



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network

SPIRITUAL GUIDELINES (9)

Gifts from the Holy Spirit

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March 2014

Christianity was birthed at Pentecost when God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to give much needed help to strengthen and support believers who were responding to the mission given them by Jesus while he was with them on earth. All these aids are available to us today to build up the Body of Christ.

The intention in this paper is to give an overview of all the Gifts.

The New Testament gives four different lists of what are commonly known as 'Gifts of the Spirit'.

- ◆ *The Nine listed in **1 Corinthians 12** are Manifestations which occur when they are needed and come through any believer rather than as gifts which can be individually owned.*
- ◆ *The Seven listed in **Romans 12** are Natural talents which can become Spiritual Gifts if handled rightly.*
- ◆ *The Five Roles or Ministries in **Ephesians 4** can both sustain and help believers to grow and exercise their ministries within the body.*
- ◆ *The two Methods (speaking and serving) in **1 Peter 4** relate to all the gifts.*

In these Guidelines we have already looked at the Spiritual Manifestations which are still a new phenomenon with many and in recent years their use has been expanded - sometimes rather inappropriately and so they needed some detailed explanation.

Romans 12 Natural Gifts

The Natural Gifts although they are much more understandable, also need to be unpacked. I was brought up to believe and accept these gifts as the basis of both the church and a good society - the accepted view for many centuries. In most societies they are still valued today - but the Giver is often forgotten.

The Christian can easily be misled if the Natural Gifts are not studied in the context of the whole passage. Just because you have a natural gift does not mean that it will necessarily be of value to the growth of the church! They are all gifts we can see in others in secular society around us - and they can be exercised in many walks of life. They have obviously been gifts which have been given to us by God and we should always give thanks to him for them. But the Natural Gifts can be exercised without any reference to God.

Natural becoming Spiritual

These gifts are the most difficult to convert into spiritual gifts. This requires a change of mindset. Paul tells us **'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourselves with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.'** He then goes on to list nine gifts all with a corollary on the way in which they are to be used, starting with **'in proportion to faith'**.

Why should this be so difficult? Unfortunately too often when we find something easy we can take it for granted and even begin to think that we have achieved it all in our own strength. Young people today are encouraged to blow their own trumpets. Those who have no faith also have these gifts - but many times they are exercised for personal gain and not for the enrichment of others - or they can be exercised badly or for the wrong motives.

End Purpose

Verse 2 of this passage also warns us '**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**' or as J B Phillips graphically translates this verse '**Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity**'.

Too many times Christians have allowed themselves to be persuaded to adopt the values of the world and to use this as their yardstick. They should really be acting as transforming agents to encourage the world to accept and confirm Biblical values. This is not an easy task as it is never finished - God has no grandchildren and so the warnings need to be repeated with each generation ensuring that they embrace the faith, the principles and the values. The structures may change and be adapted to have relevance in today's world and the current situation - but the Christian presence will continue in God's way.

Need for Others

It is not expected that all believers will have all the gifts - this is where the body comes in. We need each other and we belong to each other and as the gifts are given for the building up of the Body they cannot be used in isolation from others. A single stick on its own can be easily broken but many sticks bound together are much more difficult to break - and a bundle can also have a much greater effect. The body is built up so that it can go beyond itself and be a witness in the neighbourhood or social group - and in the world. It should be a witness to God's love and desire that all will come to know him and honour and serve him.

Small groups are helpful in discovering and affirming the gifts. In these not only can the Scriptures be studied together so that all can contribute to a common understanding, but also they are the place to affirm and support each other by using them with each other and working together in outreach to those with whom we are in touch. There is a strength and solidarity which is not there for an individual on his or her own. Remember too that if other members of your group cannot recognise the gift God has given you (without you telling them!), you may be 'thinking too highly of yourself' and may need to think again on how you are using the gifts God has given you.

Resolving some Queries

We will look further at the Natural Gifts later in this series but finally just a word on numbers. It is unlikely that the Gifts listed in the New Testament are the only ones available. As an example, martyrdom and self-sacrifice figured largely in the early church as a Gift of God enabling many to come through victoriously - and there are many who have the gift of music who use it in the Lord's service.

But in these four lists there is not really repetition as some would imagine. Prophecy appears in three of the four lists - and each has a different emphasis. The Manifestation of Prophecy is the prophetic word given by God to an individual for a specific situation; the Natural gift of Prophecy is the perception of the relevance of Biblical texts so that they can be proclaimed with understanding to others and since the coming of Christ, the church became the prophet to the world so the role of prophet now is to alert and guide the church to carry out its prophetic task in the nation and to ensure that it does not deviate from scripture.

More next time - but we hope that this will stimulate your thinking - and please do let us know the thoughts that you or your group may have that could help other members of the Body of Christ.

Always bear in mind that the Gifts are given to build up the Body - not to divide it.

*This paper come to you as part of the Issachar Ministries Resourcing for Prayer e-mail in March 2014
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