

Gifts of the Holy Spirit The Gift of Exhortation
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St. Paul lists the gift of exhortation in Romans 12; 8. The dictionary defines exhortation as “an address or communication emphatically urging someone to do something”. In his commentary on Romans, Martin Luther said exhortation differs from teaching. “Teaching is meant for the ignorant and exhortation for those who know”, wrote Luther. “The teacher lays the foundation, while the exhorter builds upon the foundation.”

Exhorters are not the most loved in a congregation. They may challenge the church membership to obedience when they do not want to hear correction. It is even more threatening when the exhortation is directed to a specific individual.

Sometimes what may be concluded to be a prophecy may be in fact an exhortation as well. I can think of several situations where such might apply. First was the response of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell to the 9/11 crisis. They attributed that disaster to God’s removal of His protection over the United States. That may well have been accepted if they had not cited certain hot social issues (abortion and homosexuality) connected with the reason for God’s withdrawal of His protection. This message became too personal when specific sins were named, where if they had stopped short of naming specifics, people may on their own have asked the reason why protection was removed and come to the same conclusion or something far more convicting. The second again involves Mr. Robertson and his remarks concerning the witchcraft in Haiti connected with the earthquake. I have been to Haiti and witnessed the open witchcraft prevalent in that island nation. Perhaps no place on earth has been more evangelized than Haiti, yet witchcraft prevails and to some extent even integrated into the Church. I am not here to defend or affirm what these men said. I am suggesting that what they said could be considered exhortations to the nation, and a calling forth of something greater than what has been the past.

Exhortation may call a person or group to repentance. In one church where I was conducting a teaching mission, a message was given in tongues (*glossalalia*) and the interpretation was a challenge to the congregation regarding an issue in the church the people had been reluctant to heed. The interpretation was in fact an exhortation.

An individual by encouragement may be exhorted to greater things than they are presently accomplishing. The purpose of exhortation is to raise the awareness of the individual or group to higher achievements, to greater ministry, to more productive use of the ability God has given. There are times when a true compliment will encourage a person to greater heights while they may be thinking less of themselves.

In First Corinthians 14:3, St Paul defines prophecy as edifying, exhorting, and strengthening. There are prophecies that call for the best that can be offered either by the individual or a group.

God wants us to excel to the highest degree of which we are capable. With Him all things are possible, and the Holy Spirit through the exhorter seeks to encourage us to make use of what has been given to the fullest. Jesus' condemnation of the man who ordered the destruction of his smaller barns and replace them with larger so he could sit back, relax, eat, drink and be joyful was not because the man had succeeded but because the man had not made proper use of that which had been granted him. He had not used his gain for the benefit of others but thought only of himself. Jesus wants us to use the talents given us for the benefit of the Kingdom and the citizens in the Kingdom.

You may think you have nothing to give, but again, the scriptures speak of all God's people having something. Of course some may have more gifts than others and that will usually be due to the fact that what they have recognized has been put to service and the result was the recognition of additional talents or gifts. Things not used can fall into disarray, and we lose what has been given us.

In a seminar I was conducting in the Philippines I asked the people to hold their hands in front of them. I asked them to "look at your hands?" I explained that they may see nothing visible in their hands, but God has no hands to use except their hands and if they will by faith put those hands to work, God will accomplish marvelous things through them. Later we held a healing service at the church. To the surprise of several of the priests, as they laid their hands on people who came for prayer, God worked miracles. It was exciting the next morning to watch and listen to several of the men who went to their bishop and said, "look Bishop, these hands. God used them last night in healing."

Ask the Lord to show you what you have to give and then obediently respond.