

GOD JUST TOUCHED ME - WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT

Chapter 11 - THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT TO THE CHURCH

About Gifts to the Church

The same Holy Spirit that gives gifts to individuals also gives gifts to the church. Gifts to individuals are special supernatural abilities given as the need arises. These gifts do not belong to the individual all the time and may change as the needs dictate. Gifts to the church are people endowed for life with special capabilities. These people are given to the church for ministries that function within the church and serve the church. God dwells within His church and the fullness of Christ, His presence and His power, should be evident within His church (Ephesians 1:22&23, Ephesians 3:18&19, Ephesians 4:13) just as the Holy Spirit resides in individuals (1 Corinthians 6:19). Since the church is not a physical body, but a spiritual body (1 Peter 2:5) the church requires spiritual functions to survive and be healthy (Romans 12:5&6_a). Just as in the physical body a foot will remain a foot and not become an eye, the capabilities individuals have been given for the church will remain what they are. If the fullness of Christ is to be realized in the church every member must do their part and use the gift with which they have been endowed (Ephesians 4:15&16). The gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to the church are identified in (Romans 12:6-8), (1 Corinthians 12:27-29), and (Ephesians 4:11). Some cautions concerning the gifts to the church: 1) Don't try to be someone else. Be yourself and use what you have been given (1 Corinthians 12:17-20). 2) Don't see someone else as lower, or someone else as higher, because the same Spirit gave all the gifts (the endowed individuals), and all the gifts (the endowed individuals) are needed for the health of the body. 3) Understand that these lists are neither exhaustive nor exclusive.

Apostles

Apostles are gifts of the Spirit to the church. Apostles are messengers sent out on a special mission. While many of the Spirit's gifts to the church are intended to operate within local congregations, the gift of apostles is for the entire church. Most people think of apostles as "The Apostles", those who were personally selected and trained by Jesus. However, the term is used in the New Testament for others that performed apostolic functions, such as Paul, Barnabas, and James, the brother of Jesus. While it was the duty of the church to identify and recommend individuals for many of the church functions, the apostles were chosen directly by God, not by the community. Jesus told us that he would send out apostles (Luke 11:49). When the church was born the apostles did go out on their mission and the church grew. They fulfilled multiple roles within the church, and considered themselves to be elders (1 Peter 5:1). As Jesus' emissaries they performed many might works (Acts 15:12), made decrees for the church (Acts 16:4), and were even able to impart the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:18). However, the enemy also sent out false apostles trying to deceive the believers (2Corinthians 11:13&14). The real apostles could be seen functioning as overseers, prophets, and evangelists, but the thrust of their activities was to the believers (Acts 9:32). Though unbelievers came and heard, the apostles were there to teach the church (Acts 11:25&26). They refuted false teachings and explained the deeper things of the faith. Wherever they went they called the church together (Acts 14:25-28). They met in council to make decisions and then sent the results out to the church (Acts 15:22&23). Their concern was for the spiritual health of believers everywhere (Acts 15:36). Wherever they went, they appointed elders to stay behind to serve the local congregation (Acts 14:23). The apostolic functions they performed are still required in the church today, and we still have need of modern apostles who are chosen by God and serve many congregations from differing denominations. Because they often act as evangelists, and often sound like evangelists, we tend to mistakenly call them evangelists.

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Prophets

Prophets are gifts of the Spirit to the church. Like the apostle, the prophet is for the entire church. Jesus told us that He would send out prophets (Matthew 23:34). The word prophecy means to speak on behalf of someone. The church prophet speaks forth God's word and reveals God's will and activities to others. The prophet is an inspired speaker under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit. Prophets are sometimes selected from birth by God (Jeremiah 1:5), and they are ordained by God. The prophets remained prophets their entire lives. Sometimes the prophet was part apostle and part evangelist. The prophets were so in tune to God that people would consult them concerning the will of God (2 Kings 3:11, Jeremiah 21:1&2, Ezekiel 14:7). Many of the prophets were not very popular because they knew the things people tried to hide, and they were usually convicting, scolding or warning the people. However there were some that also comforted, uplifted and encouraged the people. Sometimes the prophet simply gave instructions and guidance from God. There remains a need for convicting, scolding, warning, comforting, uplifting, encouragement, instruction and guidance in the church today. People still have short attention spans, still wander off into the wilderness, and still tend to ignore God and serve self. There were prophets in the early church (Acts 13:1, Acts 15:32). There are prophets today that are recognized as such (Graham Cook), and they travel around to the whole church. People still tend to seek them out or avoid them.

Evangelists

Evangelists are gifts of the Spirit to the church. They are traveling preachers of the gospel, much like apostles. While the apostle is sent to the church, the evangelist is a missionary to the unconverted. When Jesus sent out His disciples He did not send them to other disciples, but to the lost (Matthew 10:6-8). The Lord prepares peoples hearts to receive Him as Lord and Savior but someone must actually go and tell them. The need is great (Luke 10:2&3). The evangelist is a harvester seeking the lost. Because God did not create man for hell it is His desire that all be saved (Ezekiel 33:11). Jesus told us that He had come to reclaim the lost (Matthew 9:13). Jesus initially sent evangelists to Israel, but then told them to go into all the world (Matthew 28:19&20). That is exactly what happened after Pentecost (Acts 8:4). Paul instructed Timothy on the obligations of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:2-5). Evangelism was an essential function in the early days of the church (Acts 8:26-40, Acts 22:15), and is even more crucial now in these end times. Those who serve as evangelists now are having a miraculous effect on the unsaved. Modern day evangelists are doing works similar to those recorded in the book of acts. Just look at the results of the ministry of Billy Graham and Reinhard Bonnke. Their messages and words are effective because the Holy Spirit endows them with the special capabilities of an evangelist, and they are bringing many to Jesus who are either godless or following false gods.

Pastors

Pastors are gifts of the Spirit to the church. According to modern usage the pastor is the minister in charge of the congregation. Scripture defines the pastor as a shepherd, the one to care for God's people and protect them from spiritual trouble and harm. The pastor's task is to keep the congregation close to Jesus. Pastors are elders in the church and are given by God (Jeremiah 3:15). When God appoints pastors He is serious about what they do, and if they are not serious about the task they will be in serious trouble (Jeremiah 23:1&2). Jesus directed His disciples to care for His followers (John 21:15-17). Most people today are not familiar with shepherds and flocks. The sheep are not the brightest objects in a pasture, and if left unattended they will scatter, get lost, and fall prey

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to whatever predators are around. That is why the shepherd lives with the flock twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. The sheep depend upon the shepherd to lead them to food, water, and shelter at night, and to protect them from predators. God in His wisdom knew what He was talking about when He compared people to a flock of sheep. Jesus warned us about hirelings who do not care about the sheep but are in it only for the pay (John 10:1). He also told us about the relationship between the real shepherd and the sheep (John 10:2-4). Pastors are assistant shepherds and Jesus is the chief shepherd (John 10:11). God promised that He would be our shepherd (Isaiah 40:10&11). The scriptures define how pastors are to act with their congregations (1 Peter 5:1-5). Pastors, appointed by God, are supposed to be like the chief shepherd in their care of the congregation. While they are protecting the flock, the flock must also protect them because they are fellow humans. The congregations must uphold, support, and pray for their pastors, and put a ring of spiritual protection around the pastors. The function of the pastor within the body is so important that the enemy knows that if he can destroy, discourage, or disgrace the pastor, he can split the congregation (Matthew 26:31).

Teachers

Teachers are gifts of the Spirit to the church. Teachers have the ability to explain the faith and equip others to apply it in their own lives. Anyone can relate facts to others, but that is not teaching. A good teacher will explain and demonstrate in order to impart understanding. One endowed by the Holy Spirit to be a teacher will inspire others. A teacher in the church must be grounded in the faith and be able to speak about that faith so it is understandable. Jesus' last command to His disciples before He ascended to the Father was to go out and teach (Matthew 28:19&20). In His own ministry Jesus was always teaching in diverse places as the opportunity arose (Matthew 5:1&2, Matthew 9:35, Mark 6:34, Mark 12:35). After the ascension the apostles continued His example (Acts 5:42). Teachers are needed to impart the faith (Colossians 1:28) and propagate the faith (2 Timothy 2:2). Teaching is intended to be an integral part of the Christian life (Colossians 3:16) and should be scripture based (2 Timothy 3:16). Paul gave Titus sound advice about teaching (Titus 2:1-8). Godly teachers are important to the life of the church and are to be supported (Galatians 6:6). False teachers who would lead people astray will face God's wrath (Matthew 23:13-15).

Helpers

Helpers are gifts of the Spirit to the church. Helpers are people who assist others in the various ministries of the church. Their work of a helper is more practical than spiritual. When there is some activity that is beyond the capabilities of one person, the helper has the ability to graciously step in and perform useful work. The helper always works under the direction of another person and is reluctant to be responsible for the entire activity. You can find helpers preparing the church facilities for an event, maybe a potluck or a worship service, but not personally running the event. They get their satisfaction in making tasks easier for others by assisting however they can. Since the function of a helper is more practical than spiritual, scripture does not elaborate other than to identify the gift, and give some examples. Paul found helpers invaluable in his ministry (Romans 16:3, 4, &9).

Administrators

Administrators are gifts of the Spirit to the church. Administrators are individuals endowed with special abilities to facilitate, manage, and organize. They are quick to recognize needs and identify ways to fill those needs. They know how to make things happen and can direct helpers. The

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administrator would rather direct a project with stated goals than to identify goals or needed projects. Like the helper, the work of an administrator is more practical than spiritual, and the scriptures do not say much about administrators. Jesus described good and bad administrators (Matthew 25:14-27).

Service Givers

Service Givers, called ministers in some translations, are gifts of the Spirit to the church. The service giver has the role of a servant and tends to the immediate physical needs of someone else. Jesus told us that we should be servants (Matthew 20:25-28). He even demonstrated the servant role so there would not be any doubt about what he meant (John 13:12-17). Like the helper and administrator, the work of a service giver is more practical than spiritual. It is for that very reason that the ministry of the deacon was established (Acts 6:1-6). Deacons are Service Givers. While anyone can be a servant, those so endowed by the Holy Spirit truly have a servant's heart, and scripture has more to say about these service givers. The deacons were appointed to take care of the physical needs of the church so that the overseers and elders could concentrate on the spiritual needs. The deacons were ordained by the laying on of hand, and were held to a higher standard (1 Timothy 3:8-12). However, if you read through the Book of Acts you will see that the deacons were effective preachers and evangelists as well as caretakers. So that we would understand the role better, Jesus identified service giver's activities and rewards (Matthew 25:34-40).

Exhorters

Exhorters are gifts of the Spirit to the church. The exhorter gives comfort, consolation, encouragement, warnings, and admonitions to others. The exhorter will come alongside a person in times of stress to inspire, motivate, strengthen, and affirm. God called for exhorters for His people (Isaiah 40:1&2). We too are told to encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18) and to build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11). We are to care about one another and provide moral support and guidance to one another (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Exhorters can also be seen in action in nature. Whenever you see a flock of geese flying south for the winter the leader is breaking the wind resistance while the rest follow in the wake honking their hearts out in encouragement. So it is in the race for salvation. When you are worn and think you cannot take another step, someone coming beside you to urge you on and assure you that you can make it is a tremendous help and encouragement. Our God consoles us that we may do likewise for one another (2 Corinthians 1:4). We should be as concerned for the spiritual state of our brothers and sisters as we are of our own (Hebrews 3:12&13). Exhorters are the cheerleaders in the body of Christ, a sort of spiritual endorphin that prevents discouragement in times of trial and stress. Exhorters maintain the joy of being a Christian.

Givers

Givers are gifts of the Spirit to the church. Givers are those who contribute to the ministry of the church by joyfully sharing their money and resources. They are not necessarily wealthy, but have been endowed with a burning desire to provide what they have to advance the kingdom of God. If given the option of going out to a dinner and a show, or giving the money to a missionary, they would stay home and support the missionary. Their joy comes in sharing their material things. Some people like to make a big show of their giving so others notice; God said to give your donations in private (Matthew 6:1-4). Since Jesus freely gave us His gift of salvation and eternal life, we should likewise give freely (Matthew 10:8b) and abundantly (Romans 12:8b). A reverse form of the golden rule could

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be stated, "It will be done unto you as you do unto others" (Luke 6:38). God gave us everything out of the abundance of His love, and He expects us to do the same (2 Corinthians 9:6&7). Even those not endowed as givers need to be considerate (1 John 3:17).

Leaders

Leaders are gifts of the Spirit to the church. Leaders are those individuals that govern, supervise, and guide, the church. They can be related to a particular congregation, but are usually associated with multiple congregations in a defined area. In today's church leaders will often, but not always, serve in the office of bishop or overseer or superintendent. They are called to be protectors of the faith and a pastor to pastors. God identified the qualifications of leaders when Moses was burdened by his leadership responsibilities (Exodus 18:21). Leaders, also called rulers, can serve the church in various offices where the ability is required to understand goals, recognize what must be done and then make rapid wise decisions. In the secular world these individuals would be presidents of countries, governors of areas, and captains of industry, with goals related to wealth, power, and personal recognition. In the body of Christ they are concerned with advancing the kingdom of God. Leaders are not only bishops and superintendents, but also leaders over the various programs of the church that extend beyond the local congregation. Without the gift of leaders the church would have difficulty reaching beyond the local congregation with missionaries, disaster relief, and the many programs that are nation wide or world wide. Without the gift of leaders it would be possible for false shepherds to lead congregations astray. No matter what office they hold, leaders should meet the qualifications for bishop, overseer, and superintendent (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:7-9).

Mercy Givers

Those who perform acts of mercy are gifts of the Spirit to the church. Mercy givers have exceptional ability to perform acts of kindness and compassion, even to individuals undeserving of it. The love of God can be felt flowing through the mercy giver. All Christians are expected to be merciful (Zechariah 7:9&10, Micah 6:8). Being merciful brings happiness (Proverbs 14:21, Matthew 5:7). We are called to be imitators of our heavenly Father (Luke 6:36, Ephesians 4:32). As brothers and sisters in Christ we are required to care for each other (1 Peter 3:8&9). The one who is a mercy giver goes beyond the general requirements given to the entire body, and has a real burden for those in need. The mercy giver cannot tolerate seeing anyone in misery without doing all possible to relieve it. A reverse form of the golden rule could be stated, "You will be judged with the same mercy you judge others (James 2:13).

Other Gifts

The gifts the Spirit gives the church are not limited to those identified in scripture. There are many other gifts of the Spirit to the church. Just a few examples include intercessors, worship leaders, janitors, and church secretaries. Every member of the body is needed in the body and is endowed by God with some special capability. You have some gift. Find it!