

Faith Pulpit

The Gift of Teaching and Local Church Ministry

New Testament References:

The gift of teaching is one of the continuing spiritual gifts given to the church. Three New Testament books specifically mention this gift.

- 1 Romans 12:7—”He that teacheth, [let him teach].”
- 1 Corinthians 12:28—””And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers.”
- Ephesians 4:11—””And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.”

Some people link the latter two gifts and understand them to be the gift of pastor-teacher. 1 Peter 4:11, a verse in the context of spiritual gifts, mentions speaking (“if any man speak”). If this is a spiritual gift, perhaps it refers to an ability that is embodied in more than one spiritual gift. If so, teaching is certainly one of those gifts since it involves speaking.

Definition:

Ryrie suggests that a spiritual gift is a “God-given ability for service” (*Basic Theology*, 367). Using this definition, the gift of teaching is the special ability God gives to some believers to excel in teaching, that is “teaching” or explaining the Bible to people, leading them to discover and understand Biblical truth, and urging them to obey it. Since this teaching is a special ability from God, it is not merely a natural ability to teach (though God may choose to give gifts in keeping with a person’s natural abilities). Furthermore, because it is a gift, it must involve something more than the teaching God commands every believer to do (see Matthew 28:20).

The gift of teaching does not relate to any age level or to any particular educational ministry. It is the God-given ability to teach, though admittedly some people seem to minister more effectively with one age group or in a certain ministry.

Purpose:

1 Peter 4:10 exhorts the believer to “minister the same [gift] one to another” (cf. Ryrie’s “for service” definition). God does not give His gifts to people to foster a “look what gifts I have” mentality. Rather, God gives gifts to people so that they can serve others, especially those in local churches. On that basis, we conclude that God gives special ability to some believers, not to inflate their egos, but to enable them to serve people by teaching them Biblical truth. The result of the use of this gift is that believers will be built up in their Christian faith (see Ephesians 4:12, 13).

Importance in a Local Church:

Paul indicated in Ephesians 4:12 and 13 that spiritual gifts are essential for the proper functioning of a local church (“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”). Without spiritually gifted individuals, a local church will suffer. Consider, then, the importance of the gift of teaching. This gift is certainly needed, since so much of a local church’s ministry involves teaching.

- A large part of the pastor’s work involves teaching.
- The Sunday School ministry is primarily a teaching time.

Other ministries, such as VBS, youth work, and Bible studies involve teaching.

In a typical local church, a substantial part of the congregation could be involved in some kind of teaching ministry. On the basis of the great need for teaching in a church, we may expect that God gives the gift of teaching to many people in a congregation.

Role of a Pastor:

A wise pastor recognizes the need for gifted teachers in his church and takes steps to identify these people and help them develop their gift.

IDENTIFYING GIFTED TEACHERS—A pastor, often working with his Sunday School superintendent or other ministry leader, can ascertain a person’s giftedness through:

- (1) personal conversation (“Megan, in what areas of church ministry do you enjoy being involved?”),

(2) observation (“I have seen Megan serving in VBS, and I think she may fit into our Junior Department.”), and

(3) recommendation (“John, where do you think Megan might fit in our Sunday School program?”).

Once the pastor has identified a person who may be spiritually gifted in teaching, he will want to provide some kind of training and experience to confirm that identification and to develop the gift.

DEVELOPING GIFTED TEACHERS—While a gifted teacher has a God-given ability, he nevertheless needs to develop it. He needs to “stir up the gift of God, which is in [him]” (2 Timothy 1:6). A pastor can provide for such development in at least two ways. These ways parallel the kind of training provided for school teachers.

(1) **TRAINING**—Training conferences and seminars are certainly helpful, and a pastor should see that all his teachers attend these whenever possible. However, a pastor should make arrangements for some kind of training in the local church as well. This training can be as extensive as a pastor and other ministry leaders want to make it, but it should at least include instruction in how to use the curriculum materials. The pastor should arrange for one of the ministry leaders to spend a couple of hours with the new teacher to review the curriculum resources and acquaint him or her with how to use them.

(2) **MENTORING**—In addition to training, a pastor should structure a situation in which the individual serves with a veteran teacher. In a six-week program, the new teacher could spend two weeks observing the mature teacher, two weeks teaching with the teacher, and two weeks teaching under the supervision of the teacher. At the end of the six weeks the supervising teacher could meet with the new teacher to share strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for improvements. Throughout these times the pastor should talk to the person about the gift of teaching and make him aware of what it is and the likelihood that he may possess it. Part of the benefit of possessing the gift of teaching is being aware of it and working consciously with it in mind. At the end of the training and mentoring, an individual should be ready to serve effectively in a classroom ministry.

Benefits to a Church:

Identifying and nurturing the spiritual gift of teaching will take determined and conscious effort, but it will produce great benefits to the church and to the individuals. The church as a whole will benefit because its teaching ministries will be staffed with people who possess the gift of teaching and who have been properly trained to teach. The gifted individuals will benefit because they can teach with confidence. They can approach each teaching opportunity knowing that God has given them special ability, and they can teach with power and assurance that God will make their ministry effective.

Mr. Don Anderson

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Don Anderson earned degrees from Faith Baptist Bible College (B.A. and Th.B) and Grace Theological Seminary (M.Div. and Th.M.) For 40 years, Don has been involved in church educational ministries as a Sunday School teacher and leader in his local church, as a faculty member at Faith Baptist Bible College, and as a member of the editorial staff of Regular Baptist Press. He currently serves as the Sunday School superintendent of his church and teaches an adult Sunday School class. Don and his wife Elly have two married children and four granddaughters. The Andersons live in northwest suburban Chicago and are active members of First Baptist Church of Arlington Heights, Illinois.