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## Burial of Jesus, pt 4

R. W. Surgenor

Our brother's last meditation on the precious event of our Lord's burial

### Four Portrayals of Jesus

**M**atthew, who worked for a king as a tax collector, wrote of Jesus as the King. Mark, being a servant to Peter, wrote of Jesus as the obedient Servant. Luke, as a physician, recorded Jesus as the unblemished Man, and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, portrayed Jesus as the eternal Son of God. Considering these connections, notice how these inspired writers describe the cloths that were wrapped around Jesus' body.

**Matthew:** "He wrapped it in a clean linen cloth." Isaiah, looking forward to the kingly reign of Christ, wrote, "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment" (Isa. 32:1). Jeremiah also writes, "I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth" (Jer. 23:5). We see the purity of the King (clean linen). The word "clean" means "pure." Ethically, it means "free from corrupt desire, from sin and guilt, free from every admixture of what is false; sincere genuine, blameless, innocent, unstained with the guilt of anything." Only one King could fulfill these qualities — Jesus.

**Mark:** "He brought fine linen." Thus we see implied the fine texture of the obedient Servant's ministry. Very often we use the word "fine" to define something of "high quality, superior, excellent." No ministry could ever equal the

ministry of our Lord. It was of the highest nature ever known to man. "The disciples were astonished at His words" (Mark 10:24). "All the people were astonished at His doctrine" (Mark 11:18). "And they were astonished at His doctrine: for His Word was with power" (Luke 4:32). Even at the age of twelve "all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers" (Luke 2:47).

**Luke:** He "wrapped it in linen." This simple and concise description speaks of the moral loveliness of the perfect Man, who received sinners and ate with them, yet never diminished in purity, holiness, and true love.

**John:** They "wound it in linen clothes with spices." How beautifully this displays the fragrance of the Son. The Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. All Thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made Thee glad" (Ps. 45:6-8).

Only Matthew mentions the nature of the stone. It was "great." He also wrote, "Jerusalem; ... it is the city of the great King" (5:35). This is the only time in the N.T. where you will find these expressions. It also is only in the Gospel of Matthew where you will read these assuring words. "Upon this Rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (16:18).

Both Luke and John introduce a time element into the picture. "And the Sabbath drew on." "Because of the Jews' preparation day." Seeing that the Lord died at 3pm and the Sabbath began at 6pm, it didn't allow much time for a burial preparation. Considering the fact that Joseph went to Pilate to beg for the body, and considering the time it took to carefully remove it from the cross then transport it to the area of the sepulcher, we are left with perhaps only two hours or so, before

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the required sealing of the tomb.

## Godly Women

The women who stood afar off viewing these things, they too would not have much time to secure the spices for further anointing of their Lord's sacred body. They would be rushing into town to quickly purchase the needed items for a fully decent burial, which they planned to use on Lord's Day morning.

These godly women are entirely passive prior to the sealing of the sepulcher, but notice how active they become afterwards. Even before the sun appeared in the eastern sky, these women made their way toward the sepulcher, and they came fully prepared. What intense love and devotion on their part.

Sister, when you come to remember the Lord, do you come prepared? Is your heart saturated with an offering for Him? Are you there early, or do you rush in at the last minute and take your seat with only scattered thoughts in your head? I can understand being delayed in getting to the meeting on rare occasions, but I do notice in some assemblies there are some saints who come in with only a minute or two to spare. This is normal behavior for them. They can be termed DD's: "Deadline Disciples." We also have, as William Warke described, some Christians who are "Seventh Day Adventists." They only make their advent at meeting once every seven days – Lord's Day morning. This is normal behavior for Sardis-like saints who have a name to live, but are dead (Rev. 3:1).

John never mentions the construction of the tomb, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke write of it as a tomb hewn out of a rock. However, John, along with Matthew, mentions it as being "new." John also states that it was in a garden which none of the other three writers mention. Since John writes of the Lord as the Son of God, we see the son of God (Adam, Luke 3:38) had his commencement on earth in a garden, and the "last Adam," the Son of God, concluded His stay on earth in a garden.

Luke and John both support the fact that no one was ever yet laid in this new tomb. Have you ever considered why the Spirit would mention this? Turning back to 2 Kings 13:21 we find a possible answer. "And it came to

pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." Jews knew of this event, but they would never be able to say that perhaps the bones of some famous prophet were in Joseph's tomb, and when the body of the Lord touched those bones, he sprang back into life. Jesus came into this world by way of a virgin womb. He left this world by way of a virgin tomb.

Only John records the spiritual awakening of Peter and John taking place inside the empty sepulcher. Receiving a message from Mary Magdalene of Jesus' missing body "Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:3-9). Then the disciples went away again unto their own home."

John is the only writer who never mentions the godly women prior to the sealing of the sepulcher with the rolling of the stone. However, after the stone was rolled away to display an empty tomb, John far exceeds all the other writers in reporting on the activity of these godly women. He employs 413 words in 18 verses. Matthew has 236 words in 10 verses. Mark 254 words in 11 verses, and Luke has 245 words in 11 verses.

Concerning the two women mentioned earlier, we stated that Affection was connected to Mary Magdalene and Association with Mary the mother of Joses.

Mark testifies, "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils." This woman had experienced a great deliverance, and this

resulted in great affection to the One who delivered her from her desperate condition. This truth is borne out in our Lord's words to Simon a Pharisee. "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged" (Luke 7:41-43). Interesting, isn't it? The person forgiven the most, loves the most. Mary Magdalene was deeply appreciative of her deliverance, for her deliverance was exceedingly great. She was the first one at the tomb on Lord's Day morning, and the first one honored by the Lord to tell others of the resurrection of her Savior.

Mary, the mother of Joses was the mother of a son who became an apostle, known as "James the Less." This woman sacrificed her substance and her son for the service of her blessed Lord. Filled with gratitude to Him for all He had done for her, she became generous, and faithful to the Lord. Her loving example has been displayed in godly sisters down through the ages, and is a wonderful sight to behold in many today.

*The best way to do good to ourselves is to do it to others. The right way to gather is to scatter.*

## **Times of Famine, pt 3**

*Joel Portman*

Considering the responses of different saints to times of famine in their lives

**A**s we think of times of famine in Israel's history as illustrations of times of spiritual famine in our lives, the real issue to consider is how we respond personally to such times. This is very essential because our response will determine what we might receive from it and what its results will be in our lives. So we can learn from the responses of God's people during similar times in God's Word. Notice that,

### **1. Some Left in the Famine:**

The first example is Abraham in Gen. 12:10. As a result of the shortage of food and the drought, we see that he left the land and went to Egypt. Egypt always seemed to attract God's people whenever there was difficulty (Ex. 32:1, Num. 11:5), as also was the case after the deportation of the majority of the people to Babylon (Jer. 43:5). Despite the counsel of Jeremiah, they determined to go to Egypt and did so, to their loss. Egypt seems to be a picture of the cultured world that seeks to captivate and enslave the believer with its order and artistry, culture and education. More than one promising younger Christian has been enthralled with the allurements of this world, not realizing that it is also not of the Father, but is of the world system (1 John 2:15-17).

Abraham lost his testimony in Egypt and denied his proper relationship with his wife. Through unfounded fear, he denied that she was his wife and injured her as well as himself through doing so. Not only that, but it was evidently in Egypt that they acquired Hagar, and we know the problems that resulted from having that person in their home with the result being Ishmael, who was an enemy of God's people ever after.

It is sad to see that Isaac followed his father's example in going to the land of the Philistines in Gen 26, where he also lost his testimony in the same way and was humbled before Abimelech through doing so.

We also see that Elimelech left the land in Ruth 1, thinking that his sojourn was only a temporary measure and that they would return when conditions improved. If he had known the disastrous results that would follow, would he have made such a move? Failure to honestly and earnestly seek to know the will of God always results in loss and ruin in the life of a believer, and that ruin is not only seen in the individual's life but also in the lives of his family members. Consider well, whenever we determine to make any move that is of our own plans and that seems right in our own eyes. The results will likely bring loss and heartache later on!

Christians need to be careful to not try to live with one foot in the world and another in the heavenlies, enjoying a measure of both.

The result of that conduct is that one has very little testimony for the Lord and finds failure that brings sad results.

### **2. Jacob waited on the Lord in the famine**

We often criticize Jacob, and he indeed did many things that were motivated by his self-will in earlier days, but his spiritual development over his lifetime is remarkable and worthy of our emulation. At this point in his life, Joseph had sent clear evidence of his high position in Egypt and called for Jacob and all his family to come to Egypt to escape the remaining years of famine.

Despite the strong attraction for Jacob to respond immediately, we note that he waited at the edge of the land to receive definite direction from the Lord. Whether he had learned from the example of his forefathers, or perhaps had learned to curb his impetuosity in later years, his waiting allowed the Lord to confirm to him that going to Egypt was God's will for him. We read that the Lord appeared to him in the night after Jacob had offered sacrifices and told him, "I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt..." (Gen. 46:3-4). With such assurance, Jacob rose up from that place and went to Egypt, where God blessed him and where his testimony was upheld before Pharaoh, as we read in Gen. 47:7-10, "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh."

We do well to learn from his example. Caution and care are needed to make sure that any move away from where God has established us is truly His will. We are so often prone to make our own decisions and expect God to confirm us in what we want to do. Of course, we are sure that He will not lead us to leave the place spiritually where He has purposes for us

and which is according to His revealed will. Many are those who have left an assembly, declaring that they were sure that the Lord had led them to do so and that they were truly blessed as a result. In reality, they have led themselves away and are only deceived to think that an enlarged sphere of activity or feeling of freedom is His blessing.

### **3. David sought the Lord in the famine**

In 2 Samuel 21:1-2 we read of a famine in the reign of David, about which he inquired of the Lord. He learned that it was because of Saul's crime in slaying the Gibeonites. He may have done this through a false zeal for God or to cover another of his wrong actions, but in so doing, he had violated a solemn oath that Joshua and the elders had made with these people in Joshua 9. Whatever the cause, it had to be remedied and couldn't be ignored after three years of drought.

The famine was God's judgment for Saul's sin in this way and sadly, what he did involved the entire nation (even as David's sin in numbering the people resulted in later years). It was wise for David to seek to know the reason for the famine by asking the Lord, even as the same exercise should be ours in similar times. Too often we ignore those times or simply try to go on in our way without seeking to know what the reason might be. The Lord's response clearly shows that a sin that had taken place many years prior had not been forgotten by God nor could it be ignored by His people. Is that one reason why believers or assemblies can experience times of dryness, without seeing fruit? Those times should stir our hearts to seek the cause and remedy it.

The price to remedy the wrong was stated by the ones offended. Very likely the house of Saul had enabled him in this wrong deed and possibly they were continuing the same attitude toward the Gibeonites. So they paid the price to deliver the nation.

David represents a spiritual man who realizes that past wrongs of a nation or a body of God's people will have a lasting impact on the entire body. It is a lesson that we forget or ignore, and there are Christians and assemblies that have done wrong, but through pride are not willing to face the wrong and deal with it

justly. The result can be spiritual dryness and lack of fruit that continues year after year. How sad!

### **4. Elijah trusted God to supply in the famine**

In 1 Kings 17, we learn how God fed His servant during a similar time of drought and suffering. It is interesting to see that God could use an unclean bird to bring food to the prophet by the brook and could use a Gentile woman, also considered to be unclean by Israel, to supply at Zarephath. It was not the means that Elijah might have desired, but it was the method that God chose to use. Those circumstances were a test of his confidence in God, and he learned that his needs could be supplied in various ways. Some have suggested that the Hebrew word could be pointed otherwise, in which case it would read "Arabs" instead of ravens. In that case, the Lord was using foreigners to supply the needs of His servant while Israel was suffering collectively.

We can learn from this experience that faithfulness to the Lord, delivering the Lord's message without fear, and obeying the Word of the Lord will always result in God's power being displayed to support and supply. A faithful believer can prosper under adversity although other believers are enduring spiritual drought. Our personal state shouldn't depend on that of others! We can flourish no matter what might be our circumstances of life.

This would lead to the last example of a response,

### **5. Boaz prospered in the famine**

Some prospered in famines instead of suffering. We could mention Joseph in Egypt in addition to Boaz, but there were more. While Elimelech left the land for the plains of Moab and lost everything (remember Lot's choice?), God's Word records his opposite, Boaz. The first mention of Boaz draws attention to his economic and social status, "a mighty man of wealth," and we learn later that all the people respected him highly. What a contrast! Naomi returned with bitterness (Ruth 1:20-21) while Boaz stayed with blessing and recognition. It was a man who never left that land who had the willing capacity to provide redemption to the

one in poverty.

### **Do Famines Come into our Lives?**

Most certainly, and there may be various reasons for them. But how we respond to them is most important. Any response that centers on Self and which takes one out of the will of God is always doomed to failure and loss.

Famine should turn our souls to God, make us seek to know the reason and to seek restoration to right conditions that are in line with His purpose for us. We can gain and prosper in such times of deprivation and adversity. During any time like this in our lives, there is always the potential to rise out of it to be much more capable and effective, to be a channel of blessing to others and to enjoy increased usefulness for God.

### **Hold Fast**

*(anon).*

A needed exhortation in days of departure!

**B**eloved, we would just say a word as to holding fast what we have got. If the Lord has mercifully delivered us from man's traditions, let us see that we are not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. In these days there is departure from the simplicity that is in Christ. But this need not stumble us, as Scripture plainly forewarns that this will happen. We may be delivered from going back to Egypt, and yet we may have Egypt in our hearts. We may not go back to the world's system of religion, and yet the world's system of religion may find its way in among ourselves. Many who once began, in the guilelessness of early love, by giving the Lord Jesus the place in the midst, are now content that some other one should have that place. Not only is there departure from the truth, but "My people love to have it so." This is caused by love growing cold, and the heart getting away from God. When Moses went up to the mount to meet God, Israel could not endure the "blank." To wait until Moses would come down was more than an impatient, murmuring people were equal to. And hence we find, as soon as Moses was out of sight, that they must have someone, or rather something to look at. The flesh cannot wait on God. It takes some little measure of faith to endure as seeing Him who is invisible. Hence the golden calf. Now, beloved,

our Moses, is away on the mount with God. Our Lord Jesus is within the veil, and we are waiting for Him. Let us wait in patience. He is both Lord and Christ. Let us give Him His true place, and we shall have no lack. By His Spirit He is here to guide us and lead us into all truth—to satisfy our soul in thought and keep us alive in famine. Let us honor Him, and abide in His ways. We may appear weak and helpless, but we need not care, if the Holy One is great in the midst. If others depart from the path of faith and simplicity, that is no reason why we should do so. On the other hand, in the midst of flickering light and wavering testimony, is there not all the more urgent need that we should hold fast the things that God has taught us?

(WIS Sept 1939)

### **Gifts in the Local Assembly, pt. 1**

*Jim Beattie*

(All readers may not agree with our brother, but his study of this important subject is worthy of honest consideration).

#### **Preface**

**S**hortly after I was saved in January, 1958 I became exercised about God's will for my life. I wondered what my gift might be and how I would know. When I asked older godly believers, who were near the end of a long life of devotion to God, how I might know, the answers they gave were vague and indefinite. The whole subject seemed as hazy to them as it was to me.

When I asked them what their gifts were, invariably they said they didn't know; they told me they simply helped where they could. When I expressed my concern for my gift, believers would tell me to pray about it and the Lord would show me. That much I knew and I did pray, but still didn't have answers. During those early years the story was always the same.

And in public teaching and in conference Bible studies on the subject, I was always left with the same feeling of uncertainty and a lack of clarity. This was unusual in assembly life because we were so accustomed to having Scripture for everything we did. "Thus saith the Lord" was the watchword for every practice.

Moreover, I recall receiving recordings from a weekend conference Bible study that took up the question of gifts in the local assembly. I was not able to attend but was very interested in receiving the recordings because the subject had so intrigued and perplexed me since I was saved. As I listened over and over to the discussion of the subject especially on 1 Corinthians 12, I realized that, though the discussion was between highly regarded gifted Bible students, they offered no clarity on the matter and actually seemed vague and uncertain themselves. With due respect, I have to say that I listened to the same hazy explanations I had received from everyone else. I was still left puzzled and confused.

### **The Change in My Thinking**

When we were commended to the work of the Lord, the concern about gift on the personal level diminished because we felt we had some concept as to what our work was to be and we kept busy in evangelism largely and some Bible teaching.

As years went by, however, believers asked me the same questions I had asked others so many times in the past. So now I faced the same dilemma older believers had when I had asked them: I had no answers.

Finally, I decided I needed to take a serious look at the at the major passages on gifts: Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 4.

First I looked at the dates when the books were written and noted that both letters to the Corinthians were written first, Romans next, and Ephesians last. Accepting this order that is clear from comparing statements in the books themselves, I saw that the largest number of gifts are mentioned in the Corinthian letter, fewer in Romans, and fewest in Ephesians.

Thus as time passed, there was a diminishing number of gifts mentioned. And yet as the number diminished some new ones were added. This added to my confusion.

Some questions I asked when I was a younger believer and even into my later Christian life were:

- ☞ Why did the number of gifts decrease?
- ☞ Why were new ones added?

☞ Why were different lists of gifts in different letters?

☞ Why were the gifts of Ephesians 4 given by the Lord Jesus Christ, whereas the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 given by the Holy Spirit? And why are we not told the source of the gifts in Romans?

☞ Why was the word used for gifts in Ephesian 4 different from the word used in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12?

☞ Did the diminishing number mean that there were only five gifts in later New Testament times (or four, if pastor and teacher are one gift and not two, as some writers suggest)?

☞ Does that mean that every believer must have (or be) one of those limited number of gifts?

☞ When does a believer receive his or her gift? On the day of salvation or some later time?

☞ Why can't the gifts in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 be easily defined?

☞ Why do we say that some of those gifts no longer exist?

☞ How do we know which ones still do exist and which don't?

☞ Are "showing mercy" and "hospitality" and "giving" mentioned in Romans 12 gifts? Should not all believers be merciful and hospitable and liberal?

Some have explained this by commenting that "some are just better at those activities." But that doesn't really answer the question. Either we are gifted or we are not. If some believers just enjoy entertaining guests more than others, does that mean they have "the gift of hospitality?"

Lastly, a question, mostly unanswered, is: What gifts do sisters in the assembly have?

As the years passed, I began to think differently about gifts in order to bring some clarity to my own thinking. I remember one of the first times I expressed doubts to a believer about what I had been previously taught and the different way of thinking that was beginning to form. I suggested that not all believers have gifts. That was almost twenty-five years ago. Perhaps because I did not express my thoughts clearly or my own thinking was embryonic at the time, it was not well received. It seemed perhaps I was expressing some desire for "one-man ministry"

- a kind of pastoral system. That was not my thought; I was just perplexed that assemblies who have a "Thus saith the Lord" for everything" had nothing but vague generalities on this subject.

As time passed, my thoughts became clearer and in 2011, I spoke publicly on the subject for the first time (with a good measure of hesitation). I was pleasantly surprised as to how well it was received. Two older highly-respected elders in the audience were very warm in their encouragement. One told me that I should speak on the subject everywhere. The other stated he would love to hear it all over again. With a few exceptions, my understanding of the subject has been welcomed and well received.

Before addressing the question of gifts, I should mention that priesthood is not the same as gift. Every believer – brother and sister – is a priest. The apostle Peter told his readers that they were a holy priesthood, saying, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5-6).

And the writer to the Hebrews exhorted the believers: "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15). This is the privilege of every believer. While the public exercise of this is limited to men in the local assembly, all believers can offer the sacrifices of praise at any time.

But, leaving that, I want to look at the question of gift in the life of a believer in the local assembly.

In 1 Corinthians 12 there are two Greek words that have caused some difficulty. In verse 1, the expression "spiritual gifts" is a translation of the Greek word (πνευματικός, pneumatikós, Strong's # g4152). The other word is the word "gift" (χάρισμα, charisma, Strong's # g5486) found in verses 4, 9, 28, 30, 31.

The word translated "spiritual gifts" (in 1 Corinthians 12:1 in the KJV) has been a perplexing problem for translators. I checked thirty-seven translations. Twenty use the word "gift" alone or with a modifier. One uses the

word "gifted" and the rest translated the word in various ways.

The difficulty is that it is a substantive – a word that is often an adjective, but in 1 Corinthians 12:1 it is used as a noun without any modifier. In the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 12, it is literally "spirituals" which doesn't convey much to the reader. A few translations gave it the meaning of "spirituals," others "spiritual matters" or "spiritual things." One translates it as "things of the spirit." Darby's translation has "But concerning spiritual *manifestations*, brethren, I do not wish you to be ignorant" (italics are his).

Two translations which pre-date the KJV 1611 edition, the Bishops' New Testament of 1595 and the Geneva Bible of 1599, use the word "gifts." So translating the Greek word as "gifts" has a long history in English Bibles.

But I think the reason the word "gift" came into use is because of the rest of the chapter and the use of the word "gift" to translate the Greek word χάρισμα, (charisma, Strong's # g5486) in the rest of this chapter:

v.4 Now there are diversities of **gifts**, but the same Spirit.  
v.9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the **gifts** of healing by the same Spirit;  
v.28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then **gifts** of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

v.30 Have all the **gifts** of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

v.31 But covet earnestly the best **gifts**: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

In other words, the latter verses of the chapter became the deciding factor in translating the word in this earlier verse. This is not a problem in itself. Context is often a deciding factor in translation. In this chapter, however, it gave a certain thrust to the whole chapter and, I believe, sent our thinking down a wrong path. It has led to the misconception that the believers in Corinth were being taught that they had specific gifts that they were to exercise.

The difficulty with translating the word πνευματικός, (pneumatikós, Strong's # g4152), as "spiritual gifts" is that this gives the

Greek word a very specific technical use, whereas the Greek word is used in a variety of contexts and should not be given more than a general definition, allowing the context to clarify the nuance in each case. The Greek word really does not have the connotation of "gift." It has the basic concept of that which is spiritual in contrast to that which is material or carnal. To translate the word as "gift" at the head of 1 Corinthians 12 is bound to affect the thinking of the reader in the rest of the chapter.

If the apostle had wanted to say "spiritual gifts," he could have said that. In fact, he did just that in Romans 1:11 at a later time. He uses both words in the phrase: "ἵνα τι μεταδω χάρισμα ὑμῖν πνευματικόν" (in order that I may impart to you some spiritual gift; (χάρισμα, *chárisma*, Strong's # g5486; πνευματικός, *pneumatikós*, Strong's # g4152). Paul was not as concerned with gifts as the Corinthians were. Rather he was concerned about the abuse of gift and was warning against that.

While a believer cannot be indwelt by demons, demonic influence can manifest itself among believers. It appears he is warning against demonic induced imitations of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It is possible the Corinthian believers were being deceived by demonic activity – a remnant of their former days in the idols temple. Hence, early in the chapter, vs. 2 and 3 Paul raises the issue of their previous experience.

Brother Jack Hunter has a very helpful suggestion in his commentary on 1 Corinthians in the *What the Bible Teaches* series. He states:

"The word "gifts" is italicised in the Authorised Version, intimating that the word does not appear in the original text. Most translators insert the word "gifts" because the adjective "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) is in the plural number, and the subject of gifts commences at 1 Corinthians 12:4. Young translates "spiritual things"; Darby "spiritual manifestations." Brother Hunter states that "possibly 'spiritual realities' best fits the passage."

Thus Paul is warning them against the danger of the influence of their former

association in the idol's temple creeping into genuine "spiritual realities" in the local assembly – to use brother Hunter's expression. Paul is bringing in "charismas" only to show the Corinthian believers abuse of these. Notwithstanding, from this writing, we receive Scriptural principles of instruction about the regulation of activities in the local assembly.

(continued)

## "Faith"

*George Mueller*

A reminder of an essential element in our lives

**I**mpressions have neither one thing nor the other to do with faith. Faith has to do with the Word of God. It is not impressions, strong or weak, which will make the difference. We have to do with the Written Word and not ourselves or our impressions.

Many people are willing to believe regarding those things that seem probable to them. Faith has nothing to do with probabilities. The province of faith begins where probabilities cease and sight and sense fail. Appearances are not to be taken into account. The question is – whether God has spoken it in His Word.

God delights to increase the faith of His children. We ought, instead of wanting no trials before victory, no exercise for patience, to be willing to take them from God's hand as a means. I say, and say it deliberately, trials, obstacles, difficulties, and sometimes defeats, are the very food of faith.

## Mercy and Faithfulness

Psalm 36:5.

*W. M. Calder*

**I**n the four preceding verses the Psalmist draws a fearful picture of the grievous state of the wicked, they are altogether estranged from God, God is not all their thoughts, ...they abhor not evil.

The Psalmist then proceeds to extol the glorious character of Jehovah his God, His mercy, His faithfulness, His righteousness, His jus-

tice, His preserving grace, His loving kindness, and His abounding grace and goodness. In verse 5, "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds or skies." Skies is the better word, I think the clouds are limited in their height above the earth, the skies are illimitable and such is the faithfulness of God. Mercy is that Attribute of the Godhead in which Jehovah is said to delight, see Micah 6:18, where the Prophet exclaims in wonder and admiration "Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage, he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." We must not however infer from this that there is any inequality in the divine character; that is not so. All the attributes and perfections of the Godhead are exercised in absolute harmony with each other. God is just, as well as merciful, he can by no means clear the guilty except on righteous grounds, justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne, mercy and truth doth go before His face. As far as our finite minds are able to comprehend the ways and purposes of God, the Attribute of mercy must have remained in abeyance had not our first parents fallen from their state of innocence in the Garden of Eden. Mercy requires an object upon which it can be exercised and our first parents with their wretched covering of fig leaves, hiding among the trees of the Garden from the all-seeing eyes of Jehovah were indeed miserable objects of mercy, and mercy appeared upon the scene. God could and God did righteously exercise mercy towards our first parents. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning," saith the Scripture.

In exercising mercy towards our first parents God had an eye to an event that yet lay in the womb of the future, namely the Cross of Christ, four thousand years later when man had been fully tested and remained incorrigible. God in sovereign grace and mercy provided a Saviour and a great One, even His well-beloved and only begotten Son, Who by His death did give Himself a ransom for all, and paid the penalty for all who believe on Him. The work of the cross was retrospective as well as prospective, it reached forward to the last soul saved in this age, and stretched back to the first man, hence I say God could and God did exercise mercy towards our

first parents on the ground of that finished work upon the cross, they were freely and fully forgiven, their fig leaves were removed and they were clothed in suitable garments, but they were expelled from that beautiful Garden of delights, and this was in mercy, lest they should put forth their hand and eat of the tree of life and live for ever in their sinful condition. God has so decreed that sin shall bring its own penalty, were it not so sin would overleap all bonds, and this world would become a pandemonium of atrocious wickedness, even as it was before the flood. "Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the skies. For ever O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven, Thy faithfulness is unto all generations." The Psalmist, speaking prophetically, in Psalm 89 says, "I have said mercy shall be built up for ever, Thy faithfulness shalt Thou establish in the very heavens." This has been abundantly fulfilled in our day. The Lord Jesus Christ is established in the very heavens at God's right hand, He is the sum and substance of all God's faithful promises, all are Yea and Amen in Him. Speaking to Israel by the Prophet Jeremiah, Jehovah declares if the alternations of day and night can cease, or if the heavens above can be measured, or the foundations of the earth searched out from beneath, then might His word concerning Israel fail, not otherwise.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Church at Corinth says, "God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and in Romans he declares "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Joshua at the close of his career declared that not one thing had failed of all the good things He spake concerning them, and he warned them that God likewise would be faithful in the fulfillment of His warnings concerning them if they failed to obey his commands, which warnings we see in our day have been literally fulfilled in their dispersion among all the nations on earth, and yet they remain a distinct people, we may lie in heaviness through manifold temptations, and we may be called upon to pass through times of darkness, but Isaiah 50. 10 provides an unfailing remedy for depression. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God."