

15. THE GREAT GIVER

1 Corinthians 12v4-6.

In many families there is one relative, above all others, who is outstanding at giving presents. So when Christmas comes their gift is especially anticipated. But these people don't just confine themselves to Christmas or birthdays or anniversaries; they are present-sort-of-people. And they don't spend a lot to be great givers. They turn up trumps even when it is something simple because they have wrapped it in a dazzling way.

There are plenty of people like this in the church here. Liz and I still have a peacock feather, part of a bunch of flowers someone gave us. I also have a card in my study showing four surfers on a huge wave. The person who sent it knew it would remind me of a specific prophetic picture. This week I had an e mail from one of our families with some photos taken of us in 'Incredible Hulk' masks at their recent 'Come Ugly' party! On second thoughts, perhaps this isn't such a good example.

Many times the gifts these people offer have an effect which far outweighs the items in their hand. When Phil (then 18) flew off for a year to America Liz was very tearful. After waving him goodbye we went to Croydon and Liz cried all the way round Ikea (something I often feel like doing). Soon after, one of our friends called round with a bag of daffodil bulbs for Liz. "*Plant them now*" she said, "*and when they came up it means it will not be long before you see Phil again.*"

But what I want to highlight this morning is this: God is *The Great Giver!* Every beautiful expression of giving we experience is an echo of God's giving.

1. God has a "giving" nature.

Our text this morning is all about God being a Giver, and it is fascinating to notice how Paul slips in his characteristic words for the three Persons of the Godhead.

v4-6: There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit (i.e. the Holy Spirit). **There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord** (Jesus Christ). **There are different kinds of working, but the same God** (invariably, a reference to God the Father) **works all of them in all men.**

God is a giver – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His "giving" nature of God runs right through the Bible. And this same God is with us now. He is here this morning - and He is always ready to give; that's His Nature.

- "*God gives grace to the humble*". Proverbs 3v34
- "*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.*" Isaiah 40v29

- He gives *“a crown of beauty for ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair”*. Isaiah 61v3
- And supremely: *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”*. John 3v16. Jesus Christ is God’s indescribable gift. 2 Corinthians 9v15

Not surprisingly, we see the same glorious giving in God the Son

- He gives living water. John 4v10
- He says; *“Come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest.”* Matthew 11v28
- He says: *“My peace I give to you”*. John 14v27
- He announces: *“I give (my sheep) eternal life, and they shall never perish”*. John 10v28.
- Supremely, Jesus gave us His own life on the cross. *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven...This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”* John 6v51.

And the same “giving” is true of God the Holy Spirit.

- The Spirit gives life. John 6v63. Romans 8v11. 2 Cor. 3v6. 1 Peter 3v18.
- He gives assurance that we are God’s children. Romans 8v16; Galatians 4v6.
- He brings revelation. John 16v13. Joel 2v28
- He gives us instruction. John 16v13
- He gives us the right words to say. Luke 12v12. 1 Corinthians 2v13
- He gives power: *“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”* Acts 1v8.
- And, of course, the Spirit gives gifts as we see here in 1 Corinthians 12v4-11.

Perhaps the text which should take our breath away more than any other is Romans 8v31f: *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”* You cannot out-give God! He is *The Great Giver*. He has a “giving” Nature.

But there is something else about His giving in v4-7.

2. God’s giving is full of variety

Those friends or uncles and aunts who are the best givers don’t give the same gift to everyone. Nor do they give you the same gift every birthday. Some people give cash or a cheque – and that is always welcome, but the very best givers have a talent for surprises; for the unexpected! *Variety* is one of the hallmarks of a great giver.

Variety is one of the hallmarks of God’s giving too. Notice the way the word “different” is repeated in the text. **v4-6: There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same**

Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

The Corinthian believers were putting all the emphasis on one spiritual gift but Paul points out that God is in the business of *variety and diversity*. God is bursting with ideas about “**different**” gifts He wants to distribute left, right and centre by the Spirit.

v7-11: To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

As ever, the apostle rests His case on the solid foundation of the doctrine of God. There is unity and diversity at the very heart of God. The One God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals Himself in a wide variety of gifts, ministries and activity. Therefore we should expect variety in the church. This, he says, is what unity is about. Not everyone *being* the same or *doing* the same.

Paul uses three different words in verses 4-6 to underline this, and to show us that every good thing God gives contains, *within it*, some revelation of what God is like.

v4: different kinds of GIFTS (*charismaton*)

Gifts of “*charis*”; grace gifts. (Hence the expression “charismatic”) God’s nature is full of grace. His ways are full of grace. This is seen so gloriously in our salvation. “*The wages of sin is death, but the gift (charisma) of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 6v23) And His grace is also seen in spiritual “*charismaton*”.

God’s gifts are freely given, not earned. Romans 12v6 says: “*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*” Ephesians 4v7: “*To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*” Grace gifts are a sign of God’s generosity and love, not that you are better than others or more spiritual or more mature; nor are they a reward for good behaviour or an endorsement of your character! This may explain how some people continue (for a limited time) to be powerfully gifted even when their secret life is far from holy. Peter and John assured the crowd that it was not their power or *godliness* that had healed the lame man outside the temple in Jerusalem. (Acts 3v12) Gifts are about God’s grace – and they are for other people’s benefit anyway, rather than the one carrying the gift.

God gives us grace to do things that just wouldn’t come naturally! We see this especially in the realm of giving – our theme this morning. We need special

grace to be generous givers! Outstanding, selfless generosity is a gift from God according to Romans 12v8. Paul even refers to the “*grace of giving*” in 2 Corinthians 8v7. Those who have the least are often the most generous. This has been my experience in nations like China and India.

But His gifts also *reveal* God’s grace in a variety of ways. For example: His grace to heal; His grace to speak to us; His grace to open up a way for us to be intimate with Him in prayer. We will explore these more fully when we come to look at each individual spiritual gift.

v5: different kinds of SERVICE (*diakonion*)

This is the word for lowly, humble service; especially serving others at table. This is a God-like quality and it is seen supremely in Jesus “*The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.*” (Mark 10v45)

And this Serving Heart of God is not a thing of the past. A text in Luke 12 comes to mind here and, again, takes my breath away. v35-37: “*Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.*” The Master Himself will serve us at tables! The word used here is ***diakonesei***.

Perhaps this is why hospitality and serving up food to others is such a wonderful way of giving. Some people excel at this. Our previous church in south London excelled in serving couples on their wedding day. Many cell groups take meals round to members of their group when they have had a baby. To show love like this to neighbours or someone you hear is having a hard time can have a lasting impression. Why is this? Because it is a powerful expression of God’s own Servant heart. He loves to wait on us and serve us.

v6: different kinds of WORKING (*energmaton*)

This means God is at work. He is operational. We get our word “energy” from this Greek word. God’s energy is present. The same word is used in Galatians 2v8. “*For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.*” God Himself is operating in different kinds of “*energmaton*”. Sometimes this is dramatic and other times it is unseen. But it is still God at work.

Recently there has been some focus on William Wilberforce’s part (alongside many others) in the abolition of the slave trade. This is an example of God at work in a man addressing a social evil. As a passionate Christian Wilberforce drew his strength for this work from God. It meant he could press through countless disappointments over many years when others said it was impossible. God was at work in him; God’s energy. Wilberforce could use these words of Paul: “*To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which*

so powerfully works in me." (Colossians 1v29) This is exactly what we need. God's energy! God at work in us.

God's giving is so full of variety. There is nothing predictable or routine about it. And everything He gives to us expresses something of His wonderful nature.

Finally

In "The Marriage Course", Nicky and Sila Lee identify one of the love languages in marriage as "Thoughtful Presents". They call them "*visual symbols of love*". Well, you might say that this is how it is with God and His people. We are the bride of Christ. He loved us and gave Himself for us. He delights over us as a bridegroom delights over His bride. And one of God's love languages in this marriage is giving - visual symbols of love from The Great Giver.

Psalm 119v30 says "*The unfolding (or entrance) of your words gives light.*" What light has God shone in your heart as I have unfolded this Scripture about God, The Great Giver? Do you see now how much you need what God alone can give? Or do you see how God Himself is revealed in His gifts, or in your giving to others? What might God set in motion today as a result of His word?

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