

The Speaking Gifts

A woman went to a pet store and purchased a parrot to keep her company. She took her new bird home, but returned the next day to report, “That parrot hasn’t said a word yet!”

“Does it have a mirror?” asked the pet shop owner. “Parrots like to be able to look at themselves in the mirror.” So, she bought a mirror and took it home.

But the next day she was back, announcing the bird still wasn’t talking.

“What about a ladder?” the storekeeper asked. “Parrots enjoy walking up and down a ladder.”

Sure enough, the next day she was back with the same old story– still no talking.

“Does the parrot have a swing? Birds like relaxing on a swing.” She bought the swing and took it home.

The next day she came back to the store to announce her bird had died.

“I’m terribly sorry to hear that,” the owner said. “Did the bird ever say anything before it died?”

“Oh, yes,” she said. “Don’t they sell any food down there?”

The church can be a lot like this misdirected lady and her unfortunate parrot. There are certain things the body of Christ needs to grow and thrive, but we may spend too much time, money and effort on things of secondary importance, while the church suffers malnourishment of the things she truly needs. We add mirrors, ladders, and swings, but we forget the food.

This morning is not about the mirrors, ladders and swings. We are looking at one of those things that are essential to the life and the growth of the church. What we’re talking about are spiritual gifts. **A spiritual gift is a spiritually empowered ability given to every Christian for helping the church be the church.**

Let me use the body as an analogy. Let’s say Jesus is the heart, and the Holy Spirit is the blood. The heart and blood are the source of life for the rest of the body, which is us as believers. There must be a means of bringing the blood from the heart to the rest of the body. You have to have a circulatory system through which the blood flows to all the parts of the body. That is what the spiritual gifts are in the body of Christ. The gifts are the way that Jesus pumps the lifeblood of the Holy Spirit into the body.

Body:

We saw last week that in 1 Peter 4:10-11, Peter speaks of spiritual gifts in two categories – speaking gifts and serving gifts. He says,

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to minister to others. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides.

Serving gifts build up the body through what they do. These are the gifts we looked at last week. Speaking gifts build up the body through what they say. They use the tongue as a powerful tool to build up the church.

The old saying says, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That’s just a lie we tell ourselves when words have really hurt us. Words have incredible power – to hurt, to divide, to put down, to tear apart, but through the Holy Spirit they can have an amazing, divine power –to heal, to build up, to encourage. Words can give life, give strength, and give hope.

Proverbs has a lot to say about the power of words.

(3 Slides) Pr. 15:4 *“Gentle words bring life and health; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.”*

Pr. 16:24 *“Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.”*

Pr. 18:4 *“A person's words can be life-giving water; words of true wisdom are as refreshing as a bubbling brook.”*

The Holy Spirit has gifted some Christians to build up the church with the life-giving, heart-healing, hope-filling power of words. Let’s look at these speaking gifts.

I. Prophecy

The first speaking gift we will look at is prophecy. This gift is often misunderstood. When we think of prophecy we often think of what?....telling the future. Some even use the word prophet in the same way they would say “fortune-teller.” – Not Nostradamus.

However, the biblical word for *prophecy* doesn’t mean telling the future. In fact, telling the future was only a small part of what biblical prophets actually did. Most of what they did were proclamations about current events. They made pronouncements about what was happening now.

The gift of prophecy is mentioned in Romans 12:6 and in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Paul then talks about it a bunch in 1 Corinthians 14. The word he uses simply means “to speak before.” Not “before” in terms of time, but “before people.” It means to “declare openly,” “to proclaim publicly.”

The spiritual gift of prophecy is the ability to speak God’s will from God’s word in order to move God’s people. Prophecy was almost always connected with a call to action. Here’s what God says, and this is what He wants you to do about it. It’s the halftime locker room speech. It’s that come-to-Jesus meeting. It’s the family intervention to address an urgent need. The gift of prophecy usually displays itself in words of exhortation and rebuke, or comfort and inspiration.

Paul talks extensively about the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 where he compares it to the gift of tongues, or speaking in other languages. The church in Corinth had a problem because all of them wanted to speak in other tongues. It was one of the more showy gifts. “Hey, look at me. Look what I can do.” But Paul says the gift of prophecy is far greater.

On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.
– 1 Corinthians 14:3-4

Down in verses 23-25, he says,

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

We get a picture here of what the gift of prophesy does. It builds up. It encourages. It consoles. It convicts. It calls to account.

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Now, in the NT church, there were prophets who received revelation directly from God. There was the office of apostle and the office of prophet. They were a foundational role in the church. They were essential to establishing the church, but those weren't permanent offices. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:20 that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. But once the foundation is laid, you don't keep laying the foundation. We don't have New Testament apostles and prophets today.

Those were essential to establishing the church before the church had the complete New Testament revealed to them. Even though there is no more biblical office of prophet who receives new, direct revelation from God, I believe there are still those who have a prophetic gift. They are not a prophet in the technical sense, but they have a prophetic gift to speak the will of God from the word of God to move the people of God. God isn't revealing new truth to them. God's word is complete. We aren't to add to it or take away from it. However, they may receive insight in understanding truth that has already been revealed or guidance from the Holy Spirit in how to apply that truth to a specific situation. They are empowered to call God's people to live according to that truth.

Beware of anyone who claims to be a prophet and claims to receive revelation directly from God, and who makes authoritative pronouncements apart from Scripture. That should be a warning sign. The gift of prophecy never adds to or replaces Scripture. It clarifies Scripture. It applies it. It lifts it up.

What are some signs you might have a prophetic gift. You have a strong desire to express God's will verbally. You have an ability to proclaim God's word in a way that confronts and challenges God's people. You can share the truth of Scripture authoritatively, and you speak up for the truth even if the view is unpopular. You are greatly distressed when Christians neglect to seek God's will, or simply ignore it. You find your greatest joy in when God's people are moved to follow God's will.

Those with the gift of prophecy today are often travelling evangelists, local church ministers, or authors who proclaim God's will through their writing. Those with the gift of prophecy in the local church are often those who are urging the church and those in it to do the right thing.

II. Teaching

A closely related gift to prophecy, is the gift of teaching. Paul mentions teaching in Romans 12:7. This word refers to instruction and training. This word originally referred to the instructor who trained a chorus for public performances.

The spiritual gift of teaching is the ability to instruct biblical truth in an understandable way so that others grow in the knowledge of the truth. Paul writes this to the young minister, Timothy (2 Timothy 2:24-25):

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

We see an example of this in Acts 8. This is where Philip is sent to the Ethiopian Eunuch who is travelling by chariot and he's reading the book of Isaiah as he goes. Acts 8:35 says, "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."

Like prophecy, the gift of teaching is based on the word of God, but it's less of the rah, rah, you can do this, or you better do this and it focuses more on systematic instruction that leads to understanding, and explaining to people how to do something. The prophet is more the commander who leads the troops into battle, yelling, "charge!" The teacher is more the commander who trains the troops for battle.

Personally, my biggest area of spiritual giftedness is teaching. If someone asks me what my spiritual gift is, I say, "teaching." I am a teaching pastor. Others, or more of a prophetic voice, but I lean toward instruction and explanation.

The teacher's go to scriptures are like Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

For years my favorite passage of Scripture has been 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in

righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

You will find the gift of teaching at work in a lot of other places in the church as well. In the youth program. Sunday School teachers. In Bible colleges. Not everyone with the gift of teaching teaches large groups. Some of the greatest teachers are great one on one teachers. They can sit down with you at your kitchen table and open their Bible and teach. They make great mentors, and can be very good in personal discipleship.

Do you have a deep desire to know and understand Scripture? Are you able to explain hard to understand passages in the Bible so that they make sense to others? Are you greatly distressed when other Christians take Bible verses out of context? Does your greatest joy come when that lightbulb finally lights up over the student’s head, and they finally “get it?” Are you always striving to grow in your own knowledge of God’s word and want to share it with others? If so, you might have the gift of teaching.

III. Wisdom & Knowledge

Next I want to talk about a pair of gifts – wisdom and knowledge. They are found 1 Cor. 12:8 where Paul says, “*To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge.*” Knowledge focuses on understanding and wisdom focuses on application. It’s knowing what to do and how to do it. It’s to take a truth of Scripture, understand what it means and then having the ability to apply it to a specific life situation. **The gift of knowledge is the ability to understand God’s truth. The gift of wisdom is the ability to apply God’s truth.**

Both of these gifts often work together and hand in hand with those who have the gift of prophecy or the gift of teaching. For instance, whenever I’ve taken any sort of spiritual gifts test, teaching is always the highest, but almost every time, right behind are wisdom and knowledge. Everything else is way back behind these three. The knowledge and the wisdom enable the teaching gift.

However, this doesn’t mean that everyone who can speak a message of wisdom or a message of knowledge is a preacher or a teacher. They might simply be the person you go to for advice. They always have good counsel. It’s not just that they are smart or they are experienced. They have learned from what they’ve studied. They have learned from their experience and know how to apply it to life.

We all know people in the church that you can take them a complicated problem and they cut right through it with a simple observation, and it seems so obvious. That’s often the Holy Spirit at work through a message of wisdom and knowledge.

IV. Encouragement

The final speaking gift we want to talk about this morning is one of the most precious gifts in the church, and a gift we so desperately need in our world right now. I’m talking about the gift of encouragement. You could debate whether this is even a speaking gift.

Not everyone who has the gift of encouragement encourages primarily through their speaking. Some of the greatest encouragers say very little. They encourage you by what they do. Perhaps this gift belongs both with the serving gifts and the speaking gifts.

Not every gift looks alike in every person. That's the thing about gifts. They come in all shapes and sizes. So, don't think your gift will be just one of these things, or that it will look exactly like what I've described. It could be a combination of things, and it might work in surprising ways. We serve a God who's really good at surprises.

Paul mentions this gift in Romans 12:8. But let me show you something really cool about this gift. I don't give you a lot of Greek words, but I'm going to give you a couple this morning. The Greek word for encouragement is *parakletos*. Let me show you another Greek word – *paraklete*. Do you know what that word is translated to in your Bible? It is translated as “helper,” “advocate,” “counselor,” or “comforter,” and it is used of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:6, Jesus says, “*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate (paraklete) to help you and be with you forever.*”

There are people in the church who are gifted by the *paraklete* to be *parakletos*, They literally do the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. People in the 1st Century used this word to refer to legal advisors or defense attorney. This is who you went to in times of trouble.

The word literally means “one who comes alongside of.” The encourager is one comes alongside you in times of trouble. These are the ones seek out when you've stepped in it and you don't know what to do. **The gift of encouragement is the ability to come alongside someone in a time of trouble.**

When you don't know if you can make it another day, someone with the gift of encouragement comes alongside and helps carry the load. When you are thinking about just giving up and giving in, it is this person with the gift of encouragement who gives you just that little extra you need. When you wonder if it's really worth it, the encourager is there to say, “Yes, yes, yes, it is so worth it.”

It's the unexpected card in the mail, it's the anonymous donation, the phone call out of the blue, the seeming random offer of help, or the surprise visit that makes you say, “How did you know? It's exactly what I needed.” It's the Holy Spirit doing His thing through the gift of encouragement?

If you have this gift, you have an ability and desire to comfort, console, and uplift others. When everyone else is running away from someone in trouble, you are running to them. You are very sensitive to needs before others even notice. You are surprised how often you have the right thing to say or the right thing to do to lift up others when they are down.

In a world that is so good at knocking you down, and kicking you while you're down, we need those with the gift of encouragement in the church.

CONCLUSION (Advance Slide)

We live in a world where the tongue is so often a weapon. It is used as a tool of destruction. With it we wound and slander, we gossip and lie. We heap insult upon ridicule. With it we vent the darkest lusts and angers of the heart. James says it is a fire which sets the whole forest aflame.

Sadly, we often see its deadly work in the church, with its hateful and hurtful words. But God has gifted many of us to use our tongues in a much different way. Instead of a weapon of destruction, your tongue is an instrument of healing. Your words provide instruction, compassion, and wise counsel. Your tongues lift people up, instead of tearing them down. Instead of a blade that cuts people apart, your tongue is a needle and your words the thread that knit them together. Your tongue is not a flame that burns and destroys, but your mouth is a hearth that warms and comforts.

The church needs those of you with speaking gifts to use them to build up the body. The tongue guided by the sinful, human heart may have power to do great damage, but that is nothing compared to the power of the tongue empowered by the Spirit of God by a divine love for others.

If you have the gift to speak prophetically from God's word, if you have the gift to teach, if you can encourage, or share words of wisdom or knowledge, do not let those gifts lie unopened. Through your gift, you teach the whole body how to use our words from good. You help us all teach with what we say. We all become more encouraging. We all have wisdom and knowledge to share. It begins with you and your gift.