

Blessing People Spiritually – Grace Gifts in Action
1 Cor 12:1-13, Acts 9:36-43, 18:24-28

Well brothers and sisters, how is it going with blessing people spiritually? Has this been on your mind as you are going about your daily business this past week? Has it been something you've remembered to focus on as you've been at work, or school or out shopping or hanging with your friends?

Did you put that list of names up on your bathroom mirror where you will see it everyday when you brush your teeth and you can be reminded to pray for them?

And... are you remembering to be intentional and specific in your prayers for these people? Have you identified something in their life that is standing in the way of them believing in Jesus, or coming to church, or living in obedience to God's laws – and are you interceding about that in prayer to the Lord? Are you asking God to give you the opportunity to bless them spiritually in some further way?

How's it going??

Well, if any of you have had a week similar to mine – I'm guessing that like me, you're struggling to remember that we're supposed to be focused on blessing people spiritually.

And I know... the Stanley Cup playoff season doesn't make remembering any easier...

And also I'm guessing that there is a myriad of tasks and responsibilities that are competing for your time and attention along with the unexpected interruptions that impose themselves upon our schedules. Like maybe you had to take a whole day to unexpectedly replace a dish-washer...

Or maybe you have a move coming up, or maybe you are travelling for business or family plans, really important stuff that needs your time and attention and focus and even though last week Sunday you were like... Yes! Gonna pray specifically and intentionally for my people on my list... Monday rolled around and life has just happened to you all week long with a vengeance and today, like me, you're realizing – ok, I was not even thinking about it last week!

That's kind of been my week – anyone else here feeling the same way?? Aren't you glad that God is Sovereign and His plans for people are not resting upon our efforts and abilities!

However – this is what God is calling us to do, and so it's more about our learning obedience and learning how to keep in step with the Holy Spirit each day in each situation we find ourselves in – and when we are obedient in this way, we'll see God doing some amazing things in people's lives – BECAUSE – we've been paying attention.

So before we go any further in learning about how to bless people spiritually by using grace-gifts lets be specific and intentional and intercede in prayer about this and we'll all pray for each other – right now, ok.

Lord Jesus, we confess that business has gotten the better of us this past week, forgive us for forgetting to focus on blessing people spiritually. Holy Spirit, we ask you to interrupt our days and remind us to bless people for the Father's glory.

And we pray for each other what it says in Ephesians 5. May we all be filled with the Spirit, speaking to others with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. May we sing and make music from our hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything. Amen!

Ok – so, now we're ready to dig into our need for the Holy Spirit's empowerment in order to bless people spiritually, and what that means in terms of using the Spirit's gifts.

Now we are not unfamiliar with our need for the Holy Spirit's empowerment, or infilling, or baptism of the Spirit here at Valleyview.

I've done numerous messages about what it means to be empowered and filled and baptized with the Holy Spirit and how there are two ways in which this occurs based on two different words used to talk about being filled with the Spirit in the New Testament.

The first word we just prayed from Eph 5:18, its "*pleroo*" and it means to be filled to completion, to be made perfect, to carry out or accomplish something over the long term.

So this is the baptism, infilling, empowerment of the Holy Spirit to regenerate our spirit, born again (John 3:5-6), to convict us of our sin (John 16:8) and to cause us to put our faith and trust in Jesus' for forgiveness, (Eph 1:13) which seals our destiny to be resurrected and glorified. (Phil 1:6) This is a one-time for all filling.

It works its way out of us with external evidence in the fruit of the Spirit as we display "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal 5) Also by what we believe and confess, as we read in 1 Cor 12:3 "no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." And in how we speak, as we prayed in Eph 5:20-21 "*speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.*"

So this is the first way in which we need to be Spirit-filled.

The second way is how the disciples were filled at Pentecost. The word used there is "*pletho*." This is baptism of the Holy Spirit to empower someone for a particular purpose, to fulfill a Karios moment, to accomplish a specific task – like blessing someone spiritually. Thus, this infilling is episodic and should occur repeatedly as needed.

This filling of the Holy Spirit also works its way out of us with external evidence; such as signs and wonders, miracles and healings and demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's power that we see and read about in the N.T.

Additionally, all the spiritual gifts mentioned in Rom 12: 4-8, 1 Cor 12: 7 – 11, 12: 27-28, and Ephesians 4:11 are evidence of this *pletho* filling of the Holy Spirit.

So – we just prayed that we would be reminded and be returned to that pleroo filling of the Holy Spirit and have it manifest itself in our lives in such a way that it would counter how all the busyness of life jostles us around and knocks us off our focus.

Now we want to learn about what we need to be filled with - *plethoed* - and given by the Holy Spirit so that we fulfill God's task for us to bless people spiritually.

And while we might want to rush right away to the part where we figure out which grace gifts we have received, or perhaps we think we know already what we've been given it's important that before we get to this part that we take some time to really understand what the bible teaches us about spiritual gifts.

So let me do a quick review of some of the things we've learned about them in the past.

Spiritual gifts are better called "Grace gifts" because they come out of your experience of the GRACE and mercy of being forgiven from your sin by Jesus Christ.

Grace Gifts are what make the Church the Body of Christ and keep it as such so it does not become a social club, or a charity group, or an activist group, or a false church!

Grace Gifts make us *all* ministers, the Holy Spirit gives us specific gifts to play specific parts in the church – nobody is a volunteer in the Body of Christ.

Grace Gifts are different from our creational skills and abilities that we use for our work or studies, and also different from the fruit of the Spirit.

It's important to beware of counterfeit gifts, the Enemy uses such gifts to try to destroy the church instead of building it up.

True Gifts come from the Holy Spirit, and you can determine if the Holy Spirit is working in someone's life by what they confess about Jesus Christ, and a true gift by how it helps to produce faith in Christ as a result of its being used.

So, those are some basic points about grace gifts, gifts of the Spirit, that it's important to know and understand so that, as the Apostle Paul says we are not "*ignorant about these gifts.*"

But, being reminded of this knowledge in and of itself doesn't always inspire us to action, does it? Knowing these facts about grace gifts doesn't motivate us to go and discover ours and put them to use, in blessing people spiritually right?

We need something a bit more...

Let me give you an example. If I were to go online and look up "fencing" or "Sword fighting" on Wikipedia, I'd get interesting facts, descriptions about different styles of sword play, find instruction on how to hold your sword, how to care for your sword etc...

but... what really makes me want to learn how to fence is watching movies like Lord of the Rings, or Pirates of the Caribbean. All that great swashbuckling, action and fighting!

Then I'm all pumped up to go out and sign up for a class in sword fighting, I'm motivated to learn and practice, and then I'll go and use my sword to duel someone, or slice up a whole bunch of pumpkins.

So, in our scripture passages this morning, we've read about instances where the disciples went out and did some amazing things using the grace-gifts, with incredible results, and we're going to take a closer look at what was going on in these instances.

An I'm praying that it will inspire you to go out and utilize the grace-gifts to bless people spiritually! That you will get excited to identify which specific gifts the Spirit has given you and develop them further – or just ask the Spirit for more gifts that you could use to bless people – that you might need for a specific person.

So, the first story is about the apostle Peter – and while he is travelling abroad he makes a stop over in Joppa in order to raise a dead woman, who was a local charity superstar, back to life! What an amazing demonstration of grace-gifts.

Now, if anybody could tell you about experiencing Jesus' grace and forgiveness it was Peter. As a disciple Peter was the

keener of the group. He was impetuous, bold and often spoke before he thought.

When Jesus asked who the disciples thought he was Peter blurts out, *“You are the Christ the son of the living God!”*

When Jesus foretells that all his disciples will fail to stand up for him when he is arrested, Peter swears that he will never desert him...and yet as Jesus warned Peter, on that Good Friday morning before the rooster crowed Peter had denied Jesus three times.

Peter needed Jesus’ grace and forgiveness – he was one of Jesus’ inner-circle, and he knowingly had betrayed his Lord, deliberately...out of fear for his own life.

It hard to come back after you’ve done something like that isn’t it? But yet after his resurrection Jesus finds Peter on the beach one morning and cooks him breakfast, forgives him, and reinstates him as an apostle!

So Peter really knows grace and it drives him to use the gifts He has received through having the Holy Spirit poured out on him at Pentecost and what we read today is just one story among many detailing how Peter used these gifts so that the Body of Christ was built up!

So what gifts are being exercised? Well, Peter is an apostle and he is using this gift by travelling around to various cities to oversee the groups of believers that have started to grow everywhere. So we see the gift of apostleship used here.

And the poor lady who died was also using her grace-gifts! Funneling her natural skills and talents as a seamstress through the grace-gifts of Helping and Serving to make clothes for the poor and needy!

And finally we see the gift of miracles being used here as Peter prays and then commands Tabitha to get up and she is raised back to life – and the cumulative result of all these grace gifts being used is that many people in Joppa believed in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Blessing people spiritually by putting grace gifts into action!

Now the next story features some believers who have been the recipients of Christ's grace because other believers have been using their gift of evangelism and teaching.

Priscilla and Aquila were Italian Jews who had been evangelized and taught by the apostle Paul in Corinth, and Apollos was an Egyptian Jew who had been evangelized and taught by some follower of Christ unknown to us.

So, Apollos comes to Ephesus and there his creational ability as a scholar is funneled through the gift of Teaching the faith and he is a powerful force - but when Priscilla and Aquila hear him teach, they realize he doesn't have all the information.

They use their gift of Discernment and also the gift of Nurturing Leadership, by inviting Apollos over for coffee one afternoon and teaching him about Christ more fully.

Now Apollos must also use Discernment here – he doesn't know these people and they could be using counterfeit gifts from the enemy to introduce false teaching!

But Apollos knows enough about what the prophets say about Christ to discern if what Priscilla and Aquila teach about Christ is coming from the Holy Spirit – and it is! So, with their additional instruction he is now more fully equipped as a teacher, and so he decides to go off to another city to do more teaching there...

And the combination of his creational gift of scholarship used through the grace gift of teaching the faith is a great help to the believers in Ephesus, He publicly debates the Jewish skeptics and proves from the Old Testament that Jesus is the expected Messiah.

So the believers in Ephesus have their faith strengthened through this! Blessing people spiritually putting the grace gifts into action.

Now I want you to notice how in both of these stories the grace gifts are being used in love, agape (*which is a manifestation of our one-time initial baptism of the Holy Spirit and is very different from the “love from love-wins” that is a manifestation of the evil spirit of our times*)

Because as the apostle Paul explains in that famous “love” passage in 1 Corinthians 13 you can perform the most amazing feats with your grace gifts – like giving all you have to the poor, making sense of the deepest mysteries, and so on... but if you don’t do them out of love, out of agape – its nothing!

If you don’t exercise your gifts out of that selfless giving agape which characterizes the grace and forgiveness that Christ accomplished for us – even the most amazing results will be nothing.

Can you imagine if Peter didn’t exercise his gifts in love?

He’d be impatient with the messengers who’d come to ask him to go with them – after all he had more important things

to do on his “apostle-tour” than visit a dead woman, she’s dead – and He’s got a scroll signing engagement this afternoon. But oh alright, I’ll go and see what I can do.

Then he could have chewed them out rather rudely for not having enough faith and praying and healing her themselves, and said something like it’s a good thing I was close by to come and take care of this...

Blessing people spiritual with the grace gifts in Action – if it’s not done in agape... its nothing.

And Priscilla and Aquila could have jumped all over Apollos’ incomplete teaching and embarrassed him publicly.

They could have called up their credentials in front of everyone that they had spent time with Paul THE apostle to the Gentiles, and conversely... Apollos could have dredged up Paul’s past sins of persecuting and killing Christians and tried to discredit his attackers who dared challenge his impressive intellect.

But... as Paul writes *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”*

And this is how the grace-gifts were used by the people in these scripture passages.

Now, we often use this great passage on love, agape, for weddings, for romance, Valentine’s Day, and that can be helpful for our romantic relationships – but.... it’s actually about the way in which Christians are to exercise their grace gifts so that they have maximum impact in building up the body of Christ, and so that the one exercising the gift also benefits from using it as well.

When we don’t use the grace-gifts in love, we become proud, we become self-centered, we are setting ourselves up for a fall – but most of all, we are not blessed by the results

because there will be no grace and no reason to trust Jesus because it will have been all about us.

So brothers and sisters, blessing people spiritually with the grace gifts must be done out of agape love.

So for as much as we might find that Love passage, that Agape passage, inspirational for a wedding and how a husband and wife ought to relate to one another – I pray brothers and sisters that the Spirit will use it to inspire us to put the grace gifts into action and bless people spiritually!

Which kind of brings us full circle when it comes to being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Even though there are two kinds baptism, infilling, empowerment – they really are inseparable. You can’t just stick with that initial infilling because you won’t have the grace-gifts that you need to truly be effective and accomplish the task that God has commanded us to do...

And you can't use or focus only on Grace-gifts from that second kind of empowerment apart from a basis of that initial filling - because you won't be able to use them in agape love, and they won't accomplish what they are supposed to.

So – brothers and sisters – since we are here, confessing Christ as Lord, speaking to one another with songs, hymns and spiritual songs... I know the Spirit has filled us. So, let's ask the Spirit to FILL us – and let His gifts loose in our lives this week.

And we won't be able to forget about what we're supposed to be focused on – because the Holy Spirit is going interrupt us.

It won't be life interrupting our Blessing focus - it will be the Holy Spirit's gift blessing people and interrupting out daily schedule.

Just imagine what the Spirit can do through us with His gifts! What results could happen in the lives of people we are praying for, people we know at work, at school, from our

social circles - the impact it will have on the relationships we have with our family and friends and our fellow church members.

Our creational skills and ability being funneled into the Kingdom of God to do amazing things, people serving and helping others, even miracles happening! And even more spectacular than someone coming back to biological life, will be the people who come alive spiritually and believe in Christ as savior.

All to be obedient to what God is calling us to do right now, go out and bless people spiritually and fulfill Christ's purpose for his church to make disciples of all nations.

So, brothers and sisters are you inspired? I hope you are! I hope that you want to discover what gifts Christ has given you, that you are all pumped to try them out as ministers, and experience the amazing results in your life and in the lives of others as you bless the spiritually using the grace gifts. Amen