

“The Gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Part 3)

Some TV programs begin with an advisory: “Viewer Discretion Advised”. Then it indicates “Adult Language,” or “Sexual Themes.” Well, I would give a warning or advisory for the content of this sermon! No – there’s no sex or violence, but it does include some material that you may think is strange or off the deep end!

We are looking in this series at the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I myself believe there are 20 gifts of the Spirit identified in the New Testament (they are listed on the insert in today’s program). I am trying to describe each one, and suggest how this gift can operate in the church today. Last week we examined the gift list in Romans 12. Today, we look at the gifts enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12. This list includes some that may seem rather bizarre! My former pastor and friend, Rocky Riedel, did his master’s thesis on the gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. His advisor at Lancaster Theological Seminary was Dr. Paul Achtemeier, one of the most renowned New Testament scholars in the world. Rocky asked this great Bible scholar, “Does the Holy Spirit really work this way today?” Dr. Achtemeier’s reply was that we can’t limit the Holy Spirit to working just in ways that our culture views as “normal”. The Holy Spirit moves as He pleases!

So, as we look at the gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:7-10, I hope we can keep an open mind and realize that we cannot box the Holy Spirit in and expect Him merely to act in ways that suit our tastes and expectations.

The first gift in the list is this: “To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom” (1 Corinthians 12:8). Now we talk about wisdom in the natural sense, like someone is a wise person. But this spiritual gift is different. Notice, it says the “*utterance of wisdom*” or the “*word of wisdom*.” This involves wisdom that *you have no way of knowing yourself*, but it’s revealed by the Holy Spirit, then *uttering or telling someone something wise to do*. A lady in Harlem went into a store and said to the store owner, “The Lord told me you should close your store.” At that, the owner kicked her out, and 15 minutes later that store was robbed and the owner shot.

This gift could work in a counseling situation, where the Spirit puts an idea in your mind and you share it, or tell someone something to do. And the person leave, does it, and it proves beneficial. The utterance of wisdom (or word of wisdom) could operate in church meetings, where someone with this gift has a thought that comes to mind (like out of the blue – but it’s from the Spirit); then the person tells the group, and it works out to be a wise decision for the good of the Body of Christ.

The next gift seems similar: it is the ***utterance of knowledge***. 1 Corinthians 12:8 says, “To another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit.” Again, this is not the usual use of the word knowledge, like the person who acquires a lot of knowledge through experience and study. The utterance of knowledge (or word of knowledge) is *knowing something you have no way of knowing on your own, then telling it*. The late Kathryn Kuhlman had a world recognized healing ministry. Apparently she had the spiritual gift of the word of knowledge. Often she would look out over the audience and say something like, “Someone in this section is

being healed of cancer in their right lung” – then find out that someone there was at that moment actually being healed.

One day when I was pastor of a church in suburban Philadelphia a man stopped in at the church office. He had seen a sign outside for our healing services. He told me about a lady in the community who had been miraculously healed. She went to a healing service in a nearby Catholic Church. The Catholic priest conducting the service said, “There’s someone over in this area who’s suffering from a back problem and there’s a healing taking place.” (apparently this priest had the gift of the utterance of knowledge). A lady sitting next to the sick woman grabbed her to lay hands on her – she didn’t know it was *this lady* who was the sick person – but apparently this lady also was given a word of knowledge. She said something to the lady with the back problem, and then laid her hands on her. The sick woman felt warmth in her body, and the same day she was healed.

This gift can surface in any setting, where a believer is given by the Spirit a fact or some information he or she would have no way of knowing, then speaking it so someone else or to a group – *so that God’s purposes can be worked out and God glorified.*

The next gift of the Spirit listed is ***faith***. 1 Corinthians 12:9 says, “To another faith by the same Spirit...”. Now *every Christian believer* is to have faith in God. But the Spirit-gift of faith is not the same as the faith in Jesus we need in order to be saved, or the daily trust in God that brings calmness and serenity. The spiritual gift of faith seems to be that mountain-moving, miracle-producing faith!

A classic example of one with this gift is George Muller, who lived in Bristol, England over 100 years ago. He cared for 10,000 orphans over a period of 60 years, receiving probably \$5 million over that time. He began the work with 2 shillings in his pocket. He never made known any need. He just prayed for it day by day and had faith God would provide. The children never went without a meal, even though on occasions they sat down to eat when the pantry was bare. One morning, there was not a speck of food or milk on hand to feed the hungry kids. They sat down at their tables and Muller prayed: “Father, we thank Thee for the food Thou art going to give us.” Just then there was a knock at the door. A baker stood and said, “I was awakened at 2 a.m. and felt I should bake some bread for you.” A few minutes later there was another knock. A milkman said, “My milk wagon just broke down in front of your place. I have to get rid of these cans of milk before I can take the wagon for repairs. Can you use this milk?” This took place over and over again. Any need for food was never made known outside the orphanage Muller just trusted God to provide. He once wrote, rather modestly: “It pleased the Lord to give me in some cases something like the gift of faith, so that unconditionally I could ask and look for an answer.”

Who knows, but maybe someone in this congregation may have the spiritual gift of faith!

The next gift of the Spirit is ***healing***. “To another gifts of healing by the one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:9). Jesus healed people. So did the Apostles after Him. *The Church as a whole*

is instructed to pray for people to be healed (cf. James 5:13-16). But some are given this as a special gift of the Holy Spirit. The Greek here literally says, “gifts of *healings*”, a double plural. Some suggest this may mean one person may have a gift of healing over certain type of illness, another person over a different disease.

I have held many healing services in churches I’ve served. I have seen some wonderful examples of people being healed physically, emotionally, spiritually, or in their relationships. I would love to have someone with the gift of healing lead our healing services! In all the years of having healing services, this still has not happened yet. God wants us to be whole human beings, healed from dysfunction. He has provided some in the church with gifts of healings so this can be accomplished.

The working of miracles is the next spiritual gift on the list. “To another the working of miracles” (1 Corinthians 12:10). The Greek word translated miracles is “*dunameis*” (from which we get the English word dynamite!) and more accurately should be translated “mighty works” or “powerful deeds”.

Acts 2:22 says Jesus went about doing mighty works (*dunameis*). Kenneth Kinghorn has categorized the “mighty works” of Jesus as power over disease, power over demons, power over nature (stilling the storm, walking on water), power over matter (water to wine, multiplying loaves and fishes), and power over death.

Many people today are skeptical of “miracles”, or anything that goes against known natural laws. *But God has the power to do what He pleases with his own creation!* Some in the church are gifted to be instruments through whom God does mighty works!

Here’s an account from Zaire. A brother named Alexander, a man with very little education, was conducting a preaching meeting, when the corpse of a young woman was carried in. Her fiancé challenged him defiantly: “You say God raises people from the dead. Here is a test for you.” Well, the woman had already been dead 4 days. The stench filled the small, stuffy room. Alexander and the little congregation began to praise God and rejoice and pray for about 20 minutes. Suddenly he felt someone tugging at his jacket, and when he opened his eyes he saw that the corpse was missing. He looked around, and the “dead woman” was standing among those praying, eyes closed, hands up, praising God. When the rest of the congregation saw her they bolted out the door with Brother Alexander right after them! This miracle shook that whole area and people turned to God in large numbers. (Missionaries with all their training had failed to achieve in a hundred years what was now accomplished by one simple man – used to work a miracle).

Someone has documented the ministry of a British plumber who died in 1947. There were 14 occasions when a dead person was raised. Sometimes he would pray. Other times he would just speak the word. Now I can imagine some of you are thinking, “C’mon Harry. You don’t really believe these stories, do you?” Well, why not? Jesus said His followers do even greater things than He did! Jesus said, “He who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater

works than these will he do, because I go to the Father” (John 14:12). Check out some of the mighty works done through the apostles in the Book of Acts! Many of us have been brainwashed by the modern era where science and reason have held sway. We tend to doubt anything we can’t explain. Our unbelief hinders the work of the Spirit!

The Holy Spirit gifts some in the church to do mighty works, that call attention to the sovereignty of God over all creation!

Prophecy is the next gift. We looked at this gift last week, since it’s also in the gift list in Romans 12. It means to speak for God – this is what God is saying to us in this particular situation.

Then there is the **discerning of spirits**. “To another, the ability to distinguish between spirits...” (1 Corinthians 12:10). The word “distinguish” used here means “to judge through” or “to see through”. There are many forces, many kinds of spirits, at work in the world. There are many different motives behind what people do. Ephesians 6 says we are in constant *spiritual warfare*.

Many *in the church* today dismiss the idea of evil spirits – while the secular world is into astrology, horoscopes, the occult, witchcraft, zombies, black magic! There was an article in the Lancaster newspaper several years ago about a witches’ convention held in Lancaster County!

God wants to protect the Church, and enable us to distinguish what is from Him and what is from Satan, what is truth and what is error; to see through the motives of people who may cause harm to the Body of Christ. And so, the Holy Spirit gifts some people to distinguish the kinds of spirits at work in the world and in people, so that the church isn’t defenseless against the powers of evil. I myself have taken a spiritual gifts inventory a number of times, and each time I’ve scored high on the gift of discerning of spirits. At times it seems I have had an ability to see beneath people’s motives. For instance, prior to the exposure of Jim Bakker of the PTL Club and Jimmy Swaggart’s sexual scandals I just sensed deep inside that something wasn’t right about these men and their ministry. Later, the scandals surfaced.

We will take the last 2 gifts on this list together. 1 Corinthians 12:10 informs us, “to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.” These are the gifts of **tongues** and the **interpretation of tongues**. The word “tongues” here simply means “an unknown language”. Very rarely when someone speaks in tongues is it a known language – like French or Arabic or Spanish. In the Book of Acts, sometimes when people first received the Holy Spirit, they would speak in tongues. In the church in Corinth, speaking in tongues was getting out of hand, so the Apostle Paul had to lay down some rules on the use of this gift (cf. 1 Corinthians, chapter 14). Today, this is one of the more strange gifts. Often people make it controversial

The gift of tongues (an unknown language) seems to have 2 main purposes. When used **privately**, in prayer and praise, it’s a way of expressing our feelings and our inner self to God that’s not dependent on the limitations of earthly language (it comes from the heart, and bypasses

the brain and reason). Some with the gift of tongues say what a great release it is just to let this heavenly language come forth, and how it strengthens them spiritually.

When tongues are spoken *aloud in public*, it's a way God has of speaking directly to us. But the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 that if tongues are spoken in public worship, then there has to be someone there with the gift of interpretation – either the one who spoke the message in tongues, or somebody else.

Which brings us to gift of interpretation: the Holy Spirit gifts some people to interpret messages in tongues. It is not like translating a foreign language – the interpreter doesn't comprehend the message in tongues with her mind, but the Spirit gives her the words of interpretation. Think of it: when there is an authentic message in tongues and someone interprets the message, this is a way God communicates directly with His children!

A group of believers in a remote area of Guatemala lived in a place where there was a severe drought. The village was on the verge of extinction. The Christians prayed and someone spoke in tongues, and God gave another believer the interpretation. The message was to go up a hill which was owned by the Christians and dig a well. It seemed to be one of the most illogical places to dig, but they obeyed, even in the face of being ridiculed by unbelievers in the village. They soon struck an abundant supply of water, and the whole village was saved. Many of the astonished villagers became Christians as a result.

I've been in gatherings where people have given messages in tongues that were interpreted. I have had people come to the altar in a church service, and softly pray and praise God in tongues, and these have been beautiful experiences! *God's Spirit often works in ways outside the boundaries of what we consider to be "the norm"*.

Next week, in the last sermon in this series, we will look at the remaining spiritual gifts, and then share some closing thoughts about what the gifts of the Spirit can mean for the church today.

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