

Spiritual Gifts - Obstacles to using Gifts - a study for the Gulf Coast Baptist Church Bible Institute for the Winter session 2020-21 by Steve Thomas

Introduction By their very title Spiritual Gifts must be used by the Spiritual Believer. Carnality is an obvious obstacle to using spiritual gifts, walking in the Spirit, the believer putting himself at the disposal of the Spirit and keeping in step, following the leading of the Spirit, will make exercising his gift a natural occurrence. But the scriptures discuss three other hindrances to the use of the Gifts. Believers suffering persecution under Nero allowed fear to keep them from using their Gifts. Timothy allowed shame to hinder him from using his gifts fully. The Corinthians used their gifts but without *agape* love, and it kept their gifts from being effective.

Peter's admonition to the persecuted saints

In the fourth chapter of Peter's first epistle, he has to tell the believers several things. They were surprised with the level of trials they were having to endure, as if this was not to be expected in the Christian life (4:12). He uses the imperative telling the believers to "stop thinking it strange..." The greek construction here informs that they were "actively involved" in considering their treatment to be a strange and abnormal thing. It had caused them to cease ministering their gifts to one another. In verses 7-10 he reminds them to be good stewards of "the grace of God". Remember the greek word for gift is *charisma* and grace is *charis*. These words are so close that they could almost be used interchangeably. The believers were "graced" with gifts. They were "gifted" with grace. The people here that Peter is dealing with had ceased using their gifts, and were guilty of being poor managers of God's property.

Consider some of the specifics that are mentioned here. Peter recommends "fervent charity" (vs 8). This is *agape* love. He asks them to use ungrudging hospitality, referring to the gift of giving (vs 9). The gift of ministering (Deacon) is mentioned specifically in verse 10.

Peter reminds them at the outset of the letter that the persecution they were facing was part of God's plan. Their scattering was according to the foreknowledge of God. These believers were to continue to use their gifts towards one another, even in the midst of persecution.

Paul's admonition to timid Timothy

Timothy had been sent to Ephesus to stand against the false teachers that had sprung up in the church there (1 Tim 1:3-4). This was the group that by the end of the first century had left their first love (Revelation 2:4). In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he had to encourage Timothy to "man up". Timothy had become ashamed of Paul and of his imprisonment. The greek word for ashamed is used 11 times in the New Testament, and it is used three times in this second chapter of 2 Timothy. Paul asks Timothy to not be "ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" (verse 8). He uses the term again to describe his own lack of shame of his own suffering (verse 12). And again he uses the term to describe his fellow slave Onesimus (of Philemon fame), who was not ashamed of Paul's chains (verse 16). Paul deals with this directly in verse 7 by stating that God is not the source of this spirit of timidity or cowardice. The word used here is not the normal word for fear *phobos*, but one that involves the mind (John 14:27) and emotions, causing the individual to stop from performing their duties (Matt 8:26).

It seems that Timothy had shrunk from using his spiritual gifts (Timothy had three - Apostle, Pastor/Teacher, and Evangelist), withering under the opposition that had sprung up in his church there in Ephesus. Paul admonishes Timothy to "stir up" the gift within him that Paul had recognized with his own

laying on of hands. The Laying on of hands is not a mystical giving of the gift through actual touching but a recognition of one individual that God has blessed them with gifts, and that person pointing it out, putting the other individual into service using the God-given gift. Timothy needed to stir up his gift as embers in a dying campfire. Shame had caused Timothy to stop using his gift, and Paul sought to reverse this trend.

Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians

Paul admonishes the Corinthians in chapter 13 of his first letter to them. The lack of love hinders the use of Spiritual Gifts. The believers at Corinth were performing acts of labor tied to their gifts, but they were not accomplishing anything. Remember that *Agape* love is only possible when one is spiritual. Consider the notes on Labor and Work, and notice how *agape* love is linked inexorably to both.

Willam Barclay in his book *More New Testament Words* had this to say about agape love :

“[Agape] has to do with the mind: it is not simply an emotion which rises unbidden in our hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live; (it) has supremely to do with the will. It is a conquest, a victory, an achievement; sacrificial.”

When the believer attempts to operate outside of this Fruit of the Spirit, nothing lasting or effectual is produced. Consider Paul's language in chapter 13. He uses the terms “sounding brass” or a “tinkling cymbal”. The word for sounding is echoing or reverberating, used of the sound of a roaring sea. The word for tinkling is one that we might say - a clang. He goes on to use the word “nothing” in verses two and three to show the effects of operating without love. There was a lot of religious activity in the Corinthian church, but not much of it was effectual, coming from the flesh of the operatives, instead of the Spirit-filled activity that was coming from hearts of love. The love of Christ needs to be at the core of all the labor/work that the believer does. There is a saying that I heard growing up: “**Only one life,** ’twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.” With this chapter in mind, I would amend this quote by C.T. Studd to say, Only one life, ’twill soon be past, only what's done by Christ will last. It is the Character of Christ, the Fruit of the Spirit, that will cause us to turn from our religious works of the flesh to seeking the Desirous will of God, doing the works he has called us to do, in the Love that he has provided.

Conclusion

The believer can be hindered from operating his gifts by fear, shame, or a lack of love for fellow believers. Hundreds and Thousands of believers are not exercising their gifts towards the Body because of fear of persecution. Perhaps it is their pride, causing them to be ashamed of fellow believers. The carnal lack of love can cause a believer to be paralyzed in the local assembly. This has led to the sad state of affairs in today's churches. Only the humble, loving, spiritual believer will stir up the gift within himself, and become a better manager of God's property.

How Work and Labor are connected to

Agape Love

Agape Love is necessary to use one's spiritual gift.

1. Agape love is the source of all labour performed by saints. 1st Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10; 1st Co. 15:58
2. Labour and works are two words linked regarding ministry conducted to the saints.
 - a) "Work" which is "ergon" in the Greek -- ***a task accomplished by the saint in the carrying out of his role in God's plan and purposes.*** -- K.D. J. cf. 1st Tim. 5:10 (reflected in widow candidates)
 - (1) "Work" is used in a general sense of all the things the believer does while on earth. Tit. 3:1 (seen as related to the world)
 - (2) "Works" are tied to spiritual gifts. cf. 1st Tim. 3:1; 1st Thess. 5:13 (of the pastor teacher gift); 2 Tim. 4:5 (evangelist); Heb. 6:10 (seen in service to the saints which would be inclusive of all spiritual gifts -- cf. 1st Pet. 4:10)
 - (3) Work is a natural result of faith -- it is what's produced in a believer who is yielded to the Holy Spirit. cf. 1st Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10; 2 Thess. 1:11
 - b) "Labour" is from the Greek word "kopos" and ***extends work to the point of exhaustion in providing for the needs of the saints, absent of concern for one's own well-being.*** -- K.D.J. cf. 1st Thess. 2:9 (Paul's example with the Thessalonians); Phil. 2:25-30 (Epaphroditus towards "the Christ")
 - (1) Kopos occurs 19 times in the New Testament (14 times in the epistles).
 - (2) Kopos is tied to genuine works cf. 1st Co. 3:8, 14-15
 - (3) Kopos includes doing indirect things for the sake of aiding the saints. 2 Thess. 3:8 (of Paul working to not burden the saints)
 - (4) Agape love fuels labour. 1st Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10