

Called. Gifted. Inadequate.



I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge.
II Cor. 11:6

This is a statement I would expect to read in one of Peter's letters to believers. Fisherman, basic education skills, impulsive temperament—someone who might be defensive of the fact that he is not a trained speaker. But the statement is made by Paul—educated by the best rabbi in Jerusalem, at the head of his class, excelling in knowledge of the Scriptures and the rabbinical interpretations—which is probably why I have never really believed him when I have read this. It sounds similar to Moses, who was educated in the Egyptian schooling system, telling God that he had never been eloquent and was slow of speech.

But what if Paul were telling the truth? What if he really wasn't a trained speaker—meaning that he wasn't a skilled orator that could work a crowd by the power of his public speaking skills? Doesn't that seem like such a necessary, or at least useful, skill to have in order to "carry (Jesus') name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15)?

Paul was **called** in a dramatic fashion. He was **gifted** as an apostle and God confirmed his authority with signs, wonders, and miracles. But there are clues that when it came to the skill of public speaking—he knew that his "natural abilities" were **inadequate** to produce the repentant change and spiritual growth he desired in the lives of those to whom he spoke.

People in the Corinthian church liked the way Apollos delivered a message better than they liked Paul's style.

Those who didn't like Paul in Corinth specifically pointed out that "his letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." (II Cor. 10:10)

In Troas, when Paul was limited on time with the believers, Luke records that Eutychus sank into a deep sleep as Paul "talked on and on" and even Paul's passionate writing style is complex and sometimes difficult to follow.

Paul twice asked for prayer that when he opened his mouth, the words would be given so that he would be fearless in presenting about Jesus. He didn't have his presentation all figured out to "wow" the crowds—he felt his neediness when it was time to speak. (Eph. 6:19 and Col. 4:3)

In I Corinthians 2:4, he says, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power." In other words, the resulting conviction and change in the listeners' lives couldn't be explained away by Paul's amazing oratory skills—it was the result of the Holy Spirit using Paul's passionate appeals to the consciences of the listeners.

When God calls us to a ministry or leads us to a work, He does incorporate the gifts He has given us as His children, but usually in such a way that we can say with Paul: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God." (II Cor. 3:5)

Our uncomfortable sense of inadequacy drives us in neediness to ask God to do what only He can do, and be inter-dependent on each other so that the credit doesn't go to a single person, but to the One working out His good purpose.