

Life With The Spirit Part 6

Supernatural Gifts

We talked last week about spiritual gifts and I told you that today we would focus upon the nine gifts of the Spirit that Paul speaks of in **1 Corinthians 12**. We talk about these gifts as being supernatural gifts of the Spirit, supernatural empowerment and manifestations of the Holy Spirit given to and expressed through the church. We shouldn't be surprised that the Holy Spirit brings supernatural anointing and gifting to the church since the Holy Spirit brings to the church the life of Christ. Remember Paul speaks of the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead living in us in Romans 8. He says that same Spirit will quicken our mortal bodies. "The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead," we are talking about something and someone, a power and a Spirit beyond the natural here.

Jesus sent the twelve and the 72 out to minister and they came back rejoicing because miracles had occurred. Jesus said we would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon us and we would be witnesses, sent out with that same miracle working power working in us and through us so we could point others to Christ. If that's the case, I don't think we should be surprised the Holy Spirit is still manifesting the miraculous in and through the life of the followers of Christ! Certainly there can be a natural dimension to these particular gifts. For instance, the gifts of healings. Healing occurs through natural means, through medicine and doctors and surgeons for sure. But there are supernatural healings that occur, as well. So let's look at what Paul has to tell us about these supernatural gifts or manifestations of the Spirit. (Read 1 Cor. 12:1-11).

We talked last week about the different kinds of gifts, specifically those in addition to these supernatural gifts. It is the same Spirit who gives all of the various gifts to the church and as we mentioned there is a diversity of gifts given by the creative power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us in verse 5 there are different kinds of service or a variety of ministries, but the same Lord. Notice that the very nature of the word, service, implies that the gifts to be mentioned here are tools with which to serve God and others. The ministry, the effect will be different, but it is all moving toward the fulfillment of God's great purpose and plan.

Verse 6 tells us there are different kinds of working, i.e. different manifestations or operations, but the same Heavenly Father is at work in each person to bring about his will.

Verse 7-11 we have this description then of nine particular spiritual gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Again while some teach that these nine gifts are just natural gifts, I believe there is a supernatural dimension to these particular gifts of the Spirit. How would you explain the working of miracles as being non-supernatural? Or discerning of spirits? Obviously, by the very nature of the gifts, we are talking about an extraordinary gifting of the Holy Spirit. Verse 11 tells us these gifts belong, not to us, but to the Holy Spirit and He distributes them according to his will. This is why I always have a problem with people saying they have a particular gift of the Spirit. "I have the gift of knowledge or I have the gift of prophecy." These are the gifts of the Spirit and he gives them to each one as he determines. They belong to him and he expresses or manifests those gifts through the members of the body of Christ as he determines and as needed.

There are three main categories of gifts described in this passage. There are any number of ways to categorize them, but essentially they are:

Gifts of revelation/gifts to know: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, discernment of spirits.

Gifts of power/gifts to act: faith, gifts of healings, working of miracles.

Gifts of inspiration/gifts to speak: prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues.

Let me give you a basic description of these nine gifts and their function.

Word of Wisdom. I think of this as insight and revelation. This is a revelation of God's purpose and plans, the insight needed to manage the church and its affairs. In the early church the decision in Acts 6 to choose deacons to serve the church, and the decision concerning the inclusion of non-Jews into the church in Acts 15, these are examples of a word of wisdom. I have seen this gift in operation in board meetings as we are seeking the Lord's will and someone suddenly speaks with insight that you know has come from the Lord. Jesus' handling of the woman caught in adultery, when he said, "he who is without sin, cast the first stone," in John 8, I would say is an example of a word of wisdom.

I have seen this gift operate in counseling sessions when suddenly a word of wisdom comes and it is like the missing piece to the puzzle falls into place. That is the word they needed, the revelation of the root problem or the solution to the problem.

Word of Knowledge. This is a supernatural revelation of facts known to God that enable a

believer to know things they couldn't have known otherwise. Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in John 4 is an example of a word of knowledge. He told her things about herself he couldn't have known except by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Acts 10:19 is another example when Peter is told by the Holy Spirit that three men were looking for him and he was to go with them.

The word of knowledge may also be a flash of insight into a particular truth in God's word that enables us to effectively communicate the gospel. It can also be an insight into the needs of an individual or a body of believers that enable us to effectively minister to the people. Some have suggested the word of wisdom is knowing what to do with a word of knowledge.

Discerning of Spirits. NIV reads "distinguishing between spirits". This is a supernatural operation of the wisdom and knowledge of the Holy Spirit to discern good from evil. Paul in Acts 13:9 discerned a wrong spirit in Elymas the magician. Peter discerned that Annanias and Sapphira had lied to him and to the Lord in Acts 5. There is a tremendous need for discernment in the church and in the world today. Jesus said his sheep know his voice. By the discerning gift and presence of the Holy Spirit we can know his voice and respond appropriately.

Faith. This is a supernatural assurance - you know that you know that you know that God is going to do something in spite of the evidence or circumstances. Some have said this gift of faith goes beyond having faith in God - it is having the faith of God. It may be faith that manifests in immediate results, or the gift of faith may be the kind that perseveres for years, confidently resting in the assurance that God will fulfill his promise in a given situation.

Miracles. NIV reads "miraculous powers". This gift is the supernatural intervention in the ordinary course of nature. It may involve the suspension of natural law as we know it, in favor of God's children and purposes. These are works of power for supernatural protection and provision for God's children, typically resulting in the conversion of unbelievers who witness the miraculous. The stories of the martyrdom of some of the early church fathers involved miraculous intervention - fire couldn't burn them, animals wouldn't devour them - all as a witness to the miraculous power of God. Brent Teague told us only two weeks ago about the miracles involved in his being shot and left in the wilderness of Niger. Someone called the authorities thirty minutes before he was shot to tell them a man had been shot and to send an ambulance. The surgeon at the village was there by mistake, the only man in the country at that

time who could save his life and his leg. The working of miracles along with the gifts of healings allowed Brent to stand before us whole.

Gifts of Healings. Notice this gift is plural. Gifts of healings. This is the supernatural power to heal both physical and emotional sickness and disease. There are different ways healing occurs. Laying on of hands, speaking a word of faith, anointing with oil. There are various manifestations of healing - physical, spiritual, emotional, gradual healings, instantaneous healing. I believe the gifts of healings can bring about healing in every dimension of our life by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Prophecy. Stated very simply, prophecy is a supernatural utterance in a known tongue. It is essentially speaking forth God's word under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We often think prophecy is going to tell us something about ourselves and what is going to happen in the future but the gift of prophecy is about forthtelling, not foretelling. Telling forth the plan and purpose of God. The book of Revelation declares "...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Revelation 19:10. A prophetic utterance will always, in some way, testify of God's purpose and declare his plan as revealed through his son, Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 14 that the gift of prophecy serves to strengthen, encourage and comfort the body of Christ. In addition, in verse 24, Paul tells us the gift of prophecy will convict the unrepentant of their sin and reveal the secrets of their heart so they will worship God and declare, "God is really among you." Prophetic words call sinners to repentance, comfort people who are broken and wounded and they may even tell people of a future event that then encourages the person to know Jesus or follow and obey him even more.

There are lots of folks out there claiming to be prophets. Are they testifying of Jesus and bringing honor to him? Are they strengthening, encouraging and comforting the body of Christ? Do the words they speak come true? The bible tells us that prophetic words are to be weighed carefully (1 Cor. 14:29).

Tongues. This gift is a supernatural utterance in a tongue unknown to the speaker. It may or may not be a known tongue or language. This is a gift to be exercised within the body of Christ. We make a distinction between tongues as the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as seen in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. Some call this devotional tongues or your spiritual prayer language. This is an experience available to all believers.

The gift of tongues however, is what we usually refer to in Pentecostal churches as a message in tongues. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit manifested in a corporate worship service whereby one person is prompted by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues and it is to be followed by the operation of the gift of interpretation. Paul has a good bit to say about the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14.

Interpretation of tongues. This is the supernatural revelation of the meaning of other tongues. This is an interpretation of the meaning of the tongues and not necessarily a word for word translation, consequently the number of words or the length of speaking may be entirely different. Think of the difference between interpreting a painting and interpreting a text. God is infolding a word to us through tongues and interpretation, but again it isn't necessarily a translation, it is an interpretation. This interpretation is given so the entire church can be edified and encouraged.

Now that is a general overview of the nine gifts of the Spirit referred to in 1 Cor. 12. Let me share with you some of the purposes for these gifts.

- 1. The gifts of the Spirit confirm the word of God.** The gifts of the Spirit are manifested to confirm the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. The bible tells us **“how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”** Hebrews 2:3-4
- 2. The gifts of the Spirit are a sign to unbelievers.** It's hard to argue with a miracle isn't it? When the gifts are operating appropriately and in order, they bring conviction to the heart of those who are not followers of Christ. As we have already seen...
- 3. The gifts of the Spirit heal and help the broken and hurting.** (Gifts of healings, miracles, faith).
- 4. The gifts of the Spirit reveal the plan and purpose of God.** (Gifts of knowledge, wisdom, discernment.)
- 5. The gifts of the Spirit strengthen, encourage and comfort the body of Christ.**

These are some of the purposes for which the Spirit manifests these gifts. If you want more information concerning the gifts of the Spirit, I would encourage you to get one of my books on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. I have listed additional purposes for the gifts

and abuses of the gifts in the chapter on Charismatic Gifts. But let me wrap this up by sharing some tendencies I've observed over a lifetime in Pentecostal/Charismatic circles.

1. Spiritual gifts are not necessarily a sign of spiritual maturity. There has been a tendency to make spiritual gifts the ultimate sign of spiritual maturity. If you are used in the gifts, you must be super spiritual. We put those folks on some kind of spiritual pedestal. But spiritual gifts are not necessarily a sign of spiritual maturity. Remember Paul was writing this letter (1 Corinthians) to a church needing correction because of abuse and error. And remember what Jesus said, **“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”** Luke 7:21-23. Spiritual gifts are not necessarily a sign of spiritual maturity.

2. The greatest spiritual gift is salvation! There has been a tendency to be impressed by the glitter and glamour of the gifts. We are so impressed by the power gifts, by words of knowledge, by healings and miracles, etc. But remember what Jesus said to the 72 when they returned, so impressed by the miracles. They were rejoicing saying “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” And Jesus said, **“I have given you authority...to overcome all the power of the enemy...however, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”** Luke 10:18-20. The greatest spiritual gift is the gift of salvation through the atoning death of Jesus upon the cross. We must never lose sight of what is most important.

3. The gifts are all about Jesus! There is a tendency to focus upon the person manifesting the gift. I mentioned we tend to think those folks are really spiritually mature. We also tend to elevate those folks. We almost build hero-worship cults around charismatic leaders and teachers. Let me remind you, the focus of the gifts of the Spirit must always be upon Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul begins this teaching concerning spiritual gifts. **“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.”** Then he interjects this, **“...and no one can**

say, **‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:3.** From the outset the focus was to be upon Jesus. All of the glory and credit and attention must go to Jesus. Watch out when preachers take the credit or bask in the glory that is due only to Jesus. The Holy Spirit has come so we can honor Jesus and know Jesus. The Holy Spirit is testifying through each and every gift, “Jesus is Lord!” The gifts are all about Jesus.

4. The gifts are all about serving others. There is a tendency in some circles for the gifts to almost be used to control others, to manipulate others, and as we’ve said, to lift up and exalt one person over all others. “The Lord told me to tell you...” and then we control someone’s decisions or make them reliant upon us for spiritual direction (“have you got a word from the Lord for me?”). But the bible tells us the gifts are given in order to edify, encourage, strengthen and comfort the body of Christ, and to bring the knowledge of Christ to those who don’t know him. Notice what Paul says, **“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 12:7.** It is all about serving others. It is about the common good, edifying the body, not taking advantage of the body. It is one of the ways spiritual gifts can be abused and care must be taken that the gifts are ministered with the common good in view.

5. The gifts are about meeting needs! There is a tendency to elevate certain gifts above others. We emphasize tongues and interpretation of tongues, or healing or prophecy above other gifts, but the truth is, the gifts are like tools in a tool chest. We can’t say one gift is more important than another. It simply depends upon the need! If you need a screwdriver to get the job done, a hammer isn’t going to meet the need. The gifts often work together, faith and healings, tongues and interpretation, but the importance of the gift is determined by the need at any given moment. They are given for the common good and the bible says, **“All these are the work of the one and the same Spirit and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” 1 Corinthians 12:11.**

There is a tendency to surround the gifts with such a sense of mystery, that we take them out of the very context where they are most needed. It’s like we think the gifts of the Spirit are only to operate on Sunday morning in the service. I believe the gifts of the Spirit are to operate where ever God’s people gather and wherever there is a need. Some of those gifts will be in a corporate worship service, but there is a need for healing and miracles and discernment and faith

and wisdom and knowledge on the job and in the marketplace and in the classroom. I believe the gifts of the Spirit are to be at work where ever there is a need that the Holy Spirit, through his church, desires to meet. The gifts ought to be at work in our lives on a daily basis.

How can you be used in the gifts? The key is found in 1 Cor. 14:1 **“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts...” 1 Corinthians 14:1**

I think our prayer should be, “Lord, I want to love you more and know you more and I want you to love through me even more. I pray you would use me to lift up Jesus to others and to lift up others to Jesus through the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Let me be an instrument that you can use for your glory in any way you choose.”

Let’s open ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit. Let’s make ourselves available to him, to speak through us, to work through us, to love through us.