

Sermon – Spiritual Gifts – Preaching and Teaching

Titus 1: 5-9; Ephesians 4:1-16. “Spiritual Gifts”

III – What’s the best present you’ve ever received for a birthday? (Responses?) We don’t remember ALL the gifts we get. Maybe just the important ones. Or the expensive ones?!

Because the birthday itself is the important thing. It’s the day that’s important. The gifts help us to celebrate the day when we were *actually* born! If we weren’t born, there would be no gifts and no celebration! In fact, you could say the only gift that really matters is the first gift – the gift of our parents giving birth to us!

In the Christian life, the most important thing is our birthday – our spiritual birthday. Or as Jesus puts it – the day you were “born again.” What’s really important is that on a particular day, you were spiritually born. God’s Holy Spirit came to live in you. Maybe it was when you were born or when you were 15, or 50. Maybe it was last year. It doesn’t matter when it was. Even if you can’t remember the exact date! What matters is that you *were* spiritually born into the family of God and you received eternal life.

So as we talk about “Spiritual gifts” over the next 2 weeks, I want us to begin by NOT talking about the gifts of the Spirit, but to begin by talking about the GIFT of the Spirit. (Singular). That is, the actual gift of receiving the Holy Spirit himself. He is THE gift who gave us our FIRST gift – the gift of spiritual birth! Without him, we would not have a spiritual birthday.

And next week we’ll look at what that gift means for us each as individuals. But today, we’re going to look at what that gift looks like for us as a church. Ephesians 4:4 says – “*There is one body and one Spirit*”

III – Imagine our church like a car. A car is an automobile. The word *automobile* literally means a self moving vehicle. (auto=self, mobile=moving).

Now imagine that there is a world oil crisis and the world has run out of petrol. Is your car able to move itself anymore? No! It has no petrol! So it’s really not an automobile any more. In fact, what you have is a very expensive chunk of metal that cannot move anywhere!

A church that cannot move, is no longer a Church. A church has a purpose and a function and that purpose and function is to do God’s mission. To move. The petrol God’s church needs to move is the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, we are useless. We are in fact, not a church. Just a bunch of people meeting together. Make the metaphor whatever you want – call the Holy Spirit the wheels, call him the motor, call him the key that starts the ignition, call him the petrol that powers us. Either way, he is the one we NEED to be a church and to move us as a church. He is the one who gives birth to the church. Who gives us the gift of life. So what does he do? How does he enable us to move?

Jesus equips us with not only the gift of the Spirit himself, but also with gifts from the Spirit. The Spirit is the gift who keeps on giving!

III – One Valentines day one year, instead of buying Heather a dozen red roses, being the romantic that I am, I bought her half a dozen red rose *bushes*. And I said to her – “Now I don’t have to buy you roses on Valentine’s Day any more, because these rose bushes will keep supplying you with roses!” By the way, guys, that line doesn’t work! But it was worth a try!

The Holy Spirit is the first gift that makes us a church. But he keeps giving gifts. And those gifts are not “things”. Those gifts are *people*. What people does God gift his church with?

Ephesians 4:11 – *“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...”*

There are plenty of lists in the New Testament with gifts like these. What is so special about this list is that all these gifts have to do with one fundamental part of being God’s church – the Word of God. The work of all these people – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers – are all to do with delivering the Word of God to people. The Holy Spirit gives us the gift of people to bring us the Word of God.

Now, let’s turn to Titus, and look at two particular people who are given to the church with this gift – elders and overseers. The way we translate those words in the Anglican Church setting is “Presbyters (or priests), that’s what I am. And Bishops. Like our Archbishop Peter and our Bishop Glenn.

Elders and overseers are responsible for looking after congregations of people. They are *“pastors and teachers”*. All elders and overseers are called to teach the Word. In Titus 1:9 they’re told to *“hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught”*.

But Paul also outlines something special about these particular roles. Not only must they be gifted to teach, but they are also to be people of godly character.

It’s difficult as your elder to speak on this, because I am a sinner like everyone here. But the first word is “blameless”! Who is blameless? But as we read on, he’s not talking about **perfection**. He’s talking about lifestyle and character. And the picture is of a man who has one wife and a family who is a testimony to his ability to lead a church. Of course, an elder doesn’t **have** to be married. He could be single. But he cannot be a divorced man, or have several wives. He’s not to have wild and disobedient children... hang on... I know what you’re thinking – you know my kids. They can be wild and disobedient! Because they’re not perfect! But again, we’re not talking about perfection here (thank goodness!) We’re talking about an elder who on the whole shows a godly life which is reflected in his family, if he has a family.

Let me just speak to husbands and future husbands here for a minute. An implication of this is that our families are our first church. We have a responsibility to lead them in godliness as their pastor. To ensure our wife, and children if we have them, are getting instruction from God – through church or Bible Study for example. And we are to be an **example** to them of godly living. If you’re not, make that 1st priority. Your family is your first church.

Now, the list goes on for the elder... not quick tempered, not a drunk, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain, hospitable, self controlled, holy, disciplined... all good things aren’t they? Are only elders called to do these things? No. Of course, we’re all called to live this sort of a holy life. And of course, none of us, especially me, is perfect.

So what is the point of this list? The point of it is to shine a public light on the life of the minister, or elder, and the way he looks after his family. He must model, above all, what it means to live as a Christian. A church needs to be able to see their minister and his family as one that reflects what their church should look like.

Church is a big family! Church is a large scale version of the family! Now, as the elder here, allow me, in a difficult way, to refer to myself. Let’s not think of God “giving me the gifts” to do this work he has called me to do. Instead, let’s say: God has given this church, by his Holy Spirit, the gift of Bruce. Think of **me** as being God’s gift to you!

That’s strange isn’t it – “Bruce thinks he’s God’s gift to the church!” Well, I’m certainly not God’s gift to women!

But yes, that is exactly my point. God has gifted you with me. I am a gift of God to you. Don’t say “thanks God for the gifts that our elders and overseers and teachers have. Say “thanks God for Bruce, and Derek and Ian and Richard and Ian and Mark and Emily and my home group leader!” God has given us these **PEOPLE** as gifts.

And now the big question. Why? WHY does God give us these people – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers – as gifts to the church?...

Ephesians 4:12 – “to prepare God’s people for **works of service**, so that the body of Christ **may be built up** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature...”

God gifts us with people to bring us his Word for two reasons:

SO WE CAN BE PREPARED FOR WORKS OF SERVICE and SO WE CAN BUILD EACH OTHER UP.

What does that mean? Let’s make this practical.

Who do you expect to visit you or ring you up or bring you a meal when you’re sick or when you’re facing struggles in your life? The apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors and teachers? **Or your church, who are prepared for works of service and are building each other up?**

When a newcomer arrives at church, who would you expect to invite them to lunch? The apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors and teachers? **Or your church, who are prepared for works of service and are building each other up?**

Who welcomes the visitors at the front door on Sunday? Who remembers their names? Who phones them during the week to say hello? Who finds out if the people who **aren’t** here on Sunday are OK and not sick? Who teaches your kids in Sunday school? Who invites your neighbours to Church events? Who makes sure we have enough funding to employ staff or do children’s work? Who is responsible for making this building work happen?

The apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors and teachers? **Or your church, who are prepared for works of service and are building each other up?**

Of course you should see your elders do this as well. They should set the **example** with all these things. But God has given his church the gift of people to teach his Word SO THAT the church can go out and DO works of service and build one another up.

Do YOU know what your next door neighbour’s needs are so YOU can do works of service for them?

Do YOU know how the people in your church are going so YOU can build them up?

III – Imagine: Your car is out of petrol. You go out, put some petrol in it. Walk back inside. Never use the car again. It has petrol. It’s ready to go. But it’s just sitting there.

It’s exciting to see how God has empowered us as a church to move. To DO MISSION. We are ready... and able. **But we must be willing to move.** Willing to get in the car and go somewhere. And when we **do** move: Eph 4:15-16:

“... we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

This is what it’s about – growing up together as the body of Jesus. Being equipped by **Jesus’** Word to do what **Jesus** did – being ready for works of service AND building each other up. Let’s pray.