

Introduction

It's told that during the French Revolution, three Christians were sentenced to die by the guillotine. One had the gift of faith, one the gift of prophecy, and the other the gift of helps. The one with the gift of faith was placed on the guillotine first, face up, and declared, "**I believe God will deliver me.**" The rope was then pulled but the blade didn't fall, causing the executioners to free him. The one with the gift of prophecy was placed on it the same way and exclaimed, "**I predict God will deliver me.**" The rope was then pulled, but again, the blade didn't fall, causing the executioners to free him. Finally, the one with the gift of helps was placed on it the same way, face up, enabling him to see the guillotine. The rope was about to be pulled a third time, when he suddenly blurted out, "**Wait, stop! I just spotted what's wrong with your guillotine.**" He was only using his gift of helps you see.

As I explained last week, each of you has spiritual gifts that equip you to minister for God. You need to discover and use those gifts and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Jesus Gives Gifts to Men

Let's start with verse 9. Paul says that Jesus "**descended into the lower parts of the earth.**" That language refers to His incarnation. He came to earth in the flesh, as a human being.

Verse 8 and the word "**captives**" reveals why He did. It was to conquer and that's exactly what He did. He conquered Satan, sin, and death through His birth, life, death, and resurrection.

Now notice what He did after He conquered. Verse 8 says that He ascended on high - to the right hand of Father God. And from there, according to verse 10, He "**fills all things.**" That means He is Lord over all the powers of both heaven and earth. He reigns supreme over them.

Verse 8 goes on to tell us what the ascended Jesus, as Lord, is doing. He's dispensing the booty, the benefits, of His victory over Satan,

sin, and death to His people. One of those benefits is **"gifts."**

What Paul mentions in verse 11 – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers - reveals what the word **"gifts"** refers to. He mentions three of those things again in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and calls them in verse 1 of that chapter **"spiritual gifts."** We know, therefore, that the **"gifts"** Jesus gives in verse 8 refer to spiritual gifts.

We learned last week, in 1 Corinthians 12:11, that it's the Holy Spirit who gives us spiritual gifts. But we also learn here in verse 8 that Jesus is their ultimate source. He gives them to us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the agent by whom He gives them.

According to the Measure of His Gift

Yes, Jesus gives them and verse 7 tells us how He does, **"according to the measure of"** His **"gift."** Note two words here.

The first is **"measure."** The Greek word is *metron*, from which we get the word **"meter."** It suggests a specific and thus limited quantity of something, in this case spiritual gifts. Jesus had all the spiritual gifts, but He's the only one who ever has or ever will. The rest of us have a measure of them – at least one and most likely several.

The second word is **"gift."** I'd make an observation about gifts in general. One Christmas, a family member gave me two ties, which I've never worn and never will. That illustrates a crucial point. Givers determine the nature and number of gifts. Well, it's the same way with Jesus and spiritual gifts. He decides which ones and how many we have and to what degree we have them. He gives them, in other words, **"as He wills"** to quote 1 Corinthians 12:11. That implies two things.

First, we don't determine what our spiritual gifts are; Jesus does. Suppose you're a married couple and want a child. So you pray and ask for a 6'4", 200 pound blond boy who has an IQ of 175 and is able to play major league baseball. That's absurd of course because it's God who determines the child you have. It's just like that with Jesus and spiritual gifts. I'd love to have the gift of evangelism and healing, for instance.

But I've never asked Him for them because of what I know. He, the giver, not we, the receivers, determines what our spiritual gifts are. He gives them **"as He wills"** not **"as we will."** Recognizing that, we should receive and use the ones He gives us with gratitude and joy.

"As He wills" implies a second thing. Others don't determine what our spiritual gifts are; Jesus does. Some Christians esteem their own spiritual gifts so highly that they impose them on everyone else. Doing that is called **"gift projection."** Consider the Christian I mentioned last week who has the gift of intercession. She expects everyone to pray as extensively and effectively as she does. Or consider George Mueller whose gift of faith built an incredible orphanage ministry. Listen to what he wrote about that: **"Let not Satan deceive you in making you think you could not have the same faith, but that it is only for persons situated as I am . . . I pray to the Lord and expect an answer to my requests; and may you not do the same, dear believing reader?"** Mueller expected that everyone can have the same kind of faith he had.

What he wrote reflects the reasoning of many who project their spiritual gifts on to everyone else. It goes something like this: **"I'm just an ordinary Christian, no different than anyone else. I do this certain thing and God blesses and works through it. If you do what I do, He will bless and work through you in the same way."**

But that isn't so. We who don't have the gift of intercession can't pray like those who do. We who don't have the gift of faith can't believe some things like those who do. No matter how well intentioned they are, those who impose their spiritual gifts on to everyone else impose false feelings of guilt as well. But don't let that happen to you. Always remember the message of verse 7 instead. It's Jesus, not we ourselves or others, who determines what our spiritual gifts are.

For the Work of Service

Now, Paul explains why He gives you the spiritual gifts He does. According to verse 12, it's **"for the work of service"** or as the KJV

translates it, **“for the work of the ministry.”** That line in conjunction with verse 11 teaches a critical insight that all of you need to know.

In verse 11, Paul mentions five offices, five official positions within the church: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. I said earlier that those five things are spiritual gifts. That’s true. But it’s also true that they’re offices that those with the corresponding spiritual gifts fill and carry out.

Now let’s link verses 11 and 12. Together, they reveal what the purpose of those office holders is. It’s to equip the saints so they can do the work of ministry. Tony Campolo tells a joke: **“Preachers are paid to be good. Laymen are good for nothing.”** That’s who the saints are, what we today call **“laymen.”** Anyway, notice the critical insight here. It’s the saints, not the office holders, who do the work of ministry.

That insight destroys what Peter Wagner calls **“the myth of the omnicompetent pastor.”** A church, looking for a pastor, ran an ad describing what his or her qualifications needed to be: **“Excellent public speaker, skilled counselor, good administrator, motivated soul winner, Bible scholar, theologian, public relations expert, and dynamic leader.”** That’s an omnicompetent pastor and it’s purely a myth that such a person even exists. There’s no man or woman anywhere who is all those things, who has all of those gifts.

Paul makes it crystal clear verses 11 and 12. God’s church and kingdom won’t grow on earth unless the saints (laymen) are doing the work of ministry. Or to localize it, Bethel Friends Church won’t grow unless you are doing the work of ministry. So, do the work of ministry.

You do that work of ministry in three ways.

One is to fulfill your roles. Roles are functions that God gives all Christians to perform. A friend of mine knew a brother in Christ was short on rent and anonymously gave him \$400 to pay it. My friend doesn’t have the gift of giving. But like all Christians, he does have the role of giving and fulfills it as he can. It’s the same with intercession, evangelism, and faith, to name a few. You won’t do those things as

extensively and as effectively as ones who are gifted to do them will. But you should do them nonetheless. You're ministering when you do. So, learn what the Christian roles are and fulfill them as you can.

You do the work of ministry in a second way. Exercise what John Wimber called "**gracelets.**" Gracelets are spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives Christians temporarily to meet a specific need. Some years ago, I felt impressed to pray for a woman with a permanently injured neck. She woke up the next morning without any pain and her doctor eventually pronounced her cured. I don't have the gift of healing but the Holy Spirit gave me the gracelet of healing to meet her particular need. Look for and exercise gracelets.

You do the work of ministry in a third way. Exercise your spiritual gifts. Last week, I mentioned my brother Harold and his gift of faith. He has the gift of intercession as well. He's retired but still gets up at 5:00 every morning and intercedes for several hours. He also goes to church at least an hour early every Sunday morning to pray for the services. He has the gift of intercession and uses it. Prayerfully determine effective ways to use your spiritual gifts. Then use them in those ways.

Discover Your Spiritual Gifts

You cannot use your spiritual gifts of course unless you know what they are. So know what they are by discovering them. You discover them by doing five things.

First, learn as much as you can about spiritual gifts. Learn the specific ones that the Bible identifies and the principles it reveals about them, some of which I've shared. Also learn what "those in the know" write about them. I'd suggest Peter Wagner's book *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* because it's simple and to the point.

Second, experiment with spiritual gifts as much as you can. That's how we discover what our natural abilities are – by trying things. My son Aaron, for instance, tried baseball and had "O" talent for it. He then tried gymnastics and had much talent for it. You can do the same with

spiritual gifts. So you learn about the spiritual gift of healing. You then look for opportunities to pray for people's healing, assessing your effectiveness in doing so. Or you learn about the spiritual gift of evangelism. You then look for opportunities to share the gospel with unbelievers, assessing your effectiveness in doing so. Experiment with spiritual gifts as much as you can.

Third, examine your feelings. Findley Edge writes this: **"A person who finds God's calling through his or her spiritual gifts will have a 'eureka feeling.' The person will think to himself or herself, 'This, really, is what I had rather do for God than anything else in the world.'"** He's right. Thus, what you strongly desire to do for God is an indicator of what your giftedness is. So is what you enjoy doing. If you really have a spiritual gift, you'll enjoy using it. I believe I have the gift of teaching. For one thing, I passionately desire to inform people about God and His kingdom. For another thing, I thoroughly enjoy doing so – even the study and preparation part of it. Examine your feelings.

Fourth, seek the input of other Christians. They are likely to see the spiritual gifts that are in you. If they don't see them in you, therefore, it's probable you don't have them. Or if they do see them in you, it's probable you do. So, seek their input. Ask them what they see.

And finally, fifth, take a spiritual gifts inventory. Taking a spiritual gifts inventory can be helpful in conjunction with the other four ways. We'll provide you with an opportunity to do that in tonight's meeting.

Conclusion

I close with these statistics. According to a nationwide survey conducted by the Barna Research Group, 88% of born-again Christians have heard of spiritual gifts. But only 39% can identify which spiritual gift or gifts they possess. For you who are here, that first figure, by the very fact that you heard this sermon, is 100%. But your challenge is this. Make the second figure 100% as well. May all of you discover and use the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has given you.