

Unique Gifts Given to the Early Church

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When Almighty God begins different stages of His work, he provides “gifts” that are necessary to accomplish His purpose. For instance, when the nation of Israel journeyed out of Egypt, He gave specific talents and abilities to people who were charged with constructing a physical temple, or tabernacle, in the wilderness,

And I have filled him (Bezaleel) with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, ⁴to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, ⁵in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. ⁶And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and have put wisdom in the hearts of all who are gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you (Moses): ⁷the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3-7; Ed. notes in parentheses; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

In like manner, when Almighty God organized His Second Covenant church with Jesus Christ as its leader (Eph. 1:19-23), certain individuals were given specific tasks and the Spirit of Almighty God worked in them to accomplish what, otherwise, would have been humanly impossible,

But to each one of us grace (Gr. 5485; divine influence leading to an increase in faith and works) was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore He (Almighty God) says: 'When he (Christ) ascended on high, he led captivity captive (ref. to the future demise of Satan's influence due to Christ's victory over death), and **gave gifts to men**' (Eph. 4:7-8; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

The main purpose for these gifts was to add authenticity to the message of those who witnessed Christ's death and resurrection. For instance, when healing the sick was involved, or casting out demons, the teachings of that person would carry a great deal of credibility (Lk. 10:19-20). Paul said these actions confirmed the identity of Christ's apostles,

Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in **signs and wonders and mighty deeds** (2Cor. 12:12; cf. Ac. 10:36-42).

For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient – ¹⁹**in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...** (Rom. 15:18-19a; emphasis added).

When John and Peter were involved with the healing of a man who was lame from birth, it gave them an opportunity to proclaim Almighty God's truth about the death and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ,

Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. ¹²So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: 'Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob, the God of our Fathers, glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. ¹⁴But you denied the holy one and the just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵and killed the prince of life, whom God (Almighty) raised from the dead, **of which we are witnesses**. ¹⁶And his name, through faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all (Ac. 3:11-16; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

It is a sad commentary in this day and age when a religious organization claims that one of its leaders is an apostle of Jesus Christ. The original apostles were given authority by Christ himself to perform specific tasks in their generation, and this has not occurred since,

For even if I (Paul) should boast somewhat more about **our authority which the Lord gave** for edification and not for your destruction... (2Cor. 10:8a; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, **according to the authority which the Lord has given me** for edification and not for destruction (2Cor. 13:10; emphasis added).

According to the scriptural definition, an apostle is someone who has seen Christ,

Am I (Paul) an apostle? Am I not free? **Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?** (1Cor. 9:1a; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Also, an apostle is someone who has **not** been appointed by men,

Paul, an apostle (**not from men nor through man**, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead) (Gal.1:1; emphasis added).

Then **he** (Christ) **appointed twelve**, whom he also named apostles and that he might send them out to preach, ¹⁵and to have power (authority) ... (Mk. 3:14-15a; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

You (Christ's twelve apostles) did not choose me, but **I chose you and appointed you** that you should go and bear fruit... (Jn. 15:16a; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

When it became necessary to appoint a replacement for Judas Iscariot, the eleven remaining apostles refused to make that decision. They understood that an apostle cannot be chosen by men. They also knew that an apostle must be someone who has seen Jesus Christ,

Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John to that day when he was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. ²³And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴And they prayed and said, 'You, O lord, who know the hearts of all, **show which of these two You have chosen**' (Ac. 1:21-24; emphasis added).

The apostles did not decide who should administer local church affairs either. Instead, they deferred to the local brethren in each geographical region. After all, the brethren would be better qualified to recognize "gifts" that were evident in their fellowship. This is

extremely important because many religious structures today centralize their administration, and decide who is to serve in various “offices”, thus maintaining power and control from their headquarters. This form of administration did not occur in the early church, and it will not be the method of administration when Christ returns to rule this planet,

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables (i.e. daily local administration).³ Therefore, **brethren, seek out from among you seven men** of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint (SGD 2525; designate) over this business (Ac. 6:2-3; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

And we have sent with him (Titus) the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches,¹⁹ and not only that, but **who was chosen by the churches** to travel with us with this gift... (2Cor. 8:18-19b; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

And when I (Paul) come, **whomever you** (the brethren in Corinth) **approve** by your letters **I will send** to bear your gift (charitable collection for the distresses and poverty of brethren in Judea; cf. Ac. 11:29) to Jerusalem (1Cor. 16:3; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

In far flung regions with no established fellowships, the apostles would pray and fast before anointing someone to care for new converts in a local area. Again, the apostles were relying on direction from God and there was no centralized administration telling them what to do,

So when they (Paul and Barnabas) had appointed elders in every church (Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe), and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Ac. 14:23; cf. Ti. 1:5; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The gift of prophecy was very much alive during the time of the early church as well,

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ Then one of them, named Agabus stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar (Ac. 11:27-28).

It is fairly common today to hear so-called prophets in religious organizations claiming they know when Jesus Christ is going to return, and when their predictions fail the church members continue to follow their false prophet. This is contrary to God’s law, but most are blinded or simply don’t care,

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die (Dt. 18:20).

When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him (Dt. 18:22).

Jesus Christ prepared his disciples prior to his death so they would be equipped to complete the unique and challenging mission they were given. Part of this preparation involved how to organize a spiritual structure, or temple, so that it could function autonomously (1Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2Cor. 6:15-16; Eph. 2:20-22). This is confirmed

by the following description given by Paul,

And **he himself** (Jesus Christ) **gave some to be** apostles, some prophets, some evangelists (SGD 2099; heralds of salvation who are not apostles), and some pastors (SGD 4166; directors of an assembly) and teachers (SGD 1320; instructors) (Eph. 4:11; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Even though God's apostles, true prophets, and evangelists are not functioning today, many religious organizations refer to Ephesians 4:11 as justification for their hierarchal church structure. This is contrary to what Paul actually stated. Instead, he pointed out that Christ himself chose certain individuals to fulfill specific tasks which would help strengthen the Body of Christ during its infancy (Eph. 4:12-15). Once this phase was finished, every member was expected to teach God's truth as they went through their life,

For though **by this time you ought to be teachers**, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles (scriptures) of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food (Heb. 5:12; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

And we desire that each one of you (every church member) show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,¹² that you do not become sluggish (lazy), but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Heb. 6:11-12; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Sadly, it is the hierarchal form of church administration that lends itself to many forms of abuse, including limiting the spiritual growth of its members which is contrary to scripture,

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... (2Pet. 3:18a).

Every member of Christ's body needs to realize they are responsible for developing to their full potential (Mt. 25:14-30). Instead of this occurring today in the churches of this present world, people are being "put to sleep" by their leaders and aren't growing in their understanding of God's way of living (1Thes. 5:6-8). Some simply "go to church" to be entertained, or maintain social connections. Others attend in order to "feel good" about fulfilling what they believe God expects them to do. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that Christ asked the following question regarding his return to rule this planet,

...nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he really find faith on the earth? (Lk. 18:8b).

Those who are confident they correctly understand God's truth are also in spiritual danger because, more often than not, this mindset is a symptom of hierarchal religious structures that grant titles to their leaders including, but not limited to, Coordinator General, Pastor General, Pope, Reverend, Father (Mt. 20:25-28; 23:8-10). Spiritual growth within these structures is virtually impossible because the leaders will not tolerate anything that can be construed as dissent, including disagreement with the official doctrine of that organization. The membership is to learn what is being taught without much question, and support the structure through their finances. This centralized power prevents removing serious errors because the leaders must appear to

have all the answers to Biblical questions. Therefore, they will not admit error, especially if it's written in the stone of their "statement of beliefs". These conditions also contribute to an attitude of self-righteousness, which is the final "nail in the coffin" preventing any change (Mt. 23:15). As a result, their members are slowly quenching God's Holy Spirit as confirmed by the five virgins in the following parable who lost the oil they once had in their "spiritual lamps",

And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom; go out to meet him!' ⁷Then all those (ten) virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves' (Mt. 25:6-9; Ed. note in parenthesis).

As mentioned previously, apostles, prophets, and evangelists in the early church were all performing mighty works that have not been seen since the first century CE. Therefore, claiming that that these offices are extant today is false. Also, stating that God's church is to be centralized and then administered from the "top down" is untrue because this is not how the early church functioned. Instead, it was established by Jesus Christ to be autonomous with each local area administering its own affairs. Due to these misunderstandings, the gifts that God has granted His people today are not being developed to their full potential, and there are very few capable of growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Instead, most church structures are entrenched in errors, and will remain that way until Christ returns.

Following Christ's return there will be another surge in "gifts" that Almighty God will grant in order to teach the nations how to live in accordance with Biblical laws and commands,

And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction (oppression), yet **your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore**, but your eyes shall see your teachers. ²¹Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left' (Isa. 30:20-21; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Logically, if there were apostles, prophets, and evangelists teaching God's truth correctly from the first century CE to the present day, the scriptures in Isaiah 30:20-21 would make no sense. However, it makes complete sense if these responsibilities, combined with "mighty works", ended after the first century.

In conclusion, there was a short period of time following Israel's exodus from Egypt when Almighty God granted "gifts" to those tasked with building a physical temple. Following Christ's death and resurrection, when a spiritual temple was in its early stages of development, specific "gifts" were granted for a short period of time. This scenario will repeat itself after Christ's return, but will last throughout the millennial period described in a number of scriptures (Rev. 20:4-6). In the meantime, God's people are to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Php. 2:12). This means taking personal responsibility for studying scripture to confirm that one's obedience is in accordance with God's will (2Tim. 2:15; 2Pet. 1:5-11), and not relying on any religious organization to teach God's truth accurately.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16). To protect the integrity of this document and prevent alteration and misapplication of its contents in whole or in part, this document is protected under copyright law.

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