

“The Gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Part 4)

This is the last sermon in this series on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So far we have looked at 15 gifts in 2 lists (Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12). We will cover 5 more spiritual gifts today. Remember, spiritual gifts are not natural talents, but special presents the Holy Spirit gives each believer to build up the body of Christ and get the gospel out into the world.

1 Corinthians 12:28 says, “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then gifts of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.” It appears as though 3 more gifts are listed here. Some may argue that these are *roles* in the church, not *spiritual gifts*. But notice, the list includes some gifts we’ve already studied: prophecy, teaching, miracles, healings, tongues. Later, in verse 31, Paul says “eagerly desire the greater *gifts*”, (so he’s still discussing spiritual gifts). Even if these are *roles*, people who filled these roles in the church did so not because they went to school to be trained for these roles, but because they had the spiritual gift that went with the role (for instance, prophets in the church had that role not because they went to prophecy school, but because they had the Spirit gift of prophecy). So, I believe we have 3 additional spiritual gifts here.

The first is ***apostleship***. “And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles...” (1 Corinthians 12:28). There is a reference to this gift also in Ephesians 4:11: “And his gifts were that some should be apostles...”. The Greek word “apostolos” means “one who is sent”, a “messenger”. So, an apostle is one who is sent to proclaim a message.

The New Testament tells us that there were apostles who were with the Lord Jesus, and later Paul regarded himself as an apostle. Some people believe we no longer have apostles – that this ended with the New Testament period. Others feel some are gifted by the Spirit to be apostles today.

The exact nature of this gift is not defined in the Bible. Some feel the spiritual gift of apostleship is similar to the apostolic-missionary activity of the early church. So then, this gift describes those who take the gospel to a different culture. Today, we would be likely to use the term “missionary”. We have missionaries serving in foreign countries. Often we say they are “called” to be a missionary. Perhaps another way to look at it is to say they have the *spiritual gift* of apostleship.

1 Corinthians 12:28 also identifies another gift as “forms of assistance” (in the New Revised Standard Version). Other translations render this gift as “helps” or “helping”. So, this is the spiritual gift of ***helps***. The Greek word is “antilampseis” – it carries the meaning of assistance, lending a hand. This gift is not defined, but it may be similar to the gift of *service* (a gift we have already discussed). Also, it has been suggested that the gift of “helps” is not so much helping the poor, the sick, the aged, etc. – but rather lending a hand where this will release other workers to do their ministries.

So, someone who is good at crafts prepares craft projects for Vacation Bible School, freeing up those with the gift of teaching to teach. Church secretaries or office helpers do their job, freeing up the pastor or those with the gift of leadership to do their thing.

There is a third additional gift in 1 Corinthians 12:28. It is the gift of **administration**. “Those with gifts of administration...” (1 Corinthians 12:28). (The New Revised Standard Version translates this “leadership”, but that is not the best translation). The word is “kubernesis”. This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament. It means “one who guides or directs toward a goal”. The word is used of the pilot of a ship, the one responsible for getting the ship to its destination.

The person with this gift has *management* ability. In most every church there are people who excel in organizing people or tasks to get things done. They’re very good at running programs or ministries. These may be persons who have the spiritual gift of administration. Obviously the Church benefits greatly when these people serve on committees or head up ministries.

The last Scripture we will look at regarding spiritual gifts is Ephesians 4:11-13: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

Now again, some people do not include these as spiritual gifts; they say these are *roles* or *offices* in the church. But some gifts mentioned here we have already covered (prophecy, teaching) – and as I said before, people were chosen for these roles because of the *spiritual gifts* they exercised. In this passage of Scripture there are 2 additional gifts.

The first is **evangelist** or **evangelism**. “Some to be evangelists...” (Ephesians 4:11). The words evangelist, or evangelism, come from the Greek word “evangelion”, which means “good news” or “to announce good news”. Now the *church as a whole, all believers*, are to evangelize, to bear witness of Christ. But some have the Spirit-gift of evangelism. They are especially effective in winning people to Christ.

Those with this gift are not just professional evangelists like Billy Graham, but lay people too. I’m thinking of a member of one of the churches I served. He was a simply man, not highly educated. But he had a natural gift of sharing the gospel with people and leading them to Christ.

This gift can be exercised in a number of ways: letter writing, music, personal conversation, painting and sketching (I know of some professional artists that use their talent as a means of evangelism), gospel magic, preaching, handing out literature, crisis ministries, etc.

The last gift we will look at is the gift of **shepherd** or **pastor**. “Some to be pastors and teachers...” (Ephesians 4:11). The word “pastors” here means “shepherds”. I prefer using the term “shepherd” for this gift, since when we think of “pastor” we often equate this with the professional pastor of a church, an ordained minister. It is important to understand that a pastor *may* have the gift of shepherding, but *others* in the church may also have this gift. The image of the shepherd in the Bible carries the idea of nurturing, feeding, protecting. To shepherd is to take a person or group under your wing and nurture them spiritually.

For many years, the church has fallen into the trap of assuming that all of the shepherding should be done by the pastor. But a pastor simply cannot know and care for everyone in a congregation, even in a small church. Besides, a pastor needs to be providing *leadership* for the church's mission and outreach – not spending all his or her time taking care of those already in the church! Here's an interesting thing: some think it's more important for pastors to have the gift of *leadership* in today's church than to have the gift of *shepherding*.

So God provides some in the church with this Spirit-gift of shepherding. I'm thinking of a Sunday School teacher in a church I served. This lady taught a class of older adults. She was like a shepherd to that class. They were her flock! She stayed in touch with the class members through the week. She visited them if they were ill or in hospital. She just took them under her wing, and loved and nurtured them in the name of Jesus. What a great gift of the Spirit this is for nurturing those in the Body of Christ!

So there we have it! Twenty gifts of the Holy Spirit. Given to build up the church. Here are a few closing thoughts as I finish this series of messages.

When spiritual gifts are operating, it makes a congregation stronger and healthier. More people are involved in ministry and serving, not just the pastor. People are not laying back and expecting a handful of leaders to do all the work. If each is using his or her spiritual gifts, when you put it all together, God's work gets done!

Paul talks about this when he writes to Christians in Ephesus. Once again, Ephesians, chapter 4: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." The body of Christ grows and becomes healthy and functional, and we become mature, "as each part does its work", and each of us exercises our spiritual gifts.

Also, focusing on spiritual gifts can change the way we enlist people to serve in the church. When we enlist people to serve, often we seek people with training or natural talent in that area, or because they do that type of work in the secular world. But their spiritual gifts may be different! Suppose a finance position is open in the church. When we look to fill it, what do we often look for? Someone who works in the field of banking or finance. However, this person's *spiritual gift* may be different – maybe it's shepherding, or healing. So what can happen? A person who works all week long in a bank or accounting office, then comes to church and does the same kind of work. That can be a drag! How refreshing it might be, for example, if this person's gift is healing, to put this person in charge of a healing service, or a prayer group where members pray for the sick. It might be a refreshing change of pace for that individual! Or you

have a person who's a carpenter or electrician. Everybody wants to stick this person on the Trustees! That may work out well – but suppose that person's spiritual gift is acts of mercy, This person would probably serve much better doing hospital visitation for the church.

Another point: having a church operating on the basis of spiritual gifts is beneficial to individuals. *It will assist us in finding God's will for our lives.* We don't have to remain vague and uncertain about God's will or what God wants us to do. Elizabeth O'Connor, of the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C., once said, "We ask to know the will of God without guessing that his will is written into our very beings. We perceive that will when we discern our gifts."

Knowing our gifts can also help us overcome feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Every spiritual gift is important. The more common gifts like serving or helping are just as important to God and the church as more visible or spectacular gifts like leadership or speaking in tongues.

Then too, identifying our spiritual gifts helps us set priorities for study, growth and ministry. Each of us has a limited amount of time to develop our potential and to serve the Lord. It makes sense that we should work at developing those areas in which we are gifted.

This fable has been attributed to Chuck Swindoll. "A group of animals decided to improve their general welfare by starting a school. The curriculum included swimming, running, climbing and flying. The duck, an excellent swimmer, was deficient in other areas, so he majored in climbing, running and flying, much to the detriment of his swimming. The rabbit, a superior runner, was forced to spend so much of his time in other classes that he soon lost much of his famed speed. The squirrel, who had been rated 'A' as a climber dropped to a 'C' because his instructors spent hours trying to teach him to swim and fly. And the eagle was (reprimanded) for soaring to the treetop when he had been told to learn to climb, even though flying was most natural for him." I think you get the point!

Another reason why it helps to identify our gifts: It helps us gain a sense of freedom in areas in where we are not gifted. There are some Christians who feel they need to do everything in the church, or feel guilty saying no if asked to do something. Often this results in "burnout", and poor motivation. It can be a liberating thing to realize God doesn't expect us to serve in areas for which we have no spiritual gift (or natural talent).

The purpose of this series of sermons is not just to learn some things about the gifts of the Spirit, but to motivate us to discover and use our spiritual gift or gifts in our congregation!

How can you and I discover our spiritual gifts? *(Remember, God wants us to discover our gifts – He's not trying to keep it secret from us!).* Here are some suggestions.

First, we have to be a Christian. Gifts are given to believers, those who confess Christ as Savior and Lord and sincerely want to serve and honor Him.

Second, take a spiritual gifts inventory. This is a tool designed to help us identify possible gifts.

You will in the very near future have an opportunity to take a spiritual gifts inventory here at the church.

Third, evaluate yourself. Do you see any of the gifts working in you now? What are you good at and what do you like to do for the Lord? This may be because you already are using your spiritual gift or gifts.

Fourth, experiment where possible. We discover our spiritual gifts the same way we discover a lot of other things: by trying it! Do you have the spiritual gift of teaching? Try teaching a Sunday School class or a weeknight study. Do you have the gift of leadership? Try leading a small group or a project in the church, and see how it goes. Get involved...try things for the Lord, and your gifts will surface. (This doesn't necessarily mean that if you have a particular spiritual gift that everything will be perfect the first time you try something. It may take time for certain gifts to mature. By you will soon discover whether you are gifted in that area or not.

Fifth, realistic appraise your effectiveness. If I am exercising a spiritual gift, I will see positive results. If I have the gift of evangelism, people will come to Christ through me. If I have gift of administration, the work I'm doing will be organized and efficient and effective. On the other hand, if I think I have the gift of healings and everybody I pray for gets sicker or dies, I probably don't have that gift! If I think I have the gift of tongues, and I have to force my mouth to make weird sounds, I probably don't have that gift! As someone has said, "When true gifts are in operation, whatever is supposed to happen will happen."

Sixth, confirm your gift with others in the church. Ask people, "Do you think I may have this gift? Do you see any evidence of it?" There was a man in a church I served who wanted to do just about everything in the church. He loved to teach. But frankly, he was not good at teaching. Much of the class material he shared he read from a Sunday School teacher's study guide. The class was boring. He was a man with a good heart, but he just did not have the gift of teaching. It would have been helpful if he just had taken the time to ask some others in the church a simple question: "Do you think I have the gift of teaching?" Since gifts are meant to operate within the Body of Christ, it's good to test our assumptions and to be accountable to others in the Church, rather than just going the route of what we'd like to do, and how we evaluate our own performance.

Let me close with an analogy. Suppose someone wanted to give you a present. It was a wonderful present that would help make you a better person, a better follower of Jesus. Not only would it benefit you and give you great satisfaction, it would enable you to enrich the lives of others, and be a real blessing to them. You really didn't do anything to deserve this present. You couldn't earn it even if you tried. But the Giver of the gift had his heart set on giving you this present. Now how do you think this person would feel if you simply refused his present. "Thanks, but no thanks. I don't want it or need it." How do you think this generous giver would feel if you took the gift, and then put it somewhere in the house – not even opening it – and just forgot about it completely. In fact, you didn't even remember where you put this unopened present.

Hopefully you get my point. And I hope and pray that as a result of this series of messages you will seek, and identify, and put to use the gift or gifts of the Spirit our heavenly Father has given you, so that together we can build up the church and accomplish our mission in the world!

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