

1st Peter 4:7-11

“Category Two: The Verbal Gifts”

Introduction

One of my favorite stories concerns a young man who was working in a grocery store. A lady came in and asked for half a grapefruit. Thinking that request rather strange, the young man went to the back of the store and said to the manager, "There is some nut out front who wants to buy half a grapefruit." Just then he glanced over his shoulder and noticed that the lady had followed him to the back of the store, so he added immediately, "And this gracious lady is willing to buy the other half. I hope that is okay."

The manager was much impressed. Later he said to the young man, "You have a quick mind. You could have a great future in this business. By the way, where are you from?" The young man answered, "I am from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the home of ugly women and great hockey teams." With a distinct coolness the manager said, "My wife comes from Lancaster, Pennsylvania." The young man responded, "And what hockey team did she play on?"

The right words spoken at the right time can prove to be of critical importance. It's true for people caught in embarrassing situations. It is true for Presidents and presidential candidates. And it is especially true around the Church.

I suggested to you a couple of weeks ago that there are four somewhat loose categories of spiritual gifts. This morning we are going to look at the six spiritual gifts that I have grouped together under the rubric of “The Verbal Gifts.” It is Peter who I think first uses this category right here in verse eleven of our reading for this morning. We are going to expand that category and I am going to suggest to you that there are six spiritual gifts that are related to one another because they all employ the use of the right words spoken at the right time. All of the gifts of the Spirit are abilities or endowments given to twice born persons so that they can continue the work of Jesus and in so doing fulfill the plans and purposes of God. So they are concerned with what we do. But these six particular gifts are associated with speaking. Of course, they pertain to more than speaking but they involve verbal communication.

We’re going to look at as many of these gifts this morning as time permits and then we’re going to come back next week and finish. Without further ado, let’s dig in.

The first spiritual gift in what we are calling the Verbal Gift cluster is the gift of leadership. Fill in the blank on point number one with the word leadership so that the sentence reads this way:

1. Persons with the spiritual gift of leadership literally “stand before” a local church and speak words of guidance and direction.

In the Greek New Testament the word that is translated as leadership in the NIV is the word “proistamai.” The word literally means “to stand before” “or to stand over.” It carries the mental picture of a person

standing in front of or over an organization speaking words that provide guidance and direction.

In 1 Timothy 5:17 it is used with reference to a particular model of leadership for the church.

In you outline I have printed the Scriptural reference of Acts 15:22-23

Before I read the referenced passage, let me set it up for you. A disagreement has arisen within the Church, the first real disagreement that the Church experienced. One side in this argument believes that in order to be saved a person must agree to and try with all of their might to keep the Laws of Moses. The other side believes that we are not saved by anything that we do. We are only saved by grace and the way in which we appropriate that gift of grace for ourselves is through faith, through believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and that He died to purchase our salvation for us. This question caused some pretty spirited and sharp debate and the church was in danger of being split in two by the argument, so it was decided that they would have a conference at Jerusalem and representatives of both sides would be there and they would talk about it and discuss it and think about it and pray about it and bring the disagreement to a conclusion by deciding which side more accurately represented God's answer to the question. The meeting was held and the issue was decided in favor of those who said we are saved by grace and grace alone. They also decided to write a letter and send it around to all of the congregations of the Church so that everyone would know the results of their decision. And this is where our verse comes in. Read it with me.

“Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. With them they sent the following letter:...”

These two men, Judas and Silas are named as “proistamai” of the church. They are men who stood in front of the Jerusalem conference and their words helped the assembled group reach a decision. Their words helped the conference choose a direction or a course of action.

This gift is listed as a gift of the Spirit in Romans 12:8

“If it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” Romans 12:8

I found a story that really illustrates what leadership is all about. A young man named Matthew Henry went to London, met a young lady of the nobility, who was also wealthy, and they fell in love. She went to ask her father if she could marry him and he said, "He's got no background, you don't know where he's come from." She said, "Yes, I know, but I know where he's going and I want to go with him." ([Source Unknown](#))

Leaders know where the church ought to go and the Church wants to go with them.

Our second gift is the gift of “encouragement” or “exhortation.” Fill in the blank in the second sentence with the word encouragement so that the sentence reads:

2. Persons with the gift of encouragement stand beside other Christians and speak words that motivate, inspire and strengthen.

This gift is listed as a gift of the Spirit in the same passage as the previous gift, Romans 12:8

“If it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” Romans 12:8

The Greek word here translated as encouragement is the word “parakalein.” It is a compound word formed by joining “para” or “beside” with “kaleo” or “to call.” It literally means to stand beside and to call out to. It’s most easily understood usage is seen the mental picture of fans in the stands calling out to their team on the field words of encouragement in the struggle. People with this Spiritual gift have the ability to inspire, comfort, motivate, strengthen, affirm and be present with others so that they can meet life’s challenges with confidence. Encouragement is speaking comforting, and sometime confrontational words to person to motivate them to live according to God’s will

The prime example of a person with this gift is found in Acts 4:36. It contains the story of a man who was so identified with this spiritual gift that his name was “Barnabas which means “one who encourages.” In the story a financial crisis has erupted in the congregation in Jerusalem. And this man Barnabas being a person of some means sells a piece of property that he owns in Cyprus and brought the proceeds from the sale of the land

and gave it to the church to help those who were suffering because of the financial crisis. In this case, it was as much what he did and what he said that offered encouragement to the other Christians.

Acts 14:21-22 Paul exhorted them to continue in the faith

Luke 22:32 Peter was commissioned by Jesus to ‘strengthen’ his brothers and he did so (1 Peter 5:1-2)

Here’s an illustration of what encouragement looks like. A little boy said to his father: "Let's play darts. I'll throw and you say 'Wonderful!'"
Bits & Pieces, December 9, 1993, p. 24.

Here’s an illustration of both the power and the danger of encouragement. One morning I opened the door to get the newspaper and was surprised to see a strange little dog with our paper in his mouth. Delighted with this unexpected "delivery service," I fed him some treats. The following morning I was horrified to see the same dog sitting in front of our door, wagging his tail, surrounded by eight newspapers. I spent the rest of that morning returning the papers to their owners. *Marion Gilbert in Reminisce, Reader's Digest, February, 1994, p. 12.*

The third spiritual gift in these verbal gifts is the gift of “knowledge.”

3. Persons with the gift of knowledge have both head and heart knowledge of Jesus and share that knowledge through their speech.

This spiritual gift is listed as a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 12:8

“To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by the same Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:8

Knowledge or “gnosis” in New Testament Greek is the gift of a deep, personal relationship with Jesus and the ability to share the insights of that relationship with others. Person with this gift communicate much more than facts when they talk with others about Jesus. They give evidence to the fact that they know him in real and personal ways. This is heart knowledge in addition to head knowledge. The spiritual gift of knowledge may reveal itself in a contentment with study or with an especially enduring passion for the study of the Scriptures. The identification “word of knowledge” identifies this as a verbal or speaking gift or the speaking forth of this knowledge to others.

Paul may be the clearest example of a person gifted with knowledge in the New Testament “And he has made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ...” Ephesians 1:9ff

There's a story about a proud young man who came to Socrates asking for knowledge. He walked up to the muscular philosopher and said, "O great Socrates, I come to you for knowledge." Socrates recognized a pompous numbskull when he saw one. He led the young man through the streets, to the sea, and chest deep into water. Then he asked, "What do you want?" "Knowledge, O wise Socrates," said the young man with a smile. Socrates put his strong hands on the man's shoulders and pushed him under. Thirty seconds later Socrates let him up. "What do you want?" he asked again. "Wisdom," the young man sputtered, "O great and wise Socrates." Socrates crunched him under again. Thirty seconds passed, thirty-five. Forty. Socrates let him up. The man was gasping. "What do you want,

young man?" Between heavy, heaving breaths the fellow wheezed, "Knowledge, O wise and wonderful..." Socrates jammed him under again. Forty seconds passed. Fifty. "What do you want?" "Air!" the young man screeched. "I need air!" "When you want knowledge as you have just wanted air, then you will have knowledge." [M. Littleton, *Moody Monthly*, June 1989, p. 29.](#)

At a Monday evening prayer meeting, Charles Spurgeon suddenly interrupted his sermon, pointed in a certain direction, and said, "Young man, those gloves you are wearing have not been paid for; you have stolen them from your employer!" After the meeting a young man came to the vestry and begged to see Spurgeon. Pale and trembling, the young man confessed that he had stolen the gloves he was wearing! He promised never to steal again and begged Spurgeon not to expose him to his employer. [W. Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers*, Moody Press, 1984, p. 219](#)

Our fourth gift in this verbal cluster of gifts is the gift of "wisdom."

4. Persons with the gift of wisdom have the ability to apply the truths of scripture to practical situations and offer practical solutions.

This fourth gift is named in a listing of the gifts found in 1 Corinthians 12:8.

"To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by the same Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:8

Wisdom or “sophia” in New Testament Greek is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the preceding gift of knowledge. The difference between knowledge and wisdom while slight is significant. Knowledge assumes a certain degree of understanding. Wisdom is the use of or applying of that information to practical situations. These persons have mature, skilful judgment. Person with this gift see the ramifications of problems and then sift through possible alternatives to find solutions that are in accordance with God’s intentions. This spiritual gift combines insight, good judgment, perceptiveness, winsomeness, and diplomacy.

James 3:13 “Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.”

The fifth spiritual gift is the gift of administration.

5. Persons with the gift of administration have the ability to organize and mobilize people to work together for a common cause.

Our study material calls this gift “Visionary and Managing leadership.” In the New Testament the name of this gift is “kubernesis.” The word originally referred to the work of a pilot or helmsman of a ship.—One who knew the way, the winds, the shoals, and one who could be trusted to take others safely to their destination. This gift includes the ability to handle details, and involves directing, governing, guiding and setting a course.

This gift has a take charge quality to it. But they are not dictators. They are strong leaders who mobilize people to work together for a common cause.

Story of Sunday school in disarray. Literature wasn't getting ordered on time, information about which classes met where wasn't getting disseminated to the congregation, some rooms were too big for the classes that met in them and some rooms were too small for the classes that met in them.

It is included in the listing of gifts found in 1 Corinthians 12:28

“And in the church God has appointed first of all apostle, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having the gift of healing, those able to help others, those with the gift of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” 1 Corinthians 12:28

Our last spiritual gift in this verbal gift cluster is the gift of discernment.

6. Persons with the gift of discernment have the ability to distinguish true from false teaching, good from evil intentions and right from wrong actions.

Discernment (“diakrisis pneumaton” or literally sifting spirits.

In the 1st Century Church there were all of these teachers and preachers who traveled around teaching and preaching to congregations that didn't know them from Adam. Some of those teachers and preachers were motivated by pure and sincere motives to preach the gospel and to teach

others about Jesus. Some of them were motivated by less pure motives. They just wanted to be thought of as knowledgeable people who were to be respected, some of them wanted to use their position as teachers and preachers for their own gain or enjoyment.

Persons gifted with the spiritual gift of discernment were able to sift the spirits of those traveling teachers and preachers and distinguish true from false teaching, good from evil intentions and right from wrong actions. These people are the immune system of the church. They are designed to protect it from false teachers.

This gift is listed as a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 12:10

“To another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.” 1 Corinthians 12:10

Peter exhibits this gift in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

Paul exhibits it in the story of the demon possessed girl in Acts 16:16-18.

It never ceases to amaze me how periodically someone joins the church thinking with great naivete that he or she has now left the imperfect, money-grubbing, power-hungry secular world and entered some holy, monastic community where everyone is good and kind and loving and no one ever gossips or spreads rumors or disagrees on any subject. When this happens, I usually watch to see how long it takes before this person's whole idyllic image of the church comes tumbling down like the proverbial deck of cards.

Usually, all it takes is serving on one committee or doing one job for the church. Whatever it is, sooner or later it happens. And then I watch what comes next: either total loss of enthusiasm and withdrawal, maybe a little sabbatical to regroup and re-evaluate or more church hopping, ever in search of that ever elusive, "perfect" church or, with some, it's complete abandonment and a return back into the more predictable secular world.

Conclusion

Two men were traveling by light airplane to a business meeting in Alaska. Somewhere over the tundra the plane's motor failed and they were forced down. When they returned home each wrote an article for his favorite magazine about the resulting crisis. One was an avid outdoorsman and his article was titled, "Survival In The Frozen North." The other was very religious and his article was titled, "How Prayer Saved Me From The Wild Wolf Pack." The stories were about the same incident. The authors were different, and so was the audience for whom each wrote.

Both men spoke words but their words were directed to different audiences and had very different effects.