

Gifts of the Spirit - Part 1 (Rora 2003)

by Norman Meeten

The gifts of the Spirit are the tools that God uses to accomplish His will through us, and they are not limited to specific individuals or roles.

Duration: 56:25

Scripture: Romans 12:1

Topics: "Gifts"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of giving and being cheerful givers. He highlights that God loves when His people give cheerfully, just as He gave cheerfully. The preacher also mentions that God wants His people to be happy and experience joy in their Christian journey. He encourages the congregation to present their bodies as living sacrifices and to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, in order to live according to God's good, acceptable, and perfect will. The preacher emphasizes that God has made provision for His people and desires to give them the necessary gifts to live godly lives.

Transcript

I know that they have competitors like outings and things like that, but people would have made their choices on the basis of their priorities. Praise God. Amen.

Well, we all have to make choices. We have to decide what are the priorities of our life. There are so many alternatives that we go here and there and everywhere doing all sorts of things and wear ourselves to a frazzle.

The important thing is to know within our own hearts what God has said to us and what we do and to do it with all of our hearts. Amen. I know that there are many things I'd like to do if I had time to do them.

But I know what I ought to do and I know what I'm going to do. Praise God as he leads us on day by day. Now it's my first turn in talking about the gifts of the Spirit.

Neither Liz or I have collaborated. In fact, none of us collaborate with each other. We trust the Lord to enable the ministry so to coordinate and you'll find that one thing leads on to another and that's without any collaboration at all amongst any of us.

We seek the Lord. We wait on him and believe him to entrust us what he wants us to impart to others. We're all very different as you would have gathered.

Amen. Now when we talk about the gifts of the Spirit, I think that so often our thinking is far too narrow. We think about 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

We think about Ephesians chapter 4. We might go back into Romans chapter 12 and that's about the length and breadth of our understanding or appreciation of the gifts of the Spirit. I believe that all ministry, where the gifts are operative, is simply an overflow of what God has entrusted to our own hearts and minds. And I believe that that's an all-embracing thing and it doesn't just relate to people who have the task of preaching or teaching in particular.

I believe that it relates to every single member within the body of Christ to appreciate and believe and allow themselves to be instrumental in the hands of God in nourishing and feeding the body of Christ and making known to men and women the heart and thoughts of God. There are two scriptures that I want us to turn to to begin with. They don't specifically mention gifts.

But I want to say that everything God gives is a gift of the Spirit. Everything. People think it's just what they call the charismatic gifts.

Well, you do know that the word charis is the word grace, don't you? And you can't be a Christian unless you're charismatic. That's using the term I believe in its biblical sense rather than in its modern sense. Bless God.

Are you a charismatic in the biblical sense of the word? Or do you believe that this whole realm of the baptism of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit are an appendage which we tack on to the end of the doctrine of salvation? I believe it's an essential part of the whole. God is the great giver. And the God that I know is so exceedingly generous.

He disclosed that almost in his first word to Adam. He said, you may eat of all of the trees except one. Amen.

That was God's gift. That was God's generosity. That was what God wanted men and women to discover in himself.

The great overflowing givenness. And of course he brought that to perfection when he gave the treasure of heaven because he could find no alternative to rectify the tragedy of Eden. He gave God so loved that he gave.

That was an agreement between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. I believe that that was Jesus responding to the Father and the Son when he said, whom shall we send and who will go for us? Isaiah didn't bring us salvation. He was instrumental in the hands of God to prepare the way.

But only Jesus could properly answer that question. And he came in response to the agreement that existed within the heart of the Godhead. That great fellowship of love.

God so loved that he gave. Amen. And that's probably the greatest gift of the Spirit that you will ever experience because all the other gifts flow out of our relationship with the gift and the giver.

Again, it's this wonderful relationship that you and I are invited to come into where we, as Ron told us earlier on this morning, we have access to the very throne of God. By that great new and living way where we can come into his immediate presence, listen to him, confide in him, respond to him, receive from him and find our lives day by day enriched in ways far beyond than when we first knew about him and made our initial response. Glory be to God.

Scripture often refers to us as being rich. Or writes Colossians, he said, you're rich in the word of God. Amen.

Sometimes I come and I think how poverty stricken I am. How much more there is to learn. Glory be to his name.

Now in 2 Corinthians chapter 9, there is a most magnificent verse. It's verse 8. In the context where the apostle is talking about giving, it says in the preceding verse that God loves the cheerful giver. In other words, he wants you to be as cheerful about giving as he is.

Amen. There was no reticence in the heart of God when he gave. He gave cheerfully.

I believe that's why the apostle Peter said that Christian experience is joy unspeakable and full of glory. God's a happy God and he wants his people to be happy. A loose translation of the word blessed, but it's implied.

Glory to his name. Then in verse 8 he says, God is able to make all grace abound towards you that you always having all sufficiency in all things may abound unto every good work. There's the generosity of God's heart again.

All sufficiency in all things that you may abound unto every good work. Everything that you and I will ever need to enable us to fulfil the word of the Lord and the will of God related to our own personal lives is given. Amen.

No one has any privilege above another. God has no favourites. We're all his favourites and he wants to give to every one of us and all that he requires of us is to be open and receptive and by faith believe that he really means what he says and receive at his hand those good things that we discover are essential to enable us to fulfil our function.

Turn into 2 Peter where there is a very similar statement in verse 3. Glory according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness. That's 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 3. His divine power hath given us all things that pertain to life and to godliness. Amen.

Everything that you and I will ever need he's given at the expense of the life of his own glorious son. That doesn't mean to say that he didn't give before. He did but man restricted him by his unbelief and unwillingness to respond and it was the privilege only of the exceptional man or the exceptional woman down through the Old Testament dispensation.

But in this great day in which we live God wants every single member of the body of Christ to appropriate and appreciate what he intends us to have and enjoy and move in. Bless God. I believe that there's a great dearth of an appreciation of God's intention for you and me and that's why there's often such a lack of the manifestations of those glorious gifts that God gives to his people.

James tells us in the first chapter of his lovely little letter. Let's turn to it. James, go back just two books.

Verse 17. Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above.

Amen. The gift of new birth came down from above. Amen.

Every single thing that you and I will need comes to us from above. That's God's heart. That's God's intention.

That's God's will for every one of us. God is a God of gift. Amen.

He is the gift that enables him to impart gifts. God is gift. Turn to Ephesians chapter 4. If I wanted a title just for this one chapter I would call it Gift.

And the chapter starts by exhorting us to walk worthy of our vocation wherewith we are called. Now we cannot do that unless we receive gifts from the Lord. It is impossible to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.

That is all we are to walk worthy of the Lord Jesus as we saw last night. But each one of us will have a particular vocation, a particular calling that will need particular equipment. I often refer to the gifts of the Spirit as the tools of love.

Those instruments which God can use to fulfil what he wants to accomplish through you and through me. And his gifts are not restricted by us unless we refuse to respond. So often we make excuses and feel that we're not worthy, we're not qualified, we haven't got the ability.

Well you won't have the ability unless you receive first from him the gift that will impart to you the ability to do what he says. We often use our weakness. Paul never used his weakness as an excuse for not doing what God wanted him to do.

He never used his weakness as a justification for his failure and sin. Paul used his weakness as a platform upon which God could demonstrate his power. So that people would know that it wasn't him but it was God.

You will discover as you learn to live and move in the Spirit, beloved, that often when you feel utterly weak and inadequate and insufficient, invariably that's when God really moves and works, to your amazement, to your surprise. I believe that lots of people function in the gifts of the Holy Spirit without knowing it. I believe that lots of people prophesy without knowing it.

There are sections within Christendom that equate prophecy with preaching or preaching with prophecy. And of course then they get in a tangle when they find that Philip had seven daughters, all who prophesied. In the same group which would not allow the women to preach.

So you can't have it both ways. One or the other, less God. Now prophecy can function within the context of preaching.

It can function outside of the context of preaching. Amen. I remember once writing a letter sitting on the roof of a little hut in India, in a village.

God exercised my heart to write to a certain brother. I can't even remember what I wrote to him, but I had a reply back from him in record time, especially with the communication breakdowns that you have in a country like India. And he was over the moon.

Apparently there was a sentence in that letter that didn't particularly relate to other things that I was saying in the letter, that answered a problem with which he had been wrestling for years. Now I wasn't setting out to give him a prophetic word. I wasn't saying I'd got some great revelation for him.

I just wrote him a letter. And God utilised that. I believe that that was a gift of the Spirit working way and beyond my understanding or my intelligent appreciation of what was happening at that time.

And God can do that. Blessed be His name. Now in chapter 4 of the Ephesian epistle, there are references to at least five gifts that God gives.

And I'm going to just touch on them very briefly. But I believe that they form a background that is larger than much of our general thinking about the gifts of the Spirit. First of all in verse 7 it says, But unto every one of us, I love that, everyone, everyone.

You'll read it again and again, especially in the context of the church, especially in the context where the Lord is talking about His gifts. He keeps on saying, everyone, everyone, everyone. Amen.

Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. What largeness of heart. Unto every one of us is given grace.

In John chapter 1, He's described as being full of grace and truth. And you only have to let your eye drop down a couple of verses in John chapter 1 and it says, And of His fullness have we all received grace upon or grace for grace. Hallelujah.

You couldn't have more than that. Unto every one of us is given grace. If ever there was an expositor of grace, beloved, it was the Apostle Paul.

Wasn't it? He didn't deserve it. He didn't merit it. He hadn't done anything to qualify to receive it.

It was all of grace. Amen. He was going in the opposite direction when God met him.

He wasn't even seeking the Lord. I know there's a verse in the Bible that says, Those who seek shall find. But he wasn't seeking the Lord.

He was like Jonah in the Old Testament, paying his fare to go in the wrong direction. Sin is always very expensive. But God sovereignly intervened and demonstrated to him the reality of grace.

And it was like a great gift pouring into his life. And that was the touchstone. And then God developed him and enlarged him and increased him.

We're not absolutely sure how long that period of time was. We don't know how long he was in the desert. We don't know how long he was back up there in Tarsus.

We don't know. But during that period of time, obviously the Spirit of God had been ministering to him, teaching to him. He had no one else to teach him.

He was a master in the Old Covenant, but he had no one else to teach him. And God just poured grace upon grace upon grace into his life. Of course, Peter is another expositor of grace.

And that's why they talk about grace within the first few verses of almost every letter and with the last few verses of every letter. My grace is sufficient for me. That's God's gift.

And it's on the basis of that, beloved, that all other gifts will flow. Not because someone has particular abilities, natural giftings. Every natural gift, beloved, has to come to the cross and die.

I know that in a very realistic way. I am an artist by nature. I was born an artist.

You don't become an artist, you're an artist. You can't help it. Like if you're a pianist, you were born a pianist.

You learn the techniques. You know how to mix colours. You know how to use a piece of paper so that when you've done your painting it's not all wrinkly.

Lots of simple techniques. You learn perspective and things like that, so your buildings don't look all topsy-turvy. But the Lord came to me and said, Finish.

Why? Was there anything wrong with painting pictures? No, I didn't paint things that were obscene. I painted lovely country scenes. Amen.

The reason why he said, No more, because he saw it as a competitor for the first place that he alone should have in my life. And that's nearly 40 years ago when God spoke that to me and I've never painted a picture since and wouldn't dare paint a picture unless God released me. Amen.

Not the biggest issue. I'm still an artist. Give me anything of natural substance, I can create it.

Give me a bunch of flowers, put them in a bottle, People say, How do you do it? I don't know, I just do it. Go into a room, it either pleases me or offends me. Terrible person to live with.

Go into a room, pull the rug just a half an inch. Amen. And it's right.

Hallelujah. Natural gifts, beloved, have to die so that they don't dominate and intrude upon what God is giving. He may restore a natural gift, like He restored Isaac to Abraham because that was a part of the outworking of His glorious purpose.

And that was a tremendous miracle because wrapped up in Isaac, beloved, were all the redemptive purposes of God. Christ was in the loins of Abraham. Amen.

You can trace that down through the generations. Very wonderful. I often say the people included in the generation of Jesus Christ is a pretty horrendous list especially when you come upon a person like Manasseh.

You say, Well, however did he get there? He was probably the most vile man who ever sat upon the throne of David and yet he's included in the generation of Jesus Christ. And other people who you think should be there are not there. And the only reason was that he was there, beloved, was because he repented.

You can trace all these things back in the Old Testament in the books of the Chronicles and the Kings. He repented. And as we heard this morning, he was therefore justified in the sight of God and allowed to become a part of God's great eternal purpose.

Blessed be His name. Now that's the first gift that Ephesians chapter 4 talks about. Then the second one is in the next verse.

Very easy. You just have to keep reading. In verse 8 it says, Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, or a multitude of captives, and gave gifts unto men.

Now there are diversity of gifts. There are differences of administration. It's all the same spirit.

Praise God. What he gives to one he may not give to another. That's why Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians, he said, Do all speak in tongues? He was dealing with that particular gift which has always been the gift which has caused the biggest problems about which men and women have argued.

Paul spends more time in looking at that gift than any other. I may look at that on Thursday morning in particular. But there are diversities of gifts.

There are differences of operation. And so God will give to one what he may not necessarily give to another. And we have to remember, brother, that the gifts are not ours.

They're His. We are simply to be the stewards of what God entrusts to us. We are to use those things.

We mustn't quench the Spirit. We mustn't analyse things through our head, but yield ourselves to God so that He can operate through us. The devil will always jump on your shoulder and tell you that it's you, or you're not in the Spirit, or all sorts of things.

But if God begins to move in your heart, then you have to yield to what He's saying. Even if you can't work it out. You know, lots of people are afraid to start to prophesy or to speak in tongues or interpret in case they get stuck half of the way through.

Your life is being dominated by fear if you act in that way. Perfect love casts out fear. You're in a relationship of love with the Lord Jesus where the gifts of God flow.

Blessed be His name. He gives us gifts. You have a list in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

You have another list in Romans chapter 12. They vary. You also have another little list further on in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

They're an interesting list. Let me just point out some of those to you. Turn over into 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

I'm not going to enlarge on them, but towards the end of the chapter he goes on to talk about giftings or ministries, no matter how you like to call them. He says, Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But cover earnestly the best gifts and yet show I unto you a more excellent way. 3 verse 28 in the same chapter.

God has set some in the church. First apostles, secondary prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, the gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. A gift of helps.

I don't hear many people talk about the gift of helps. It's one of the loveliest gifts that God gives to his church. Someone who, I remember a dear lady.

She's still alive. She's not here. We all love her very dearly.

Once coming to me and she said, the Lord has shown me what my function in the church is. I thought she was going to be a prophetess. Amen.

She said, God has shown me that I'm to be a help. And she was the sort of person who never had to be told what needed to be done. Never had to be told that someone was needing some help.

She seemed to have eyes in the back of her head. She saw a young mother on her own with a number of children. She was the first person.

You didn't have to tell her to do jobs. You didn't need to have a list of duties. She was there.

She went in the kitchen. There was a piling washing up. No one had to hint to her or suggest to her that she should wash up.

She saw it as a part of the outworking of her gift. Nothing is unimportant to the Lord. These are the sort of things that facilitate the flowing of God's Spirit amongst his people.

And when we're really living and moving in the Spirit, beloved, it's not a stressful thing. A liberating thing. Now if everyone had the gift of help, beloved, there'd be an absolute crowd.

It would be like Clapham Junction at rush hour and everyone wanting to wash up the dishes. Amen. And you don't have to get a guilt complex if you are not directed in that way.

But make sure, beloved, that you're not avoiding your responsibilities. Amen. I'm amazed how many people, beloved, can have cups of tea and leave the cups all around the house and do this, do that.

I'm not talking about our house. The houses in which I lived, the Lord promises to me once I should have houses and land. Amen.

I can go around the world where people have said to me, it's yours. I have a dear brother in Sicily. He has a watch shop.

And it's not just a diddy sort of watch shop. It's a watch shop. The watch is in his shop.

Invariably it belonged to the top rat. And he once said to me when I went in shop, he said, brother, half the shop is yours. He said, take what you want.

In fact, he just had selected for me the most expensive watch in his shop. The problem was I couldn't see what it said. That's one of the problems of getting older.

It had all the times of the world. He said, this is just the watch for you. I said, elder, I appreciate it.

It's a lovely watch, but what's the use of having it if you can't see what it says? Oh, he said, choose another. So I've got it on my arm. I could never have afforded a watch like this.

Praise God. The generosity of God's heart working out amongst his people. God is so good.

I don't lightly regard anything that is given, especially if the Spirit of the Lord is the promoter of that generosity in the heart of a man or a living. And we have to learn, beloved, that it is important to receive as it is to give. Someone said, receiving honours the giver.

Amen. Blessed be his name. God wants to give us gifts.

As I say, we've got a list. Turn into the Roman epistle. Let's just read the list there.

Chapter 12. Which starts off, present your body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you might prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Beloved, you and I cannot live in the reality of that statement without appropriating and receiving from God the essential gifts that are necessary to enable us. God doesn't say one thing, beloved, and leave it for us to work out. Everything that he says to us, he's made provision for us.

That's why there's a rest for the people of God. That's why you don't live in stress and strain all the time. Now let's go down in the chapter.

It says in verse 6, having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy, according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or teaching on teaching. He that exhorteth on exhortation, he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity or liberally. That's why God loves the cheerful giver.

Amen. Did you know that giving is a gift of the Spirit? That's why some people seem so exceedingly generous and often the people who don't have much of their own and yet they have an ability to give and give and give and give. I know a number of people like that.

They just abound in generosity and Paul writes about the Macedonian church in 2 Corinthians. He said it was out of their poverty that they gave, first having given themselves to the Lord to prove His good and acceptable and perfect will. He that ruleth with diligence, he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness, let love be without dissimulation of all that which is evil, cleave to that which is good.

The list is endless. As I say, you can't limit it to these passages of Scripture in the letters of the Apostle Paul. It relates to everything that is necessary to enable you and I to live lives that are godly in Christ Jesus and to function within the body of Christ that we might be useful for their upbuilding.

He gives us gifts. Then if you go back into Ephesians chapter 4 and in verse 11 he says, he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Notice I read that, beloved, in a different way to which it is printed in the authorised Bible.

In the authorised Bible it has a comma after some. That's not how it is in the original. He gives us some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, all in the plural.

Not just isolated people, but all in the plural. That's what God wants to give to his church. Not just a pastor.

In the anglicised Bible, the word pastor only appears once in the New Testament. Look into the original, of course, it appears many, many times. It's associated with the concept of the shepherd.

But so often we put all our eggs in one basket and we'll insist on calling a man a pastor when he's not a pastor. I'm not a pastor. That's why I resigned my eldership at the Longcroft, where I'd been for years.

Why? Because you can't look after God's flock if you're on the other side of the world. New people come to the church and you have no idea who they are when you return home. I guess half of the people in the Longcroft now, I don't really know.

Not because I don't want to know them, but because I'm not there to know them. And therefore I cannot fulfil a pastor role. Now sometimes God will put you in a position where you fulfil one function for a period of time.

Then he might change your direction and get you in another way or lead you on to something else. One of the great things that I learned very quickly after God baptised me in the Spirit was that the ministry is plural, always, without exception. When Paul talks about eldership, it's always elders.

One eldership, but always made up of elders. And I believe that that is the greatest authority in any local church. That's why when I go to a church to minister, sometimes people ask me, under whose authority do you function? I say, quite simple, threefold.

First, I'm moving under the authority of God. Secondly, I am released by the eldership of my own local assembly. And thirdly, I am subject to every leader or group of leaders in any fellowship or situation into which I go.

I remember once going to Eltham to preach one weekend. We gathered together Sunday morning. I guess it was about half past ten and the meeting went on and on and on and on.

And then it came about half past twelve and Terry got up and said the grace and dismissed the meeting. Came to me afterwards and said, why didn't you preach? I said, you didn't ask me to. I said, if you had said before the meeting began, brother, if you feel free to move, and God tells you, or if you had said, we would like you, brother, now to minister, I would have ministered, but I will not contravene God's order.

And if we conform to God's order, beloved, then we eliminate so many problems. Blessed be his name. God gives to us men and women.

As I pointed out this morning, there were seven daughters of Philip who were prophesying. Read the biography of that wonderful couple in scripture called Aquila and Priscilla. They were a magnificent couple.

Their biography is woven into the New Testament. They were refugees who had been kicked out of Rome because of persecution against the Jews. And wherever you find them, beloved, they are actively involved in what God is doing.

They didn't just sit on their heels and feel sorry for themselves and lament. They got alongside and they moved in with the Apostle Paul for a little while in Corinth. And the three of them together, beloved, saw the foundation and the birth of the Corinthian church.

You find them in Ephesus. You find them all over the place. And wherever you find them, beloved, they are practically, realistically engaged in what God is doing.

They were instrumental in seeing the church of Jesus Christ's birth. Again and again. Invariably, that's how the work of God begins.

God gifts a man, gives him a vision to get stuck in. And not very long after, God will begin to add to him other men. And if he doesn't anticipate or hasn't got a heart, beloved, to share what God has entrusted to him, it won't be very long before he faces problems and difficulties.

He gives us men, praise God. They're no better than anyone else. So often one elevates the leadership or the eldership.

The pastor is on a pedestal. You treat him differently. I've faced this sort of thing, beloved, as I've travelled around the world where they seek to elevate you because your face is white and because they think that you're some superior person.

They will provide you with a special table, a special chair, special glass, a special knife, fork and spoon and a special china plate when everyone else has a tin mug and a tin plate and they sit on the floor. It took me three years, beloved, to convince a group of men in Darjeeling that I did not want to be treated any differently from anyone else. There's a glorious equality in Christ.

And because God gifts someone in a particular way, it doesn't make them superior. Amen. Apostles weren't superior people.

Listen to the Apostle Paul. Sort out whether you want to be an apostle or not. Literally, apostle is simply a sent one.

Modern word, missionary, I suppose. A sent one. That's one of the definitions of an apostle.

Go back into 1 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 9. For I think that God has set forth us, the apostles, last, as it were appointed to death. For we are made a spectacle or a theatre unto the world and to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but you are strong. You are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place.

And labour, working with our own hands, being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we suffer. Being defamed, we entreat.

We are made as the filth of the world and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. Do you want to be an apostle, beloved? People sometimes say, refer to me as an apostle. I said, well, I don't mind you call me apostle if you read 1 Corinthians chapter 4. I don't want to be any other bracket.

It's not the pinnacle. Glory be to God. A man becomes a gift to God's church, invested with particular abilities that will enable him to fulfil a particular role.

No one man, beloved, in the church can do everything. It's quite obvious to that. Ron and I are different as chalk and cheese.

But we're brothers. We enjoy inequality. We love and respect and revere each other.

There's no problem because we're one in Christ. That's wonderful. We don't have to be competitors.

We don't have to try and be what someone else is. If you do that, beloved, you forfeit that unique and most glorious thing that God is wanting to do through you or through me. You try to be someone else.

You try to wait somewhere else. Beloved, you forfeit that. And you deprive not only yourself, you deprive the whole body of Christ.

That's why it's so important that every one of us realises and looks to the Lord to enable us to make that contribution, not only when we're gathered together in worship, but to make that contribution in His church as He's going to bless our brethren. God gives you something and you don't give it, beloved. Essentially, you deprive the rest of your brethren.

The amazing thing is that God is very understanding and patient with us and will, if we don't budge here, prompt someone else. Amen. So we don't lose out in the long run.

But the person who fails, beloved, quenches God's Spirit. Back into Ephesians chapter 4 and we go a stage further where the gift is not so apparent but it's here. Verse 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth according to the effectual working in the measure of every part maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Listen to this. The whole body. Every joint.

Every part. Wonderful verse. God gives us to each other.

Amen. That's why you're living with the person that you're living with. That's why you have to work alongside the person that you work alongside with.

Whether they're the Lord's or whether they're not, beloved, they're there for your good. Once you've settled that, beloved, you suddenly find that you've got no enemies. They may not like you but that's their problem.

They've got to sort that out with God. But God brings you a place, beloved, where you can live and work and function with anyone, anywhere. You cease to be judgmental or critical but you get on and do what God has given to you to do.

And it won't be very long, beloved, before the person who you find so difficult sitting next to you will begin to want to know what makes you tick. No use beating him over the head with the Bible. That will make them retaliate even more.

But you just be Jesus, Tom, in your workplace and allow him to function through you in that way. Every part. The whole body.

Every joint. Lovely illustration. It's the illustration that the apostle Paul uses more frequently than any other when he's talking about the church.

Has a diversity of illustrations. They're wonderful. Talks about it as a building.

Not a building made with bricks and mortar, of course. Because God doesn't live in buildings made with bricks and mortar. Peter goes on to say that we are spiritual.

A spiritual house. Talks about the church as his body. Talks about the church as his bride.

Talks about the church as a family. Many, many illustrations that all complement our understanding of what the church is. But every one of us, beloved, is like a cell within the body.

And every cell has a responsibility to minister the other cells. You should read a book by a man called Dr. Paul Brand, who's probably the world's most outstanding leprologist. And because of my particular interest in that realm of work over the years, I've become familiar not only, I'd never met him personally, but with his writings.

He wrote a book called *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*. Before he was a surgeon, he was a carpenter and a builder. Amen.

He thought that that's what he was called to do. But then God prompted him and told him he was to be a doctor. All his knowledge in building and all his knowledge as a physician, beloved, has given him tremendous insight related to the natural illustration of the body of Christ.

He illuminates truths in a way that I've scarcely read anywhere else. *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*. It's just one of a number of books that he has written over the years, often with the assistance of a man called Philip Yancey, to whom Paul Brand has been a tremendous blessing.

Philip Yancey came out of a strict Baptist background in Southern America, where he'd really sickened by it all and struggled over the years to find his place in God again. Dr. Paul Brand was one of those men who has had a vital and significant input into a man called Philip Yancey. I'm not necessarily dotting all his I's or crossing all his T's, but it's lovely to see how one man complements another.

One member of the body complements another. We are here, beloved, to minister to each other in the power of the Holy Ghost. As I say, there will be times, beloved, when you do that, when you're not even aware of doing it.

It becomes so much a part of your, I was going to say, natural life, that you're not even aware that it's happening. You're not winding yourself up to try and exercise some particular gift, some particular function, some particular ministry. You just are.

Going back to the whole concept of eldership, beloved. Elders are made in heaven. And a real elder is not looking for a name or a position or a reputation.

He's just getting on and doing what he knows God has invested in his heart. The church cannot recognise something that doesn't already exist. That's why election and voting, beloved, is out.

You follow the pattern of democracy in the church, beloved, you will end up by having the unregenerate vote and win against the regenerate. It makes a mockery of it. Of course, every church, beloved, has made up a whole conglomeration of people at different levels of understanding.

But elders are made in heaven. They are a gift to God's church. They're a member.

They're a cell within the body and have a function and a role to fulfil. Not to dominate. No one member must dominate another.

But each must complement each other. Like the cells within our own body. I've used this illustration before, I'm sure.

You've got one cell that malfunctions in your body. You've probably got the death knell hanging over your head. It's a very crude and layman's definition of an explanation for a cursed disease called cancer.

And I've experienced that within my own family. My youngest sister's youngest son, strong, able-bodied person, went to Sandhurst to train, to be an officer in the British Army. His grandfather had been the ambassador to Persia.

He was his sort of idol. His father was a minister. And within a week of being there, his legs wouldn't work.

All his friends thought he was just opting out because the training was too tough. But as I say, he was a great, strong rugby player sort of lad. Went home and for six months they tried to find out what was wrong with him.

They suggested this and this and this and this. Until one day, the consultant saw a little spot. There was a little spot on his neck and he said, son, let me look at that.

And having looked at it, he said, I want to do a biopsy on that. And having done a biopsy, he told the young man that he had a condition called T-cell lymphoma. It's a very, very rare form of cancer in this country.

He said, you've probably got a 50-50 chance of survival. He underwent radical treatment. He got better.

Involved in a 1,500-mile sponsored cycle ride for the Macmillan Nurses, that is a company of people who care for people suffering from terminal illness. Halfway round, developed tremendous pains in his chest, was rushed back to hospital, found that he'd grown a tumour right across his chest. Again, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, virtually disappeared.

That was in November. He was told to come back after Christmas and they would have another look at him. When he came back after Christmas, it was as bad as it was before.

He was told on his 21st birthday that he had three months at the most to live. In fact, he lived nine months. The explanation was one single cell in his body that wasn't functioning properly.

That tells me a lot about the body of Christ, about the function of the gifts of God's Spirit, how vital it is, beloved, that every single cell within the body of Christ, if you're born again and full of the Holy Ghost this morning, God is more than eager to invest in your life gifts that will make your life a complement to the rest of the body of Christ. And don't think, beloved, that you're nobody. Don't hide on the fact that you think that you've nothing to contribute, nothing to give.

You have. I want to tell you, beloved, you have. And if we were all to move and function as God intends us to function, amen, our meetings would literally take off.

You wouldn't need anyone. You know that lovely passage in the 14th chapter of 1 Corinthians, where we have a little cameo vision or look into an early church meeting in Corinth. It talks about when the whole

church become together.

Verse 23. If therefore the whole church become together into one place and all speak with tongues and there come in those that are unlearned and unbelievers, will they not say that you are mad? But if you prophesy and there come in one that believeth not or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all, and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest. And so falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is in you of a truth.

How is it then, brethren, when you come together, every one of you, there it is again, every one of you, hat. I think we have to ask ourselves this morning, what have we got? What have we got? Then he goes on. Every one hat, a psalm.

So you say, that's an easy one. All I have to do is remember one of the psalms. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not.

That's not yours, beloved. That was David's. He may give it to you under the inspiration of the Spirit.

You may choose the hymn in the meeting, beloved. Either you choose it because you like the tune or it's your number one pop or God has inspired you. You can kill a meeting, beloved, by choosing the wrong thing.

You have to be as sensitive about choosing a hymn as you do about prophesying a word. And our brother Mr North was here. He'd often, someone would ask for a particular hymn and he'd say, wait sister.

He wouldn't overlook them. He wouldn't forget that they'd asked for a particular hymn but he'd say, wait sister. Wait brother.

He wasn't dominating them. He was just sensitive to the way in which the Spirit of God was moving and he knew what was going to compliment that move of God's Spirit amongst us and what would quench the Spirit. Now don't get all locked away and all afraid now and you won't announce any hymn, you won't start any chorus.

Sometimes I wake up, beloved, and it's already singing in me. Amen. That's functioning in the gifts.

Have a psalm. Have a doctrine. Have a tongue.

Have a revelation. Have an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

What is a God? Don't feel sorry for yourself. Don't limit God to what you are. Paul says he takes those which are not to bring to naught the things that are that no flesh should glory in his presence.

And that's what the cross is all about, beloved, to bring us to a place of absolute reality where we face that we are not. We utterly disqualify and then he makes us what he intends us to be in himself. You can't be less than not for you believe him.

You trust him. You say to him, Lord, here am I. I want to be instrumental in your hands to the edification and that building of the body of Christ where I meet at this particular time. And I believe that if men and women begin to function like that, God will lead us on.

God will lead us on. We will grow. We will develop.

We will increase. Go back into Ephesians chapter 4 and we must stop here. The most wonderful gift is referred to down in verse 30.

Again, it's not explicit, it's implicit though where he says, Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. That's Paul's way of talking about the baptism of the Spirit. He only uses the word baptised in the Spirit in relating to the church.

He said we are all baptised by one Spirit into the body of Christ. When he talks about the baptism of the Spirit, invariably he uses this word sealed. You'll find it in the second chapter of the Ephesian epistle.

You'll find it in the first chapter of the second epistle to the Corinthians. You'll find it here. Sealed.

It's a wonderful picture again. The modern word for that would be signature. God says, I will write my name on you.

It's a statement of approval. It's a declaration that God approves of the finished work of the Lord Jesus in your life. It's also a guarantee, beloved, that what He has done, He will never take away.

Wonderful that is. If you're feeling down in the dumps, beloved, remember that. That what God gives, He never takes away.

I know it's in a different context, beloved, but it says the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. In other words, He doesn't go back on His word. We can quench, we can grieve the Spirit.

We can create a blockage, but we can't frighten Him away. The most classical example of that, beloved, in the Old Testament was Samson. He grieved God.

But in the moment of his death, beloved, he accomplished more than he did in all the other moments of his life. The Spirit of God hadn't quit. Amen.

And you and I live in a dispensation, an age, beloved, where the Spirit of God is not just a transient guest who comes and goes, but He's come to abide. And that is the gift, beloved, that makes all the other gifts function as God intends them to function within the body of Christ. We live in the Spirit.

We walk in the Spirit. It's our life. It's not just going to meetings.

I wouldn't care if I never went to another meeting. It's not just in our meetings. Again, beloved, it's living and believing the Spirit of God to so work in us and work His life out through us in those unique and particular ways that He invests in your life and my life and to be faithful to God.

Stop comparing ourselves with each other. Stop limiting God to what we feel that we are or we feel that we are not. And allowing God, the great gift and the great giver, so to invest our life with everything that is essential to life and godliness, to the edification and up-building of the body of Christ.

What phenomenal potential in this room alone if we all believed that God wanted us to live and function like that. Amen. Close our books and let's just pray.

Up us twelve. I understand that the queues at the dinner tent are very, very long. Amen.

For those who are very hungry, go and get in the queue first or you might have to wait an hour. So I'm told. Amen.

If you're not hungry, let your other brothers and sisters go before you. Amen. Father, we do thank You for the generosity and love of Your heart towards each one of us.

We thank You, Lord, for all that we so richly enjoy in the person of Your Son, the Lord Jesus. Teach us, Lord, how to stir up the gift that is in us and to move and function as You motivate us and lead us by Your Spirit because we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Again, may I remind you...

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