

The Gifts of God

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In Acts 2, we read the account of the Day of Pentecost when all the apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in v38 Peter is saying 'Repent and be baptised, and you will be forgiven your sins and receive the Holy Spirit - you, your children and future generations'.

While the promise of forgiveness of sins is available throughout the generations, including up to ours, we also know that the Holy Spirit could only be passed on by the original receivers of the gift, and so would be available only to the 2nd, maybe 3rd generation after the apostles. This got me thinking. If the gift of the Holy Spirit is not available anymore, then what gifts *can* we still expect to receive? I won't actually be using Acts 2 any further this morning, but rather using it as a springboard to dive into our theme for this morning which is going to be the 'gifts of God'.

Let us start by considering what constitutes a gift. The general rule is that it is something *given* to you, without condition, as opposed to something that has to be earned.

How we respond to the giving of that gift is also something worth considering and there are two factors which are largely at work here – Firstly, who gives us the gift, and secondly is that gift of any practical use to us?

Let's expand on this by using a hypothetical example. Imagine the caring husband who is buying her wife a birthday present. He spends the usual long time thinking about the gift, considering all the usual ideas like chocolates, flowers, jewellery, but eventually finds something that he thinks she will like. On the morning of her birthday, the wife unwraps the present and from amongst the multitudes of wrapping paper emerges a garden spade!

Yes, a spade! A rather risky gift to give you might think – and normally you'd be right, but in this instance, the wife is a very keen gardener and the handle of their current spade is just about ready to snap off.

What seems to be a poorly thought out gift turns out to be a well thought out gift that the wife values greatly. So you see, the gift doesn't have to be expensive or have a worldly appeal, but only has to be of value to the receiver, like the spade was – and some of that value may come because of *who* it is giving the gift, in this case, the caring husband.

Obviously some gifts, while expensive *and* from someone we love, *can* be poorly thought out, and for example if my wife were to give me a vacuum cleaner for my birthday – well, not being all that domesticated, I'm sorry to say, I don't think it would hold much value for me!

So, the question is – do we really need the gift we are being given, and how much do we value the person giving the gift? What we are going to do now is unwrap some of the gifts that God gives us and I'd like you to hold these questions in your head as we look at them – do we need it? Do we value the giver?

Let us start in the book of Ecclesiastes and chapter 3. This is a rather unusual gift, not one that you would immediately connect to being a gift of God, but one that is available to all mankind. v12 – 13. It's the gift of God! He gives it to all men. What's this gift about though? v12 – says that it is to rejoice, to do good in life, v13 – to eat, drink and enjoy the fruits of your labour. It's all about finding satisfaction in our life, being happy with what we've got and what we do. It's the simple things in life like being able to eat and drink, being able to share that with our friends and enjoy the work we do. Ecclesiastes is telling us that all this is a gift of God!

We look around us today and see so many unhappy people in this country, they haven't got enough money, they want more, they want bigger and better things; they are unhappy with the way life is treating them and they are the ones who are missing out on this gift of God – the gift of enjoying the fruits of our labour. The

challenge is to recognise that it *is* a gift – but how often *do* we look upon it as a gift? We must be happy with what we have rather than acting as the rest of the world does in looking for bigger and better things.

Let us move on to our next gift. John 4.

Jesus is travelling through Samaria and meets up with the woman at the well. v5 – 6. so he's sat down on the well and v7. this woman comes and Jesus asks her for a drink. v9 – 10.

Here we have Jesus talking about the gift of God, but what is this gift he is talking about? It doesn't seem to be that he is referring to himself for he says 'If thou knewest the gift of God, **and** who it is that saith to thee' – he talking about two things which are separate - and goes on to say that he would have given her living water had he been asked. The gift here isn't Jesus, but the living water, or rather the words spoken by Jesus, which is the Word of God.

v13 – so you see that the gift of God is the word that he was speaking through Jesus. How often do we think of the words of Jesus as a gift from God and as a gift that we really need? Do we value this gift or do we just leave it on our bookshelf gathering dust?

v15 – the woman of Samaria perceived that the gift being offered was of great value, although her understanding of it was not complete as she did not realise quite what water Jesus was talking about. Do we understand the true value of this gift being offered to us?

2 Cor 9. Here is another gift that God has provided for us. Notice what Paul says about this gift, that he struggles with it – v15. It is an unspeakable gift, Paul can't describe how wonderful this gift is, but what gift is he talking about?

v14 – We see that it is the grace of God, and in v15 he can't begin to describe how amazing this gift is, it's indescribable, it's so valuable that words are not enough.

v8 – note the use of the word 'all' in this verse, all grace, always, all things – it is so apparent that this is an overflowing gift from God that is given in abundance.

Also, in speaking to the Corinthians Paul says at the end of v14, 'grace of God **in** you'. That little word, 'in', not 'towards' as you'd perhaps expect to find, but 'grace in you'. The gift of God's grace was working in the Corinthians and we can see the effect of this in v6 – 7. Having received the grace of God they had modified their behaviour in giving to others. End of v7, 'God loves a cheerful giver' – the Corinthians were reciprocating what God had given to them by likewise giving to others.

What about us, do we v6, sow sparingly, or do we v7 give grudgingly or out of necessity? We *can* be like that, but if we recognise that the gift of the grace of God abounds in us, then it often translates into behaviour where we respond to the grace of God and give graciously unto others.

v9 – this does indeed describe God for he is a cheerful giver, but v9 is a quote from the OT, Psalm 112 and I'd like to look at the context there as it's useful to see how it is used here in Corinthians.

Ps 112 – v9. This is the quoted verse, but is it talking about God? Who is the 'he' mentioned in v9? Well, we can see the context from v5, v7, v8 ,v9a – the 'he' is the good or godly man, and if we take this context back to 2 Cor 9 v 9 we can see that it is talking about the person who in response to the gift of grace that he has received from God has changed his behaviour, not just through his words, but also in the form of graciousness, kindness, thankfulness to others, dispersing it abroad, to the poor and to everyone.

A wonderful gift indeed – the gift of grace.

Romans 5. These gifts are really starting to pile up now – grace, the word of God, fruits of our labour and here is another one in Romans 5 v 17. We see one gift we have already looked at in there, grace, but here also is the gift of righteousness. What's this one about then, this gift of righteousness? It's the being able to declare us righteous even though we have sinned, so what we have here is the gift of forgiveness. And how

did that gift come about? – v18, this gift came to us through the actions of one man, the one we remember this morning. Forgiveness is closely related to grace, but through the death of Jesus we have another gift we can add to our list. Do we see a need for this gift in our lives, do we value it, do we value what had to happen before this gift became available to us – which was God sacrificing his only begotten son upon the cross. Our challenge is to see the need for this gift in our lives.

v21 – see grace linked here with eternal life and if we move into the next chapter (ch 6) then we see another verse concerning eternal life. v23 – grace, forgiveness of sins and another gift, eternal life all closely linked together.

2 Cor 1. this is not the sort of gift that we perhaps think about, but still a gift of God nonetheless. v8 – we have it appears, Paul and Timothy, going through a tough time in Asia believing that their life was in danger, v9 – there was a terrible threat to their lives, but they believed through God's grace they would be delivered from that danger. v10, v11 – another gift. What is this gift that Paul is referring to? It is in the context of prayer as brethren and sisters had been praying for Paul and Timothy to be delivered from the danger they faced and those prayers had been answered – the gift here is the gift of prayer being answered. Not so much the prayers of Paul and Timothy, but the prayers of other brethren and sisters made for them – and those prayers were answered. Paul says 'That's a gift of God!'

Sometimes we don't always think of prayer like that, we don't always think that when we offer a prayer for someone else, that the answer for that person is a gift from God. Paul acknowledges this gift saying it was their prayers that allowed his work to continue. We should never underestimate the value of prayer and the gift that God gives us when answering our prayers.

We find another gift in Philippians 1. It's fair to say that we would not really consider this to be a gift of God, but I present it to you with the suggestion that it is indeed a gift. v29. Nothing immediately suggests gift, but the idea of 'given' speaks to us of a gift, the gift to believe on Jesus Christ, but also the gift of suffering for his sake. How can that be a gift? Well, it can help us to appreciate a little of what he went through to make all these other gifts available to us, which are all obtainable because of Christ's suffering. But sometimes suffering in Christ's name is something that we need, to help us realise the true value that can be found in the gift of eternal life. If life was perfect would we still feel a practical need for some of these gifts?

We've had a look at quite a few gifts this morning, there are more we could have looked at but our pile is quite big enough – we have the gift of finding contentment in what we have, the gift of God's word, the gift of grace, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, the gift of answers to our prayers. All these gifts and more God given to us. What do we have to do, what are our responsibilities?

Deut 30, and in v19 we have the words of Moses spoken to the people of Israel. v19 – life (one of the gifts) or death? Moses tells Israel to choose life. So it is with us, we are called to choose life, but that's exactly what it is, a choice. If we want eternal life we can have it, it's our choice, if we want the gift of forgiveness of sins, it's ours if we choose. Equally we can simply reject them all, our choice. All these wonderful gifts can be ours, but how we respond to them is important. Do we cherish them, do we love them and accept them into our lives with rejoicing, or do we accept them and then push them to the back of the drawer, essentially forgotten, unvalued and unused? It's entirely our choice what we do with these gifts.

How does God view these gifts he has given? Rom 11. For us, we have a choice whether to accept these gifts or not, but God has told us this in v29 – the NIV uses the word irrevocable – this shows us where God stands, he will not withdraw his offer of gifts, he will not change his mind. When Jesus died, God gave us forgiveness of sins, he will *never* take that away from us. God has placed these gifts before us and they will always be available to us, God will be faithful, he doesn't change – you see, it is for us to simply reach out and take what we want.

Now we turn our attention to the emblems of bread and wine on the table before us, and think about the great gift that we have not spoken so much of this morning – the gift of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the giving of his life all these gifts are made available, irrevocable in the eyes of God. So it is now we can

offer our sincere thanks to God for all the wonderful gifts he offers and indeed also for the grace and love he has shown us in giving us his Son.