



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### **Living in Light of Eternity, Part 3**

1 Peter 4:7-11

The Parable of the Talents

In Matthew 25, we read of the parable of the talents. You know the story, a landowner goes on a journey but not before entrusting three of his servants with a portion of his wealth in the form of a talent.

Now, that raises the question, what is a “talent”? In Bible times, a “talent” was a measurement of weight.

Revelation 16:21: “And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each [lit. ‘one talent each’], came down from heaven upon men...”

In light of this, it is impossible to know exactly what each of these slaves received. However, this we do know: what they received was quite substantial (for we know that in the ancient world an Attic talent amounted to 6,000 denars<sup>1</sup> [roughly, sixteen and one-half years of work for the average person])! And yet, the focus of the parable is NOT on the amount of money received, BUT on the fact that what they received was, “...according to his own ability” (Matthew 25:15b).

And so, to one he gave five talents. To another he gave two talents. And to the last he gave one talent.

After some time, the landowner returned and discovered that the five and two talent servants doubled his wealth. But the one talent servant was selfish and so, did what? He buried the talent he received. Today he stands as the poster child of irresponsibility and so missed opportunity!

Now what makes this parable so practical is that it is the source for our English word, “talent”- as in *America’s Got Talent*. On the surface, it might seem that our use of “talent” is out of accord with the biblical use. But it really is not for the focus of this parable is the proper use of that which God has entrusted to us: whether that be a skill, a talent, or a spiritual gift!

We are examining the final section of the middle portion of 1 Peter 2:11-4:11. Peter has focused on what it means to be a man or woman of God in a hostile world. And he closes this section with a series of exhortations to the body of Christ stressing the importance of NOT being a maverick or a lone-ranger Christian. He previously has talked about the importance of...

1. Prayer
2. Mutual Love.
3. Mutual Service.

Now he closes this section with a mini seminar on the use of spiritual gifts. He begins by teaching us that we must be good stewards of our spiritual gifts.

1 Peter 4:10a, “As each one has received a *special* gift...”

Recall that when it comes to the discussion of spiritual gifts, no Christian is excluded! Truly, EVERY believer has received a deposit from God — and so a stewardship — which they are EXPECTED to use unto the glory of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:11, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

Don't miss the implication of this truth. If you are child of God, YOU HAVE RECEIVED A SPIRITUAL GIFT.

Imagine if you were hired by a very wealthy construction company which supplied all the tools you would need for your job. Then imagine coming to the construction site and there noticing that many of the workers didn't bring their tools. Many just milled around all day not really doing any work at all. Others stood and watched you as you pulled out some really neat tools and used them.

Brothers and sisters, every time you go to church you have entered a construction zone. Now upon being hired to work in God's kingdom (that is, upon being saved), God entrusted to you, tools which we call spiritual gifts. May God give us the grace to come each week knowing that we have come to work and so serve the Lord with the gifts/tools He has given us.

### The Number of our Spiritual Gifts, v. 10b.

1 Peter 4:10b, "As each one has received A *special* GIFT..."

Long has been the debate as to how many spiritual gifts God has given to the church. While there is debate over how many spiritual gifts, from these passages on spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4), I have cataloged 17 gifts.

1. Prophecy, Romans 12:6b; 1 Corinthians 12:10b, 28b.
2. Service, Romans 12:7a; 1 Corinthians 12:5.
3. Teaching, Romans 12:7b; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28c.
4. Exhorting, Romans 12:8a.
5. Giving, Romans 12:8b.
6. Leading, Romans 12:8c.
7. Showing Mercy, Romans 12:8d.
8. The Word of Wisdom, 1 Corinthians 12:8a.
9. The Word of Knowledge, 1 Corinthians 12:8b.
10. Faith, 1 Corinthians 12:9a.
11. Healings, 1 Corinthians 12:9b, 28e.
12. Miracles, 1 Corinthians 12:10a, 28d.
13. Discernment of Spirits, 1 Corinthians 12:10b.
14. Tongues, 1 Corinthians 12:10c, 28h.
15. Interpretation of Tongues, 1 Corinthians 12:10d.
16. Helps, 1 Corinthians 12:28f.
17. Administration, 1 Corinthians 12:28g.

It is not quite that black and white. For clearly, each New Testament passage addressing Spiritual Gifts are NOT exhaustive. We arrive at the number of seventeen from all four texts! This opens the door to the possibility that these four passages still do NOT constitute the total

number of the gifts God gives His church. Yet that is O.K. for we note an interesting peculiarity in the text before us.

Peter here does NOT speak of God giving us “spiritual giftS,” BUT of God giving each of us “A spiritual gift” — as in one! This has led to the understanding today that while there are seventeen spiritual gifts referenced in the Bible, the number and amount of each gift entrusted to an individual constitutes his spiritual gift. In other words, your spiritual gift is NOT comprised of one of the seventeen spiritual gifts, BUT the combination of a plurality of gifts unique to you and your calling. Dr. John MacArthur wrote this:

...the New Testament makes clear that God endows His children with many combinations and degrees of giftedness. He mixes these gifts much as an artist mixes colors on his palette to create the exact shade he desires for a particular part of the painting.  
(MacArthur, 1994, p. 162)

If that is correct, then you haven’t received one of the seventeen gifts, but a composition of spiritual gifts for the Kingdom service! In one, it could be one-fifth teaching, three tenths mercy, and one-half administration. In another, it could be one-quarter leading, one-third helps, one-sixth administration, and one-fourth mercy.

This is why, for example, no one preacher/teacher is alike. Preaching consists of a combination of four spiritual gifts: teaching, exhorting, the word of knowledge, and the word of wisdom. When I think of preacher with a large portion of the gift of teaching, I think of John MacArthur or R. C. Sproul. When I think of a preacher with a larger portion of the gift of exhortation, I think of Al Martin or Charles Spurgeon. And when I think of a preacher with a large portion of the word of wisdom, I think of Chuck Swindoll or Brian Chappell. When I think of a preacher with a large portion of the word of knowledge, it would be John Piper or James Boice.

Each of these men are gifted preachers whom God has used greatly in His kingdom. Yet each handled the biblical text uniquely — and this is the key — “according to their gifting”!

So truly, each and every one of us possess a spiritual gift/endowment from the Lord. How it behooves us therefore NOT to bury the gift, BUT to use it as an offering of praise to the Lord!

And yet you say, “How is my gift discovered?” Spiritual gifts are discovered NOT as we take a test, BUT as we minister and need God’s enabling grace/a spiritual gifting. It is then that our Spiritual Gifts emerge. Recall, God only gives us “grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16)!

And yet sadly, because some of the giftings God gives His people are showier than others, it is easy to conclude that the particular gift-match God has given us is NOT very significant or important! In fact, Paul took this on in 1 Corinthians. In the context of his teaching on spiritual gifts, Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 12:14-18, "For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now, God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired."

Just like in a physical body, so it is in the body of Christ! EVERY MEMBER AND EVERY GIFT IS IMPORTANT! As members of the body of Christ, each of us have a different and unique gift CRUCIAL to the ministry of the body. Trying to operate outside or contrary to this gift will produce in us all manner of:

- Frustration.
- Discouragement.
- Guilt feelings.
- Mediocrity.
- Pride.
- Defeat.

And more importantly, it will stunt the growth of the body! There is NOT a person in this body today possessing a gift which, if they were removed, wouldn't hurt us as a body. John Owen wrote this:

Spiritual gifts are that without which the church cannot subsist in the world, nor can believers be useful to one another and the rest of mankind to the glory of Christ as they ought to be. (Owen, 2007)

And yet, whether it be through peer-pressure or a desire to be something that we're not, we frequently find ourselves discontent to serve the Lord with the tools He has given us such that we bury them!

- I am a mouth, but I want to be a hand.
- I am a liver, but I want to be the heart.
- I have the gift of service, but I want to be a teacher.

Sadly, it is this attitude that has led many in the body of Christ to inactivity in the Kingdom of God. Either we don't think we have anything to offer. Or we are so worried about someone else. Yet we need to realize that God did NOT purchase you by the blood of Christ so that you could sit home and be comfortable; RATHER, God purchased you in order to use you! He engifted you for service!

Therefore, let us endeavor to serve the Lord on His terms with the gifts and abilities that He has given!

And so, as members of the body of Christ we conclude that ALL GIFTS ARE IMPORTANT! With that, notice a third truth derives from Peter's exhortation here; the purpose of a spiritual gift.

## The Purpose of a Spiritual Gift, v. 10c.

1 Peter 4:10c, "As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving ONE ANOTHER..."

This is a massively important truth. The gift that God has given you upon your conversion was NOT given to you to encourage you, build you up, or establish you in any way. The gift God invested in you has been given to you that you might use it unto the building up of the body of Christ! As that is the case, we must come to understand a very important truth: I do NOT possess or own the gift entrusted to me, the church does!

Romans 12:5, "...we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Notice that Paul does NOT say, "members of one body" BUT "...members of ONE ANOTHER." Every gift that God gives an individual in the body of Christ is NOT for them! The gift belongs to Christ and so His body! We see this truth taught elsewhere in the Bible.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit FOR THE COMMON GOOD."

And thus, in our text we read this:

"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another..."

And yet we hear a very different message today! We are told that the purpose of Spiritual gifts is for the building up of OURSELVES unto OUR growth in grace.

Don Basham, a charismatic pastor and author wrote, "Speaking in tongues is a way of praying which liberates the spirit within and strengthens the Christian in a wonderful manner. The primary purpose of it is for use in one's own devotional life. (Basham, 1971, p. 66)

Robert Morris, another charismatic author wrote this:

For me... the gift of tongues turned out to be the gift of praise. As I used the unknown language which God had given me, I felt rising in me the love, the awe, the adoration pure and uncontingent, that I had not been able to achieve in thought-out prayer. (Sherrill, 1964, p. 83)

The primary source that is used to corroborate this assertion that tongues (and for that matter, all gifts) are for the edification of the possessor are these verses:

1 Corinthians 14:3-4, "But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church."

With this, consider the dynamics of "Edification". According to the Bible, what is needed for you to be edified? A feeling? An emotion? No! An understanding of truth which is then acted upon.

1 Corinthians 14:6, 11, "6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?... 11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me."

How is "revelation," a "prophecy," a "teaching," or "knowledge" able to edify the church whereas "tongues" do not? Each gift was UNDERSTOOD!

In other words, sitting next to total stranger on a park bench will not edify you (even if the person is a Christian). But when an exchange of information occurs such that I hear of this person's growth in grace or what God has taught them, then and only then am I able to be edified! And so, when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:4 that the one speaking in a tongue "edifies himself" we conclude that this occurs because the one speaking UNDERSTANDS what is being said (which raises a whole other issue which we are not going to get into here).

Accordingly, the call that rests upon each of us with regard to our spiritual gift is that we "...employ it in serving ONE ANOTHER..." (v. 10c)! That is the reason God entrusted to you a spiritual gift! We could give no better example of this than Christ Himself.

1. The bent of Christ's life while on this earth was wholly other-centered!
2. He never sought for a gift, labored for Himself, longed for self-edification, or looked out for Himself. Rather, His focus was wholly God-centered and so Redemption-centered...

Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Let this teaching and Christ's example compel you in your ministry. You were purchased by

God to be a blessing to the church (Ephesians 4:12, 15-16). Accordingly, use your gift unto that end!

Yet to do this, we will need to throw off our American individualism and the trappings that come from wealth and cultivate a biblical view of ministry. So often we gauge our service in the kingdom by these things:

- The “treasure” we long to store up in heaven.
- The “brownie points” we want to earn with God.
- Or that all-important question of, “What’s in it for me?!”

Yet the kingdom of God consists of people to whom God has given a spiritual gift that they might labor to grow the body of Christ in grace!

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## End Note(s)

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. (France, 2008, p. 356)