

Place: Lurgan Baptist 29:1:2002

Reading: Romans 12:1-8

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US

13. IT'S SUPPER TIME. WHERE'S MARTHA ?
SERVING GIFTS

It's supper time and I'm getting hungry. I need a servant like Martha. Her story appears in (Lk 10:38-42) She was the proactive member of the delightful Bethany household. Her brother Lazarus and her sister Mary were also friends of the Lord Jesus. He often visited this delightful and happy home. Luke tells us about one such occasion. Can you picture this scene in your mind ? Here's a little home just two miles outside Jerusalem. A family that specially endeared themselves to the Lord Jesus. The Lord had not arrived long before the two sisters were busy preparing an elaborate and tasty meal.

Things were well under way when Mary seeing no need for further service " sat at Jesus feet and heard His Word." But poor Martha her mind is on the kitchen, we men are always thinking about the kitchen, especially when we have visitors.

Now, Martha didn't have a modern kitchen with microwaves, and dishwashers, and automatic washing machines, I mean women today, have it so much easier than their mothers and grandmothers. Martha had none of those things, her cooking fire was probably fuelled by a dry thorn bush and some camel dung. No air conditioning, and I can tell you it gets hot in Bethany !

The Bible says, " Martha was cumbered about much serving " (Lk 10:40) Her mind is being pulled in different directions, she cannot sit down until the kitchen is cleared. So in a rather impatient and irritable state she comes to the Lord Jesus and says, " Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone ?" (Lk 10:40) And Christ responded by saying, " Martha, Martha, away from her." (Lk 10:41-42)

One thing is absolutely essential. What is it ? To sit at the Saviours feet. Now the Lord Jesus is not condemning active service but He is saying that we can be so occupied working for Him, that we neglect to spend time waiting on Him. I think I have been really hard on Martha down through the years. But when supper time arrives, where she is ? Just watch Martha in the kitchen. She's always active. She's getting the meal ready. She's getting the table set. She is baking, and cooking, and roasting. I don't about you, but I would hate to be married to a woman who was a flop in the kitchen. Pop in meals from Marks and Spencer are o.k. even I can do them, but I like the real thing. Now we all know the Martha's in the church. They are the believers who attend a continual round of meetings. They serve the Lord often in the background. They are involved in so many areas of God's work. Thank God for the Martha's. What would the church do without them ?

Those who utilise their " Serving Gifts." Now do you remember that Peter gives us two categories of gifts ?

He says, " If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God " (1 Pet 4:11) So there are Speaking Gifts and we looked at those last week.

Then Peter says, " If any man minister or serve, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth." So there are Serving Gifts and we want to consider these this !

Peter says these gifts are to be exercised so " that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." You see, spiritual gifts are for the good of other believers. They are also for the glory of God. We are to use our spiritual gifts, so that the church might be built up, and God might be glorified. Now let's consider this the serving gifts, the Martha gifts, these are the gifts that God gives Christians so that they might bless

others ! As we look at them, the Lord may set off His heavenly alarm clock in your heart, a light bulb may blink on in your mind. The Holy Spirit may help you to see an area where you have the spiritual capacity to serve the Lord Jesus. Now as the word implies, " the serving gifts," are geared for service. The issue here is not to proclaim the Word of God, the issue here is to serve someone's needs. Now these gifts appear in two passages in the New Testament, namely (Rom Ch 12 & 1 Cor Ch 12) I have listed six of these " Serving gifts," for you, the first is:

(1) LEADING

Look at (1 Cor 12:28) Underline that word " governments," for that introduces us to the gift of leadership. Paul says in (Rom 12:8) " He that ruleth with diligence." Now both of these words refer to leadership, they are synonymous. Look how this matter of leadership is:

(a) DEFINED:

The word " ruling," means " to lead, to manage, to have charge over, to oversee, to rule." In fact, the apostle uses this word when referring to the domestic qualifications of elders and deacons in his pastoral letter to Timothy. (1 Tim 3:4, 12) He talks about those who rule well their own home. When writing of the respect and recognition that should be shown to elders, in the churches he says, " Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour." (1 Tim 5:17) Now the word " governments," has an interesting slant. It means " to steer a ship." (kubernesis) It refers to the skill of piloting a ship it refers to the one who is at the helm of the ship, who charts the course, who knows the destination, and who is able to keep the ship on course. Leadership is the ability to see an objective, formalise it, and then mobilise a group of people, and get them to reach that objective.

It is not the ability to push paper around a desk, its not the person who has the most fancy office. No, leadership is the ability to make decisions and determine direction, to mobilise people to reach an objective. The Risen Lord says to the pastors and elders, " Here is the goal, here are the people. Now mobilise them and move them there." That is leadership ! Indeed, look how this gift of leadership is:

(b) DEMONSTRATED:

1. Among the LEADERSHIP of the Church:

Do you recall what Paul says in (1 Thes 5:12) ? Is'nt that a lovely description of pastors and elders ? They are " among you," but they are " over you." The last chapter in Hebrews reminds us of our responsibilities toward those in leadership. The apostle says,

" Remember them which have the rule over you,"
" Obey them that have the rule over you."

(Heb 13:7, 17) You see, pastors and elders have the oversight of the church, they rule, and that assumes that God would give them the gift of leadership. So we believe that the gift of leadership should belong to the pastors and elders who lead the church. But does it end there ? Well, think of how this gift is demonstrated:

2. Among the MEMBERSHIP of the Church:

You see, the church is far too complex to function with everyone serving and no one leading at all levels. Moreover, has it not always been God's plan that out of the community of God's people would come other leaders ? Do you recall the advice that Jethro gave to Moses ? Speaking of his work load, " Thou art not able to perform it thyself alone thou shalt provide out of all the people able men " (Exod 18:18, 21) In other words, Moses delegate ! Some of you here have a responsibility for a group of people, you lead a Bible study, you teach young people. That is leadership, for it has to go beyond the pastor-teacher, the evangelist, the apostle, the prophet, it has to extend throughout the body of Christ. Now Paul says we are to lead diligently. He says, " He that ruleth with diligence."

The word " diligence," means " speed," or " haste." Who is a good leader ? Someone who recognises a need and acts quickly. My if you are in a position of leadership and see a need, meet it now. Now that is a hard lesson to learn, because we all tend to procrastinate. We need to learn to force ourselves to deal with the issues the moment we become aware of them. So, God has given leaders to His church. My leadership is not an easy responsibility because there are people who react negatively to what you do or say. Sometimes you have to stand all alone in making decisions. Sometimes you alienate people and create hard feelings. Don't try to be a leader unless God has gifted you in that area. (1)

(2) HELPING

Do you notice that little word in (1 Cor 12:28)
" helps, ?" In (Acts 20:35) the same Greek word is translated "
support." This is a supporting gift, a helping gift. In (Rom 12:7) it
is called the gift of " ministry."
Paul is talking here about:

(a) LOVING SUPPORT:

The word " helps," literally means " to take a burden off of someone else and place it on yourself." It is the gift that comes alongside leadership. The people who have this gift are able to help in any conceivable way.

1. Think of the SEVEN Helpers in Acts 6:

Do you recall what the apostles said ? " We can't wait on tables, we have to teach the Word and pray. Get some people who can wait on tables." They called them servers deacons. Originally, the word referred to waiting on tables. For this people with this gift, their greatest joy and labour of love is to serve other people. There is no glory, no fanfare, no acclaim, just serving.

2. Think of the TWO Helpers in Romans 16:

Do you know them ? Well, look at (Rom 16:3) What did Aquila and Priscilla do for Paul ? Maybe they made some sandals for him. Maybe Priscilla stitched up a torn tunic. Maybe they gave him a bed. Maybe they gave him some food. I don't know what they did, but they helped Paul. The same thought is found in (16:9)

" Greet Urbane, our helper in Christ." What did Urbane do for Paul ? Who knows ? Maybe he marketed some of those tents Paul made. I don't know what he did, but he helped Paul !

3. Think of the ONE Helper in Philippians 2:

For Paul speaking of Epaphroditus, " he that ministered to my wants." (2:25) Epaphroditus served Paul to the point that he even gambled with his life. He nearly died, but he wouldn't stop serving Paul's needs.

I believe the most needed and therefore the most common gift the Spirit of God gives, is the gift of helps.

We have to have it. We can't accomplish anything if we don't have co-operation and help. Maybe you can't preach, can't teach, can't sing, but you can clean, you can take a meal to someone, you can fix something for someone, you can visit someone, you can mow the neighbours lawn because he is ill you can do most anything. Now this gift is not glamorous, its not an expressive gift but the church must have the gift of helps. Loving Support ! Paul is aer that miracles, the gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

(1 Cor 12:28) Right in the midst of all these grandiose gifts, Paul interjects helps ? Why ? He wants the Corinthians to know that this gift flows with the others.

The gift of helps no public recognition, just loving service. So, God has gifted us in the area of (1) (2)

(3) GIVING

For did you notice (12:8) Now this is a gift alright, for look at (12:6) Now giving is a touchy subject with a lot of Christians. I've heard that the most sensitive nerve in the body is the one attached to the wallet. But all Christians are to be faithful in the matter of giving.

One of the most helpful things we can do for young believers is to share the blessing of giving in obedience to the Lord's commands. But then some believers have an unusual gift of giving. That's what Paul is talking about here. Notice here:

(a) THE MEASURE OF GIVING:

" He that giveth " (12:8) Now the normal Greek word for give (didomi) just means " give." But the word Paul uses here is different. (metadidomi) It means " super give." Now all of us are called upon by the Word of God to give. The Bible tells us that we are to sow bountifully in order to reap bountifully.

(2 Cor 9:6) All of us are to lay by in store the first day of the week as God hath prospered each one of us.

(1 Cor 16:2) All of these things are commanded very clearly in terms of our giving. But there are some of us who are to be supergivers who are to go beyond the normal because we are gifted in that way. (a)

(b) THE MOTIVE FOR GIVING:

" He that giveth let him do it with simplicity." (12:8)
That word " simplicity," is an interesting one. It means
" without folds." This refers to unfolded cloth. It means to give purely
with no ulterior motives. Its also means not to ruffle the mind by making
folds in it. We are to give with openness of heart, without self-seeking,
and without expecting anything in return. My when you give with
simplicity you give with one single motive. If there is a need, I give.
Now most of us give with two motives meet the need but make sure
there is enough left for us. But the gift of giving enables someone to
give with only motive the need. Nothing else enters his mind.
Singleness of mind and heart translate into an undivided motive. Now this
gift of giving does not relate to how much you have. Some people who
don't have very much have the gift of giving away all they have. Other
people who have a lot don't have the gift, whereas others who have a lot
have the gift. Supergivers !

1. Is that not what MARY was ?

Do you remember the day she took the ointment and anointed the feet of
the Lord Jesus ? Do you know what Judas said ? "Why was not this
ointment sold for three hundred pence (denarii) and given to the poor
?"

(Jn 12:5) Now a denarius was one day's wages for one day's hard work.
Mary poured three hundred day's work on His feet in one act of love !
That is how costly that
ointment was. Now that is the gift of giving magnanimous, knowing no
bounds, with no thought of the absence of that possession once it has
been given.

2. Is that not what the MACEDONIANS were ?

Had they not the gift of giving ? Paul speaks about them when he says, "
Their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." (2 Cor
8:2) They didn't have much but they gave everything they had.

3. Is that not what C.T.STUDD was ?

His biography contains a beautiful story.

His father was extremely wealthy. C.T.Studd was to inherit a substantial
amount of money. Now this took place in the 1880s, and at that time it
amounted to £29,000. So far as he could judge, his inheritance was
£29,000-00, but in order to leave margin for error he decided to start by
giving away £25,000-00. One memorable day, the 13th January 1887, he sent
off four cheques of £5000-00 each, and five of £1000-00 pounds each. He
sent £5000-00 to D.L.Moody, he sent £5000 to George Muller, he sent
£5000-00 to George Holland, in Whitechapel, " to be used for the Lord
among His poor in London." He sent £5000-00 to Commissioner Booth Tucker
for Salvation Army work in India. To others C.T.Studd sent £1000-00 each.
In a few months he was able to discover the exact amount of his
inheritance. He then gave some further thousands, mainly to the China
Inland Mission and that left him with £3400-00.

Just before his wedding he presented his bride with this amount. She, not to be outdone, said, " Charlie, what do the Lord tell the rich young man to do ? " " Sell all."

" Well, then we will start clear with the Lord at our wedding." C.T.Studd took that remaining £3400-00 and gave it away to the Salvation Army. When they had given all their money away, C.T.Studd packed up his little wife and they went to Africa as missionaries for the rest of their days. My is that not the gift of giving ? Is that not how God ministers ? Think of what came out of that one man's gift ? China Inland Mission, (Hudson Taylor) George Mueller's orphanages, Salvation Army Extensions, and the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. That is how the Spirit of God operates ! Now do you see yourself in any of these three gifts ? Leading, Helping, or Giving ? If you do, then be obedient because there will be tremendous joy.

(4) DISCERNING

Look at (1 Cor 12:10) The Greek word for discern (diakrino) means " to judge through, to see through to the truth, to truly evaluate something." So, discerning spirits is simply to evaluate the spirit whether it is God or a spirit other than the Holy Spirit. Its the ability to know the difference between things or to discriminate between them. What an important gift this was:

(a) IN THE EARLY CHURCH THEN:

You see, this gift was the watchdog, the patrol, the guard, the sentinel for the church. In the early years of the church the New Testament had not been written and people would stand up in the church and say, " God says " or " I'm a prophet of God," or " I speak for the Lord " It was very difficult to know who did or did not speak for the Lord. So, the Spirit of God gave a supernatural ability to certain people who could determine the true from the false. They would say, " That is not the Spirit of God speaking, that is a demon spirit from Satan." Sadly, the church at Corinth had people with the gift who were either not using it or, when they did use it, they were ignored by the rest. As a result someone had actually stood up in the assembly and cursed Jesus, and they had agreed that it was from the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 12:3)

Someone with the gift of discernment should have stood up and said, " That is not the Spirit of God speaking." And they all should have listened. My this gift was given for the protection of the church. (1 Cor 14:29) Peter exercised the gift of discernment in the Early Church. For do you recall that he exposed the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira ? " Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost ?" (Acts 5:3) How did Peter know ? He had the gift of discernment. He could tell truth from error, hypocrisy from genuineness ! You say, " what about the gift of discernment,"

(b) IN THE EXISTING CHURCH NOW:

Well, certainly this gift has changed from the first century, because today we have the completed Bible, but today its just as important to protect the church from impure doctrine as ever it was. Have you ever listened to someone speak, and it just didn't sound right to you ?

Have you ever heard someone on Television, or on Radio, and it was like a loud buzzer went off in your heart ? My thats discernment ! Thats why John says,

" Beloved believe not every spirit, but try (test) the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 Jn 4:1) False prophets are everywhere today. I believe there are people who are gifted by God to unmask these false prophets. Some of them write books to unmask them. You see, they have the capacity to see through something to the core of its hypocrisy.

These people with this gift are the watchmen of the church. They can distinguish between truth and error, between the divine and the demonic, and they serve the church in a vital role ! Paul mentions another serving gift here in (12:9) He says, " To another faith by the same Spirit " That is the gift of

(5) BELIEVING

It means having an extraordinary kind of faith. Its a supernatural capacity for believing God. Obstacles are only challenges to someone with this gift they believe what is beyond the visible. Now when we talk about faith we must recognise that there is:

(a) THE INITIAL ACT OF FAITH:

The Bible calls this saving faith. Paul says, " For by grace are ye saved through faith " (Eph 2:8) Now this kind of faith is not the spiritual gift that Paul is talking about here when he speaks of the gift of faith.

No, saving faith is the faith you exercise when you trust Christ as your Saviour ! (a)

(b) THE GENERAL ATTITUDE OF FAITH:

Paul says, " For we walk by faith not by sight."

(2 Cor 5:7) All of us can grow and mature in faith, we can grow in our confidence and trust in the Lord, but this is not the gift of faith. (2 Thes 1:3) You see, Paul is not speaking here about (a) (b) he speaking about:

(c) THE SPECIAL GIFT OF FAITH:

This is monumental faith, mountain moving faith ! An unusual capacity to believe God in the face of a storm, in the face of enormous obstacles. Those who have this gift of faith laugh at impossibilities and cry " It shall be done." My we need these people. I mean we have plenty of sceptics and pessimists. They figure out how it can't be done. They constantly repeat the seven last words of the church, " We've never done it that way before." My we need people who have the gift of faith, the ability to believe God for big things ! I heard about a young pastor who was averaging about fifty people in his Sunday morning service. He got all fired up at pastor's conference, and he set a goal of five thousand in attendance for a big Sunday. Now do you think he made it ? Of course not. Thats not faith, that's folly ! But there are Christians who believe God for big things. A young pastor was doing well in his church. Someone asked a deacon, " How's your young pastor, getting along ?" " Great," replied the deacon, " He's asking God for things we didn't even know God had."

My in the Bible we read about people who had this special gift of faith ! What about the heroes of faith in Hebrews Ch 11 ? What about Hudson Taylor who believed that the Lord could win the Chinese people of his day ? So without any money, without any support, and refusing to ask for a penny, he founded the China Inland Mission and accomplished the greatest work in the history of that nation. What about George Muller ? As he trusted God to feed the orphans ? My has God given you the gift of believing God for big things ? Use it ! But don't allow your excitement to carry you away with projects that may not be wise ! Always inform your faith by Scripture and the leading of Spirit ! One more gift and we're through. Paul speaks of:

(6) CARING

In his Roman epistle. He says, " He that showeth mercy with cheerfulness " (12:8) The word " cheerfulness, means " gladness," or " graciousness." This is the Spirit given ability to love and to care for hurting people. Now showing mercy:

(a) REFLECTS THE CHARACTER OF THE LORD:

The word " mercy," here is a Greek word (eleon) which means " pity," or " mercy," or " compassion." Its a term that is characteristic of the character of God. Psalm 103 contains some marvellous statements about the mercy of God ! For example:

Verse 8, " The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy."

Verse 13, " Like as a father piteth his children, so the Lord piteth them that fear Him."

My God is merciful. God is pitying. God is compassionate ! " Showing mercy," (a) and it:

(b) REVEALS THE COMPASSION OF THE HEART:

The idea is conveyed in (1 Cor 12:26) which says, " And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." (1 Cor 12:26)

Do you remember Dorcas ? The Bible says " She was abounding in good deeds and acts of charity."

(Acts 10:36) She exercised the gift of caring with a dedicated sewing needle. My have you this gift ? Do you know what it is to come alongside the poor, the sick, the destitute, the orphan, the widowed and minister. W.A. Criswell tells a beautiful story of a little girl who came home from school and said, " Mummy, my best friend came to school today and said that her mother died." The mother said to her little child, " Well, what did you say to her dear ?" The child replied, " Oh, I didn't say anything mother. I just went over to her desk, sat beside her and cried with her." My has God gifted you in this area of caring ? Has He given you areas of ministry such as hospital visitation, convalescent homes, shut-ins, the poor and the needy ?

My ... if God has given you this gift use it !

Its Supper Time. Where's Martha ? Serving Gifts !
Martha, I hope you realise how very important you are to all of us ! My
.... I hope you realise how very important you are to the body of Christ.
God has gifted you ! Are you using your gift for the good of others and
the glory of God ?