

Life With The Spirit Part Five

What About Spiritual Gifts?

After two Sundays of missions emphasis we are returning to our Life With the Spirit series. This morning I want to focus on spiritual gifts. I have said it often that everyone of us have been given a measure of faith and a spiritual gift. We are spiritually gifted people. We may not exactly know what our spiritual gifting is or we may not have opened that gift, but every believer and follower of Christ has been given a spiritual gift.

I think too many of us struggle with this idea of having a spiritual gift or with trying to discover our spiritual gift. “What is my gift? How can I know what I’m supposed to do with it if I even know what it is?” There are books that have been written that explain spiritual gifts, charismatic gifts, motivational gifts, ministry gifts. There are tests you can take that will help you discover your spiritual gift. I suppose I worry a little that some of this teaching misses the point. Let me explain.

You can spend all of your time trying to figure out which spiritual gifts you have and ignore the opportunities the Holy Spirit provides everyday for you to minister to and bless others. “I don’t have time to help you today, I’m enrolled in a course on determining spiritual gifts and I have to complete a four hundred question inventory to see if I have a gift of mercy and helping others.” We aren’t talking about facts and tests and inventories (and I’ve taken tests and inventories and they are all helpful and good) but beyond all that we are talking about living our life with the active presence of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us. I guess what I’m trying to say, to preface all we are going to say about spiritual gifts, don’t miss what this is really all about – the Holy Spirit of God manifesting the life of Christ and the compassion of Christ and the love of Christ in and through your life. That’s what spiritual gifts are all about. It’s more than just having a list of your spiritual gifts or knowing the facts about spiritual gifts, it is about living a life of service to Christ by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

God has purposed to give each one of us gifts that are to be used for his glory and for the good of the body of Christ. There are several that are listed in the Scripture. Look first at **1 Corinthians 12**. Paul begins this section of the letter with these words, “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” Ignorant meaning uninformed, unaware, uneducated. Now notice what he says in verse 7. “**Now to each one the manifestation of the**

Spirit is given for the common good.” Notice Paul says, “to each one.” No one is left out here. If you are a born again follower of the Lord and the Holy Spirit is at work in your life, there is a spiritual gift that He desires to manifest through you, for God’s glory and for the common good.

Notice Paul refers to these gifts as manifestations of the Spirit. Think of that: the Holy Spirit desires to manifest himself, to reveal himself and his activity through us by means of these spiritual gifts. These gifts are expressions of the Spirit’s power and purpose working through us.

Notice as well Paul says these gifts are given for the common good. There is always a corporate dimension to everything God does in our life. Gifts are given not for self-promotion but to build one another up, to help others, to serve others. It is once again at the heart of what this life with the Spirit is all about. It is about living life for Christ and for others.

Look at verse 4. **“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6**

For all of us who argue, “I’m a follower of Christ but I don’t have a spiritual gift or ability. I can’t do anything. I have nothing to offer the Lord,” these verses shoot that argument down. Hear the truth. If you are a born again believer you have the Holy Spirit living within your heart and if you’ve allowed him, he is at work in your life. The Holy Spirit then brings with him those gifts that are to be used to build up the church and to establish and advance the kingdom of God. As He works in you, he may choose to use some of those natural gifts and abilities you have, sanctifying those gifts and anointing them for His service. He may choose to impart other gifts to you or to manifest one of the nine gifts of the Spirit mentioned here in this chapter through you, but the Holy Spirit is making that choice. Verse 11 says **“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”**

Understand, when it comes to spiritual gifts, it’s not about you and your ability, it’s about the Holy Spirit and His ability. Are you saying there is something God can’t do? You are the one person in the world through whom the Holy Spirit can’t work? That’s not humility, that’s arrogance. Once again, it’s not about your ability, it’s about His creative power. And in fact, it’s not about the Spirit’s ability, that’s not really in question, it’s about our willingness – our willingness to be used, to be placed where he desires, to express those gifts he imparts to us. God wants us, all we have and all we are. He takes us, but it’s not just about us and our

resources, our natural talent or gifts, it is about Him and his resources working through us.

You see, he can take us as unskilled and untrained as we are and use us and make something extraordinary out of us. That's why he took a reluctant stutterer like Moses and made him a leader. It's why he took a stutterer like Oral Roberts, dying of tuberculosis, healed him and made him a powerful preacher and healing evangelist. It's why he takes shy, introverts and makes bold evangelists out of them. It's why he takes broken people and makes healers out of them. It is about the Spirit's power and resources and not our weakness and lack of resources. These are the gifts of the Spirit, imparted to us for his purpose.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:11, "No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." The Holy Spirit knows the mind and the will of God, so he imparts gifts to us in accordance with the will of God for us and for the body of Christ of which we are members. All spiritual gifts are linked to His purpose and his will. So when we start thinking about the gifts we have to offer, or the gifts God has imparted to us, it is not about how successful those gifts can make us. It's not simply about whether we are good at these things. That may be part of the process of identifying our strengths or our gifts, but the question is, **"Does God want to use me in this way, in this place, in this moment, with this gift?"**

When we think of spiritual gifts this morning, start by thinking not so much about your strengths or your abilities, but rather think about words like: purpose, mission, assignment, obedience, willingness to be used by God, surrender, trust, submission to his will, availability, service to others, the common good, His empowerment, His enablement, His wisdom, His will. When we start thinking in those terms, I think we will discover the gifts God desires to use through us.

With all of that said, let me share with you a quick over-view of some of the gifts that are mentioned in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul mentions what we often refer to as the charismatic gifts or the gifts of the Spirit. These nine gifts are viewed as more than just natural gifts but in fact as supernatural gifts given by the Holy Spirit as he chooses. We will talk in detail about them next Sunday, but for the moment, just notice Paul refers to:

1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 28

Word of wisdom

Word of knowledge

Faith

Gifts of healing

Working of miracles

Prophecy

Discernment of spirits

Speaking in tongues

Interpretation of tongues

Helps

Administration

Romans 12:6-8

Serving

Teaching

Encouraging

Giving

Leadership

Showing mercy

Ephesians 4:11

Apostles

Prophets

Evangelists

Pastors/teachers

1 Peter 4:9

Hospitality

This is a list of gifts mentioned, but by no means do I believe this is a comprehensive list of gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the church and to believers. The Holy Spirit is infinitely creative and in every way, in every generation, in every culture the Holy Spirit imparts gifts for the common good and in order to fulfill the redemptive plan and purpose of God.

Let me quickly share five truths and principles concerning spiritual gifts this morning.

1. It's all about Jesus and others. The bottom line with gifts and spiritual gifting: it is all about exalting Jesus and serving others. All of those gifts in the list are a means of encouraging, helping, healing, delivering, teaching, empowering, equipping, serving others! When we do that, we bring honor and glory to God. Beware if someone uses spiritual gifts to draw attention to themselves or to build their own reputation. These gifts are given for the common good, to serve others and to lift up Jesus.

2. It's all about variety. Paul tells us there are different kinds of gifts, different kinds of service, different kinds of working or operations, but the same God, by the same Holy Spirit, gives these gifts. **“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” 1 Corinthians 12:11.** Different gifts, functioning and operating in different ways all ultimately working toward the same end.

To illustrate this, Paul uses the analogy of the human body being made up of all of its' individual parts. The foot and hand, the eye and ear and nose, all different parts that serve different and distinct purposes, but all arranged by God for the effective functioning of the body. Paul asks, **“If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” 1 Corinthians 12:17-20**

The body is at its best when all the parts are working, doing what God intended them to do. The church, the body of Christ, is at our best when all the parts are working, doing what God intended us to do. When all of us come together and share the gifts that God has placed within us by the Holy Spirit, we are then working at our optimum level. We will then be healthy and effective and able to accomplish all God has for us to do. That's what Paul means when he says in verse 27, in the context of this discussion, **“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”** We need a variety of spiritual gifts i.e. we need every part in order to be the healthy body of Christ!

3. It's all about the common good. Let me continue to overemphasize this point! It's about the common good. In that sense we shouldn't be envious or jealous of another's place or function in the body of Christ. We shouldn't be envious because someone else has a different

gift. It's all for the common good. We are all contributing our part. Each gift matters! That's what Paul means when he said, "if the foot should say, 'because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body." I need my hand but I need my foot as well. I'm not willing to give up either one.

We sometimes act like, "Since I'm not up front in some gift or leadership role, I'm just not a part of things." "I don't have an important gift, I'm just a _____ so I'm not really needed or noticed." "I'm just a foot or a hand." Trust me, every gift is needed or the Holy Spirit wouldn't have given you that gift to share with the church. Every part of the body is needed and the body suffers when those parts aren't contributing their part.

When my gallbladder stopped working, I noticed. I hadn't paid much attention to it before. I feel badly about it because I'm sure I took my gallbladder for granted. I'm sure there were days when my gallbladder complained about how my heart and lungs and brain were getting all the attention, but let me tell you, that gallbladder was important. It was a valuable part of the body even if it didn't get much recognition. And when it stopped contributing its gift, I suffered for it. I miss it still but I'm not going to ask Dr. McGee to put it back, thank you.

I'm just telling you, you are important. Your gift is important. You and your gift are needed to make this body efficient and effective. The larger body of Christ needs you. The Holy Spirit has given you a gift - open it! Unwrap it! Explore it! Don't waste it, neglect it, ignore it, or hide it. Use it.

Understand, it may not be a gift that is used in a Sunday service. It may be a gift that yields little recognition. It may be a gift that is used and shared with non-believers, outside of the church service. Or perhaps it is a gift to be shared with the larger church, universal, but the gift is to be used for his glory and for the common good and to bless and help others. That decision is up to the Holy Spirit so don't be jealous. Trust the Holy Spirit and realize that you and that gift the Holy Spirit desires to manifest through you, you both are important and valued.

4. It's not only about that one gift. Before you decide your gift exempts you from all other responsibility, understand, there are responsibilities and stewardship in the body of Christ to which every Christian must participate.

You may have one gift that you are really, really good at. Everyone recognizes and affirms that gift but that doesn't mean you are exempt from other service. For instance, let's say

you are really gifted at teaching, but not so gifted at showing mercy or giving. That doesn't mean that when the elderly lady falls in front of you, you are exempt from having to help her up and make sure she is okay. It doesn't mean that you don't have to give in the offering or to give to missions. "That's not my gifting. I have a gift to teach."

Some people have the gift of evangelism and they are brilliant at sharing their faith with others. Some people operate in the gifting or the office of an evangelist, but that doesn't exempt the rest of us from sharing our faith. "I have a gift of administration so I don't ever have to tell anyone about Jesus." Nope. Not exempt from that. All of us have a calling to share what Jesus has done for us. You will receive power and you will be my witnesses. Go into all the world and preach the gospel and make disciples. That's for all of us, whether you have a gift or not.

Some have been blessed so they can give in extraordinary fashion, but all of us are called to give in faith, whether we are gifted in that way or not. Don't dismiss Christian responsibility on the basis of spiritual gifting.

While we are on the topic, remember the little elderly lady that got knocked down in the last illustration. You have the gift of a teacher but not the gift of mercy or giving, right? Well, not every gift is appropriate at the same time. It wouldn't be that helpful to stand over the little lady and begin to teach her about the six rules for carefully navigating the hallways at Carbondale. "First of all, you should wait until the crowd is already through the hallway, then you should..." Take your teaching gift and step to the side. We need someone with a gift of mercy that will come and help her up and comfort her. We need someone with a gift of healing to help bandage up her arm and make sure she is all right (she skinned her arm when she fell. You didn't notice that because you were too busy with your gift of teaching.) We need all the gifts available, but we need the right one at the right time.

5. It's always about love. Have you ever wondered why Paul placed this long treatise on the importance of love between two lengthy teachings about spiritual gifts and charismatic worship? The answer is because it is always about love. If the gifts, whatever the gifts, if they are not shared and expressed in love, they aren't going to profit anything.

I've seen people operate in spiritual gifts, I've seen people with extraordinary gifts and talent and abilities, they were amazing in their ability to teach or preach or help others, but they didn't really have love and the end result was people were hurt and confused by their actions.

Listen to what Paul writes about love. (Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13).

Life with the Spirit is going to mean sharing the gifts God has entrusted to us with others, and always we will be motivated by love! Amazing gifts, thank God for them, but Paul says, “And now I will show you the most excellent way.”

Here it is. Love God, share your gift for the common good and for his glory, and love one another.