

“The Gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Part 1)

What is your spiritual gift? What are your spiritual gifts? In 1 Corinthians 12:1 Paul writes: “Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.” The King James Version of this verse has it, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.”

Paul wanted to make sure believers understood the gifts of the Holy Spirit – what they are, why they are given, and how they are to be used. Yet, today, many in the church *are uninformed* about the gifts of the Holy Spirit (especially in mainline denominational churches). We’ve left the gifts of the Spirit to Pentecostals and Assembly of God people! But the gifts of the Spirit are “presents” God has given the Church and Christians so the work of Christ can be done!

Today I am beginning a series of sermons on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We will look at the gifts named in the New Testament, and see how they operate. We will try to understand the place of spiritual gifts in the church today. Actually, these sermons are more *teaching* than they are *preaching*.

Let’s start with a fundamental question: ***what is a spiritual gift?*** The word for “gift” in the New Testament is the Greek word “charisma” (χαρισμα). It has its roots in the Greek word “charis”, which means grace. So a spiritual gift, charisma, is a *grace-gift* – it comes to us through God’s grace. It’s not something we deserve. It’s not something we can earn. It’s a “present” from God, given out of His sheer generosity. I like Kenneth Kinghorn’s definition of “spiritual gift”: He says it is “a divine, supernatural ability given by God to enable a Christian to serve and minister. More simply put, a spiritual gift is a special tool for ministry.”

The Bible lists a number of spiritual gifts. We’re going to be looking at each gift in the coming weeks, so we will just get an overview today. There are two main lists of gifts. One is in Romans 12:6-8. The other is in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Romans 12:6-8 says, “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

1 Corinthians 12:7-10 shows us more gifts: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.” There is a total of 15 gifts listed here (prophecy is in both lists).

I believe 3 additional gifts are mentioned later in 1 Corinthians 12: *apostleship*, *helps*, and the spiritual gift of *administration*. And 2 more gifts are listed in Ephesians 4: gifts of *evangelism*, and *shepherding*.

To be honest, Christians don't always agree on how many spiritual gifts there are, or even what some of the gifts are. I see 20 gifts listed in the New Testament. Others may come up with more or less. Sometimes people ask: Might there be other gifts of the Spirit that are not mentioned in the New Testament? The Bible doesn't say for sure. No gift list mentioned in the New Testament is complete in itself – so there may be more gifts. My focus in these messages will be on those that *are enumerated* in Scripture – trying to understand what they are and how they work in the life of a believer and the church.

In the rest of my message today I want to present some *basic teaching about the gifts of the Spirit*. First of all, ***gifts of the Spirit are given to every believer***. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” If you are a follower of Jesus you have at least one gift of the Spirit (maybe more). It's not a matter of being a “good enough Christian” or attaining a certain level of spirituality to get a gift. If you have turned from your sins and received Christ as your Savior, you've been given at least one gift of the Spirit to use in the Body of Christ.

Second, spiritual gifts are ways the Holy Spirit makes Himself evident and visible. Again, 1 Corinthians 12:7 teaches, “To each is given the *manifestation* of the Spirit...”. When we get saved, and the Spirit comes to live in us, He longs to make Himself real, to manifest Himself through us! He wants us to be able to see things happen where we say, “Wow. That was the Holy Spirit at work there!” That happens when gifts of Spirit are operating!

Third, spiritual gifts are to be used for the benefit of others. Still referring to 1 Corinthians 12:7 “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good...*” 1 Peter 4:10 Says, “As each one has received a gift, employ it *for one another...*”. Any spiritual gift we are given is never to be used for selfish purposes, to glorify us or further our own ends. It's to be used for the good of all in the Body of Christ. Now, discovering and using our spiritual gifts can give us a great sense of fulfillment. That's good. But the main reason God gives any gift is to *build up the Body of Christ, and to help the church get the message of the gospel out into the world*.

Fourth, the Spirit gives out gifts as He chooses. Further on in 1 Corinthians 12, it says, “All these (gifts) are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually *as He wills...*” (1 Corinthians 12:11). We can't manufacture any spiritual gift within ourselves. We can *desire* a gift and *pray for* a specific gift. For instance, maybe we'd like to have the gift of prophecy, or the gift of leadership – but the Holy Spirit gives what He wants to whom He wants! He parcels out gifts as He sees fit to build up the Church.

Fifth, the Spirit gives many different kinds of gifts, providing for a rich diversity of ministries in the church. 1 Corinthians 12:4 tells us, “Now there are *varieties* of gifts, but the same Spirit...”. Your gift may not be my gift; my gift isn't yours. But when each contributes his or her gifts to the Church, the Church is healthy and strong, and God's work gets done. Remember, ***every gift*** is important. We're going to be looking at some gifts that seem very ordinary (like service, or helps); other gifts may be spectacular (like healing, or working of miracles). It does

not matter. Each gift is essential to the church and its mission.

Next, spiritual gifts are given to be used! This seems like an obvious point! Romans 12:6 commands, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let us use them.*” For some people, it’s a big step just to *learn about* spiritual gifts and *identify* their gift or gifts. But we can’t stop there! Now that I know what my gift is, I need to *use* it! I won’t be held accountable to use a gift I haven’t been given. But I will be held accountable to use the spiritual gifts God has given me.

And then, spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents. Natural talents and abilities are given to *everyone*, whether a person is a Christian believer or not. Gifts of the Spirit are given *only* to followers of Jesus! Now natural talents are from God also, and they’re important. But spiritual gifts are different. They are *supernatural* gifts, given by the Spirit to those in the Body of Christ.

Sometimes it’s hard to distinguish between a spiritual gift and a natural talent. For instance, a person may have a natural ability to teach. But there is also a *spiritual gift* of teaching. The two may not be the same – as we will see when we study that gift.

Someone has said that we may have a natural talent – and at conversion, the Spirit may choose to take that natural ability and turn it into a spiritual gift for ministry. For instance, Peter Wagner talks about his colleague, the late John Wimber. Before John became a Christian, he had two outstanding talents. First, he was an accomplished musician. He played many instruments, wrote and arranged music, directed groups, and studied music theory on a graduate level. And second, he was a good salesman. He was very successful marketing music and he made a great amount of money doing that.

When John Wimber became a Christian through a dramatic conversion, God did an interesting thing with John’s talents. Of course, he kept his musical talent, but he never really did much with that. But God took his natural ability as a salesman and transformed that into the gift of *evangelism*. As a result, literally thousands of people in Orange County, California, came to know Christ through John Wimber. John had this gift of evangelism. He used to say he would get an intuitive feeling that told him when an unbeliever was ready to be born again. He knew how to approach such a person and how to present Christ. Peter Wagner said that when his friend John Wimber didn’t lead anyone to Christ in a week, he would get restless and feel something was wrong. So it seems that God transformed John’s natural talent for selling into the spiritual gift of evangelism.

Today’s message has been just a basic introduction to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the next few weeks, I will try to explain each spiritual gift. I’ll give examples of this gift in operation, both in the Bible and in the church today. I will also suggest ways that you and I can identify our spiritual gift or gifts

I realize in doing this series of sermons that ***each of us is in a different place when it comes to***

the gifts of the Spirit – how much we know about them, and how much we have experienced them. Some of us know what our gifts are and are finding joy and purpose in using them. Others of us haven't been taught much about the gifts of the Spirit. Maybe we've never heard a sermon on the gifts of the Spirit. If that's the case, what I've said so far may sound weird or foreign to our experience. For some of you, this sermon may have aroused your curiosity about the gifts of the Spirit. For others, you are already having negative feelings about what I'm saying. Maybe you have had a bad experience in the past related to teaching about the gifts of the Spirit or someone claiming to have a gift.

I do hope you will try to keep an open mind and a desire to learn more about the gifts of the Spirit and how they can be relevant for the church today! Because if we choose to reject the gifts of the Spirit, or disregard this part of Scripture, will be hampering the Spirit from doing what He wants to do here at Community church!

For a long time, mainline Protestant denominations have pretty much ignored what the Bible says about gifts of the Spirit. These sections of Scripture have just kind of fallen through the cracks. And churches have been spiritually anemic as a result! I spent 4 years in theological seminary being trained to be a pastor. No one in that academic setting challenged me to understand spiritual gifts nor to discover what gift or gifts the Spirit had given me!

But the encouraging news is that more churches are taking seriously what the Scripture says about the Holy Spirit and His gifts. Many congregations are making a conscious effort to help persons in the congregation discover their spiritual gift or gifts - these "tools for ministry" the Spirit gives. When this happens, it can create a sense of aliveness and excitement in the church! Because when the gifts of the Spirit are operating, it's not just the *pastor* or a *few select people* doing all the ministry. People throughout the congregation are using their spiritual gifts to build up the Church and do the work of the Lord.

Next week, we will begin to look in more detail at each spiritual gift mentioned in the New Testament.

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