

NOTE: This issue of Dig Deeper will largely be devoted to remarks enlarging on two points in previous Dig Deepers, particularly on chapter 4.

4:9 Gift and Speaking

While God has always bestowed natural gifts on all men, the ascended Lord bestowed spiritual gifts on each believer. The natural gifts are to be presented to Him as part of the living sacrifice spoken of in Romans 12 1-2. We have laid them at His feet. We only pick them up again and use them at His specific direction for His glory. All Humans are responsible to use these abilities for good, to glorify their creator and to bless others. We are authorized to enjoy created things with thanksgiving. We should not use them to glorify self, gain power over others or harm them.

The spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are freely given to be freely used for the Lord who gave them to His own. Some of these are named in Romans 12, 1Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. (Of course they are to be laid at Jesus' feet as well.) They are spoken of in these passages as free gifts, available for our free use, misuse or disuse. But they are clearly given, as Peter says here, for the benefit of others and the resultant glorifying God, not to bring glory or power to one's self.. They are to be used under the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit Who gave them. No human ordination is mentioned here or anywhere else in the New Testament. No human authorization or empowerment is needed for using these gifts. No human intervention or restriction on the use of spiritual gifts is authorized by scripture. Instructions for use are given in 1Corinthians 12 and 13. Instances of misuse or abuse are rebuked in 1Corinthians 14 but no human arrangements were instituted to control their use. Rather each is put under personal responsibility to govern themselves before God as servants and good stewards of the gift(s) given them. What liberty! What a privilege! What a responsibility! Each servant is accountable to his Master, Romans 14:4.

Peter speaks of the manifold grace of God. The gifts are as varied as the colors of the rainbow. Each beautiful in its own way, yet best when shining together in harmony. Each member of the body doing what he or she is gifted to do as assigned by the Lord and empowered by the Holy Spirit as outlined in 1Corinthians 12:4-11. Therefore we have Peter's instructions to speak as the oracles of God. Whenever we speak, whether to a small child's Sunday School class or before an audience of 10,000, privately one on one or in assembly, we are to speak as the oracles of God. Speaking as an utterance from God, with befitting sober (not somber) urgency and focused clarity.

However, while use of an individual's

spiritual gift is always his or her personal responsibility, there are additional limitations when in assembly. There brothers only speak, gifted or not and then only two or three. Gift takes no precedence, distinction or prestige whether when remembering the Lord, in collective prayer, or even when waiting on the Lord for a word from Him. Let the gifted or the naturally eloquent be careful not to impose on the liberty of the Spirit, quenching Him. Let those who do not consider themselves gifted for public speaking be careful not to resist the prompting of the Spirit to speak because of their sense of inadequacy, thereby quenching the Spirit. He is adequate!

Indeed whatever we do for the Lord is to be done diligently with the ability the Lord gives. He may indeed use our "natural" abilities and acquired skills along with Spiritual gifts He has given, but it is all for the glory of God and the blessing of those He wishes to bless. All is to be prayerfully done with the ability God gives and the immediate direction and power of the Spirit for that occasion.

4:17 Judgement begins at the House of God.

As was mentioned last week the Lord demands that His House, the church, be holy and maintained that way. Early on God had demonstrated how seriously He views sin by taking two sinning members out of this scene through death, Acts 5. Each local assembly is responsible for this, Matthew 18 :15-20. When sin was tolerated in one local assembly (Corinth) Paul intervened and led them in purging it out, thereby "clearing themselves" and the Lord's Name. That faithful action led to a later repentance and restoration of the brother who was sinning. Those instructions are preserved for our benefit and use today, 1Corinthians 5. If we ignore this we may be disciplined directly by God, as were the Corinthians. They were weak and sickly, and some deceased, because they dishonored the Lord's Supper, 1Corinthians 11:30.

The Lord uses another means to purify His own collectively. One of these is by means of division. Divisions leave behind faithful remnants called out from an unfaithful mass. Examples include Noah, Abram, the kingdom of Judah, the Jews carried into captivity, the returning remnant of the captivity under Zerubbable, Ezra and Nehemiah, Jesus and His disciples, the Church, the Reformation and yet to come, the Rapture.

In the 1800's another remnant was separated out, this time from among the Protestants. These were gathered solely to the Name of the Lord, relying on His

promised presence in the midst to lead and empower their meetings. They re-instituted scriptural order in the assembly and the practice of assembly discipline long neglected (or abused). Sanctified, set apart, a remnant who would in turn faithfully yet lovingly deal with any sin arising among them.

Sadly, however, a distressing and bewildering array of additional divisions among these have occurred since then. All of this history, disturbing as it is, was allowed of God to purge out and maintain faithful remnants in the midst of pervasive decline and departure from the faith. Down through history God allowed the professing Church to be broken into many pieces, among the little remnants maintaining holiness becoming to His House. Yes, judgement has indeed begun at the House of God and will continue until the final calling out the Rapture of His own to glory.

Have you responded to His calling out in separation from the **mixture** of those who seek to honor and those who dishonor His Name? Do you walk with others who seek to follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, calling upon the Lord out of an undivided heart? With those seeking to comply with the original intent of the Lord for His Assembly?

Soon the Lord will rapture to glory a remnant out of the professing church. After the Rapture He will somehow call out a godly remnant from among the nation of Israel now restored to its land. Only this remnant will enter the Millennial reign of Christ on the earth.

Yes, judgement begins at the House of God. Now.

By Ron Canner, February 23, 2005