

Bible Basics Conference 2007: Things God has prepared for us

Part 3

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[00:00:01] Well, good morning to you all. I'm sure David will be very pleased that it is just good morning and not good afternoon. The subject that we've got before us this morning is that of gifts. Source, use, opportunities and dangers. Obviously, we need to be clear as to what we're talking about. The gifts are special abilities given by Christ. Something extra that Christ has given members of his body to help the members of his body to carry out his work, the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously, divine power. Divine power, energized by the Holy Spirit which acts upon our souls. That spiritual gifts are more than just our [00:01:07] natural abilities and we'll develop that point as we go on. Their source, Christ is the source of these gifts. That Ephesians 4 tells us that as a victorious risen ascended saviour, that he's conquered Satan at the cross, he's led the enemy captive, he loves the church, he loves each and every member of his body. He desires the very best for us and to help us, he has given members of his body gifts so that we can help each other. That he cares for every member of his body. And that, as again we'll see developed later, that these [00:02:07] gifts are given so that souls might be saved. That people might be saved from the power of Satan and brought into a knowledge of the love of God. And that God's people, that through these gifts, by these gifts, that we all should be edified and nourished and perfected because that will bring glory to our Lord Jesus Christ. The origin of gifts, they're given by Christ from heaven itself. The gifts that we are blessed with, that he is giving us, come from heaven. They're heavenly. They are of another order of being than anything that might be found here upon this earth. The gifts are given according to his sovereign [00:03:06] will. Christ gives them, the Holy Spirit distributes them and they are given according to his will.

We cannot, we cannot definitely say that we want this gift. We can't go to the corner shop or Tesco's and say we'll have a bit of this and a bit of that. Christ gives them to the members of his body as he wants to and he decides and he gives them. And of course all is by grace. We don't deserve, we don't deserve anything that the Lord will give us.

But by grace he gives us, to help us, to nourish us, to edify us, that we don't deserve anything from

the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ. But his overarching desire is that these gifts [00:04:08] are given so that we can support and help and encourage each other. I've written down the examples of gifts that we've got in the three main places in the New Testament. You might like to cast your eyes over those gifts and see the different character and some examples that are clearly marked out here for us. A little easy question for you is to see if you can spot any that are mentioned in all three passages. You'll see obviously some that aren't. And one of the points that we'll make again is that it would be impossible to categorise every single gift. There are many, many different gifts that the Lord gives [00:05:03] to his assembly. With different perhaps strengths, different characterisations, different for use in different fields and in different places. But here you can see a general categorisation of the gifts that are mentioned in three places in the scriptures. It's perhaps worth mentioning that in Ephesians 4, the right hand column there, it particularly talks about people as being gifts. Where in the other two scriptures we're talking more about the gifts themselves.

So what might be the purpose of the gifts that Christ has given to us? You see again from Ephesians 4 that perhaps the primary purpose is for perfecting the saints. Perfecting [00:06:03] the saints. Now clearly we would think in our earthly capacity what a most difficult job that would be, to perfect the saints. But these gifts are given so that saints might be perfected. So that we might be in a position, a place, a standing in a state which is perfect and that we're able to use them for the glory of Christ. For the work of the ministry. Gifts are obviously given so that we can be helped but so that the saints can be ministered to.

So that where we need help, where we need direction, where we might need reproof and discipline, that gifts are given so that they will help that work of the ministry. That [00:07:05] Christ would like the body to be edified. Now the edification obviously means building up of the body. That the body might be strengthened. That it might be helped, improved, that it might be stronger. And Christ's purpose would be that the body of Christ, the members of the body of Christ might be edified. We have, we saw the gift of an evangelist in the last list. That clearly there are those that have been given that special gift. The gift of being an evangelist. One who can bring souls to our Lord Jesus Christ. That doesn't negate the fact that we're all told to tell others of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. That we are all in a position of praying and looking for opportunities to tell others of the Lord [00:08:07] Jesus and we should have that forever before us. But we would all agree that there are some special people that have got that particular gift of being the evangelist. We can see that when souls are saved. When the Holy Spirit is at work convicting men of their sin and their need of a saviour. That these gifts are given, their purpose is not intended to serve the world. It's not intended for the world as such. Those that are not Christians. It is intended to serve Christ. And there I think we need to pay particular attention.

If we emphasize that point, that those that have gifts, that the purpose of those gifts [00:09:02] is to glorify and serve Christ. So often we might find and think we can discern that gifts are used for the boasting and puffing up of members of the body of Christ. For bringing attention to the gifts themselves. But how important it is that we remember that these gifts are given with the purpose of serving Christ. That if we have a gift, our purpose in using them should be to serve the Lord Jesus. Not to bring attention to ourselves, but to serve him. So that the result is that God is glorified. And that would be another test for us. Is that when people might make claim of using gifts and developing those gifts, do those gifts result in bringing glory to God? That they're for profit, not for display.

[00:10:04] So often again we see around and hear around about us, where there is great emphasis laid upon those gifts of a seeming miraculous nature that we don't commonly find in the ordinary things of

this world. But surely we need to be reminded of the fact that these gifts are for profit. They're supposed to profit those that hear, those that are involved.

So when we come to the use and the working of these gifts, how important it is that we pay particular attention to the ministering of those gifts must flow from Christ alone.

That if we look into the organisations of the church and different groups of Christians, [00:11:01] we can see that often there is some sort of intermediary process or even a blockage that prevents the working of the gifts in the midst of Christians. That there is a direct link from Christ, who gives those gifts, distributed by the Holy Spirit to the members of the body of Christ. We know that as human beings, as being still prone to sin and error, that if anything gets in the way of the working of the Holy Spirit, then the true benefit, the full benefit of that working will not be found. It is the Holy Spirit that gives the energy and how we do need for the full working of the Holy Spirit to be found in our midst amongst Christians today. That the Holy Spirit must be given that full sway. [00:12:05] That again, as we see the working of these gifts, we can ask ourselves our question, what is the motive for the use of those gifts? Love for the fellow saints. Is it intended? Is it worked in such a way? Is it used with such emphasis for love for fellow saints?

For their benefit, for their encouragement, for their help, to support them, to show them more of the Lord Jesus Christ, to help them understand more of what the scriptures contain. And that Christ continues to give these gifts and will continue, Ephesians 4 tells us, until we all come in the unity of the faith. If we perhaps contrast for a moment, I think it's a diagram that perhaps we can think about throughout a number of these talks. [00:13:06] We've perhaps been based in organizations and if we think of perhaps what would be considered some of the best organized companies, businesses, schools, whatever they might be in this world, there would be a hierarchical mode of organization. Now for many business and other organizations that are found, this type of organization works well. The boss is at the top, he gives his orders and commands to people underneath him, they pass down those orders to other people and then the poor workers perhaps in the shop floor or otherwise, they have got to do as they're told and carry out what the dictates are from above. You can see the little diagram there with somebody definitely on the top. We would like to have somebody who we can look up to, somebody who's our boss, sometimes we don't like doing what the [00:14:03] boss says, but many times we do. We want to be organized, we want to have a Prime Minister, we want to have a cabinet and this is the typical organization that's found in this world. Why is it so? Well I'm sure there are many reasons as to why this is usually followed, but one of the reasons is because the man at the top, the managers so to speak, they haven't got the capacity, they haven't got the ability to be able to control and organize more than a few people that might be underneath them. In these huge companies as we drove here and passed the east side of London there with the huge towers of the great big banks, organizations that are controlling tens of thousands of people across the world, how can one boss hope to control and organize everybody in his organization? So if we think [00:15:08] about the church, the assembly, they're made up of individuals throughout this world of many languages, tribes, tongues and nations. The Holy Spirit distributes as he will and the Holy Spirit, because obviously he is God, he is omnipotent, he is omnipresent, he is omniscient, he can control individuals as he will. There's no need for any intermediary, there's no need for it to take months for a dictate to pass from the top ranks of an organization to the very bottom, because the Holy Spirit can work directly in each one of our hearts. Now that is a most marvelous thing, it is an incredible thing, because [00:16:07] you and I have, as we know we have direct access to God, but the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts and the Holy Spirit we can allow to fill us and the Holy Spirit should and can and wants to direct us and he can direct us to our doorsteps so to speak. He can tell us what we have to do and

how important it is that we recognize that fact, that we accept that fact, that we obey that fact, that the Holy Spirit, God himself, can speak to us, he can use us and does use us and he uses us for his distinct and direct purpose. So if we look a little bit at the work of the Holy Spirit, we can perhaps, I often like [00:17:02] to look for types in the Old Testament because it helps my simple mind, perhaps to get a simpler appreciation of what the truth is being conveyed. So we've spoke of the Holy Spirit distributing these gifts, making them effective, his direct work in us. And we can liken it to Abraham as old, we've already been directed to Abraham. But as Abraham was looking for a wife for his son Isaac, that Abraham, he owned the goods and he gave the goods to Eliezer, his servant. And Eliezer, speaking of the Holy Spirit, he went in search of that wife for Isaac and obviously found Rebekah. And he takes the gifts to Rebekah and he opens up his storehouse of gifts and he gives them to Rebekah, the picture of the [00:18:04] church, the wife for Isaac. So we have there that simple picture of the Holy Spirit going out and giving to the church those gifts from God himself. Now, we can, there's obviously many, some different ways in which we can categorize those gifts. Simple categorization is to think of just two types. The first one, where we have the gifts that are there for awakening souls, for impressing upon individuals their need of the Savior. And those also that would bring in and gather in those into the church. The church comprised of all those that belong to our Lord Jesus Christ. Then Edwin, apologies, he's going to talk to us [00:19:03] later over particularly the sign gifts. The sign gifts that are there to indicate the presence of God in the church that show that God is indeed acting to this world. And we said before that it's unlikely that two gifts are ever the same, exactly the same. That there are many different variations of those gifts. So in Ephesians 4, we have that the people are the gifts. That that chapter looks at only those gifts which gather and edify the church, the first category that we've looked at. That these gifts will remain because these gifts Christ has given so that the church might be encouraged and nourished and helped.

[00:20:04] It's inconceivable, isn't it? That the Lord Jesus would leave us here without gifts for himself to help us in these areas of encouragement, edification, etc. If we look down at 1 Corinthians 12. Now 1 Corinthians 12 would discuss both kinds of gifts. That we look at wisdom, knowledge and faith, how we need those three things. Wisdom, knowledge and faith. That the Holy Spirit there, we're taught, is energizing and distributing them to those as he wills.

And also in 1 Corinthians 12, it shows us, indicates to us how we can distinguish between divine gifts and those of demons. Because we know that Satan is an angel of light and [00:21:04] will always seek to counterfeit, to always mirror what the Lord Jesus is doing. In 1 Peter chapter 4, we have an indication there of that all was done coming from God. So that God might be glorified. That if the saints were to honestly wait on God, there would be more gift. Emphasize that a little bit later. And that those who have gifts, that we should serve by the ability that God has given us. Now perhaps just a few moments to sidetrack on what is clearly a very important point. That when we look at the scriptures, [00:22:02] the scripture tells us quite plainly that all Christians are priests. That there's not an extra special category of Christians, sometimes they might not even be Christians as so called in other areas. But that all Christians are priests. That as priests, we should praise, worship, and thank God. And that all priests should serve God. That is the joy, but the responsibility of us all. To praise, worship, and thank God. Now can we perhaps just consider and think for a moment of how it must grieve God himself. When supposedly, perhaps particularly on a Lord's day, that if we had that ability to see what was going on in many places where [00:23:02] Christians were meeting together. And we would see that in many places, that the opportunity for priests to carry out their God given service is completely denied. That there is no opportunity for those to audibly, and perhaps even silently sometimes, to praise and worship God. That God wants this from his people, perhaps above all things. That there is that opportunity for a brother here and there to stand up and simply give thanks

and praise and worship him. But in many places, we would have to agree that that's denied. So priests is an area, as we're all priests, we each are given that opportunity, or should be.

[00:24:01] If we look at the work of ministry of these gifts, then only a few are ministers. That ministry should be performed by those with gifts given by Christ. Now of course we're moving into areas where there is a weakness, certainly a weakness amongst us, a weakness in the church of God. That those who are to be used by the Holy Spirit should not be chosen by men. Again, we need to think about this for a moment. I've put lately there, as you can see, those who have not been to college. How incredible it is that the church, the members of the body of Christ, that we copy the same sort of organisational system that's found in the world, and that we follow the same, perhaps we can call it training pathways, that we find in this world. That many groups of Christians would feel that only those people [00:25:02] who have been to a theological college, who've been on special courses, would be able to use gifts. That would even be able to be heard in an assembly of his people. That most clearly is not found in the scriptures. That the Holy Spirit is active choosing whom he will for the roles and the gifts that he will. That the Holy Spirit wants to have that sway amongst his own people. That men shouldn't be the ones to choose who is going to do this and that. That training would be given, and the gift would be given by the Holy Spirit himself. That gift is more than just a natural ability. I'm sure if we were to look amongst ourselves here, then we would all have natural abilities. We would all have some things that [00:26:07] we were naturally good at. We have that parable, don't we, where the Lord gives out the talents. That some he gave one, some he gave five, and some he gave ten to. That there are people here in our midst, and we look at them and think, what natural abilities they have. How clever they are. How able they are to do this, that, and the other. But when the Lord gives out these gifts, then he clearly takes into account the natural abilities that people have been given. But natural ability alone doesn't make one a minister of God's word.

There must be a positive bestowal of a gift from Christ. That the Holy Spirit picks out, and sometimes undoubtedly he picks out the most incredible, the ones that we wouldn't [00:27:07] think of at all, to actually use that gift from himself. What a wonderful thing it is that we might be bereft of natural abilities. That we might be particularly weak in an area. But the Holy Spirit gives a gift to that person so that he can be glorified and the saints can be edified. So a principle scripture seems to be that we might, might not possess a natural ability. That clearly in itself is given by God. He distributes the talents. That the gift is given by the Lord to one another as he wills to be used only under his direction. And that the person who is given that gift has to be diligent. They have [00:28:01] to use that gift. They should use it again for the glory of God. We can think of two examples amongst millions really. Paul. If we think of the natural ability that he must have had studying under Gamaliel to understand the deep theological issues. But he was given gifts. He could speak in tongues more than any of them. And we think of Peter. If we were going to choose twelve disciples, how many of the twelve that were chosen by the Lord would we have chosen looking at them? A simple fisherman fishing on the sea of Galilee. But the Lord chooses. And the Lord is sovereign in this area. So there are a number of dangers that we clearly must be aware of. Some are unfortunately all too obvious. That we might [00:29:01] be given a gift. But that gift doesn't prevent us and doesn't stop us being influenced by our sinful nature. That flesh that's inside us. If we've been given a gift and that gift is used for the help of many, how easy it would be to be proud and boastful and to be lifted up. The gift itself doesn't prevent or prevent the working of our sinful nature.

That the gifts can cause Christians to be boastful. The gifts themselves don't make us spiritual. Don't make us listening to what the Lord would have us to do. Directing us.

Giving us an understanding of the scriptures themselves. The gift might be helps to do this and to do that for the saints. The gift doesn't make us spiritual. That it's quite [00:30:03] easy for Christians to lose their balance. That to become lopsided Christians, if we can use such a phrase. To be overemphasizing this or neglecting completely an area of other things. And unfortunately as we know all too well, these gifts can positively bring discredit on the name of Christ in the way in which they are used. So some serious dangers that we need to be aware of. Now why do we think perhaps that we might not see the evidence of gifts in the Christian church today? Well again the reasons are fairly straightforward and obvious. And we need to look at these reasons don't we? Each one of us. And see why then? Why is it that we don't see the Holy Spirit acting in a way in which we would [00:31:02] all like? The first reason is that we ourselves. Problems always come back to us as an individual. That if we sin, if we do things that are wrong, the Holy Spirit can't use us. Because we haven't confessed that sin. We haven't asked the Lord to forgive us on a daily basis and to make us fit and willing to be used. That sin hinders the working of the Holy Ghost. It cannot work where there's sin. And sin must be dealt with and must be forgiven. That we might neglect the Lord's discipline. The discipline of the Lord is given for us so that we might benefit in the future. That it might be harsh, we might have to go, or we might have to undergo difficulties and sorrow. But it's there to stop us doing things that we would get into for our detriment. And of course if we're not using our gift [00:32:02] then the whole church suffers. Love for Christ wins. We might not love the Lord Jesus as much as we should. And loving Christ would mean that we would have a desire to serve him and help those that are Christians. And we might not be diligent. We might have a gift. We might have been blessed with a wonderful gift. But we're lazy. We can't be bothered. We are not in a condition. We're not in a place. We're not in such a spiritual state that the Holy Spirit can use us. And how awful that is. Then if we look at the church itself, the gifts might not be seen in an assembly because man's will is taking control. They might have put their organisation on that church. Only this person can speak in the [00:33:05] assembly. Only this person can do this particular role. That somebody, some group of people, this is how we will organise. How terrible that is. That man thinks he will do what he wants and rejects the way in which Christ would have the assembly operate. The arrangements of man. The way in which only one person can speak. The way in which those that have gift are prevented from using their gift. Disorder. God being shut out. I wonder if we were able to see as God sees and how many places where God is shut out, not even considered, his wishes not followed. How terrible that is. There might only be a few gifts or even none [00:34:05] in an assembly because the gifts are given to the whole church. Gifts are not given to one group of Christians or one assembly or one particular or few people. Gifts are given for the whole assembly. So in our subdivided state, we might not see the evidence of certain gifts amongst us. So we've seen that these people are given to church by Christ but they're not invested by human authority. It's not the Archbishop of Canterbury who can be there investing his bishops or other people. The intermediaries shouldn't be there. It should be the Holy Spirit acting on individuals so they can do his bidding. But the denominations way of appointing people is different from the scriptural way. That the Lord gives the [00:35:08] gifts and that no human intervention is required. So how should gifts be used? Everyone who has received a gift should firstly suggest live close to the Lord Jesus. Now how that's true of us all. If we're living close to him, if we're following him, listening to him, being guided by him, then he will direct us in the use of that gift. We should follow Christ's directions. Christ will direct us. Sometimes we might receive help from fellow members of the body of Christ. But we should lean upon him. We should seek him only for [00:36:01] direction. How many instances in history can we look at where people have felt the Lord calling them to do this, calling them to do that and they've been hindered by other Christians. If the Lord is telling us to use this gift, then we should listen to him and be directed by him and him alone. We know of the work in the Congo where the Westcott brothers were directed by the Lord to go out and we believe that they were, some sought to persuade them not to go. And the result of that work

is millions, well not millions perhaps, but tens of thousands come to the Lord Jesus Christ. If they'd listened to other people, they wouldn't have gone. And if we listen to other people, when Christ is telling us to do something different, then the body of Christ suffers. That we should serve Christ energetically. That we shouldn't be lazy. We [00:37:06] shouldn't be those that perhaps figurative or we can think of sleeping in bed till midday or something like that. That if he'd been given a gift, we should serve Christ energetically. We should use them responsibly. If he's given us this gift, then we are responsible for the use of that gift and we have to answer to him and be directed by him. We should use them to their full profit. Perhaps I'm sure that if we might feel that we've used them occasionally, we've perhaps used them half-heartedly, but if we use the gifts and obeyed the directing of the Holy Spirit to their full profit, then people would surely be blessed. And perhaps lastly, we should always be aware that we [00:38:02] should keep within the limits of our gift. That how we've seen, I'm sure, those that have perhaps been given the gift of teachers and pastors in the assembly who can help guide us to a use and a knowledge of them in the assembly and then preaching the gospel. And we see that that is not their gift. And so perhaps we ought to be exercised, that we use our gift fully, responsibly, energetically as directed by the Lord, but we leave perhaps other things to those that do have the gift so that Christ might be glorified and that we all are edified. So I apologize there for going on over my brief. I think if I just finish there and let Edwin come up.