can prove that they are over two thousand years old, and knew Jesus in the flesh!

While I'm on that subject, I would like to interject my personal feelings upon "titles" that men are given within the church. We are called as Christians to be the "least" among men, in order to be great in the Kingdom of God (**Matthew 23:11**). **Philippians 2:3** says, "**Let nothing be done in strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others, greater than themselves**" (I like the KJV better here). If in fact we are to take these scriptures literally (which we are), then why do we feel the need endow ourselves with titles of prominence? For example, I have been a minister of the gospel for many years, but I absolutely refuse to be called "reverend". The word actually means "revered one". Wow! I only know of One who is able to claim that title, and quite frankly, it isn't me, or any other servant of Christ. Jesus is our "revered one", and "**apart from Him, we can do nothing**" (**John 15**).

I think we would do well to strip away the titles and just serve within the body. The only title that we should be concerned with is to one day hear our master refer to us as "good and faithful servants". Following Christ was never intended to make us rock stars, but rather "living stones" being built into the spiritual house of God (**1 Peter 2:5**). When we crucify our flesh, we no longer desire to be first in this world. We are content simply to be a part, of what is being built upon Christ, the Chief Cornerstone. He is the true Rock Star, and we are just the back up singers, and should be honored to be so! So let the world have its titles, just give us Jesus.

The apostles then, were a one-time-only group, who quite honestly turned the whole world upside with the message of the cross. We have been greatly blessed by their endeavors and owe them our debt of gratitude. While we are to follow in their footsteps by bringing the message of hope to a fallen world, we are not to presume ourselves to be their equals, for they were truly one of a kind. They were granted special status and abilities to enable them to establish the church that endures to this day. We do not need to be like them to carry on the mission that they began. We merely need to use the gifts that we have been given, in combination with the rest of the body, to see that the work of the church is perpetuated. Let us now continue as we observe the greater gifts that remain in the church today.

Evangelism

All Christians are called to share the gospel, and in so doing, win lost people to Christ. However, some Christians have been supernaturally gifted with the spiritual gift of evangelism. These individuals are completely consumed with reaching the lost for the sake of the kingdom. The evangelist doesn't necessarily have to be a pastor (though many pastors have the gift of evangelism), for many of them are not. Philip, in the book of Acts (**Acts 6:5, 8:26-40, 21:8**) was a deacon in the early church. He had been ordained to serve the widows of the church by making sure that they each received their proper food distribution. His ministry was not one of church leadership, but rather of service (the word deacon actually means waiter or server). Although I am quite certain that Philip did a wonderful job of distributing food to those in need, his spiritual gift was evangelism. We are able to see this clearly in **Acts chapter 8** as he runs alongside the Ethiopian Eunuch's chariot in order to share the gospel. The evangelist will go above and beyond just for an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone. Philip is the perfect example of how an evangelist's mind works. The evangelist is consumed with seeing people born again.

The Christian with the gift of evangelism often thinks of little else. They tend not to get bogged down in the day-to-day shepherding of the flock. They are more like an obstetrician, when it comes to "birthing" new believers. After they reach the lost person with the gospel, and they become "born again", they tend to move on to the next lost soul. Someone else with a different gift set will usually take over, and disciple a new convert to Christ. The evangelist usually can't sit still long enough for that sort of thing. Notice in **Acts chapter eight** that as soon as the Ethiopian gave his life to Christ and was baptized, Philip is out of there. The evangelist depends upon other members of the church to nurture the new believer, once he is brought into the fold. Just as an obstetrician hands off a new born baby to a pediatrician after it is born, the evangelist entrusts his/her "newborn" believer to those with Shepherding gifts that will help them grow in the faith.

A young preacher once gave a message to a large group of people unknowing that the great evangelist Dr. Billy Graham was among the crowd. At the end of the sermon, Dr. Graham approached the young pastor and said, "That was a great sermon". The young man was taken aback and replied, "Thank you Dr. Graham. Coming from you, that means a great deal to me". To which Dr. Graham replied, "Why? I'm not a great preacher. I'm a great inviter!" The evangelist is just that, an inviter. He is always extending an invitation for people to join the family of God. Once they are in, other preachers will teach them the word of God, so they can mature into the healthy, vibrant Christians that God has called them to be.

Are you constantly searching for lost souls? Do you have a tireless desire to see new believers brought into God's family? Do you find yourself thinking that a church service was only good if someone gives their life to Christ during the invitation? Do you feel that the discipleship of young Christians is far too time consuming and will keep you from reaching others for Christ? If so, then you very well may have the spiritual gift of evangelism.

Pastor/Shepherd

If the evangelist is an obstetrician, then the Pastor/Shepherd is the pediatrician. The word "Pastor" actually means shepherd or overseer. Christians with this particular ministry gift tend to be nurturers. They are motivated by a desire to see not just the individual, but rather groups of people, mature in their faith. The Pastor/Shepherd is on the front lines when it comes to the great commission, **"go and make disciples... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20)**. Christians with the gift of shepherding are not always pastors of churches, but most church pastors definitely have this gift. If they do not, their ministry suffers because of the lack of it. The pastor has a great heart for his flock. He often works very long hours to ensure its welfare, because just as Paul instructed the Corinthian Church, **"when one part suffers, every part suffers with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26)**. The pastor feels a deep attachment to those under his care and has tremendous empathy for their hurts. It is his responsibility to equip the saints for every good work, and to guard the unity of the church (**Ephesians 4:12-13**). He does this by correctly teaching and applying the word of God, so that

every believer in his flock will know what Christ requires of them. He will also stand before God to give an account of the spiritual growth for those under his care (**Hebrews 13:17**), therefore he takes this charge very seriously.

Pastors must be sober-minded in their calling. They are not afforded the luxury of much public error, for they are always under great scrutiny, not only from God, but by those they have been called to lead. It is for this reason, that Pastors quite often have very few close friends, and yet many acquaintances. They are held to such high standard (**1 Timothy 3:1-7**) that they tend to live in "glass houses" with every one in the church watching their every move. Therefore, the pastor shepherd must maintain a close walk with his heavenly Father in order to lead the people effectively for the kingdom's cause.

I believe the spiritual gift of Pastor/Shepherd to be the most important spiritual gift within the church, for without its proper utilization within the body, the church would be in chaos. The Pastor sets the tone for everything within the body. If he falls, the results can be catastrophic. This is why every member of the church should be in a constant attitude of prayer for their pastors. We are depending upon them to lead us, and the devil knows it. Do you have within you the deep desire to lead people to grow and mature in the faith of Jesus Christ? Do you have a heart to be there to lift up those who are struggling, to give Godly counsel to those who have lost their way? Do you long above all else to see healthy churches, not just making converts but making disciples of Jesus? Do you feel an inescapable calling to preach and teach the word of God? Then you may just have the spiritual gift of Pastor/Shepherd.

Prophecy

The Greek word used for Prophet in the New Testament means "one who foretells or one who dispenses truth". In the days of the Old Testament, the prophets would speak from divine revelation given to them directly by God himself. In short, they would speak forth God's words to the people. The prophet was held to the highest standard, he would only speak what God had told him, no more or no less. To do otherwise would be to risk his very life for being disobedient to God. For this reason, the prophet often seemed to be a lone solitary voice crying out against the sins being committed by those around him. He was bold and seemed fearless in the face of opposition. There was no "gray" about his character, he saw everything in black and white; right or wrong; truth and falsehood. He would "foretell" the judgment of God that would befall those who refused to listen to the voice of truth and repent. Because of this, the prophet was oft times an unwelcome visitor to the people. No one likes to hear bad news, especially when it's from someone who is preaching, "repent, or else", but this was the life of the prophet.

We are now living in an age where God has said all that He intends to say, by the Word of scripture. God has revealed to us in the scriptures His holy character, His will, and His revelation of what He will do in the future. Since this is the case, the modern day prophet is simply called to preach the black and white truths found in the Word of God. In short, what Paul calls "prophecy", we call preaching. It is the modern day preachers responsibility to speak against evil and disobedience when he sees them, based on what is found in scripture. He is to admonish those who do wrong and to warn them that they must repent.

The gift of prophecy is given to those who are to preach the word of God for correction and rebuke. Most successful pastors are endowed with this gift. They must stand for truth when others will not. The prophet will also despise seeing the scriptures being misused to teach falsehood. A true prophet of God cannot help but get angry at the teachings of a false prophet, who uses scripture to manipulate others for their own personal gain (like most televangelist). Prophets are not willing, EVER to compromise the Word of God, no matter how intense the pressure to do so. These men have been called to take a stand, and not "go along to get along". Just as in Old Testament times, modern day prophets are often despised for their proclamations of coming judgment upon the wicked and unrepentant. Some things never change. Most people do not like to have their sins pointed out to them. The prophet has no choice, he must do so in order to be obedient. He will be as hard on his own sin, as he is the sins of others.

True prophets are not usually known for their mercy, instead they are known for speaking the truth, oft times in the most blunt, and matter of fact tone possible. The Corinthians obviously were lacking in this kind of plain speaking, which is why Paul suggested they trade in their speaking in tongues for a simple word of prophecy (**1 Corinthians 14:1**). The corruption in the Corinthian church could only be undone by a bold prophet, unafraid to speak truth so that all could understand, repent, and obey.

Prophets aren't about "sugar-coated" half truths, they speak with the authority of scripture with a "take no prisoners" mentality. For this reason the prophet is often misunderstood as someone who is unfeeling or uncaring. This could not be further from the truth. In fact the prophet cares deeply about the people of God, he merely wants them to be in right standing with God. He wants to warn them away from judgment.

Just as a parent will scold the child they love in order to protect them, the prophet will admonish those within the church to save them from disaster. When you are trying to rescue someone from a burning building, you don't always have time for subtlety. No fireman has ever stood patiently in front of a house on fire and politely said, "Listen, I don't wish to hurt your feelings, nor is it my intention to inconvenience you in any way, but if you have time, would you please consider coming outside? It's a really nice night and the stars are out, and I'm sure you will enjoy the night air." Of course not! The fireman has only one thing on his mind, to save lives, as quickly as possible. The same is true with the prophet of God. He speaks truth in the face of danger BECAUSE he cares. He would much rather not have to carry this burden, but it is his to carry nonetheless. The prophet may not be popular, but he is necessary. Do you feel a strong desire to expose sin and condemn the wickedness that surrounds us? Do you find yourself hurting at the thought of the sorrow God must feel, when He looks at what is going on in the world? Do you tend to see things in black and white, and find yourself getting angry when scripture is either ignored, or even worse, taught falsely and out of context? If so, then you might have the gift of prophecy.

Teaching

The spiritual gift of teaching is yet another of the speaking gifts that helps to enrich the church. Those with this particular gift are about one thing, and one thing only: the accurate and expository teaching from the Word of God. The Bible is everything to the teacher, and they live for one purpose, to teach the scriptures to as many who will listen, in such a way that they can fully grasp every detail. A teacher's favorite moment is when a student's eyes light up to express that they "get it". The satisfaction that comes from being able to implant the word of God, with all its facts and spiritual truths, into the hearts of other believers brings a sense of indescribable joy to those of us who are called to teach God's word.

Teachers are about accuracy. They tend to study much harder than their other ministerial counterparts, because they are fully aware that scripture warns that those who teach will be judged more strictly (**James 3:1**). As a result, the teacher will develop intense study habits, spending many long hours in the word of God to ensure that they have a firm grasp upon every nuance of the particular passage that they intend to teach. Teachers will search out the original texts of Greek and Hebrew to make sure that they fully understand the intent of scripture passages. Because they are willing to invest so much time to study, they have little or no tolerance for those who attempt to teach others without this same discipline. Every good Bible teacher comes to despise error or inaccuracies when teaching from the word of God. If the teacher unknowingly teaches something that is incorrect, they will immediately correct the error as soon as possible. Even the smallest mistake in teaching will bring a terrible sense of remorse upon those with the spiritual gift of teaching.

The teacher is convinced that if they teach correctly what they have learned from God in His word, then God in turn, will continue to give them more and more insight to pass along to their students. Unlike pastor/shepherds, teachers are not as overly concerned with the life application of a passage. This doesn't mean that they think life application of Scripture is unimportant. It is just that they tend to be more concerned with simply presenting the facts in an understandable way. I personally believe that the teacher is not as focused with the need to apply the Word to the lives of individuals simply because they

believe that The Bible, when properly taught, will do that for itself. The teacher is merely content to teach the Word and allow the Holy Spirit to convict and correct the learner where He deems appropriate.

These men are usually less drawn to books, other than the Bible. While they do enjoy study with the aid of Bible commentaries, most teachers are not overly fond of books written about various spiritual topics, because the teacher often finds such texts heavy on opinion and light on scriptural doctrine. It is important to understand that when you are dealing with someone with the gift of teaching, the Bible means everything to these people. They believe that it should be taught with clarity and accuracy and should always be taught with enthusiasm. In short, the teaching of God's Word should NEVER be boring. If it becomes so, then the one doing the teaching should consider finding some other vocation within the church. Those with the gift of teaching will always have others who want to learn from them.

Our Bible teachers take us deep into the scriptures and help us to grow in our faith. Without them, the church will never be able to become fully mature in its doctrine. Do you have a burning desire to study the Word of God in such a way that you can impart it to others? Do you believe that the Bible is the most important tool a Christian has to become mature in the faith? Does teaching God's Word give you an incredible sense of satisfaction that you can find in no other ministry? Are you constantly searching for one more Biblical truth to pass along to others? If so, then you may have the spiritual gift of teaching.

These then are the speaking gifts; apostolic, evangelism, shepherding, prophecy, and teaching. It is these gifts that are the main focus of the church. The serving gifts, as well as the sign gifts, are specifically designed to bolster and affirm these speaking gifts, for it is in them we find the voice of the church, the very gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us now move on to the second tier group of spiritual gifts, the supporting gifts of service.

Truth!