

Chapter Seven

GIFTINGS

I well remember a time of frustration I experienced while leading the youth work in Wales.

Our numbers had grown and we were considering purchasing a public house (beer saloon) next door to the church, to use as a youth centre. As the financial underwriting for this would have to come from the church, a congregational meeting was held. It was encouraging to see the support from all sections of the church.

One of our members was training to become a lawyer so the legal aspects of the purchase were put in his hands. Another member owned a small building company so the responsibility for checking out the building's safety and renovation needs were made his responsibility. No one questioned these 'appointments' - they were considered obvious.

That part of the congregational meeting was concluded satisfactorily, so the pastor took the opportunity to raise another concern. The Sunday School was needing teachers. When it became obvious that there would not be sufficient volunteers for the assumed vacancies, it was suggested, and heartily accepted, that the teenage children could listen to audio taped lessons! I strongly opposed this, knowing from my teaching experience that only a small percentage of what we learn enters our comprehension and memory through the 'ear-gate'. A much larger portion enters through the 'eye-gate' while most comes through a hands-on experiencing.

It was not sufficient that I was 'on top' of my profession in teaching, having been elected staff president by my colleagues, serving on the Board of Governors, was home room teacher for the school senior class and on a select panel of teachers developing the national curriculum for my subject, Physics. No one knew much about the legal aspects of buying a public house, so they were glad to pass that on to the 'expert'. No one knew much about house structure and repair, so they passed that on. However, it seemed that everyone in that congregational meeting thought they knew how to teach and my opinion was just that - another opinion, of no more weight than any other. If everyone can teach, why are there so many poor teachers in our school classrooms?

The same principle applies in the church. God has placed different gifts, talents, abilities in the church and we would be wise to discover these in our people. For example, the only real distinction between an elder and a deacon is that the former is "apt to teach"¹. This is neither a matter of being 'more spiritual' nor higher in rank, but is a different gifting. That does not mean that the elder should be a Sunday School teacher, teaching a set curriculum, but that whenever he approaches a situation in the church or in a person's life, it is *second nature* to him to turn to the Bible to teach a Biblical principle. Should some church members have financial difficulties, the elder would probably direct them to the Scriptures to show how we hinder God's work in our lives whenever we allow

¹ 1 Timothy 3:2

ourselves to be in debt. He might then indicate a Biblical attitude to finances, before pointing them to a person more knowledgeable about financial counselling. That second person might well be a deacon, ministering in church finances. How sad it is to see 'elders' operating in a hierarchic church structure, directing the church but with little aptitude to present Biblical patterns and doctrine. Many have been elected to that position as a promotion for faithful diaconate service or because of business acumen, political savvy or personal charisma, with little recognition of Biblical requirements.

I was recently involved in a major ministry in a South American country, where all the staff had to wear name-tags so they might be easily recognised by visitors to the office where we worked. Mine said *Pastor Gareth Evans*. I put it on my lapel and wore it for a while, until I noticed that many others were also called 'pastor', though hardly any of them had ever functioned in that role. It was explained to me that as they were all in some kind of ministry, they were all pastors. Just as everyone in my church in Wales thought that they could teach, it now seemed that everyone in that office thought they could pastor! I quietly took my name-tag off and replaced it with one that simply said, *Gareth Evans*.

When we call people *pastors* or *elders* though the Lord has not appointed them so, we weaken the authority of that position and risk losing its anointing. No wonder that the people they lead are often starved of the meat of God's Word and grow up on its milk sop.

The Lord "*gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.*" (*Ephesians 4:11-13*)

These five ministry gifts are but a small part of the varied gifts and talents that the Lord has placed in the church, His *body*. The apostle Paul uses the analogy of a body to describe the relationship that should exist in the unity of all believers. We are one body of which Christ is the head.

*(Aside: I am often asked which part of the body I am. With a grin I reply, "I am a 'big toe'!" When asked to explain, I remind my listeners that like the big toe, a pastor often works in the 'dark, smelly places' of people's lives. He is also constantly 'under pressure' but the #1 reason I consider myself a 'big toe' is that I want to bring **balance** to the Body of Christ.)*

It is noteworthy that the three contexts in which Paul writes about the body of Christ, are also the same three places where he emphasises the giftings of the Holy Spirit. As we study these, it becomes apparent that the giftings of the Spirit are for the benefit of the church, His body, not the individual.

Ephesians 4 quoted above.

vv 4 - 7 One body ...

linking verse, v7 "*But to each of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.*"

vv 11-13 Five gifts for equipping.

Romans 12

- vv 4 - 5 Many members in one body and all do not have the same function.
linking verse, v6 *“And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them accordingly.”*
- vv 6 - 8 Prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, mercy.

1 Corinthians 12

- vv 12 - 27 By one Spirit we were baptised into one body ... the body is not one member but many the ear cannot say to the eye ‘I have no need of you’ But now God has placed the members in the body, just as He desired.

linking verses, vv4 - 7 *“There are varieties of gifts varieties of ministries varieties of effects to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*

- vv 8 - 11 word of wisdom, word of knowledge, (gift of) faith, gifts of healing, effecting of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, various kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues.
- vv 28 - 30 apostles, prophets, teachers (also in Ephesians 4)
miracles, healings, tongues (also earlier in this chapter)
helps, administrations, (also in Romans 12 - serving, leading)

It is not important how many giftings there are, or to be able to clearly define just what each gifting involves. What is important is to realise that the Holy Trinity has appointed these gifts, not man. (1 Cor 12: 28 - *“God has appointed..”*; 1 Cor 12: 11 - *“The Spirit distributes ..”*; Eph 4:11 - *“He who ascended .. gave ..”*)

The Lord gives gifts, talents, abilities to His people to enable them to carry the burden He has placed upon them. They make the yoke ‘easy’ and the burden ‘light’.

He also wants to use our ‘natural’ abilities and talents, and may put His anointing upon them when used in conjunction with the spiritual gifts.

When God called Moses to lead His people out of their bondage in Egypt, His servant expressed apprehension. “They will not believe me,” he said. “they will not recognise that you have sent me.” In other words, they would doubt his authority.

The Lord said, “What is that in your hand?”

“Only my shepherd’s staff.” “This is all I have for I have been tending sheep for the past forty years.”

“Exactly,” the Lord might have replied. “That is a token of your authority as a shepherd. A shepherd whom I have been training and molding for the past forty years, so that you might be the anointed instrument through whom I shall lead a million, bleating two-legged sheep for the next forty years!”

“David, what do you have in your pocket?”

“Only a sling for chasing off bears and lions” the shepherd boy replied.

“Good! That will be sufficient to defeat this giant, Goliath, for I have been training you for this day!”

“Widow woman, what do you have in your house?”

“Only a small pot of oil.”

“Collect all the pots and pans you can. We’re going to bless all your neighbours!”

“Peter, what do you have in your boat?”

“Only my fisherman’s net.”

“Cast it out on the other side of the boat so you will haul in a great catch.”

“Paul, what is that document you guard so well?”

“It’s my certificate of Roman citizenship.”

“You need that for I’m taking you to Rome to be my witness in this world’s capital city.”

I was presenting this material to about fifty men at a weekend retreat. At this point in the teaching one of the company stood up and asked if he might tell a story. “I never thought I had any gift to offer to the Lord,” he began. “until, one day in church I noticed that a young lady who regularly sat in front of me, was missing from the service. The next week I had opportunity to speak to her, so I told her that she had been missed. She informed me that she had not been able to come to the service, because her car was needing new brake shoes and she could not afford to have it done. A friend had brought her this day and the car remained unusable. That week I took her car to a friend who owned a garage, and asked him if he would replace the shoes as a favour to me, and I would pay him. He agreed but insisted that he would also be part of blessing this young lady by charging me only the cost of the parts. When we saw the smile on her face as the car was returned to her, we both received a great blessing. Little did we know what the Lord was planning. I began to look around the church at others whom I might help in such a way, especially young people who had little experience with keeping their cars in good, working order, something I knew how to do quite well. Each weekend my friend and I would work together on someone else’s old jalopy, until one day I was called before the senior pastor. ‘I am not pleased that the two of you are blessing our young people so much!’ he said. I was taken aback until he added, ‘Everyone is talking about you, and many new people are coming into the church because they have heard from these young people, how much this church cares for them. But you are not allowing us to share this blessing with you! I want you to continue seeking out needs, recruit others to help you and charge the costs to the church!’ We have been so blessed as we have seen many of our men released into a ministry of helps!”

What a wise pastor! No wonder that church is growing in numbers and impact in that community!

That brother offered his ability and finances (secular gifts) but the Lord had given him a spiritual gift of ‘helps’ to augment them. When he ministered in his burden, anointing came upon him and the church.

“Paul, why do you travel and write so much?”

“Because the Lord has given to me the gift of apostleship to the Gentiles.²”

“Philip, why did you go to the desert to speak to that Ethiopian eunuch?³”

“Because the Spirit of the Lord led me and told me what to say.”

“Henceforth you will be known as Philip the Evangelist.”

“Timothy, what is the secret of your ministry?⁴”

“It is the gift of faith I received through the laying on of (Paul’s) hands.”

“Then kindle it afresh for you have not received a spirit of timidity, but of power, love and discipline.” (2 Tim 1:6,7)

“My child, what do you have in your soul?”

“I have my ‘pot of oil’ - the presence of your Holy Spirit.” (throughout the Scriptures, oil always speaks of the Holy Spirit).

“He has come to give you the gifts I want you to have in order for you to carry my burden, to set the captives free, to defeat the giants, to bless your neighbours, to be a fisherman of men and to be my witness in your Jerusalem, Samaria and Judea and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”

Your gifting

So what gifts has the Lord given you that He can use in His kingdom?

Ask other mature believers if they see evidence of any spiritual gifting in you. You should define your burden but others need to define your gift. There are natural gifts, talents or abilities which the Lord can use as you offer them to Him. He may well put a special anointing upon them but is under no obligation to do so. However, He will *always* put His anointing upon the humble man or woman who is ministering in their burden, exercising the spiritual gifts which He has given for that purpose.

Here is a list of some other gifts:

Spiritual (*my pot of oil*): deacon; gentleness; goodness; government; helps; hope; joy; love; meekness or teachableness; showing mercy; peace; self control or temperance;

Secular (*the rod in my hand*): airman or mariner; business ability or position; catering; computer and media; driving and piloting; education; experience; finances; hospitality; languages; good marriage; nursing; office work; science; some other specialised knowledge; sport; teaching; travel and literature;

.... write your own.

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