

1

Me, a Gifted Child?

The superintendent of a Sunday School approached a soft-spoken chemist about teaching a class. The chemist, a Christian for two years, responded, "I have no gift. When God gave out spiritual gifts, He missed me!"

When the same superintendent contacted another member, a lawyer who had been a believer for five years, his answer was, "I'm sure God must have given me some spiritual gift, but I really don't know what it is or how to discover it!"

Down the street in another church, a long-time believer was running in circles doing fourteen different jobs, few of them effectively. In his heart he knew he didn't possess enough gifts to serve in so many capacities.

In still another church, a new convert, a well-educated man, was prematurely assigned to teach the college class. As the class began to dwindle, it became evident that he didn't have the gift of teaching. To salvage the situation the superintendent dismissed him, perhaps too abruptly. His feelings hurt, the ex-teacher rarely attends church today. The superintendent wonders, "If we had helped him discover his gift in a more cautious and prayerful manner, might he be serving the Lord in our church today, though in some other capacity?"

The subject of spiritual gifts, important in the life of the early church but too often neglected through the centuries, has recently risen into prominence in modern church thinking.

19 GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Apostolic believers learned early in their Christian experience the truth about gifts. When the young church at Jerusalem faced the complaint of discrimination in the administration of daily welfare, the apostles urged believers to seek out godly and *gifted* men to handle the problem. So the congregation chose men with the gift of wisdom. The result was an increase in the ministry of the Word and in the number of disciples (Acts 6:1-7).

Paul wrote about gifts in his letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians. In fact, these letters give us three major lists of gifts.

Paul taught about gifts from the very beginning of every new church. He wished each assembly to develop spiritually in normal and undelayed fashion. New churches with all new believers had no members adequately mature to qualify as elders or deacons. But thrown on the power of the Holy Spirit, to put into practice Paul's teaching on the discernment and discovery of spiritual gifts, some members grew sufficiently to be chosen as elders on Paul's return visit, not long later (Acts 14:21-23). Through the exercise of gifts, saints had been edified.

Sadly, too often through the years, the church has failed to encourage its members to use their gifts. Pastor has done much, but people little. A bit of doggerel composed by an anonymous clergyman's family goes like this:

*"The Rector is late,
He's forgotten the date,
So what can the faithful do now,
Poor things?
They'll sit in a pew
With nothing to do
And sing a selection of hymns,
Poor things!"*

(One People, John R.W. Stott, InterVarsity Press)

A pastor was reviewing the church membership rolls with his official board. Scribbled after several names were the initials, FBPO. After a while one of the board members asked, "Pastor,

explain the meaning of those letters."

Replied the pastor, "They mean—For Burial Purposes Only. You see—these are our inactive members!"

God would have taken us to heaven immediately at conversion had He no purpose for us here. Among other purposes, "we are saved to serve." To equip for service, God gives one or more spiritual gifts to every child of His. He does not want "deadwood" in His church.

Pastors unwittingly discourage the development of spiritual gifts if they play the "I've-got-to-do-everything" superstar role. All the while, spiritual gifts lie dormant in laymen who should be sharing in the ministry by teaching, leading, counseling, evangelizing, and in many other ways.

Today, the renewed interest in spiritual gifts is manifesting itself in many ways. Seminary classes and pastors' seminars are being devoted to this topic. Some Christian leaders who never gave serious study to the subject are being confronted with it. A pastor who was interviewing a prospective Christian education director had the tables suddenly turned on him when the candidate, taking advantage of a lull in the conversation, asked, "Pastor, what do you consider to be your spiritual gifts?"

The pastor, though he had been in the ministry over twenty-five years, confessed, "I never really gave it much thought before this moment!"

Dr. Earl D. Radmacher, chancellor of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, in an article, "The Jack-of-All-Trades Syndrome," writes, "Every pastor ought to have a goal of helping each member to identify his gift, and then to find the place where his gift fits into the total work of the church. It is a rare pastor who has preached a series of messages covering each of the spiritual gifts. I ask pastors I meet, 'Why don't you take fifteen weeks and preach on one gift of the Spirit each week and then ask for decisions from your people?' Ask them, 'What are your gifts? How are you using them?' And really dig in deep because, as I understand it, shaping up the saints in large part means enabling them to find out what their gifts are and where they can use them" (*Moody Monthly*, March 1971).

On the other hand, some congregations have rediscovered

19 GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

the role of the layman. They afford opportunities for use of gifts. Laymen lead Sunday morning services, call on sick and shut-in members, visit the unchurched, and lead in plans for new ministries.

In one parish, composed of half a dozen rural congregations and served by only one full-time ordained minister plus a student intern, all six congregations have Sunday morning service every single week. A corps of nineteen lay preachers lead church worship. On any given Sunday, the pastor and his assistant will preach in two of the churches, and the other four pulpits will be filled by four of these lay preachers.

Practice of the biblical doctrine of gifts taps reservoirs of godly manpower, thaws out frozen assets, roots out unemployment among saints, reflects the universal priesthood of believers, and edifies the church.

As the church comes alive today in the area of gifts, many questions are being asked, such as the following:

What is a gift?

How are gifts related to talents?

How many gifts are there? What are they?

Are all the gifts listed somewhere in the New Testament?

How are gifts related to the fruit of the Spirit?

Do gifts differ from offices?

If a person has teaching ability, will he automatically have the *gift of teaching*?

How may a Christian discover and develop his gift?

Does the average Christian have just one gift or several?

Are all the gifts for today, or did some cease at the end of the Apostolic Age?

What place has the gift of tongues in today's church? The gift of healing? Miracles?

If a person doesn't have the gift of evangelism, is he excused from trying to win people to Christ?

Should a church have a gift-conscious committee to guide church leaders in finding what gifts the Holy Spirit has given members, then aligning these people with some ministry in the church for exercise of their gift?

This book will attempt to answer these and other related questions.

NO UNGIFTED BELIEVERS

Every child of God has a gift or gifts. Our gifts are assigned us when we are born by the Holy Spirit into the family of God. At the moment of a believer's baptism into the body of Christ at regeneration, he is given a gift which he should exercise for the health of the whole body. Though gifts may lie dormant for months or years, they are given at our spiritual birthday. The word for gift was used by the Greeks to refer to a birthday gift. The presence of gifts from the moment of conversion explains how some in the early church could qualify for elder or deacon not long after the founding of a new fellowship.

Paul emphasized the universality of gifts. "*Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ*" (Eph. 4:7, italics added). "*The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal*" (1 Cor. 12:7, italics added).

Without exception, every new believer receives a gift or gifts. Those fresh from heathenism—new believers in Brazil, Zaire, India, and Taiwan—have been given spiritual gifts. Also unschooled converts are the recipients of gifts, for gifts have no relation to education.

Even those with wicked backgrounds are allocated gifts immediately on repentance. Though the Apostle Paul had been a violent persecutor of the church, even to sharing in the murder of saints, the Spirit gave him gifts the moment he was saved. The Corinthians possessed gifts in abundance, despite only a few months removal from flagrant sinning (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

So, you are a gifted child of God. Since you are also given an outlet for your gift, you are a minister too. Three days after confronting Jesus on the Damascus Road, Paul was told by Ananias that his ministry was to bear the name of Jesus before Gentiles and kings (Acts 9:15; 22:15, 21; 26:16-18). For every gift He bestows, the Spirit has planned a sphere of service.

Thus, no child of God should have an inferiority complex. Rather, awareness that he is a gifted child with an area of ministry should meet every child of God's psychological need to

19 GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

feel wanted and to possess a sense of worth. No false humility should make him moan, "I'm a nobody," and lead him to bury his gifts and hear the ultimate verdict: "slothful servant."

To sum up—though not every believer is exercising his gift, nor even knows what it is, nevertheless every child of God has received one or more gifts to be used for the upbuilding of the church, and for which he will one day render account.

GIFTS ARE VARIED

A well-known conductor was holding a rehearsal one night with a vast array of musicians and a hundred-voice choir. The mighty chorus rang out with peal of organ, blare of horns, and clashing of cymbals. Far back in the orchestra the piccolo player thought, "In all this din, it doesn't matter what I do." Suddenly the conductor stopped the music, flinging up his hands. All became quiet. Someone, he knew, had failed to play his instrument. The shrill note of the piccolo had been missed.

Just as many notes are needed to make harmony, and many colors to make a painting, so many gifts are essential for the functioning of the body of Christ. Paul put it, "For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Cor. 12:14).

We are not born equal. Though we share in the same Holy Spirit, who enables all believers to confess Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), and who has baptized all believers into the body of Christ (v. 13), we are given different spiritual gifts for service. More than once Paul uses the analogy of the human body with its many members—eyes, ears, hands, feet—to illustrate the varied gifts in the church of Christ. "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (v. 27).

How many different gifts are there? Some list as few as nine; others in the range of fifteen to twenty-two; and still others estimate many more. An attempt to catalog the gifts will be made in chapter 3.

How many gifts are assigned to each believer? At least one, likely more than one, perhaps several. Could not this be inferred from Christ's Parable of the Talents in which one man was given one, and another two, and another five? Though one fellow had only one, the other two had a total of seven talents.

ME, A GIFTED CHILD?

We can also observe multiple gifts in operation in individuals described in the New Testament. For example, Philip had the gifts of wisdom, showing mercy, evangelism, and perhaps others unrecorded in the sacred record.

Two or more gifts may often operate simultaneously, blending together. Just as a candle on a three-branch candelabra may shine separately and distinctly while the other two remain unlit or two or three may shine jointly, so a person may have just one gift in exercise, or at another time gifts may glow comingled.

Not only are we appointed diverse gifts, but we are allocated differing ministries. Since each believer has a different combination of gifts and ministries, it's likely each of us is in some way unlike any other believer in arrangement of spiritual abilities and outlets to serve. We may not be created equal, but we are unique. There will never be another you.

Why do we get differing gifts? And why do we get the particular gifts we do? The sovereign Holy Spirit simply assigns to every man individually as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:7). "God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor. 12:18). Clearly, distribution of gifts is by divine dealing.

Therefore, no one should boast of his gifts. Paul asks, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7) Because our gifts come through the gracious sovereignty of the Spirit, and not through any merit of ours, they should occasion no bragging on our part.

Neither should we follow, nor idolize, nor become the devotees of any human leader out of admiration for his gifts. Paul warns against this error in 1 Corinthians 3, pointing out that those who exercise the gifts must not be allowed to eclipse Him who gave them (see vv. 3-7, 21-23). Leaders are only fellow-servants, gifted by the Spirit for a particular ministry.

This means we should never envy anyone else's gifts—not Billy Graham's evangelistic ability nor John Stott's teaching expertise. Rather, we should be content with God's choice of

19 GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

gifts for us. Discontent is really criticism of the way the Spirit runs His church.

Margaret loved to entertain but found teaching impossible. When she accepted God's sovereign wisdom in bestowing on her the gift of hospitality, she entertained frequently, and was a real blessing to her guests. Barbara, on the other hand, enjoyed teaching, but found it hard to entertain. When she accepted her gift of teaching, guilt feelings over failure to entertain as much as Margaret dissolved. Barbara entered zestfully into teaching her Bible classes, also blessing many. Margaret and Barbara thanked God for each other's gifts instead of envying them.

YOUR GIFT IS NOT FOR YOUR SAKE

Complying with the law for compulsory military service in Argentina, a fellow showed up at the induction center objecting, "What good would I be? I have no arms!" They put him in the army anyway.

At basic training camp, his commanding officer said, "See that fellow up there on the hill pumping water? Go tell him when the pail is full. He's blind!"

Gifts are given us to build up one another and to enable us to serve and glorify Christ together. The eye cannot say it has no need of the ear. If all were hands, how would we walk? Each part of the body is needed to serve the whole. The exercise of our gift is needed to strengthen other saints. We, in turn, will be helped toward maturity through the gifts of others.

Paul told the Romans that he wished to impart some overflow blessing from his gifts to them, in turn receiving strength from them (Rom. 1:11-12). Another time, Paul used his gift of encouragement to cheer up saddened companions in a harrowing shipwreck; later he needed cheering up himself by Christians who came partway down from Rome to meet him (Acts 27:25; 28:15). We should throw our individual gifts into the common stock so as to receive mutual aid.

Gifts are for the common good, not individual glory. Paul put it this way: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Cor. 12:7). Spiritual abilities are for the

ME, A GIFTED CHILD?

benefit of others, the upbuilding of the church.

The Spirit gave gifts "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). This verse seems to indicate that gifts have three purposes, but the punctuation misleads. Both commas interfere with the apostle's meaning. Omit the commas to get the correct sense. Gifts are "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ." In other words, gifts prepare saints for the task of ministering in order to build up the body of Christ. Restating it, gifts train servants that they may do the Master's work, which will then result in the maturing of the church.

A wrong attitude asks, "Why should I attend church and get involved there? What will I get out of it?" By attendance and involvement, you will minister through your gifts to the good of others. And others will contribute to your spiritual welfare.

A pastor will often invite to his pulpit evangelists, Bible teachers, and other ministers who have gifts different from his own. This augments his ministry, adding considerably to the edification of his flock.

Dr. John Owen, scholar and chancellor of Oxford University, used to go hear John Bunyan, unlearned mender of pots and pans, whenever he came to London. One day King Charles asked Owen, "With all your learning, why do you bother to go to hear that simple Bunyan preach?"

Replied Owen, "Had I the tinker's gifts, I'd gladly relinquish my learning."

The mutual ministry of gifts rules out the lone wolf. No one is gifted enough, wise enough, or strong enough to live apart from others. We should not be parasites nor paralyzed members of the body of Christ.

USE YOUR GIFT-OR ELSE

The Parable of the Talents, using financial investments as an illustration, teaches that we shall be held responsible for all our endowments and opportunities—and this includes the use of our gifts, whether one, two, or five.

It behooves us to discover and develop our spiritual abilities.

19 GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Writing to the Romans, Paul listed seven gifts, urging their faithful exercise, and then added that we should be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (12:11).

Youth is not excused from the exercise of gifts. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example....Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (1 Tim. 4:12, 14).

Too many Christians, young and old, are content to sit back and let others do the work. An unknown poet has written:

*There's a clever young fellow named Somebody Else—
There's nothing this fellow can't do.
He's busy from morning 'til way late at night
Just substituting for you.*

*When asked to do this or asked to do that
So often you're set to reply:
"Get Somebody Else, Mr. Chairman—
He'll do it much better than I."*

*There's so much to do in our parish;
So much, and the workers are few.
And Somebody Else gets weary and worn
Just substituting for you.*

*So next time you're asked to do something worthwhile
Come up with this honest reply:
"If Somebody Else can give time and support,
It's obviously true, so can I."*

The Heidelberg Catechism says, "First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common partakers of Him and all of His riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts for the advantage and salvation of other members" (Question 55).

Dr. Carl Henry wrote, "Each of us has special gifts to exercise spiritual outreach....Let every Bible-believing church suggest its ablest men and women and let no believer escape

with the ruse that he or she is vocationally good for nothing to the cause of Christ. No believer is excused" (copyright 1972 by *Christianity Today*).

Each of us should be our unique self. We should find out what we are gifted to do and do our thing. We should not try to imitate somebody else, like some famous evangelist or Bible teacher. We should not quickly condemn someone else's ministry; the Salvation Army captain and the theological professor may not comprehend each other's dialect, but we should realize there is room for both.

In the day of judgment we'll not be lauded for the magnificence of our mansions, the chrome on our cars, the size of our salaries, the far-and-wideness of our fame. But we will be praised if we can properly respond to the question, "Did you faithfully use the gifts I loaned you?"

Why is the world still so far from being evangelized? Might it be that God has given enough believers the gifts of evangelism and teaching so that long ago all nations should have had opportunity to follow Christ? Might it be that men, women, and youth have just not responded to God's call to discover and use their gifts? Might it be that professing Christians have put their own interests first, neglecting the Great Commission? And might it be that many in the day of judgment will lose a full reward?

When Queen Mary used to visit Balmoral Castle in Scotland every summer, so well known and beloved was she that she walked unescorted around the countryside. One afternoon, venturing far from home and suddenly noting dark clouds, she stopped at a door to ask to borrow an umbrella.

Not recognizing the queen, the lady of the house was reluctant to lend her brand-new umbrella to a stranger. Her cast-off umbrella from the attic had one broken rib and several holes. With an apology, she handed it to the queen.

The next day the lady answered a knock at her door. She opened to a man in gold braid who held a long envelope. "The queen sent me," the stranger said, "and she asked me to thank you for the loan of your umbrella."

For a moment the lady was stunned, then burst into tears. As

19 GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

the courier turned away, he could hear her muttering over and over, "Had I known it was the queen, I'd have given her my best!"

We are all gifted children. And we will answer for it!

Therefore, "As every man hath received the gift, even so, minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).