

# **DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE**

August 11-15, 2008

(Next issue: September 1)



August 11, 2008 **Ministry: Word of Wisdom**

*“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom....But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”<sup>1</sup>*

The ministry of ‘wisdom’ effectively applies truth to specific situations. Those who exercise this ministry often seem to be able to cut through conflicting ideas, priorities or proposals and help everyone see the true dynamics of the situation. They are often able to propose practical solutions to vexing problems. They bring harmony to those who have not been able to see eye to eye.

Ministries of wisdom may be exercised with individuals in counseling situations or in less formal friendship or mentoring relationships. For those seeking to understand God’s will, encountering someone with a ‘word of wisdom’ may be the means of guidance that God uses to make things clear. Those who minister consistently in this area are of great value to groups, especially those charged with leadership or administration in the body of Christ.

Biblically, the ‘wisdom literature’ of the Old Testament<sup>2</sup> provides insight into how spiritual truth is to guide and shape our lives. ‘Wisdom’ is occasionally personified<sup>3</sup> and some believe that Jesus himself incarnates the ‘wisdom of God’, which rather than being proud or patronizing is *“peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> James 3:13,17 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Proverbs 1:20ff

<sup>4</sup> James 3:17 (TNIV)

August 12, 2008 **'Manifestational' Charismata**

*"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good....All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines."<sup>1</sup>*

In 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 the *charismata* listed are among the more miraculous: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues. Some label these the 'manifestational' gifts of the Spirit because they demonstrate the working of the Holy Spirit in an obvious or immediate fashion. Some single out the ability to speak in tongues is the essential 'manifestation' of those who are truly 'filled' with the Spirit.

In a sense it is true that the more miraculous ministries may 'manifest' the work of the Spirit in a fairly obvious way. Just as possession of a Rolls Royce can be a 'manifestation' of financial wealth, a ministry of healing or miracles is usually a good indicator of one moving in the power of the Spirit.

However, Paul is not teaching that these *charismata* manifest the presence of the Spirit exclusively or in a superior way to other ministries of the Spirit. Not all millionaires drive a Rolls. Some may drive a Ford! In a similar way, *charismata* such as mercy, evangelism, helps, etc. are also legitimate manifestations of the Spirit. They may seem less exciting or 'flashy', but to some people they may testify even more powerfully the presence of the life-changing, gracious Spirit of God.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7,11

*“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”<sup>1</sup>*

Sacraments are outward, visible signs which represent invisible, spiritual realities. They are ‘means’ or channels of God’s working in our lives. Jesus specifically established two sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Each consists of three parts: the outward sign, the inward spiritual grace and the ‘sacramental union’ between the two.

The outward or visible ‘sign’ involves material ‘elements’ used in the context of a sacred ‘rite’.

Each of the sacraments utilizes material elements. In Baptism the element is water. In the Lord’s Supper the elements are bread and wine. These ordinary things take on sacramental significance when used in the context a sacred ‘rite’.

In baptism, for example, the rite usually involves a profession of faith, prayers and usage of the water for sprinkling, pouring or emersion. The water, utilized in this special, ‘ritual’ way is the outward sign of the sacrament that anyone can witness using their ordinary physical senses.

On their own, the physical elements of the sacraments have no spiritual benefit. The water remains water. The bread and wine remain ordinary food and drink. They are of blessing only as we participate in faith and obedience, seeking to connect with the invisible spiritual realities that they represent.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:41-42 (TNIV)

August 14, 2008

**Sacraments (2)**

*“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.’”<sup>1</sup>*

A sacrament is also a ‘sign’ or ‘seal’ of invisible spiritual grace.

Signs point to something. Seals endorse the contents of letters or other legal documents. In these ways baptism and the Lord’s Supper point to “Christ and all his spiritual riches”.<sup>2</sup> They underscore the realities of the gospel, the promises given to us and our acceptance of them. Just as wedding rings indicate and affirm allegiance to the multi-faceted relationship of marriage, the sacraments indicate and affirm our relationship with God through Christ.

In baptism and the Lord’s Supper, these invisible realities and the tangible elements (water, bread and wine) is a spiritual one. When the sacrament is entered into or received in faith, the grace of God accompanies it. The Holy Spirit uses it to “visibly represent and deepen our consciousness of the spiritual blessings of the covenant, of the washing away of our sins and of our participation of the life that is in Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

Exactly how this works is something we don’t understand. It is a sacred mystery. But the working of God in and through the sacraments is nonetheless real and powerful. God desires to build up our faith and strengthen our relationship with him as we obediently present ourselves to him in the sacraments.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 16:15-16 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> Louis Berhof, Systematic Theology, p. 618.

<sup>3</sup> Same as previous.

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.’”<sup>1</sup>*

The notion of a ‘spiritual connection’ with God in the sacraments and of the necessity of faith on the part of the recipient are indicators of a Reformed approach to these sacred mysteries.

Traditional Catholic teaching on the sacraments asserts that the physical elements of the sacraments are themselves transformed in the context of the rite. So when the priest declares, “This is my body”, the bread is ‘transubstantiated’ or changed in some way. This teaching has the virtue of exalting the mystery and importance of the sacraments, fostering reverence and awe. However it often results in a somewhat magical perception. They think that simply participating, apart from true repentance and faith, will do them good.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Anabaptist teaching that the sacraments are ‘mere signs’ tends to reduce baptism and the Lord’s Supper into visual aids of the gospel. As such they are useful reminders of the teaching of the Word, but no more.

Reformed teaching tries to communicate that the sacraments truly do convey spiritual life by the power of the Holy Spirit, but that faith is essential to receive these blessings. If we come to them, believing in Christ and what he has done for us upon the cross, recognizing our own need of grace and asking for his help, God will use the sacraments to bless and nurture us.

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<sup>1</sup> John 7:53 (TNIV)