

The Gift and His Gifts

The Holy Spirit and the Use of Spiritual Gifts

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The Gift and His Gifts

Readings: 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Ephesians 1:15–23; 3:14–21

We have been thinking together about the great gift that God has given to all who trust Jesus Christ our Lord—the gift of his Holy Spirit. In a previous talk we were thinking in particular of that Holy Spirit being given to us for our spiritual good, for our personal spiritual edification.

In this talk we are to think in particular later on of the Holy Spirit giving all who trust Christ certain gifts so that we, in turn, may be able to help other people, for the work of the Holy Spirit within us is twofold. First of all, he is given to us so that we ourselves may benefit, and then he gives us gifts so that we may benefit other people.

But we ran out of time, so, before we come to talk about the gifts that Christ has given to us in order that we may help others, let us think for a short while longer of the Holy Spirit as the gift God has given to those who trust Christ for their spiritual edification.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit to all who trust Christ

We observed, firstly, that God gives his Holy Spirit to everyone that trusts Christ as Saviour. Paul says:

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Rom 8:9)

This is a categorical statement that gets us clear in our thinking from the start. If a believer is in Christ, then he is in the Spirit and the Spirit is in him. You can't have the one without the other.

Secondly, we were noticing the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit, pouring out the love of God in our hearts (5:5), being the very root and ground of our spiritual life. Acting as our guide, our comforter and advocate, he leads us step by step through life to the final goal of being conformed to the image of God's Son; praying his prayers alongside our prayers until we learn to make his prayers our own prayers (8:26). So that by our activity, and yet by his activity—his activity coming to be our activity—we make progress along the path of Christian holiness until finally we shall be conformed to the image of God's Son (v. 29).

We talked about his ministry of witnessing directly to the believer's spirit that he or she is a child of God (v. 15). Witnessing through the holy word of the Prophets that God has covenanted in Jesus Christ our Lord to write his laws upon our hearts. And what is sublimely

wonderful, he has covenanted that he will remember our sins and iniquities no more (Heb 8:10–12; cf. Jer 31:33).

Deeper experiences of the Holy Spirit

But someone may say, 'If I received the Holy Spirit when I first trusted Christ, believed in him and received eternal life, is that gift a static thing that I had then, and I had it all? Or are there deeper experiences of God's Holy Spirit waiting for me as a believer, if only I had the grace and sense to see them?'

And the answer to that question is, yes, indeed there are deeper experiences of God's Holy Spirit waiting for us. That is why I read those two passages in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in which he prays for a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit's power in the lives of believers.

But let me remind you what he says to these people: 'Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus' (1:15). So they were already Christians; they had already trusted in Christ, and in trusting Christ they had received the Holy Spirit. But for these people, who were already believers and already had been sealed with the Holy Spirit, Paul prays a deeper experience of that same Holy Spirit.

Let us consider what that experience is. In his first prayer he tells us:

[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know . . . (1:17–18)

He goes on then to enumerate three things that it is the Spirit's ministry to make known to the believer—not merely to a believer's mind and intellect, but to make them known to his heart; to 'open the eyes of his heart,' as Paul puts it. So that with his whole being he grasps these things and they become a real part of his existence. He sees them, not just with his mind, but with his whole being.

1. The hope to which he has called you
2. The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints
3. The immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe

Now, it is the fact that when people seek a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit, very often they will say that they are seeking greater power—they wish for greater spiritual power. God bless them; we could all do with more genuine spiritual power. But would you notice that that is third in the list and not first. So, let us look at the first two.

1. The hope and purpose to which he has called you

The first thing that we need to know—and know it with our very hearts—is the hope to which he has called us. That is to say, the reason and purpose for which God has saved us and called us.

May I ask you something? You, who claim to have trusted in Christ; you have been saved, you have been called, thank God—*what are you saved for?*

You say, 'That's easy. I'm saved to serve. Why, evangelists galore have told me that I am saved to serve—to help to bring others to Christ.'

And may God help you to do it. But half a minute! With everybody saved that's going to be saved, then what are we going to do? *What's the point in getting them saved?* What is the hope of our calling? Where are we going to?

I know it's lovely to have a lot of power at your disposal, isn't it? Suppose you had one of these mighty great Mercedes-Benz cars and you put the pedal down, and whoomph, off it goes! Yes, but before you put the pedal down it might be wise to know where you were going. Power just for the sake of power isn't any good. So, first we need our hearts enlightened to know the hope to which he has called us.

What is the purpose of our salvation?

Paul gives us the answer.

1. That we should satisfy God: 'That we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us . . .' (Eph 1:4).

That we should be able to meet all the interests and demands of God our Creator. He made us for himself, for his own enjoyment; and the first great purpose of salvation is that we should meet all his desires, all his pleasures, all his interests, and satisfy his heart.

And we have failed miserably, haven't we? Even since I have come to know Christ, how easy it is for me to turn inward upon myself. I am grateful for forgiveness because it makes me feel good and I seek experience of the Holy Spirit because it makes me feel good, but we have to be careful lest in our spiritual experience we become self-centred, merely seeking our own satisfaction; whereas the purpose of our being saved is that we should satisfy God.

2. That we should be fit to serve in the ages to come: 'So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus' (2:7).

It is the purpose of God, for the organisation and the administration of the ages to come, to head up all things in Christ. That is his concept. God isn't done with this world yet, nor will he be for a long while, but God is yet going to fulfil the purpose that he had when he made the world.

What is that purpose? We remember that the early chapters of Genesis tell us that when God made this world, he put people on it and he said to Adam, the first man, 'Look, Adam, I have put you into a garden here.' God planted a garden in Eden, which shows the rest of it wasn't a garden, doesn't it? 'Now,' he said, 'Adam, you get on and develop it. I want you to have dominion and fill the earth—I want you to run the place and administer the earth for my pleasure.'

What fun it would have been to have been presented with a brand new earth, only you in it and you have the responsibility of developing the whole show! Where would you start? God gave Adam 'a helper fit for him' (2:18). Her name was Eve and she helped Adam as God's viceroy to develop this planet. They very soon found that developing this planet isn't altogether child's play. You don't get very far down the road before suddenly very big, large moral problems come up. Whose world is it, and who's to have the say how it should be run? As we know, they disobeyed God and miserably fell, and introduced into our world the chaos that we now see around us.

And so it has continued until in this year, 1974, we are approaching a peak of economic crisis, not only in these islands but around the whole world. In spite of our computers and in spite of economists, we've got vast deserts in our world that the nations daren't try and cope with, because, if the Americans got the Sahara into shape, then the Russians would be jealous of the Americans and who knows what the Chinese would say. We've got millions of folks starving, though there's enough food for everybody, but man's selfishness won't let it go round. We've got our world into an impossible tangle.

You say, 'What's God going to do with it? Ditch it?'

Oh, no, not ditch it. God isn't going to be defeated like that. God originally put man in charge. As the psalmist observes:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (Ps 8:3-6)

Mankind was to run it, and the New Testament observes, 'At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him' (Heb 2:8). We see a groaning creation, travailing in sorrow, blasted with disease and blight, and torn with war, greed and jealousy. We do not yet see all things put under him, but—and here's the wonderful bit—God hasn't given up. We do see one man who for a little while was made a little lower than the angels, a genuine man, and he's named Jesus (v. 9). It was because of the suffering of death that we see him already crowned with glory and honour and one day all things shall be put under his feet.

For he who taught us to pray, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10), was not teaching us to pray some vain repetition that never would be fulfilled on earth; he was teaching us to pray for a purpose of God that shall be fulfilled—his will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. In that glorious day, it is God's purpose to sum up all things in Christ. In heaven, yes—but on earth as well. It isn't God's purpose to ditch this world and we all go floating up to heaven and say, 'Thank God that nightmare is over. No more earth, please.'

It is God's purpose to sum up all things in Christ, both in heaven and earth, and in that day our blessed Lord shall have a helper fit for him, as Adam did.

And [God] put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22-23)

Why do you need to have your eyes opened to see the power of God available to you?

Because you have a colossal responsibility awaiting you, away there in the future, to reign with Christ, to administer this world with him and for him. You need to be taking the steps to prepare yourself—or to let God prepare you—for the tasks that lie ahead.

Be assured, my dear Christian, that the old hymns that talk of us going home to heaven, taking our shoes off, putting our feet up and resting at last for ever, are a little bit

oversentimental. When you get home to heaven you won't want to rest anyway; there's work to be done. We shall reign with Christ.

Listen to Paul again:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Rom 8:19–21)

And oh how creation shall sing then to the praise of its Creator. But it waits. Why not yet? Why not already? It waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. Note the term, not the baby children, but the *sons*: the full grown sons that have achieved spiritual maturity and have been made exactly like Christ. One day those sons will be ready, conformed to the image of God's own personal Son, and God shall hand over creation to them.

When I think of it, sometimes I suddenly have cold feet. I say, 'My boy, you're getting long in the tooth, you know. You're getting old at an alarming rate, you haven't got much more time.' Oh, that God would open the eyes of my heart to see what is the hope of my calling, and that I don't waste away my time here on little nothings, when I ought to be getting ready to take over the government of earth.

2. The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

And then I shall need to know a second thing. If the first thing is getting to know the hope and purpose of his calling, the second thing is *not* to know what great power is available—not yet. We are so impatient to get our hands on the power, aren't we? But power can be dangerous stuff.

God's people are of measureless value to him

So, before we allow too much power into our hands, let's see what we need to know. We need the eyes of our hearts enlightened, so that we may know what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph 1:18)—which, all being interpreted, means that we need our eyes opened to see what a valuable treasure Mrs Smith down the road is. If you can't see that every redeemed soul represents to God a measureless treasure, perhaps you'd better not be allowed to have any power, because if you don't come to value people you can hurt them.

Power isn't given to me to make me feel good; power is given so I should help other folks. If I'm going to help them, I shall need to have my eyes open to their real value. It's difficult to see, is it not? If you lived with me you'd find it more difficult every day; and, I'm not joking, you would need your eyes open to see it. For the mere charm, if I had any, of outward exterior soon wears very thin. You wouldn't need to be a week with me before you'd begin to get a little irritated by my funny mannerisms, and a good deal else that's worse than mannerisms. And then you would need spiritual enlightenment to see that, in spite of all that, I represent to God what he regards (who can tell why?) as the riches of his glorious inheritance—even in such a one as I.

Oh, if I have no understanding of the value of dear Christian people to God, I'd better do without the power. But if I have some concept, by the help of the Spirit within me, of the hope

of my calling and the tremendous value of God's people to him, then, for my own progress and to fulfil my responsibilities to them, I shall need to know the power available to me. It is a power so wonderful that, if you want to know how big it is, it is the power that raised Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead (v. 20). 'That's what I'm praying for you,' says Paul; and we, as Christians, would do well to pray it for our fellow Christians, shouldn't we?

How we should pray for our fellow Christians

I don't know about your prayers, but so many of my prayers for my fellow Christians and friends run like this, 'Oh, Lord, help Tom to get a job; help my sister to get better from the flu.' But if I got my proportions right, above and beyond and before all those things, it would be, 'Open the eyes of my friends' hearts to know the hope of their calling and to grasp the glory of the riches of your inheritance in the saints.' So that we're not always criticising one another, endlessly, but have opened eyes to see the value of one another realistically; not pretending that we have no faults, but in spite of it seeing the work of God in us.

Not only does Paul pray this for those that already have been saved, but in chapter 3 he prays for another, deeper experience of God's Holy Spirit for them.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:14–19)

What Paul is praying for is not some sudden experience. He is praying for a process: 'that you may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.' I know that we are very often impatient. I would like to pray, 'Oh, God, make me perfect,' and he would immediately do it. But I am an absolute sinner, and forty years of being a Christian has shown me that there's little hope of that. I ought to have known it, because the word of God indicates the same. God is interested in carrying out a process in my heart, steadily strengthening my inner being by his Spirit. What for? Well, that Christ might dwell in my heart.

Somebody says, 'But that's curious, because the moment I trusted Christ, Christ came and dwelt in my heart. The preacher told me the words, didn't he? Christ says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20). I did that: I opened the door and Christ came in. Why does Paul need to pray for me now that Christ will dwell in my heart?'

The simple answer is this: that the word Paul uses here means, not merely that Christ should have come in, but that he should take up his residence in every part of my being.

Now, for that to happen it will require a process and there are no short cuts to it that I know of. You see, it's one thing to know with my head that Christ is in me—one thing for Christ actually to be in me—I can grasp that. He's in me because I asked him to come in and I received him—he's in me, and I know he's in me. It's another thing to know it so that, in everything I do, every moment of the day, I am conscious of it.

Have you arrived there yet? I haven't. I get talking with a fellow believer about a difficult passage of Scripture. Now I am indeed very spiritual—I'm talking about Scripture. Suddenly he disagrees: 'You've got it wrong,' he says. So he must be told the truth, and the stupid man can't see the truth! And then he has a view of his own—well, he has no right to have a view of his own—and, before I know it, I get steamed up. I'd quite forgotten for the time being that Christ is meant to be dwelling in my heart as well as his. We've been discussing theology, but Christ is meant dwell even among theology, let alone when it comes to clearing away the breakfast things or something like that.

It's lovely to have exciting meetings, isn't it, and marvellous feelings. Well, let's hope Christ is in them. It's also good if Christ is in your feelings when you're clearing away the breakfast on Monday morning, and when the business is difficult, and when you're trying to deal with the shop steward, if you happen to be the managing director of a firm.

'That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith' (Eph 3:17). To come to that position it will mean my inner self being strengthened, and that is a long drawn-out process; but God does perform it in the hearts of his people, bit by bit, by bit, by bit. If we want a deeper experience of God's Holy Spirit, we would be well advised to listen to what Paul is praying on his knees—this is the experience of the Holy Spirit.

The gifts given by the Holy Spirit to all who trust Christ

But I must return, as I promised, to the question of those gifts that Christ gives through the Holy Spirit to his people for the helping of others. Isn't it our duty as believers, every one of us, to help other folks? But while that is our duty, we shall be given different gifts and we shall help them in different ways.

You say, 'Now this is interesting because I've always wanted to do Christian work.'

Yes, but may I remind you of what Paul said in that passage we read: if you want to do Christian work, you must first become a Christian (Eph 1:15). You don't become a Christian by doing Christian work; you first become a Christian and then you do the Christian work.

So let's hear Paul tell us about these gifts that God gives, and how we get them. He puts it this way:

For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:12-13)

If you want to do Christian work, then you must let Christ put you into the Christian body, make you part of the body of Christ. For it is by being in the body of Christ, members of that body, that we each then have a gift. Says Paul, 'It's like the human body: the human body is one, yet it has many members.' The fingers have one job and the toes have another, the hand does one job and the brain does another. All sorts of different jobs to do and gifts and faculties, and each member of the body gets those faculties when it becomes a member of the body.

How do we become members of the body of Christ?

Paul tells us here of those two fundamental operations that are necessary if any man or woman is to become a member of the body of Christ.

1. For by one Spirit are we *all* baptised into one body
2. and have been *all* made to drink into one Spirit.

Shall we notice then, for clarity's sake, that Paul, in writing to these dear Christians at Corinth, affirms that all believers have been baptised in the Holy Spirit and all have been made to drink of that Spirit. If anyone has not been baptised in the Holy Spirit, or been made to drink of the Holy Spirit, then he or she is not in the body of Christ and is not a believer at all.

What does it mean? Well, let's take the first one first, and notice there are two things.

'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body'

You were baptised in the Holy Spirit. This is done by Christ, as John the Baptist prophesied. You will remember how John the Baptist baptised people in water, but he said:

After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you [in] the Holy Spirit.
(Mark 1:7-8)

And we can begin to get some idea of it, can't we? Let's think of John for a minute. If you came to John, John got hold of you and he put you in the water—John baptised you in water. 'Now, like I baptised *you* in water,' says John, 'Christ, when he comes, will baptise *you* in the Holy Spirit.' Clear, isn't it?

You will notice:

1. It's not the Holy Spirit who baptises, it's the Lord Jesus who baptises you.
2. Just as John baptised people in water, so the Lord Jesus baptises people in the Spirit.

That is, when you come to Christ, Christ gets you and he puts you in his Spirit.

'And have been all made to drink into one Spirit'

Christ makes us drink of that Spirit, and when we drink of the Spirit, the Spirit goes into us.

If I drink some water, where's the water gone?

'Well, it's gone into you.'

Yes. And when Christ makes me to drink of his Spirit, his Spirit goes into me, so it does two things. Marvellous, isn't it? And you have to have both things at the same time, of course.

1. He baptises me in his Spirit—he puts me in the Spirit.
2. He makes me drink of the Spirit—he puts the Spirit in me. That is indeed the only way you could have a spiritual body.

An analogy

What is it that keeps all these members together in my physical body, this one body?

Don't say, 'It's the bones and the muscles,' because they don't really. If you shot a bullet through my head and laid me out on the floor and came back in nine months, I'm afraid the fingers would be off the body, muscles and bones notwithstanding.

You say, 'Well then, what is it that keeps all these members together and makes them one body, though they are many members?'

The simple fact is that I'm standing here in the air and as I breathe I am in the air and the air is in me. Yes? And as the air goes into me, it carries the oxygen through my blood stream, right down to the tips of my little fingers and my little toes, and keeps it all together. If you were to cut off that supply of air to my little finger, it would go gangrenous and fall off.

So, in order to have a human body, I must have two things at once. I must be in the air and the air must be in me. It's no good having one at a time, is it? Try it—well, maybe don't try it! Suppose I'm here in the air, but you tie something round my throat and the air can't get into me, so I'm in the air but the air isn't in me—well, I'd go blue in the face.

Try it the other way round. The Americans decide to shoot me into space and they say, 'Take a deep breath, old boy!' The air goes into me and then they shoot me out into space, but I'm not in the air—well, then I'd go *pop*.

No, I've got to have both things, and I must have both at once: *I am in the air and the air is in me.*

And, my dear Christian friends, so it is with this matter. How are we made into the body of Christ? Christ baptises us in his Spirit—he puts us in the Holy Spirit; and at the same time he puts his Spirit in us and makes us drink of the Holy Spirit. *I am in the Spirit and the Spirit is in me.*

Don't let anybody tell you that you could have the Spirit in you and not yet be baptised in the Spirit, because that's nonsense. You might as well talk of having a human body with the air in the body, but the body not yet in the air—that's nonsense too.

Oh, what a glorious thing it is: every believer is baptised in the Holy Spirit and made to drink of that Spirit. Let the wonder of it grip our souls.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit isn't so much stuff; the Holy Spirit is a divine person. See, then, what a grand thing God has done for us miserable sinners. When we trusted Christ, he not only forgave our sins, but Christ was authorised to put us in the blessed person of the divine Holy Spirit, incorporated into the very Godhead.

Can you see how the body of Christ is born? I trusted Christ and he put me in the Spirit and the Spirit in me. Have you trusted Christ? Then he baptised you in the Spirit and put the Spirit in you. So you are in the Spirit and I'm in the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is one person, so we are in the same person. The same life that throbs through and around you throbs around and in me. We are literally members of that great supra personality, the body of Christ.

The motive in seeking extra gifts

And thus we get on to the gifts: one has this gift, one that. There's no need for us to feel that we must have all the gifts there are. I have one gift, you have another. I can't say I don't need your gift any more than my hand can say it doesn't need my foot. Similarly, if I think my own

gift is pretty small, I mustn't say, 'Oh, well, I haven't got a very big gift so I'm not in the body.' That's nonsense too. Every single member is needed and every gift is needed.

'But,' you say, 'once we have become Christians and are members of the body of Christ, is there no room for seeking other gifts?'

Yes, there's room for seeking. We are to 'earnestly desire the spiritual gifts,' said the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 14:1). Just like my hand has a general gift of grasping things; it can learn to grasp a pen, a paintbrush or the wheel of a car, so it is possible for us to seek gifts, abilities and faculties, and if it so pleases God he may add them to us. But let us again be humble enough to listen to God telling us the motive that must be ours when we seek extra gifts.

The prime motive is love

As always in Christian things, it must be. But it is here pre-eminently that we must see to it that, in seeking for gifts, our motive is love, for the simple reason that the whole purpose of a gift is to help others.

What would you think of me at the breakfast table tomorrow if I had Kellogg's Cornflakes and I didn't swallow the stuff?

'Yum, yum,' my mouth is having a glorious time!

My stomach says, 'Pass it on, pass it on.'

'No,' says the mouth, 'I'm going to do it for my own sake.'

That's nonsense. Yes, certainly the mouth enjoys the Kellogg's Cornflakes, but the whole purpose of the operation is to get the stuff to the stomach and the stomach to pass it on to all the rest.

In the exercise of your gift you will be edified, but that wasn't the purpose of giving it to you. The purpose of the gift is to help the other person, and if you seek a gift without the motive of helping others you are sinning against the basic principle of life. 'Earnestly desire the higher gifts . . . especially that you may prophesy,' because prophecy helps other folk (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1). If you've got a gift that doesn't help others, be very careful how you use it, lest you offend against the basic spiritual principle of love.

The purpose of gifts is to edify others

So let me make it clear. There are two things the Holy Spirit does. He is given to me to help me, and for that I don't need any special gifts. For instance, if I am a sinner and I need salvation, I must understand the gospel, receive the gospel and be saved. But I don't have to have the gift of an evangelist to understand the gospel and get saved, do I? I don't need any gift.

If there's somebody here who is not saved and you can't make out what all these gifts are about, you can have salvation this very moment—you don't have to have any Christian gift in order to get it. But, on the other hand, if I'm going to be used of God to bring the gospel to somebody else, yes, I shall need the gift of evangelism. The gift is not to help me; it's to help the other person.

As a believer, do you want to understand the word of God? Well, you can come to the word of God directly, and God has given you his Holy Spirit so that you may understand the things that are freely given to you of God—you don't have to have the gift of a teacher before you can begin to understand the word of God. God has given his Spirit to all believers so that

we might freely understand the things that God has written in his word. But if you are going to teach other folks, you will need a gift of teacher. Once again, the gift is not to help you, but the others. Let us see that, in seeking for spiritual things, we maintain this divinely appointed order.

Let us seek all those deeper experiences of God's Spirit that are given for our upbuilding, the enlightening and the strengthening of our hearts. Let us use the gifts that God has given us by putting us in the body of Christ. And, if we need it, let us seek other gifts. But if you are seeking gifts, I repeat, be sure that you only seek them in order to use them to benefit other people; and if they can't help, don't seek them and don't use them.

The parable of the Ten Virgins

We must draw this long study to a close. As I do so, and as we have thought of the Holy Spirit, my mind goes to the ancient parable taught by Jesus Christ our Lord. Turning our minds to his second coming and our need to be prepared for that coming, he said:

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. (Matt 25:1-4)

In the symbolic parts of Scripture, the Bible indicates to us that oil used in lamps is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit. Let us use the parable to that practical end now.

Suddenly, the shout was heard, 'Here is the bridegroom!' and the virgins awoke out of sleep to get ready, and they began to light their lamps. Five lamps began to burn very brightly and the other five lamps petered out. 'Our lamps are going out,' they cried, and they hadn't any large supply of oil. As they went to try and get oil, the bridegroom came, the door was shut and they were outside.

Christ is coming back. Are you ready to meet him? Do you mind my asking, have you been born again of God's Holy Spirit? Have you that 'living well of water' that is the Holy Spirit in your life? (see John 7:38-39.) Do you know what it means, then, Christ saying he shall be in you and he shall be with you forever?

Yes, you have some life and we all have it. You have a Bible in your hand that was inspired by the Holy Spirit. You've got some life, haven't you? You had a hymn book just now in your hand and you were singing glorious Christian hymns.

Yes, you have some life, but having just that bit isn't enough, you know. You need to be linked with the infinite supply: you need to let Christ put you in the Spirit and his Spirit in you, and you need to be 'born of water and Spirit' (John 3:5).

Let us all, with these closing words, ask God to show us our hearts, to show us where we really stand, and when Christ comes may we be ready.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.