

# Seven Gifts in the Church

By

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In I Corinthians 12 Paul identified several gifts, some of which were sign gifts which were unique to the first century church, such as the miraculous ability to speak a foreign language without any prior knowledge of the language. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul distinguished the foundational gifts of prophets and apostles which were also unique to the first century church. In Ephesians 4:11 he identified the ministerial gifts of evangelist and pastor/teacher which yet exist. In Romans 12 Paul identified seven additional gifts which are yet found in the church. They are **prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy**. The context of Romans 12 indicates that these gifts are not restricted by church office. They are found among the membership in general. He makes no distinction as to the value of one category of gift over another, indicating that the gifts are given as a measure of God's grace. He suggests that not every member has every gift and also notes that there are different administrations of the same gifts. That is, the use or application of the same gift may be different from one person to the next. Paul tells us that gifts are to be used in proportion to one's faith. From this we may conclude that God directs the proper use of gifts. The numerous administrations and operations of these seven gifts attend to the physical, emotional and, to a certain degree, spiritual necessities of church members. There is no circumstance of essential physical or emotional need that, from a godly perspective, cannot be addressed by the various ministrations of one or more of the gifts. In this regard, Paul's metaphor of the human body and the church thoroughly applies.

The human body requires natural food and water by which it supplies each component with nourishment. The body of the church is supplied with spiritual food from God which is administered by the functionality of gifts. The human body is sustained by proper functioning of each of its component systems. A church is sustained by proper ministration of each gift. The human body, using various physiological systems, breaks down natural food and supplies it to each component of the body to maintain physical and mental health. The church, through faithful operations of administrations of gifts by each member, supplies each whatever measure of physical support and/or spiritual encouragement needed to maintain spiritual health and overall Christian functionality. Each component or system in the human body has a specific, irreplaceable function which serves the common good of the whole body. Each church member, utilizing the gift God has given, also has a specific and vital function which serves the common good of the whole church.

The seven gifts God gives in the churches are exercised by administrations and operations of seeable, touchable faith in the community of the church. Members use their respective gifts to aid and support one another. The ability to administer gifts differently in various operations means that the same gift may be used in numerous ways, as defined by need and spiritual direction. Thus, every challenge the church faces, either collectively or as a single member, has the potential of being addressed by every gift of every member. No one is left out. In this, the church is analogous to the human body: To function properly both need all their parts doing their respective jobs.

These seven gifts are given by God according to the grace he gives us. One or more are given to each child of God. They are revealed as aptitudes which very often are used in our secular vocations. God

allows this. However, His primary intent, in the context of Romans 12, is that they be used to the edification of the church and the glory of God. When a member faithfully exercise his gift he can reasonably expect the ministrations or, ways it is exercised, to increase; with faithful ministration he grows in grace. Further, based upon the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, it is also reasonable to believe that when a member faithfully executes the responsibilities of his gift God will impart a new gift, whereby he may also grow in grace.

These gifts are the context for seeable, touchable faith. It is through their ministration that members manifest their faithfulness to God. They are the framework whereby faith is shown by works. Vertical fellowship with God is accomplished and demonstrated by the horizontal fellowship of a seeable, touchable good works faith toward one another. This cross index of faithfulness places church members in the central position of rendering out flowing services of faith to one another, whereby upflowing faith to God occurs as devotional glory. The Savior taught the reality of the principle of God receiving upflow glory from outflow rendered services in Matthew 25:34-40. He said that as often as one child of God renders a service to another child of God he considers the service as being rendered to him. Rendering service to one another confirms faithful discipleship to Christ Jesus. Thus, cutting timber, clearing land, building cabin's and generally seeing to the needs of one another, as demonstrated by the church community of Sandy Creek Baptist Church, was seeable, touchable faith which edified the church and glorified God.

## **Prophecy**

Prophecy is defined as the ability to foretell events. In the Bible this includes both Old and New Testament prophets who, by divine revelation, were able to accurately detail future occurrences. The definition also includes preaching the gospel by divine liberty. I have chosen not address these administrations of the gift.

The gift of prophecy, as it is given to members of the general assembly, is an ability to wisely discern the consequences of decisions or actions. It is the gift of wise counsel. This gift is often manifest as steadfastness. The brother or sister who carefully weighs consequence before taking action possesses this gift. It is the spiritually directed ability to know what to say and when to say it. It may include insight into cause and effect relative to human nature. At the same time, it is not judgmental. The gift is not meant to be used to judge or condemn people. It is a support which may help others sort out thoughts and events and determine a proper course of action. It does not direct or invoke. It gently identifies potential dangers or blessings based upon various actions that might be taken in a given situation.

Solomon was blest with the gift of prophecy as it now exists in the church. The most revealing example of his possession of this gift is recorded in I Kings 3:25. There, he commanded that a sword be brought to him. He expressed his intention to divide an infant and give one half to each of two women who were fighting over it. Solomon was able to discern the consequence of expressing an intent to give each woman one-half of the baby. By spiritually directed discernment he understood that a loving mother would give up her child rather than see it harmed. Solomon was not gambling with the child's life, because his understanding of the consequence of expressing an intent to divide the child was a faithful operation of the gift of prophecy. The Lord gave him spiritual enlightenment to foretell the consequence of his expressed action. That is how the gift of prophecy works.

Such a gift is invaluable to the church. It provides spiritual counsel as the church deliberates. It reveals unseen pitfalls. It contributes spiritual enlightenment for every decision the church must make as a whole.

Individual ministrations would include counseling troubled members or those who are prone to pursue error. Prophecy is God's method for day-to-day practical and specific application of divine principles.

This gift may be found in both male and female members. Acts 2:17 and I Corinthians 11:5 plainly indicate that a woman may possess the gift of prophecy. The inclusion of women does not mean that they are called to preach, since the gift of prophesy and some of its administrations are not exclusive to the office work of preaching the gospel.

## **Ministry**

Ministry is defined as giving aid. It carries a connotation of servitude. Acts 6:1 reveals that ministering as a servant is one qualification of a deacon. This gift is very common in the church. It extends beyond the duties of deacons. But considering the example of Acts 6:1, we find a principle of addressing the physical needs of others. That is, this gift includes the idea of rendering a service of physical labor. There is also a principle of organized activity related to the gift. This is revealed in the text I Corinthians 16:15. The whole house of Stephanus had "*addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.*" The word addicted ( tasso, gr. ) is translated; to arrange, assign, or order. This definition indicates organization.

Those who possess the gift of ministering understand that there is a goal in mind as they labor. They work to accomplish that goal. It may be to perform a specific task, such as painting the meeting house. Often it relates to providing for the necessities of some member. For instance, if a member is ill, and unable to perform some needed task such as caring for her children, the ministers in the church might provide the labor necessary to accomplish the goal of child care. This applies to every labor related necessity that a member may have but is unable to perform because of some adversity or affliction.

Ministering saints in the church receive joy from rendering a service of physical activity. Their joy of service is to physically spend themselves helping those who are in need. Further, Peter indicates that ministering to others glorifies God.

***"If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus..."*** (I Peter 4:11).

The fact that God is glorified by the physical activity of faithful ministering is proof enough of the importance of this gift. However, a church cannot properly function without it. It is Brother and Sister Minister who maintain the meeting house and see to the necessities of destitute or afflicted members. Sister Minister plans menus and brings food to church as needed.

A quiet spirit is often an evidence of the gift of ministering. This is so because the first requirement of faithful ministering is understanding need. Those who are most attentive in their listening habits are usually the first ones to comprehend need in others. Also, this trait often characterizes the service of ministry. Brother and Sister Minister do not make a show of their labors. Often the only people who

know that a service has been rendered is the brother or sister in need and the ministering saint who quietly renders service.

## **Teaching**

Teaching is a very common gift in the church. In Colossians 3:16, Paul gives a general admonition which indicates the responsibility members have to teach one another.

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*

Every category of church member, male, female, younger, older, fathers, mothers, even children have a responsibility to instruct others. Some instruction is done formally, as the preached word. But the greater portion, both in numbers of teachers and administrations, is based upon social interactions among the membership of the church. When Paul, in Titus 2:26, left instruction that the older women teach the younger women and the older men teach the younger men he was not implying that formalized sessions of instruction take place. Rather, he was speaking to the day-to-day interaction that church members should have with one another. This teaching is to be based upon both wise counsel and example. Older women were to teach younger women how to love their husbands by simple, applicable suggestions. However, the greater thrust of their instruction was based upon the example the older women provided to the younger women. This type of instruction cannot occur unless there is frequent social interaction among church members.

Children are a vital part of the social interaction of teaching in the community of the church. Their primary responsibility is learning from the instruction and example of older members. However, they also teach by example. In I Corinthians 14:20 Paul indicates that children instruct by example as to how adults are to behave when they disagree. He said that in malice, adults are to follow the example of children.

Fathers and mothers are responsible for their children receiving godly instruction IN THE HOME! A few years ago, while doing research for a book, I review many d seventeenth and eighteenth century associational minutes. Some contained queries, or questions directed to the associations from member churches relating to a father's responsibility to conduct a nightly family devotion. The associations said that it is a father's responsibility to instruct his children in the word of God. They said that a father who neglects this responsibility should be brought before the church to be instructed and disciplined as necessary. Fathers are to raise their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This means they are to instruct their children in the word of God and counsel them in the ways of godliness. Paul's praise of Lois and Eunice, Timothy's mother and grandmother, indicates that mothers share the responsibility of teaching their children Christian principles. From this it may be concluded that the activity of teaching one's children may be shared by father and mother. However, as the head of the family, God holds a father accountable for the spiritual welfare of his children. It is to our shame that this responsibility is so generally neglected.

## **Exhortation**

To exhort means to call near. Its definition includes the idea of urging one to acceptable conduct. Exhortation may also have a connotation of comforting. It always denotes sincere, or earnest recommendation. Those who exhort in the church are spiritual cheerleaders. They encourage and coax us to laudable conduct. Exhorters are reassuring. They comfort us when we have doubts.

Joshua and Caleb are examples of those who possess the gift of exhortation. They urged the Israelites to enter Canaan. They did so based upon a faithful conviction that God would bless the effort. Exhorters have a special way of looking at challenges. They see them as opportunities. Joshua and Caleb saw the same things that the other spies saw which were sent into Canaan. Yet, the other spies brought back a report that the enemy was too strong and the land could not be taken. Joshua and Caleb urged the Israelites to take the land, assuring them that God would deliver the victory.

Brother and sister Exhorter have confidence in God's ability. They are the positive thinkers in the church. They always seem to have a word of encouragement no matter how great a trial or tribulation the church may be facing. Brother Exhorter may relate a scriptural example of God's providential deliverance when others were faced with a similar challenge. Often, Brother Exhorter has a special gift for public prayer and/or relating experiences. This is because the gift of exhortation includes the aptitude to call one near. He calls upon the Lord with deep respect and reverential fear; yet with confidence that God will hear his prayer and respond. He relates experiences of God's providential mercies as a way to encourage others. Sister Exhorter may use her gift to comfort a brother or sister who is in distress over some circumstance in their life. She reassures that God is able to deliver them from every affliction of tribulation. She may confirm the soundness and happy consequence of the brother or sister heeding Brother Prophets good counsel in some matter.

Brother or Sister Exhorter may also be found encouraging Brother and Sister Minister as they engage in their labors. They tell them of the good effect their work is having and how pleased God must be with their efforts. Sister Exhorter might compliment Sister Teacher on the excellent example she is setting for the younger sisters.

## **Giving**

The gift of giving is the aptitude to be spiritually directed as to when and what to share with others. It carries a connotation of sacrifice of ones goods. It is a gift of ability. When God provides this gift he also provides the means to exercise it. God does not give one the gift of giving and then leave them destitute and unable to give. Relatively speaking, twentieth century churches have many members who have the gift of giving. Many churches have members with more financial wealth than is needed to provide for their own basic necessities of food, raiment and shelter. The increase which God has given them is evidence of their ability to give.

Brother Faithful Giver is unpretentious. He does not make a show of his ability to give. Neither does he compare his giving to others. He understands that the widow's mite is more than he has given and is humbled by her faithfulness. He is happy to give. He does not consider giving to be a burden of church membership. Rather, he receives genuine joy when that is able to give.

The Lord has given Brother Faithful Giver a heart to give. He is not covetous. He views his own financial means as a tool by which God allows him to render a small service. He is attentive to the

financial welfare of the church. He wishes her to have comfortable facilities in which to meet. He desires that the pastor be well cared for. At the same time he uses his gift in a responsible manner to assure that he is able to respond as needs arise. He is attentive to the necessities of the widows and those who are destitute.

## **Ruling**

The gift of ruling includes an aptitude for presiding. It also includes an inclination toward organizing. It may involve the ability to direct others. Rulers have good people skills. Deacons and preachers must have an aptitude to rule. However, since ruling is a gift, and not an office, there are various administrations of this gift that are outside the office work of deacons or preachers. The scriptural connotation of the gift of ruling is that of a father governing his family by organization and example. He loves each one and is careful to respect their concerns. He does not seek special privilege or exemption for himself because of his position. Rather, he understands that each member of the family will be looking at the example that he sets. Therefore, he is very careful about his own actions and also what he asks others to do.

Rulers are not dictatorial, neither are they bureaucratic. In fact, they do not formally exercise their gift unless there is a specific need. There were no deacons in the church until a specific need arose. This point identifies a principle of limited rule. Rulers are not appointed church aldermen. They do not claim more authority or respect than ministers, teachers, exhorters, givers, etc.. They simply have a gift which inclines them toward organizing and directing others.

Rulers may be brothers or sisters. Remember, this gift is not limited to church office.

One brother may exercise his gift of ruling during a church building project. He may have special planning abilities or be skillful in the building trades. Another brother may exercise his gift of ruling on some church committee. He may have special organizational skills; or, perhaps he has people skills that are particularly needed to handle some difficult situation. Often this brother is a deacon; but, since a brother is to prove his qualifications before he is chosen as a deacon, the leadership of ruling may be provided by a brother who is not a deacon.

Since many ministrations of the gift of ruling are informal, and are exercised on an "as needed" basis, a church may have several male members who possess this gift. They will not all be exercising their gifts simultaneously. Sisters also possess this gift. In Romans 16, Paul's instruction to the church concerning Phebe plainly indicates that she was to be involved in some form of directing other members. Her gifts evidently included rendering service. However, it appears that she was to help Rome church by organizing their efforts to help others. The fact that Paul instructed Rome Church to provide assistance at her request indicates that in addition to the gift of ministering she also possessed the gift of ruling. The administration of her gift of ruling was in the area of directing people in the activity of ministry, or rendering service.

## **Showing Mercy**

One who has the gift of showing mercy has the unique ability to suffer together with another; that is, to show genuine empathy, and yet remain functionally capable of caring for the one suffering. This is a

unique gift. It is different than the gift of ministering. This gift specifically relates to addressing the needs of a member who is ill, or who is suffering grief.

Doctors and nurses often possess this gift. They are able to genuinely care about a patient's suffering and yet accomplish difficult procedures to help the person. This is because they look at suffering from the unique perspective of sympathy and correction. Some people cannot show mercy. They are so overcome by another persons suffering that their emotions make unable to help. An example: Two people stop at an auto accident. The first person sees the victims injuries and faints. The second person sees the injuries and renders first aid. The first person was incapable of showing mercy because he was overcome with emotion.

Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. Both the priest and the Levite passed by the traveler who had been beaten and left for dead. Whatever their reasons, they did not lend assistance. When the good Samaritan found the man he had compassion for him and immediately initiated a plan to care for his wounds. The Samaritan considered the wounded traveler from a perspective of sympathy and attending to his wounds. He gave little regard to the fact that touching the man might soil his clothing, or that assisting him could cost the Samaritan money. He saw someone suffering and was compelled by his compassion to give assistance. He carried the traveler to safety where his wounds could be dressed. And though the Samaritan continued on his own journey he assured the traveler that he would return to see about him. The Samaritan had the gift of showing mercy.

## **Working Together in the Community of the Church**

Sister Show Mercy makes it her business to know when a brother or sister is in need. She always has a positive attitude, a kind word, and healing methods. She is the member who brings get well cards to church for everyone to sign. She visits the sick. If they need special care she volunteers to help. Brother Exhorter comes by with a few encouraging words. Sister Prophecy offers suggestions about a careful convalescence. Brother and Sister Minister are there mowing the lawns and cleaning the house. Brother Giver will bring by a bill of groceries. Sister Rule is scheduling meals and house cleaning so that necessary tasks are distributed among the entire membership. Sister Show Mercy is there caring for Sister Afflicted. She is seeing that pills are taken and that Sister Afflicted is eating plenty of chicken soup, getting enough rest, and doesn't get too excited about the fact that almost every member of the church has been by to see her in the last week. Sister Show Mercy is right there. With a smile on her face and cheerful demeanor, she is comforting and caring for sister Afflicted.

These are the seven gifts God has given to the church. However, this brief description is not exhaustive. The intent in listing certain characteristics and examples for each gift was to develop a conceptual understanding of each gift; to show how, in concert, they edify the church as the bride of Christ. They display her loveliness, as a social band that is both a family of believers and the body of Christ. When each member faithfully exercises his or her gift as God intends, the church is truly most beautiful to behold. She is an army with banners unfurled. She is beautiful for situation. She is glorious to behold as an everlasting kingdom.