

Don't Just Stand There

Why do you stand there looking into the sky?
(Acts 1:11)

Dr. Chuck McGowen

Prior to His departure from planet Earth and His return to heaven, Jesus challenged His disciples with these words, *It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.* (Acts 1:8)

There it was, His last marching orders for this rag tag bunch of 1st Century believers (approximately 120 according to Acts 1:15). In ten days they were going to become empowered, as would all Christians in the twenty plus centuries to follow, with the indwelling Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity who always takes up an immediate, permanent residence in the heart and soul of every believer. That power would change them from doubting, frightened, insecure men and women, into emboldened and spiritually enlightened persons who were willing to give their very lives for the sole purpose of spreading the truth about God and His eternal purposes. The word witness in the Greek language (*martus*) actually means martyr. Most of them would die a martyr's death for their profession of faith in Christ.

Then, after issuing that commission. the Scriptures tell us that Jesus began to ascend into heaven, out of their sight, and they just stood there in awe. What else would you expect from people who were seeing a levitation such as that? Suddenly the same two angelic beings who had been at Christ's empty tomb on that first Easter Sunday morning were in their midst. One of the angels asked, *Why do you stand there looking into the sky.?* (Acts 1:11) The same question could be asked of us as we stand in worship on Sunday mornings or other occasions. Christianity is more than worship; it's also action. When Jesus gave marching orders to His disciples He meant for them to get busy and do the work of evangelists on earth. Jesus had once told them, *I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.* (John 14:12)

Furthermore, the apostle Paul reminded every believer that has been saved by grace

through God's gift of faith that there was an explicit purpose for that act of grace. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (Ephesians 2:10)

Worship is what we do every day. Every work done in the name of Christ is an act of worship. Obedience is worship. The study of God's Word is worship. Witnessing by our actions and words is worship. Using the spiritual gifts that God has given us when the Holy Spirit came to dwell in our hearts is an act of worship. Worship does not merely occur when we just "stand there looking into the sky" as the angel's caveat proclaimed. If that angel came back now and said anything to us it might well be "Don't just stand there singing, clapping your hands and raising your hands in a praise gathering, do something. You have been saved and gifted by God for a purpose. Do something to further the Kingdom of God on Earth by fulfilling that purpose."

Recall that Jesus had said that anyone whose faith was in Him "...will do what I have been doing." When Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate He declared what He had been doing. His words were *...and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.* (John 18:37) The Truth which He professed was the fact that God exists and that He is a holy, sovereign and just God who created the universe and who intervenes in the affairs of mankind. He also came to testify to the Truth that God is the moral agent who teaches all mankind right from wrong and that there is a penalty for all the wrong that has not been atoned for. Finally, He declared Himself to be that atonement. Those truths are now to be voiced by all who have put their trust in Christ.

Those of us who stand for the Truth, the absolute truth of God's Word have an obligation, the power and the means (spiritual gifts) to witness to our individual circles of society about God's existence, His character and His intimate involvement in the affairs of this entire universe. The obligation is clear in Christ's order to His followers and the power available to us is evident in the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, a working which has resulted in a new world view and desire to live lives pleasing to Him. However, not all of us have taken advantage of the means which He has provided each of us to serve Him and do the work of Christ in the world. Many Christians have not discovered the spiritual gift or gifts that God has provided to them in order to carry out His Great commission. *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* (Matthew 28:19)

We are not responsible for making Christians out of heathen; only God can do that. Only God can change a spiritually dead person into one who is alive to the Truth of Christ.

(Ephesians 2:4-5; Colossians 2:13) We are, however, responsible for discipling new Christians, for incorporating them into a local church (baptizing) and for teaching them to study and obey God's Word. The Holy Spirit has provided the means for that entire work, through the various spiritual gifts.

Paul has said. *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given the message of **wisdom**, to another the message of **knowledge** by the same Spirit, to another the 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.* (1 Corinthians 12:7-11) In another portion of the Word, Paul lists other gifts, *If it is **servicing** let him serve; if it is **teaching** let him teach. If it is **encouraging** let him encourage. If it is **contributing** to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is **leadership** let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy let him to it cheerfully.* (Romans 12:7-8)

We shall now examine each of those gifts and find out which one or ones' might be appealing to us. I say "appealing" because that is one of the three prerequisites for determining which gift or gifts you or I might have. First your gift must be something that you long for, something that you would love to do for the Lord's glory and the common good of the church. Second, you must be effective in carrying out your gift. If I say that I love to teach, but no one in my class ever learns anything, except the dates on which I will be teaching so they can stay away, the teaching is not my gift. Last of all, other Christians will recognize and confirm your gift. If you are continually asked to lead, you are an efficient and effective leader and you enjoy leadership, then that is likely a spiritual gift. If I love to teach, but no one ever asks me to do so, I am likely not gifted in that manner.

Wisdom

The Greek word is *sophia*. While Godly wisdom is available to every believer (Proverbs 2:6; 4:5-9) some Christians, through maturing and properly handling the Word of God have attained a degree of wisdom which outshines us all. It is a wisdom that is especially cognizant of how to regulate one's relationship with God and His will. Wisdom is sometimes defined as the proper use of knowledge. That implies that these folks are not merely wise but knowledgeable. They are students of the Word and other matters of a worldly nature. Thomas Edison once said, "A genius is just a talented person who does homework." The talent is a gift from God, the homework was the result of diligence and tenacity. Wisdom is greatly needed in the church today so that folks who lead and those who follow are kept in

the perfect will of God.

Knowledge

The Greek word is *gnosis*. This is not clairvoyance (ESP) or mind reading. It is not some power that enables a "super-spiritual" person to look at a crowd and say that there is someone out there who is suffering from headaches; as "faith healers" are prone to do. Any fool can do that. In our society every small business person trying to make the monthly payroll and every soccer Mom who tries to get one kid to baseball, another to soccer and a third to a music lesson on the same afternoon while shopping for a supper menu item that will please the whole family, can tell you that "discerning" a headache in a crowd is no big deal. The gift is based on an ability of certain persons, who have done their homework as Edison said, to retain what they have learned. It also implies an intellectual curiosity and a desire to learn. These people have a way of expressing complex matters in term such that the simplest of minds can comprehend them. Their knowledge comes through a God given high IQ and a God given ability to think intuitively. These people make great teachers and the gifts more often than not go hand in hand. The ability to attain knowledge comes from God, but the learning is the recipient's responsibility. The degree of knowledge is based on the amount of time the gifted person puts into studying his or her subject matter. Knowledge does not enter one's brain by way of osmosis.

Healing

The Greek word is *iama*. Note that, curiously, the last three letters spell AMA, the acronym for the American Medical Association. I don't really believe that there is a connection between the Greek and the name chosen for the national organization that lobbies for physician's rights. Miracles of healing were more prevalent in the early church than in any other Century since the 1st. There was always a purpose behind such miraculous events. Either they were accomplished by the power of God for the purpose of validating the message of the evangelist or missionary or they were done simply for the glory of God. In the book of Acts we read, *When the crowds heard Phillip and saw the miraculous signs he did they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:6-7)* The reason for the miraculous signs, which included the healing, was so that people would listen to what Phillip had to say and believe him. His message was solely meant to "*proclaim Christ*" as Acts 8:5 tells us.

Today, in some parts of the world where the Word of God is sparsely distributed or

unavailable, miracles of healing are still reported by missionaries in the field. Here in the USA and other developed nations where the Word is replete and readily available to all whose ears and eyes are opened by God to the Truth, healing miracles seldom occur. Many charlatans have taken upon themselves the title of "faith healers" but in 35 years of following Christ, I have yet to meet a person who was permanently and completely healed of a terminal, illness by those kinds of people. I have however, seen spontaneous acts of healing, entirely through the grace and power of God, where no human had ever intervened except through devout prayer. My wife Kay was a recipient of such a healing 35 years ago.

Miraculous Powers

The Greek word is *dunamis*. Jesus warned us that in the last days such miracles would not be through the power of God the Holy Spirit, but through Satan. *For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that were possible.* (Matthew 24:24) In that passage the Greek word for miracles (also called wonders in the KJV) is *teras*. It means terrifying acts that cause you to wonder how it could have happened. When I read that I think of the performances of David Copperfield, the modern day magician of great renown. The miracles today are, like the gifts of healing, mostly confined to third world nations where the Word of God is banned or not otherwise available. The greatest miracle seen in our country today is the life that is changed by the Holy Spirit of God.

Prophecy

The Greek word is *propheteia*. It has the connotation of either foretelling, as in predicting the future, or telling forth God's Word; the roll of a minister of the Word. It carries with it the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and as we shall see, teaching. The Old Testament writers were mostly prophets. They were given a glimpse of the future by God, but even then most of them had no idea what those revelations actually meant nor when they would be fulfilled. The prophet of Old Testament times not only foretold the future events in God's plan but they also told forth God's Word. They often began a message with the words, "Thus saith the Lord." Their writings were also a telling forth of God's will and ways so that believers could become better acquainted with the character and attributes of Jehovah God. One New Testament writer was given a glimpse into the future, and that was the apostle John while he was exiled on the Isle of Patmos. As a result of his revelations he wrote the book bearing that name, the book of Revelation.

Today, the gift of prophecy is limited to preaching. All that God wants us to know about the

future is told to us in the pages of Scripture. Ministers of the gospel are best equipped when they have been called to the ministry and when they have been educated in a bible believing seminary, preceded by an under graduate degree in liberal arts or science. Such seminary studies require the mastery of Hebrew, the original language of the Old testament, and Greek, the language of the Septuagint (O.T. Greek translation) and the original language of the New Testament. They also study homiletics (the art of preaching) and hermeneutics, (the science of biblical interpretation). A course in systematic theology is also offered and recommended. An effective modern day prophet (preacher) will stimulate growth and cause conviction in the hearts of his parishioners. His message, while encouraging is not to make one "feel good" about oneself.

Distinguishing Between Spirits

The Greek word is *diakrisis*. This is basically the gift of discernment. It literally means to distinguish the difference. That difference may be related to right versus wrong; a message from a prophet or a false prophet; a movement of the Spirit of God or an evil spirit; a correct or incorrect interpretation of a passage from God's Word; the decision concerning building, expanding, selling, using etc of church property and ministries; what is and what is not in God's will or the best interest of a particular person. It is a combination of uncommon sense and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Thomas Sowell said this in his syndicated column of 1-20-04. "It may be expecting too much to expect most intellectuals to have common sense when their whole life is based on their being uncommon_ that is, saying things that are different from what everyone else is saying." If we would substitute the words "persons who have the gift of discernment " for the single word "intellectuals." then I believe that best defines the person who has this gift. They have the uncanny ability to always come up with an idea of which few of us ever thought.

Tongues

The Greek word is *glossa*. It has to do with a person speaking a foreign language which he or she heretofore had no understanding of. If I were to speak Chinese, having never studied the language or having never been to the mainland of China or to Taiwan, I would be displaying the gift of tongues. On the day of Pentecost when the believers in the upper room began to speak, Jews assembled in the street below, that had gathered there for the Jewish Holy days from all over the known world began to hear the gospel in their native tongue. The disciples were speaking in known languages that were utterly foreign to them.

This gift, like healing and miracles is still in action where God's Word is not found.

This gift, called the least of all by Paul, has become the poster child of the charismatic movement. I have personally been told that I have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit because I have not spoken in a foreign tongue of which I have not been a student. If I have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit then I am nor a Christian. (See Romans 8:9) Some have called this gift a prayer language. If that is the case, it should be done in their prayer closet, not out in the open where no one can understand their prayers. Recall that the gifts of the Spirit were distributed by the Spirit *"for the common good."* (I Corinthians 12:7) If I am a foreigner and do not understand English, and you begin to speak in my native tongue the words of the Gospel that I cannot otherwise understand, and if God has opened my spiritual ears and heart to hear and respond to that Gospel message, then your gift of tongues has served the common good.

Interpreting Tongues

The Greek word is *hermeneia*. That is the root word for the word I used earlier in this paper; hermeneutics, the science of Biblical interpretation. It literally means, from the same. That is one tells another person in his own language what someone else has said in another language that is foreign to him. The person doing so is called a translator. When ever the gift of tongues was exercised in a church gathering, Paul insisted that an interpreter be present. Otherwise the message in tongues fell on deaf ears. If I speak the Gospel in Russian to you, and you are a Russian, you are the interpreter.

Serving

The Greek word is *diakonia*. That is the root word for the English word "diaconate" which refers to a group of deacons. The word is also translated "ministry" which is how the KJV puts it. While we are each referred to as servants of Christ, some have been gifted with the desire and the special ability to serve others; service is their form of ministry. These folks are generous in giving of their time and talent to meet the special needs of other people. They are the first to suggest that we take up an offering for a person in need of food or clothing. They are the first to call on a person in the hospital. A nursing home or prison. They are every ready to welcome a new member or communicant and invite them to dinner. These folks are adept at baking pies, cookies and special treats in order to make another otherwise lonely person feel loved. They make sure that a person without means of transportation finds a way to church. They stand out in the bone chilling cold to direct traffic in the church parking lot. They tend infants in the nursery. They have a servant's

heart that enables them to stoop ,lower than most, to humble themselves, in order to be a blessing to others. I think of one person in our midst who is a doctor of music and the director of bands at our local university, and who simply plays the tympani in our small church orchestra. It is no secret, I have told him that he possesses a servants heart. Jesus said, after washing the filthy feet of his sandal shod disciples; *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.* (John 13:15-17)

Teaching

The Greek word is *didache*. That is the root word for "didactic" which refers to the kind of teaching which goes on in institutions of higher learning. This is the gift with which I am most familiar; it is mine. It is a gift that may or may not be given to Christians who are professional teachers, instructors or professors. There are certain elements that this gift requires of its recipient.

First, the Scriptures offer a caveat to those who engage in this spiritual venture. *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.* (James 3:1) The judgement comes first on earth as the people that we are teaching very often disagree with our doctrinal position. That is fine as long as they can point out their position from biblical references taken in the proper context. Often, those who disagree do so based on a tradition that differs from that which we teach, a tradition passed down through a family or a particular denomination. We are held to a higher standard of living than our students. That is just fine also, as long as the person doing the judging has no room for judgement on his or her own behalf. James covered that in the next verse when he wrote, *We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.*

Personally, it is not the judgement of my fellow Christians that I fear, it is the judgement seat of Christ, before which I shall have to answer for all of my erroneous teaching. (II Corinthians 5:10) That is why it is so very important that a teacher use the whole Bible when teaching a verse and why an intense searching of the Scriptures is so vital to proper teaching. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. There are no contradictions in the Word of God. If it appears to you or me that one verse contradicts another, then our interpretation of one of those verses is wrong.

The study of God's Word, a minimal understanding of the original languages, a library rich

in commentaries and prayerful preparation are essential to effective teaching. Eloquence is not an essential talent as Paul was quick to point out. *When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.* (I Corinthians: 2:1) Paul was the greatest teacher of all, but he relied upon the truth of the message and the power of the Holy Spirit to get his teaching across.

A working knowledge of church history, while not essential, is very important so that the teacher and student can appropriately discern how and why various denominations believe as they do. The teacher should make every effort to present the study in such a way that the student can adapt two and three thousand year old texts to his or her life in the 21st Century. The Word of God is eternally applicable in all that we think, say and do.

Teaching carries a high grade of responsibility. A teacher is one who should motivate the students to dig deeper into the Bible and to become people who are able to articulate basic Christian doctrines. A teacher should be able to get his students off milk and on to meat. Milk is a predigested food (from a cow or a mother), a substance meant for infants to live on. If a human baby lives solely on milk for too long a time, the child's growth is stunted and the child becomes anemic. So it is with spiritual food. The teaching we call milk is that which the teacher assimilated, or intellectually digested and passed on to the students. The meat of the Word amounts to that information which the student has carved out and taken in on his own.

The writer of Hebrews scolded the believers in this way, *In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone living on milk, being still an infant is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.* (Hebrews 5:12-14)

Encouraging

The Greek word is *parakaleo*. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as our paraclete (Comforter). The best known human encourager in the Bible is a man called Barnabas. In fact, in Hebrew, his name literally means son (*bar*) of encouragement (*nabas*). It was Barnabas who sold some of his land to supply the needs of some early Christians who had lost most of their material goods because of their faith in Christ. They were Jewish converts, disowned by their families. It was Barnabas who came along side the newly saved Saul of Tarsus (who would be later known as the apostle Paul) as an advocate and encourager. Saul was highly suspect among the early church members because of his pre-

conversion, violent acts against the church of Christ.

Some believers have a real sense of just who is hurting and in need of encouragement. They know, intuitively when a person is covering up some deep hurt and they have the uncanny knack of getting to the heart of the problem and lifting a person's spirits. These are the one's who make the phone call at just the right moment. They send out cards and take a friend to lunch, just to talk. Sometimes, they just make themselves available to a person in need without necessarily saying anything. Just knowing that someone loves you enough to pray for you, call you and drop you a note of encouragement can go a long way to lift you out of a pit of despair.

Contributing

The Greek word is *metadidomi*. We are all expected to give generously to the work of the Lord, but some folks are especially gifted with the spiritual ability to make a lot of money and at the same time, to give it away, contributing to the needs of others. One such a person was the late David D. Davis. That man was the most giving and unpretentious Christian I have ever known. It was my pleasure to serve him as his physician for many years. "DD", as his friends called him, was a successful international builder. His construction firm built needed facilities all over the world. One such a project involved freezer/warehouses in third world nations where huge amounts of mush needed food had formerly gone to waste if not immediately consumed. DD lived a very frugal lifestyle, but he gave millions of dollars away each year to the needs of his community (I.e. YMCA, Butler Art, just to name two) and especially to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before he died he saw to it that a portion of his monetary legacy was place in a trust to continue serving his Lord.

Leadership

The Greek word is *proistemi*. Simply because a person is a mature member of the church or a prominent and active Christian, does not assure the he or she has the gift of leadership. This gifted person has the ability to govern with wisdom, discernment, grace, foresight, faith and respect. He or she has a well organized mind and is able to properly delegate authority and responsibilities to others. A good leader does not try to do it all himself, but instead has the ability to see the gifts that others have so that the work which needs to be done in his area of responsibility can be accomplished effectively and in a timely fashion. The leader will have a handle on the financial status of his organization (the local church or parachurch organization and she will have a vision in mind for fulfilling God's purposes in

the future. A leader should be able to articulate the plans and purposes of the organization which he leads in simple and understandable terms. Most of all, the leader realizes that he is under the authority of Christ in all matters and is thus led by the Spirit through prayer and God's Word.

In his book entitled *The Right Questions: Truth, Meaning and Public Debate*, Phillip E. Johnson wrote, "People who care for nothing beyond their own comfort are safer, although a whole lot less inspiring, than people who are capable of risking their lives." The context on that statement had to do with the extremes to which an Islamic terrorist will go for something they truly believe in.

In closing, and in the context of this article, I would paraphrase Johnson's statement in this manner: "People who care for nothing beyond their own comfort are for the most part very comfortable, yet a lot less useful in the kingdom of God, than people who are willing to risk their time, spiritual gifts, treasures and worldly comfort and give their lives in the service of God.

If the angels that had been at the resurrection tomb and the ascension of Christ were to return today and speak to those non-risk taking Christians who bear that finely tuned comfort index, they would likely say with somewhat furled brows, "Don't just stand there! Find out what you've been saved to do, and get busy doing it!!"

Soli Deo Gloria.