

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-02-17—DESIRING GIFTS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The sole purpose for the existence of humankind is to fulfill the desire of God to give people the gift of eternal life. But it is not a gift in the sense that the English word suggests. Many times, a gift is given without the recipient specifically asking for it. Gifts are also given without any expectation of reciprocity; that is, without anything in return. But the gift of God is slightly different. It is in all regards undeserved and unmerited. We do not deserve it because the gift of eternal life is through the torment, torture, and sacrifice of God's Son. (We are also required to repent of sin, but that is not the emphasis here.) Notice the last part of one of the most well-known scriptures:

ROMANS 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life **through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Eternal life is the gift of God but it would not exist if it were not for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Not only did God pay a price for that gift, but it is something that must be earnestly sought out:

MATTHEW 13:44-46 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and **sells all that he has** and buys that field. 45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 “who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and **sold all that he had and bought it.**

The One Gift of eternal life came at great cost so it is given only to those who recognize it as a priceless treasure and value it above else. Unlike gifts of men, it is given only to those who seek it:

JOHN 4:10-14 Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew **the gift of God**, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ **you would have asked** Him, and He would have given you **living water [the Holy Spirit].**” 11 The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? 12 “Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?” 13 Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 “but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But **the water [the Holy Spirit]** that I shall give him **will become in him [grow into] a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.**”

But God the Father desires to give many other gifts to those who lay hold of the gift of eternal life. Those who have received the Holy Spirit are His children and, as such, are also under His grace—favor and goodwill:

EPHESIANS 4:7-8 But **to each one of us grace was given** according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, **And gave gifts to men.**"

The gifts Paul mentions are beyond the One Gift (eternal life) that is possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There are many others:

JAMES 1:17 **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father** of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Again, the gifts from above are given to those who earnestly seek after them. They are not given unless someone ASKS for them:

MATTHEW 7:7-11 "**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.** 8 "**For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.** 9 "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!**

There are many gifts of God and several are listed in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. There, you will find gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

While the One Gift of eternal life is above all others, have you sought out and asked for any of these other gifts? I am certain that many ask for the first three—wisdom, knowledge, faith—but what about the rest? Do you ask for healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, or the interpretation of tongues? If not, then why not? Do you think it is impossible to have even one of those? Or do you imagine that they are only given to ordained elders in the ministry of God? Is it because these gifts require greater faith than you have? Or is it because of fear of failure? The gifts of healing, for example, cannot be denied when someone is miraculously restored. I wonder if we do not seek after—and earnestly ask of God—for these other gifts because we are afraid that we will fail.

Perhaps the reason many of these gifts are seemingly absent from among the *ekklesia* is that people do not understand the PURPOSE of God's gifts. Maybe, we do not have the right motives when we ask for them. Paul says that every gift is unique but all gifts are meant to profit the whole of the *ekklesia*. Notice what he says in the same chapter *before* he lists the gifts:

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1, 4-7 Now concerning **spiritual gifts**, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: ... 4 There are **diversities of gifts**, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries [*referring to good works, NOT elders*], but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same **God who works all in all**. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one **for the profit of all**:

Paul understood that gifts of God are meant to edify the *ekklesia*. This is why he talked at length about the various *parts* of the body in verses 12-27. He was emphasizing that each member has abilities and gifts from God so that the body benefits. Together, the multitude of gifts profits the entire *ekklesia*.

But did you know that gifts are part of the good works of agape love? I cannot imagine that anyone who reads my articles does not know that I write often about salvation that is through becoming agape love and doing good works (which includes Giving & Receiving as discussed in the previous five articles). Notice how Paul ends the chapter where he discusses gifts in the Body of Christ:

1 CORINTHIANS 12:31 But **earnestly desire the best gifts**. And yet I show you **a more excellent way**.

Again, gifts from God are given to those who earnestly seek them. But notice the last sentence: "I *Paul* show you **a MORE EXCELLENT way!**" What is he referring to? Paul explains it in the next chapter—most know it as the 'Love Chapter':

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. 13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but **the greatest of these is love**.

What does agape love have to do with gifts? Everything. God gives diverse gifts to His people for the PURPOSE of good works, serving, giving and receiving, etc. What is the *motivation* for all good works? Agape love! When we ask God for certain gifts, we must not only ask in faith but also seek them for the purpose of serving the brethren! Still unconvinced? Paul concludes chapter 13 by saying "now abide [*remains*] faith, hope, love, these three; but **the greatest of these is love**." In the next chapter, he focuses on gifts of prophecies, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, but notice what he says about *all* gifts:

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1, 12 **Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts**, ... 12 Even so you, since **you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the [ekklesia] that you seek to excel**.

Gifts from God are always to serve the Body of Christ IN agape love. Everything that God does is founded upon agape love so everything WE do should be motivated by it and that includes gifts that are needed within the *ekklesia*. Peter also talked about the connection between agape love, gifts, and serving:

1 PETER 4:8, 10-11 And above all things **have fervent love for one another**, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” ... 10 **As each one has received a gift, minister it [the gift] to one another**, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If anyone speaks [*this is a gift*], *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers [*this is a gift*], *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that **in all things [good works] God may be glorified through Jesus Christ**, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Gifts from God are by His grace—favor and goodwill. They not only enrich the individual but also the Body of Christ. What is interesting about gifts is how much Paul emphasized their value in the lives of God’s begotten children. In fact, gifts are the first thing he mentions in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9 I thank my God always concerning you for **the grace of God** which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that **you were enriched in everything by Him** in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that **you come short in no gift**, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be blameless* in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 *God is faithful*, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gifts are seemingly rare among God’s children today, especially those of healings and ministering¹ (charitable aid) to others. Many are suffering today and in need of healing and ministering. Above all, do not avoid earnestly desiring a particular gift because you do not think yourself capable or worthy of it. As Paul said:

1 CORINTHIANS 7:7 ... **each one has his own gift from God**, one in this manner and another in that.

So, the question now is, what gift can you earnestly seek after and ask of God that is needed in the body of the *ekklesia*?

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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¹ 1 Cor. 12:5.