

The Gift of Exhortation

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All of the gifts of God are given to us according to His grace. That is, you cannot earn the gift, you cannot merit the gift, or else it would not be a gift. It is something that God has given to us and as a gift it must be received. And so, you have to set aside, in your own mind, your worthiness or your deserving of the gifts.

Now this can be a hang-up in two directions. A lot of times I think that our self-righteousness gets in the way and we think, "Well Lord, look what You have done for them and they are terrible. I am much better than they are. Surely Lord, if You did that for them, You should have done it for me actually, before You did it for them. I do not understand, Lord. How is it that when they are doing those things You would still bless them, and yet here I am doing my best, seeking You, and it seems like I am going through problems and not getting a thing."

On the other side of the coin, so often in looking at myself I say, "Well, I am not worthy. I have failed the Lord so much. I am constantly stumbling." And thus, I do not believe that God can really do anything for me. And I really do not expect Him to because I am so undeserving and unworthy. And a lot of times Satan uses that to keep us from just receiving the gift of God by faith and by the grace of God, by which the gift is given.

So if I look at myself and I see a lot of self-righteousness, then that is going to be a barrier to me. On the other hand, if I look realistically and I see all my failures and flaws, then that can be a barrier to me because then I can say, "Well, I know the Lord will not do it for me because I just am not deserving."

But you see neither of these views are looking at the grace of God that we receive from God. God bestows all of His gifts on us through grace. That is, I do not deserve them. I am not worthy of them. And I could not earn them no matter how good I might be. And so, I just have to accept them by grace. In His grace, God has given to me the wonderful gifts of salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit. And they are mine just by receiving that which God has for me, not on the basis of my worthiness or unworthiness, but on the basis of His grace.

Paul said, "By grace are you saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). And it is God's grace that has been extended to us and the gifts and the blessings of God are bestowed just because He loves us. We need to simply accept that. It is just because He loves us. We say, "But I am so miserable." Yeah, but He loves us anyhow. Just receiving the grace of God can be difficult to do.

I think that one of the hardest things is to receive the grace of God gracefully. I am always stumbling. Whenever God does something nice for me, I think, Well Lord, I will make this up to You. Now I am going to do better, Lord. And I am trying to somehow get my worthiness in there, rather than just saying, "Oh Lord, You are so good. Thank You. I love You. Oh, what grace! I just cannot understand it, but I sure enjoy it, Lord. I enjoy Your wonderful grace to me."

Now then, all of us have been given certain gifts by God. We have special talents, special aptitudes, and special abilities. And for each of us there are different talents or different gifts but that is what makes life so interesting—the variety of ways by which God has made up the human personality. You see when God created you, He created you very special and very unique. There is no one else like you. God is interested in you as you are. And thus, it is a mistake to try to be like someone else, unless that someone else is Jesus. But God has made you as you are, unique and distinct. And He loves you just as you are.

Now a lot of times I think that we find fault with God for the way He made us. We look in the mirror and say, "God, could You have done this instead of that?" Paul said, "And what is the clay that it should say to the potter, 'Why hast thou made me thus?'" (Romans 9:20).

Sometimes we are not satisfied with the way God made us, but we need to accept our uniqueness as a gift from Him. God made you the way you are because He loves you the way you are. He accepts you the way you are. And thus, it is important that we accept ourselves because God made us like this. And realize that I am special and I am unique unto God. No one else can fill that place that God has for you in the body of Christ. He has made and fashioned you uniquely for that place that you have. And that is why it is important that every one of us find our place and take our place in the body of Christ, according to the gifts that He has given and according to His grace.

So as Paul goes on then and begins to list some of these various gifts, which we have already covered:

Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation. (Romans 12:6-8)

Now last week we studied the gift of teaching. That is instructing the people in the ways of God, in the truths of God, and how vital and important that ministry is within the church. But a companion gift and certainly a necessary gift to go along with the gift of teaching, is the gift of exhortation. The gift of exhortation is tied, in the New Testament (and in the Old Testament too), with the gift of prophecy. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:3,

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

So the exhortation is a part of the gift of prophecy.

In Acts 15:32,

And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

So being prophets, they exhorted the brethren. This is a very important gift within the church. It seems that many people do not live up to what they know to be right. There are many people who are hearers of the word, but not doers. They know the truth, they even consent to the truth, but they do not do it. And thus, they need encouragement. They need a push. There are so many times when I say, "Oh yes, I should do that and I will do that," but I get caught up with—with other things and I let it slide, though I really should do it. It seems like people are naturally procrastinators—always putting things off. "Well, I hope to get to that next week because I do not have time for it today, but maybe tomorrow..."

There was an excellent article in the Reader's Digest a few years ago on the subject of procrastination. My wife suggested to one of our daughters who is sort of a special procrastinator, that she read the article. And our daughter said, "Oh yes, I saw that article and I am going to read it one of these days." There is that tendency we have of putting off what we know we should be doing and letting it slide. And we need someone to come along and say, "Now look, get in and do it. Do it now!"

Exhortation could also be called encouragement. It is an encouraging of the person to go ahead and do what they really need to be doing. Now we need exhortation on prayer. For all of us know that we should be praying more than we are praying. And all of us know that prayer should not be a last resort, but the first resort. And yet, so often we get caught up in our situations and in the pressures of life, while we are just working ourselves silly trying to find the answers. And we come and we pour out our heart to a friend who says, "Well, have you prayed about it?" "Well, I intend to, you know." And so they exhort us, "Well let us pray. Come on, let us pray right now. Let us agree together right now." You see that is encouragement—that exhorting to prayer or to trusting the Lord.

When I was pastoring in Huntington Beach we had a little ninety-year-old lady who was just a wonder. And she had the gift of exhortation. Whenever I needed encouragement I would pay her a visit. And she always would just encourage or exhort me. And she used to have a radio program. It was broadcast in Florida and down through the Caribbean area. And—her whole thing was, "God is on the throne. He knows what you are going through. He is watching over you. You do not have to worry because the Father loves you and He cares for you and He knows what is going on in your life today. Just know that God is still on the throne." And it is truth that you know, of course, but you sort of forget it in the pressure of the situation. And so, we need those who exhort.

Now, there are some people who attempt to exhort without the gift of exhortation. And that does not comfort, but it riles. You want to say, "You do it!" You know, when they are exhorting you to do something that you know you should be doing and it just irritates you. And there are others who have such a gift of exhortation that they just make you want to do it.

Now we are commanded to exhort one another. When Paul wrote to Timothy he said,

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. (1 Timothy 4:13)

So these are the things that you need to be doing—exhorting one another, reading the Word, and getting your doctrine tight.

In Hebrews we are told,

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

Again in Hebrews 3 they were commanded :

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

And Paul, when he wrote to Titus said,

These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. (Titus 2:15)

Now the purpose of the gift is that we might abound more and more in the things of God.

First Thessalonians 4:1 says,

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

So we have exhorted you as to how you ought to walk—pleasing God. That, as a result of walking in this fellowship with God you will just abound more and more. Also it is so that we might convince the gainsayers.

Titus 1:9 says,

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

Now as we look at the Old Testament, we find that most of the prophets had the gift of exhortation. They were exhorting the people constantly: to turn to the Lord; to turn from their idolatries; to seek the Lord; and, to repent of their evils. Samuel exhorted the people to not "turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart." He said in 2 Kings 17:13,

Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

And so the prophets exercised the gift of exhortation, by exhorting the people to turn to God and to seek God.

In the New Testament we find Peter exercising the gift of exhortation when he wrote his first epistle. He said,

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. (1 Peter 5:1)

Here is his exhortation to the elders or the overseers of the church:

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being the lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3)

Thus the exhortation to them to feed the flock, to tend them, and to take care of them. And then:

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5)

And thus the exhortation:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith. (1 Peter 5:6-9)

So you see, all of these exhortations that he is giving to them: to feed the flock of God, taking the oversight, and not being lord over God's heritage, but being examples and being in submission to each other. We are to be humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, casting our cares upon Him. We are to be sober and vigilant, thus resisting the enemy—Satan.

James is the classic exhorter. James was saying, "Do not talk to me about your faith. Let me see your works. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (cf. James 1:22). And so James was constantly exhorting them to prove their faith by their works. You show me your works and I will show you your faith. And that is such an important and necessary epistle because it really deals with practical aspects of Christianity. It is not just saying something. It is not just repeating an apostles' creed. It is not just standing up at the right time and sitting down at the right time. It is actually doing the things that the Scriptures tell us to do. And the proof then is in our doing; and thus, it is manifested.

Paul, writing to the Romans said,

I beseech ye therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

Again Paul is exhorting them to action—and not just to a faith or not just to a creed, but exhorting them to let it be seen in the activities of their life.

To the Thessalonians, as he closes out his first epistle, Paul just really gets on a roll exhorting them.

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all [men]. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:14-22)

In 2 Thessalonians Paul says,

Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. (2 Thessalonians 3:12-13)

Now this is a good exhortation that Paul gives. Someone might say, "Well, I am doing the right thing, but I have not seen results."

"Well, do not be weary in well-doing. Stick with it. Hang in there."

To Timothy he said,

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; (1 Timothy 2:1)

Jude was an exhorter. He said,

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (Jude 3)

Now each one of us takes our place and part in the body and we exercise the gift that God has given to us. The teachers tell you what prayer is all about. They will teach you the value of prayer and they will deal with the proper forms of prayer. But the exhorter will come along and say, "Now look, you know that you should pray, so pray!" And they push you then in prayer.

And it is amazing how many conferences they have on prayer and seminars on prayer, telling you all about prayer and what prayer can do. But there are very few conferences where you just really pray. See, we need exhorters at those conferences. And after a great lesson on prayer, then we need to say, "Okay, you have heard it, now let us all pray." You see, we need to put it into practice. And that is what the exhorter does. He comes along and he says, "All right, now you have heard it, now let us do it. Let us just get down to it."

Pastor Romaine has the gift of exhortation and it is a great balance here in the church. I have the gift of teaching, but his exhortation is a great balance to the teaching ministry. Because you see, you could be well-fed and knowledgeable people as far as the Word of God is concerned, but if you do not do it, all of the knowledge is of no value—unless you are doing it. So Romaine comes along and he exhorts you then to do it. And that is important and that is good.

My wife has a wonderful gift of exhortation, as you ladies who come on Friday morning well know. She is an exhorter and she exercises this gift in a very special way for the ladies. And they go out of here all charged up, ready to go to battle. They are ready to fight the forces of darkness that are closing in and she has a way of just stirring them into action. She goes up to the conference center with the pastors' wives and I mean they come off that mountain just floating. They cannot wait to get back to the battle and wait to get back to the problems that they left, the problems that they were so discouraged about when they came on up to the pastors' wives retreat. But boy, they go home all charged up, ready to go for another year and just tackle all life's problems. This is because of the gift of exhortation.

It is a glorious gift. It is a wonderful gift, and surely, it is an important gift. If the body of Christ is to be well-rounded—if we are to actually put into practice the things that we know, the things that we have heard, the things that we have been taught—then we have to have those who are exhorting us to be putting them into practice. "That is practicality. Let us now do it. We have heard it and let us do it."

So the exhorter stirs us to action by pushing us to do the things that we really want to do and we know we should do, but we have just been hesitating or putting off doing it. And they are the ones who come along and get us actually doing the things that need to be done. They prompt us to action in order that we might truly serve God in a very powerful way and that the Church might have a strong influence in the community, because we are not just hearers of the word but we are doers. We are getting involved in doing that which is right.

I was thinking about how many of our songs actually are exhortations. "Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." There is so much exhortation there and we need that exhortation to just really do it—not just talk or learn about it, but to do it.

May the Lord bless you. And may each one of us become doers of the word and not hearers only. May you find that gift of the Spirit that God has for you, so that you might function in your place in the body of Christ, and that the whole body might be edified as the result of each one of us exercising the gifts that God has given us to edifying the entire body of Christ. Thus, may we be built up and may we grow in the Lord and in the things of the Lord, as we follow after righteousness and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank You for the many gifts of the Holy Spirit and for this gift of exhortation. And Lord, we thank You for those within the body who possess that gift of exhortation and are stirring us up for good works. And Lord we pray that we indeed might be the doers of the word, not just hearers; that we might put into action the things that we have been taught and the things that we have learned. And Lord, even tonight, for those who are going through some heavy trials, pressured and pressed down, tonight Lord, may they just commit their ways to You and trust also in You. And may they just rest, Lord, in You. Some of them have been having a hard time, Lord, sleeping at night because of the pressures of these things and they wake up in the night and their mind turns to them and they toss and turn, Lord, as they try to figure their way out. Oh Lord, help them to just commit it and to rest in You, Lord, knowing that You are watching over us and knowing that You care for us. And knowing, Lord, that all things are working together for good to those who love You. Let them really enter into that rest that You have for Your people. So Lord, raise up others within the body with that ministry of exhortation, that we might exhort one another daily, encouraging each other to good works, to faith, to trust, to prayer, to praise, and to give thanksgiving. Help us to do the things, Lord, that we know we should be doing and really desire to do. Stir us into the activity of doing them. In Jesus' name. Amen.