

22. Spiritual gifts for God's kingdom

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This portion of the study we are going to do today is one of the most frequent arguments within the realm of Christianity. Among the denominations, they have different doctrines regarding the gifts of the Spirit. Some are willing to divide the body of Christ to prove that their denominational theologies are right. But are they? We shouldn't be that way. We should ignore man's traditions and denominational differences and follow what the Lord says through the Bible.

Before we begin our study, let's clarify the difference between the Gift of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit – distinctions that often become muddled in our minds:

1) The Gift of the Spirit: Given the moment a person believes in Christ, this Gift is the Holy Spirit Himself – John 14:16-17, Luke 11:13, 1 Corinthians 3:16.

2) The fruit of the Spirit: The fruit of the Spirit is revealed within us while we live for the Lord – "Love." Within this fruit of the Spirit, Love, there are many aspects – such as, "joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" according to Galatians 5:22-23a. The Holy Spirit plants the seeds in all believers' hearts, so that each of us has the ability to produce this fruit – love.

3) The gifts of the Spirit: Carried out through us, spiritual gifts are skills, abilities, and instruments that God gives us to benefit the whole body – the church.

Using your God-given gift, whatever it is, should bless not only others, but also you, because your gift will allow you to express your personality and deepest desires to serve the Lord. The exercise of a spiritual gift is always a satisfying and enjoyable experience.

In 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Paul gives us a solid understanding of spiritual gifts. He focuses not so much on the gifts themselves, but on how and why the gifts together produce full, sound, and rich results in harmony.

A. DO NOT BE IGNORANT

1 Corinthians 12:1-3 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: 2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

"Ignorant" comes from the Greek word "agnoeō," which means "not knowable" or "not known." Our English word "agnostic" comes from this word. However, when it comes to discovering and exercising the spiritual gifts that God has given us, there's no place for ignorance.

Paul, in his letters, names 3 things he does not want Christians to be ignorant of:

1) Don't be ignorant of God's plan for Israel. – Romans 11:25

2) Don't be ignorant of spiritual gifts. – 1 Corinthians 12:1

3) Don't be ignorant about the second coming of Jesus and the eternal state. – 1 Thessalonians 4:13

Sadly, so many Christians are very ignorant on these exact points.

The majority of Christian past teachings and experiences have perhaps built a poor understanding of the Holy Spirit and His gifts. It is easy for us to take our materialistic or superstitious views into our understanding of spiritual gifts.

Whether they'd like to admit it or not, the main denominations, such as the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc., treat the gifts of the Spirit as if they are Christian diseases, while they ignore what the Word of God says about the gifts of the Spirit in context. At the same time, the Pentecostal, Assembly of God, Four Squares, and other charismatic denominations would encourage, push, and exercise the gifts of the Spirit without the guidelines within the Word of God. All these misunderstandings come from two things:

- 1) They do not keep what the Bible says in context.
- 2) They put their denominational rules and regulations over the Word of God.

B. DIFFERENT GIFTS FROM THE SAME SPIRIT

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

The apostle Paul lists 9 spiritual gifts here, and more in other places. There is indeed a diversity of gifts, yet there is only one gift Giver who works through the diverse gifts.

The Greek word for "activities" is "*energema*," where we get our words "energy, energetic, and energize" from. It is a word of active, miraculous power. "Activities" is the same word as "working" in verse 10 of this chapter – "*the working of miracles*." Differences of activities means that God displays and pours out His miraculous power in different ways, but it is always the same God doing the work.

C. THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In verse 7, Paul teaches us the rich truth why God gives us spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

It is very important for us to find and understand which one is the key verse in the portion you study. This v7 and v11 are the key verses of today's study.

Each member of God's family has been given spiritual gifts – gifts that, when exercised, manifested by the Holy Spirit. For what? Derived from the Greek word "*sympherō*," this means, "profit, to bring together, to lift up.'

The Holy Spirit is always present in and among Christians. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, He may abide with us forever according to John 14:16, if you are a born-again Christian. However, sometimes the Spirit's presence is more apparent than other times. There are times when He may choose to manifest Himself, that is, to make Himself apparent.

The purpose of the manifestation of the Spirit is to benefit the whole church family, not just a particular individual, certainly not to brag about the gifts we received as if we have anything to do with. Bragging about the spiritual gifts only shows the immaturity of that person. If we have to brag, we must brag about our gift Giver, not us.

D. GIFTS AFTER GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another

faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Let's go over these 9 gifts one at a time:

1) The word of wisdom: This is the unique ability to speak forth the wisdom of God, especially in an important situation, as shown in Stephen in Acts 7, and Paul in Acts 23.

2) The word of knowledge: The unique ability to declare knowledge which could only be revealed supernaturally, as shown in Jesus in Matthew 17 or Paul in Acts 27. We need to understand the difference between the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge; one may have great knowledge, even supernatural knowledge, yet have no wisdom from God in the application of that knowledge.

3) The gift of faith: Though faith is an essential part of every Christian's life, the gift of faith is the unique ability to trust God against all odds, as Peter did when he walked out of the boat on onto the water in Matthew 14. Another mighty example of the gift of faith was the Christian leader and philanthropist George Mueller, who in 19th century England provided for thousands of orphans completely by prayer, without even asking for donations.

4) Gifts of healing: This is God's healing power, either given or received, and has been repeatedly documented in the New Testament and since. It is the power which at particular times the apostles received from the Holy Spirit to cure diseases; a power which did not always reside in them; because Paul could not cure Timothy, nor did he remove his own thorn in the flesh; because it was given only on extraordinary occasions, though perhaps more general than many others.

5) Working of miracles: Literally "dynameis," or "acts of power." This describes when the Holy Spirit chooses to "override" the laws of nature, working in or through an available person. Gifts of healing and working of miracles often operate in conjunction with the gift of faith, as in Acts 3. These things are not done on the whim of the individual, as if the power to heal or work miracles was at their permanent disposal – instead, they operate as an individual is prompted by God and given the faith to perform such a work.

6) Prophecy: The telling-forth of God's message in a particular situation, always in accord with His Word and His current work. Sometimes this has the character of foretelling the future, as in Acts 21 and Acts 27.

7) Discerning of Spirits: The ability to tell the difference between true and false doctrine, and between what is of the Holy Spirit and what isn't.

- Satan appears as an angel of light – 2 Corinthians 11:14
- He deceives with a false, tempting message – Genesis 2:16-3:5
- There can be lying spirits in the mouths of prophets – 1 Kings 22:21-23; 2 Chronicles 18:20-22
- Satan can speak right after God speaks – Matthew 16:23
- Sometimes people who seem to say the right things are really from the devil – Acts 13:6-12; 16:16-18
- It is important to test the word of anyone who claims to speak for God – 1 John 4:1-3

- Satan can work deceiving miracles – 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10, Revelation 13:11-14
- The devil will try to infiltrate the church with false teachers – Jude 4, 2 Peter 2:1-2

8) Different kinds of tongues: The gift of tongues is a personal language of praise and prayer given by God, whereby the believer can communicate with God beyond the limits of knowledge and understanding. When using the gift of tongues, we know that the Holy Spirit prays through us, though we may not understand what we are speaking, but God does. Tongues have an important place in the devotional life of the believer, but a small place in the corporate life of the church – 1 Corinthians 14:18-19, especially in “public” meetings – 1 Corinthians 14:23.

The ability to pray in an unknown tongue is not a gift given to every believer. The ability to pray in a tongue is not the evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit; this over-emphasis has led charismatic denomination Christians to seek the gift of tongues and even to counterfeit it. That’s very unfortunate.

9) The gift of the interpretation of tongues: This gift allows the gift of tongues to be of benefit to those other than the speaker, as they are able to hear and agree with the tongue–speaker’s words to God.

We will study more about speaking in tongues and interpretation in chapter 14.

Based on what we learned here and others – Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11, and 1 Peter 4:11, we can sort the spiritual gifts into the following categories:

- Support gifts: Apostleship, Prophecy, Evangelism, Pastor-Teacher, Teaching
- Service gifts: Administration, Exhortation, Faith, Giving, Helps, Showing mercy
- Sign gifts: Discerning of spirits, Miracles, Healings, Tongues, Interpretation of tongues.

Through these verses we tend to focus on the list of gifts, but the apostle Paul does not. Since he does not give a detailed explanation of each gift, it is probable that the Corinthian Christians were well familiar with them all.

Here is another reason for unity, and a reason against any sense of superiority regarding the gifts. They are distributed not according to the will of man, but as the will of the Holy Spirit of God – as He wills in v11.

The gifts of healing or other gifts come and go as the Holy Spirit determines. He disposes them as He sees us to use. But many of charismatic / pentecostal church teachers put heavy emphasis on having spiritual gifts – especially speaking in tongues, much like the immature Corinthian Christians did.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Being aware of our spiritual gift is pleasing to God.

God does not want us to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. So we need to study them closely in context.

2) Being willing to use our gift is constructive to the whole body of Christ.

When we use our spiritual gift unselfishly, everyone is blessed.

3) Being satisfied with our gift is an honor to its Giver.

Don't long for the gifts we don't have, but rejoice in the ones we have.