

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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A Gift Bestowed

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. (1 Timothy 4:14, KJV 1900)

How does a man preach the gospel? Why does he preach? Why can one man preach and another man not? The willingness to stand before people at church and randomly say what comes to your mind about some Scripture, or about God, is not preaching. Merely wanting to preach for various motives does not qualify a man for preaching. Paul refers to Timothy's ministry as a "gift," something bestowed on him by God, not a merit badge that he earned or an honor that he seeks for himself. How does a church know if a man possesses this gift from God? Simple; if he gives evidence of God working in his life and giving him this conviction, and if his life manifests a godly example, ask him to speak to the church. Ask him several times. Give him opportunity to speak to the church. What is the outcome of his speaking? Does he consistently present a well-studied lecture? That may be good. It may even be a gift, but it isn't a calling to preach. If the man's efforts to the church stir them to conviction and to spiritual growth, if they sense an unction from the Lord, both in him and in themselves from his time before the church, you have evidence that God has called him to preach. If that power in both his speaking and in the reception of the church is consistently missing, help him look for another work in the church. He has some gift that needs to be cultivated, but it isn't preaching. In First Corinthians the twelfth chapter, Paul goes into great detail regarding spiritual gifts in the church. In fact the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth chapters all deal with spiritual gifts. Any topic that receives that much ink in Scripture in such a focused and detailed context is an important theme that both preacher and church need to study carefully and prayerfully.

No church can make a preacher out of a man whom God has not called or gifted with this gift. No seminary can make a preacher. No wife or mother can make a preacher. Only God calls men and bestows this gift upon them.

A major point that Paul makes is that the Lord sets the gifts that He calls "...in the church." (1 Corinthians 12:28) A man cannot use his gift wisely or for the benefit of any apart from the church. Our study passage identifies a call or gift from God, an authority evidenced or bestowed by prophecy, and the work of a presbytery. Not only does the church, through the presbytery, honor that gift and authorize

the man to work in its labors, but the church also authorizes the man to continue in his gift.

Over the years I have observed a number of men whom the Lord called as they began their ministry and grew into it over time. I have also observed a few men who sought the position, but who did not give evidence that God had called them to it. The man whom the Lord calls grows, often almost from one week to the next. As he grows in his gift, the church becomes excited about it and seeks to participate in its exciting development. His zeal and his spiritual development in the gift excite the church. The man whom the Lord has not called will not excite the church or move them to such joyful zeal. They will often manifest a quiet frustration that the man thinks he is called of God, but his time in the pulpit becomes a tedious burden to them—and to him. As the man senses this lack of "connection" and contagious excitement between the church and him, he will often isolate himself from the people, even during his pulpit time. Rather than making solid eye contact with the people during his pulpit time, he will actually avoid eye contact with them. It is almost as if he is preaching to a make-believe congregation that is not present at the moment. He will stare at the floor, the walls, the ceiling, anywhere except where he should be looking—at the people to whom he is supposed to be ministering. A man in this situation may eventually drift into the self-serving attitude that his time in the pulpit is an entitlement. Whether the people are edified or not, whether the people learn anything spiritual or not, he feels that he is entitled to this time, and he often seeks more time, despite the obvious fact that he has not wisely used the time he had for edification. No man can fabricate the gift.

A man's gift maketh room for him, And bringeth him before great men. (Proverbs 18:16, KJV 1900)

Some folks have attempted to dilute or misdirect this passage in various ways. If we take it in the context of the prudent man (Verse fifteen) and of the man's neighbor who will judge the man's gift as authentic or not (Verse seventeen), it seems rather clear that the verse does deal with spiritual gifts, not the unholy "gift" of bribes or self-serving favors. Notice that the gift, not the man himself, enlarges

the man's influence and reputation. Never worship the man; worship and thank the Lord who gifted the man.

... which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Calling from the Lord is indeed the primary prerequisite, but calling alone is not sufficient. As we've observed repeatedly in our study, the man must not only preach to edification in the pulpit, but he must also preach to edification with his feet—with his lifestyle, his personal conduct. Further, he must develop this calling sufficiently that the church recognizes his calling, as well as his personal qualifications, and take official action to set him apart to this work with its authority.

"Prophecy" may refer at times in Scripture to the foretelling of future events. The word may also refer to speaking "...inspired utterances." Here "inspired" does not mean the special power and direction the Holy Spirit bestowed when He guided the men who wrote the Scriptures, so that they wrote precisely what the Lord directed and intended them to write. Rather the word refers to the fact that the man whom the Lord has called will speak with a power that is clearly beyond the man. His words are accompanied and empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry weight and conviction, "...as though God did beseech you by us..." (2 Corinthians 5:20) A man will, over time, manifest his calling—or lack thereof. He cannot fabricate this "prophetic" power or conviction with which the people hear and receive his words. Human excitement cannot produce it. Animation and motivational anecdotes cannot produce it. Preaching is not a smooth sales pitch. Outstanding research and lecture-preparation cannot produce it. When the Holy Spirit calls a man to preach, and when this man conscientiously applies himself to this calling, both with his mind and his feet, his words will be sanctioned by the Holy Spirit, empowered with weight beyond the man. The calling and the power in his preaching go hand in hand. You can't have the power apart from the calling.

...which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. One final step remains in this process. The New Testament refers to the laying on of hands several times. While we might find several different possible meanings for the practice, the conveyance of authority to function in the position or office seems to lie at the heart of this practice. Not unlike the anointing of a prophet in the Old Testament, the Lord communicates His authority upon the man in this office by way of the church which invites ordained men to gather as a "presbytery" and ordain the man.

Beyond conveying authority, there may well be an official joining with the man in this action. If I lay hands on a man in ordination, I commit to him and to myself that I will keep my hand on him throughout his ministry. If he seeks counsel from

me, I will give whatever I can freely. If he needs counsel from me, I promise to him that I will go to him and provide this guidance. He and I become partners in this work. We join together in the act of ordination, and that union remains.

I find it fascinating at times how the topics of these writings so perfectly mesh with various issues in my life. For example, as I sit at my desk writing this piece, a dear friend and young brother will today be ordained to the ministry in northern California. Health problems prevented me from attending this ordination. However, as I've described the development and growth of a young minister, proofs in the man's life and in the church's reaction to his speaking, this dear young man has repeatedly come to mind. He stands prominent in my mind as a living example of the man whom the Lord called to preach, and in vivid contrast to the frustrating and futile efforts of the man whom the Lord has not called.

We end this study with the first point that Paul makes in our study verse. ...*Neglect not the gift...* As I've written this piece and thought with joyful fondness of my dear friend who shall today be ordained, I've thought as well with grief about others who sincerely thought they were called, but they failed to convince others of their calling. Most people who heard them did not sense that power beyond the man in his words and in his life. By the evidences that we see, the only basis for our judgment of a gift, the man was not called. However, it is wholly possible, and likely in many instances, that the Lord had called the man. However, the man chose to neglect the gift rather than to make it consistently the most important thing in his life. Other issues, things, or people overpowered the weight of that calling. It has been my observation that, given a reasonable space of time, God will most surely manifest His disapproval of the man who fails to honor the gift. The man, perhaps once highly regarded, will slowly over time lose the respect of the people who so regarded him. People who responded to his speaking with zeal and excitement lose that spark and adopt the "Endure it with pain" attitude toward his speaking time. The Lord simply refuses to honor or to bless the man who so neglects the gift that He so graciously bestowed.

While this divine discernment eventually appears in the case of the man who fills the pulpit, we need to apply the same rule to our own personal lives. While God may not have called us to preach, He has bestowed gifts upon us, and He rightfully expects and commands us to use those gifts, not neglect them. How faithfully do we value and use the gifts the Lord has given us? What are we doing with those gifts? Are we putting them to good use in the Lord's house? Or are we "neglecting" them, both to our personal loss and to the loss of potential blessings that we and the church might have enjoyed, mutually realizing spiritual growth by their faithful use?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor