

Gifts of the Holy Spirit -- The Gift of Teaching
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Teaching as a gift from the Holy Spirit should seem obvious, yet there are those in the Church who fail to combine academic training in teaching and volunteerism in a Sunday School class, seeing the latter as a gift of the Spirit to the church. For the Christian in the profession of teaching in an academic setting their “job” can be a gift of the Holy Spirit. In the formal academic setting the Christian teacher may inject the influence of their Faith in what they say, how they say it, and their relating to the students. In the Sunday School or Bible class they can benefit from their academic training to present a lesson in the manner best understood by their listeners.

But the gift of teaching from the Holy Spirit is not dependent upon academic training. There are those who have never been to college or never had a course in how to teach, but have an effective ministry of teaching. My mind goes back to an older man who was my Sunday School teacher in the Intermediate Department of my childhood Methodist Church. I think that department was composed of young people in their last few years of elementary school. Under his teaching I learned Bible verses, Bible stories and developed a knowledge of some whom I called my “heroes of the Bible”; David, Moses, Elijah, Jesus. I learned to pray aloud what we called “sentence prayers”, and sometimes in the general assembly of the department prior to going to individual classrooms I would be asked to offer the opening prayer. Of all the Sunday School teachers I had in the Methodist Church growing up, I remember this man most, and to this day remember his name – Mr. Vassar. He was untrained but had a love for the Lord and children, and shared with us what he knew, his relationship with Jesus and his understanding of the Bible.

In the pastorate I had those who wanted to teach but definitely did not have the “gift”. In order to accommodate both those who thought they had the “gift” and those who definitely did, I established several courses that would be one month in duration and assigned those requesting a class as the “teacher for the month”. If the students found the teacher incapable they had only one month to put up with them before a new teacher and a new course would be available. In that month the person desiring to teach would also learn honestly if he or she had the “gift”. Usually it satisfied their desire and they no longer wanted a class. If they had the “gift” and the feedback from class members was favorable, I would encourage them to continue with a different course and longer duration.

As with clergy there are those who are gifted as a pastor; those who are gifted as a preacher; those who are gifted as an evangelist; and, those who are gifted as a teacher. They are not all necessarily gifted in every way. Some churches may think their pastor has all the gifts; they are disillusioned. If you had the choice of a tree with one root and a tree with five roots, which would you choose to plant? Most definitely the five-root tree because it will be stronger and have more sources through which feeding will take place. The same is true within the church. St. Paul in Ephesians 4:11 says Christ has placed a

five-fold ministry in the Church through whom the rest of the membership is equipped for ministry. Each of these five ministries has its own distinctive life, purpose and direction. They do not have to be a staff of five ordained people. Possibly the only ones ordained would be the apostle and pastor. The prophet, evangelist and teacher may be from among the laity, and sometimes the pastor may be a layman whose ministry is to people confined to their home, or hospitalized church members.

Teaching is vitally needed in the Church and we are never too old to be a Sunday School member or involved in a home Bible class. The more we learn of the Scriptures, the more mature we are as Christians. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a dynamic move of the Holy Spirit in mainline churches. People were experiencing a personal relationship with Jesus and getting baptized in the Holy Spirit. Gifts such as praying in a language not learned were occurring. People could not seem to get enough of the Lord. Not only on Sunday morning did they go to church but they went as often as possible during the week, involved in some kind of prayer group, Bible study or Praise service. I found once a poem:

“Mary had a little lamb; It never became a sheep;

It joined a charismatic prayer group, and died from lack of sleep.”

In the Church of the Good Shepherd, Charleston, WV we had a Monday night Prayer and Praise service that lasted for two hours. We sang, had teaching, and altar ministry.

Occasionally we had a guest speaker who sometimes attracted peculiar people. Victor Maldonado, a Puerto Rican who was a mainline Heroin addict for ten years in the Nicky Cruz gang, spoke one Monday night. Victor had been delivered from drugs through the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Handbills announcing the service were distributed, by my wife and another lady of our church, among the drug culture of the city, and that night had the traditional members of Good Shepherd been present, they would have had a heart attack. One girl on the way to the church overdosed and later from the hospital contacted us for help. She came to live with us for some months as part of her recovery.

Back to Monday night! After the two-hour service at the church those who wanted to experience more went to our Rectory. When we outgrew the Rectory we went to the home of one of the church members. We averaged between sixty and a hundred people in the home fellowship that usually did not break up until one o'clock the next morning, hence the significance of the poem. We were hungry to learn everything we could about the Lord.

The danger was becoming occupied with other matters that took us away from the teachings and there became the weakening of the foundation of the “movement”. Acts 2:42 gives the secret of success: “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship” The Apostles doctrine was teaching; learning the promises of the Scriptures, and applying them to our daily life. When we cease the fellowship in which we share our lives, and no longer hunger for the teaching of the Word, we are headed for trouble.

Teaching is not for children only. Adults need to learn the Bible if we want to have the blessings God has promised. I thank God for the teaching I received in Sunday School. When I was being examined for ordination in the Episcopal Church all the candidates were questioned on doctrine, scripture, canon law and sacraments. One question I received dealt with the difference between the Matthew account of the birth of Jesus and the Luke account. They differ. Luke tells about shepherds who came to a stable. Mathew presents the Magi visiting the Holy Family in a house. Because of my Sunday School teaching I was able to explain the difference. Later one of the candidates asked me how I came by the explanation I gave. Simple, Sunday School.

Thank God for the gift of teachers and their teaching. We need more of them in the church and church members need to avail of the opportunities offered to learn the scriptures.