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**“Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”
(Hebrews 10:24).**

Gifts of Congregational Support

Central Truth: The Spirit gives some believers special abilities for mutual support in the local congregation.

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Members of your physical body minister to the health and strength of the body so that you may be able to live and do your work. In like manner, members of the spiritual body exercise their respective spiritual gifts to the building up of that body so it can minister to others in health and strength. Those are “Gifts of Congregational Support” which make the body healthy.

To speak of the spiritual gifts by which the congregation is strengthened is not being selfish. A person involved in feeding the poor, for instance, eats that he may have strength to feed others. The church cannot long minister to others if she neglects her own spiritual health. The office gifts the Lord placed in the church were designed to grow and develop every part of the body in the spirit of love (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Every spiritual gift builds up the body when it is used properly. Three of the gifts are applied to the growth of the body in this study. They are the gift of serving (called “*ministry*” in Romans 12:7), the gift of giving and the gift of encouragement (exhortation). Observe how each of those gifts ministers to the body according to the divine plan of mutual service.

I. THE GIFT OF SERVING

“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Our mutual service takes many forms in the church. Note the list in I Thessalonians 5:14. (1) We serve one another when we admonish those who grow careless or disorderly in their Christian lives. (2) We serve one another when we encourage those who are afraid or despondent. (3) We serve one another when we give a helping hand to those who are weak, bearing their infirmities for their sake. (4) We serve one another when we are long-suffering and patient with all people. The highest position one can have in the church is the position of service.

This gift is a ministry of seeing and meeting practical needs. It is used to describe the helpful duties of domestic servants (John 2:5, 9), civil servants (Romans 13:4), Christ in His earthly ministry (Romans 15:8), Christians in their helping one another (Ephesians 6:21), and those who minister in the churches (Romans 16:1).

The New Testament epistles call us to such a lifestyle. *“By love serve one another”* is a common admonition (Galatians 5:13). It is the Christian's joy to do whatever he can to meet a need in the life of another.

The gift is manifested in ladies who work in the church kitchen, serve on committees, work as nursery matrons, provide volunteer office help, and those who help others out of loving hearts. Jesus set the example (Luke 22:27). We can do no better than to follow His example.

II. THE GIFT OF GIVING

The person who exercises the spiritual gift of giving must do it with no ulterior motives. He must give to meet human need as if he were giving directly to the Lord himself.

The spiritual gift of giving means to part with something in one's possession so that a change of ownership results. The Bible refers to one Christian giving another the blessing of a spiritual ministry (Romans 1:11), the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:8), and financial support (Ephesians 4:28). We usually think that the gift of giving involves money. It does, though it may involve more than that in time, effort, influence, etc.

John Mark helped Paul and Barnabas in their missionary efforts (Acts 13:5). Seven chosen men helped the apostles in benevolent ministries in the early church (Acts 6:1-7). Epaphroditus helped Paul by working to make money and using it to support Paul (Philippians 2:25-30).

The key to the spiritual gift of giving is not how much it is, but what inspires it. That spiritual gift is motivated by the Holy Spirit. It is inspired when God wants a need filled and moves upon the heart of one of His children to give to meet it.

A man called his pastor and asked, “Do I understand correctly that Mrs. So-and-So is living alone?”

“Yes, that is correct,” the pastor replied.

“Well, I am impressed to give an offering to help her without her knowing where it came from. May I give it through the church designated to her?”

Receiving an affirmative reply, the brother came to the church with a check for one thousand dollars. When the pastor took it to the widow, she received it with tears. She had a financial need that only she and God knew about. But God knew and moved upon one of His children to meet it. That is the exercise of the gift of giving.

Every person should give tithes plus freewill offerings to God through his church. But some are used of God to meet special needs through the spiritual gift of giving. The gift is more than a special offering. It is giving motivated by God himself as the Holy Spirit leads the giver. Giving is a delight to one who has that gift.

One with the gift of giving has the ability to produce income, to live off less than he produces, to see financial needs, and to help meet them even at a personal loss as the Lord directs. He gives without pretense, freely, generously, and with delight. His is Spirit-led giving. Thank God for those whom He has gifted with such a blessed ministry.

III. THE GIFT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Hebrews 10:24, 25 admonishes, “*Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 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.*”

The two key words of that text are provoke and exhort. To provoke means to stimulate and arouse one another. To exhort means to encourage and admonish one another. They are the two sides of the ministry of encouragement (the gift of exhortation).

Remember that the gift of exhortation means to encourage and guide another person in the right way. The Bible speaks often about Christians encouraging one another in their brotherly walk. It is a blessed ministry in which one is encouraged by encouraging another.

Two disciples who walked with Jesus said their hearts burned within them as they conversed with Him (Luke 24:32). Barnabas was so helpful in encouraging Christians that he was nicknamed, “The Son of Encouragement (consolation)” in Acts 4:36. Philemon is said to have “*refreshed*” the saints

by his fellowship and ministry to them (Philemon 7). Colossians 3:12-17 is an example of the encouragement which fills the New Testament epistles.

Christians should make it a part of their ministry to encourage one another. Take it as a part of your purpose that you will leave every Christian with whom you come in contact encouraged and strengthened. Often we live with complaints and criticisms which we share with one another. How much better it is to have encouragement and praise as our theme.

Encouragement may involve your having to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (II Timothy 4:2). See where a person is and help him to see what steps he needs to take to get where God wants him to be. Encourage him with the realization that spiritual victory and effective service are possible for him. Leave him the stronger whether you are with him five minutes or all day. Build him up in Christ. That is a ministry of God through you.

Every Christian should encourage every other Christian. But some among us have a particular ability to aid us in our problems and set us on the way to victory. Such encouragers are a blessing from the Lord, given to strengthen us in the way.

You strengthen your congregation as you exercise one or more of these blessed ministries. Be a servant to any and all who are in need. Give liberally of your material resources, your time, and your energy to meeting the needs of people as God directs. Encourage every Christian you meet. And you will be a blessing!

The church will be as effective in her work as she is strong in her inner life. The office gifts are to build up the church so she can do the work of service (Ephesians 4:11, 12). We serve Christ as we serve one another in the area of our personal spiritual gifts. Give yourself to serve.

Questions

1. Why does the church need the ministry of spiritual gifts?
2. What is the gift of serving (ministry)?
3. How can you exercise that gift in your church?
4. How is love the guideline in using that gift?
5. What is the gift of giving?
6. What is meant by the statement, “It is not how much but who inspires the gift”?
7. Why should one give whether he has the gift of giving or not?
8. Why do we need to encourage one another?

9. How can the gift of encouragement operate in your church?
10. In what practical way can you support your church this week?