

The Gifts of the Spirit

by William Fitch

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are many and varied, given to believers to glorify Christ and to edify the church.

Duration: 28:12

Scripture: Romans 12:6

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of recognizing and using spiritual gifts to glorify Christ. He highlights the need for exercising these gifts in today's world, which is filled with the powers of evil. The sermon focuses on the church in Corinth, where the gifts of the Holy Spirit were being commercialized and used for selfish purposes, causing rivalry and disorder. The preacher stresses the need for safeguards in order to prevent such misuse of spiritual gifts, and emphasizes the importance of clinging to the verities and loyalties of the faith, particularly the recognition of the Lordship of Christ.

Transcript

We continue our study of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the third blessed person of the Godhead. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we confess.

And we are thinking about the ministry, about the person and the works of the Holy Spirit. Today, on this tape in particular, we're going to think about the gifts of the Spirit. And this is one particular facet of the ministry of the Holy Spirit on which we must be informed.

Now, concerning spiritual gifts, Paul says to the Corinthians, I would not have you to be ignorant. And in Romans chapter 12, at verse 3, Paul says, And there are other passages in the New Testament to which we'll make reference as we go along. But let's remember that the greatest gift of our Lord to his church is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

He told his disciples in the upper room, This happened on the day of Pentecost. God works to a calendar. Long centuries before, God had told his people about the feast of Pentecost.

And it was on this very day the Spirit came. With the Spirit, there came also gifts of the Spirit. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

And there are diversities of administrations, but the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man in order that he might profit the entire church. 1 Corinthians 12, 4 to 7. This

last verse means, you see, that any and every gift of the Holy Spirit, these are intended to be used for the profit and advantage of everybody within the circle of all true believers.

We should note that there is a most unusual diversity of gifts. The Holy Spirit knows no restriction in the gifts he bestows. Of course, he will never bestow any gift that is evil, for he is the Holy Spirit.

What comes from him is pure and good. But there is an almost infinite mixture of gifts with which he blesses the church. Three great passages of Scripture there are that deal with these gifts.

In addition to the ministries that our Lord elaborated when he spoke to the disciples on the night he was betrayed, the three passages are in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, and Ephesians 4. Even the most cursory reading of these passages will immediately demonstrate one thing. The gifts vary in each list. They are diverse, suited to differing individual qualifications, and adaptable to every situation that the church may face.

The giver is one, but the gifts are many. And not all have the same gifts. God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? The answer to these questions, in each case, is an emphatic negative. No one has all these gifts. As in the parable of the talents, to one is given five talents, to another two, to another one.

So is it with the gifts of the Spirit. All have at least one gift. That's clear from Romans 12, 6. Having then gifts differing according to the gift that has been given to us.

Everybody has at least one gift. We have gifts that differ, however, according to the gift that has been given to us. And no one has all the gifts.

Even apostles are singled out, and prophets too. But even they don't possess all the gifts. To them has been given a gift, or to them have been given gifts of God, the Holy Spirit, for the edifying of the church, and for the building up of the body of Christ.

When we think of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we must be very careful that we have studied them sufficiently well to know how to defend ourselves against their abuse. It's made clear that counterfeits of these gifts can manifest themselves, and this has happened. Church history has many a telling illustration of how the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been misused and misapplied.

The New Testament shows us men prepared to offer money. If only they might obtain the specific gifts seen in the apostles. Thy money perish with thee.

That was the stern rebuke of God's servant to those who would prostitute a holy gift of God for ignoble and selfish ends. In the church at Corinth, the gifts of the Holy Spirit were commercialized. And had become a fruitful source of rivalry, disorder, envy, and acrimony.

There were those who possessed only one gift, but they claimed precedence over others with more gifts than themselves. They wanted priority and importance. What had happened there was that carnal men had come into possession of these gifts, and they were using them for carnal ends.

Now this is very revealing. It's doubtful if these men knew what they were doing. Satan is such a master of bombarding the subconscious, it's quite feasible they didn't realize how wrong their acts were.

No suggestion is made by Paul that the gifts in the Corinthian church were not genuine. But the gifts were being perverted to wrong goals, and they were being subverted to unworthy ends. It's indeed strange that in a church of which the apostle Paul could say that they came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of the Lord, there were nonetheless carnalities that would have disgraced a properly ordered pagan assembly.

You and I must look for safeguards, otherwise disaster looms. The right kind of safeguard is to cling to the verities and loyalties of the faith. And the preeminent loyalty is, of course, recognition of the lordship of Christ.

Let this point be stressed. Let this safeguard continually be for us. Our Lord said of the Holy Spirit, he will not speak of himself, he will glorify me.

John 16, 13 and 14. In any assembly truly ordered by the Holy Spirit, there will be much talk about the Lord whom the Spirit loves to exalt. For it's impossible to know Jesus Christ save by the Holy Spirit.

Only the Holy Spirit can make Christ real. And only when Jesus Christ is truly Lord, does the Holy Spirit come to have his rightful place in the company of the people of God. Over much talk or stress on the Holy Spirit, with a corresponding diminishing of glory to the Christ of God, is a sign that the true way has been missed.

Seek then that Christ will be glorified. Whatever gift comes from the Holy Spirit is given to you in order that Christ might be the better seen. He shall glorify me, our Lord said concerning the Holy Spirit.

And that is what happens when the Holy Spirit possesses us. And his gifts are manifest in us. The gift that he has given, or the gifts that he has given to us, they are given in order that Jesus Christ might be glorified and for no other reason.

Another safeguard against possible abuse of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is a rightful defense of the word of God. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, we are told. His gifts will therefore never be at variance with his word.

The Spirit of Christ, who is the Spirit of truth, will verify, corroborate, affirm, interpret, and attest the word of God. There's no wisdom given of God that isn't in accordance with the Holy Scriptures. In the body of Christ, order will rule, for God isn't the author of confusion.

Edification will be known, because the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way. If there be gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues with interpretations, none of these should ever conflict with the revelation already fully given. Overall, love reigns supreme.

Now these gifts are very unique. These gifts transcend natural talents, and yet they're related to them. When God first planned the epistle to the Romans, he foresaw a man who would have such natural talent and such spiritual gift as would make it possible for him.

To write this wonderful letter, and so is it still. The days of the apostles are not past, they're still with us. The Holy Spirit renews, vitalizes native powers, quickens natural endowment, and emphasizes our basic

capabilities.

Even as fire quickens, so does the Holy Spirit energize and endure us with new powers to God's glory. What is impossible with man becomes possible when he, the Spirit of glory, has come. He works through our natural talents, and yet his gifts transcend them.

There are many gifts of the Spirit. Every time I go to the New Testament and try to enumerate them, I find a different number. But somehow, that's the way I think it ought to be.

Gifts such as wisdom, faith, miracles, healings, knowledge, discernment of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, teaching, leading, helping, renewing, administrating. These are all gifts of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of God, we would never know one of them.

True, wisdom and knowledge are clearly related to the mind, to intelligence, and to learning. Nonetheless, they can't be discovered by the natural powers of man. No more can faith, though it has been called man's sixth sense.

For we walk by faith, we live by faith, we do everything by faith. What of healing? When James speaks of healing, he refers to something transcending the normal gifts of medical science. These were not despised by the early Christian.

Was not Dr. Luke numbered among Paul's party on the second missionary journey? But the gift of healing was a spiritual ministry fulfilled by the elders of the church, who were themselves filled with the Spirit. And tongues? Let's note that they were a recognized factor among the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul wished that all who heard him might speak in tongues.

How often have I longed that all the elders of my church might thus, in the way in which Paul meant, speak in tongues. It would be a clear sign that God was doing something unusual and great among them. The gift of tongues, however, it comes last in the list, and it comes first in controversy.

There's a gift of tongues that is given for a sign, as there is a gift of tongues for the edifying of the body of Christ. Careful study of the New Testament places the gift of tongues among the gifts of the Spirit, and it must be specially preserved from abuse. That it has been abused, perhaps more than any other gift, may be well true.

Possibly also there have been more divisions caused through the exercise of this gift than through any other. We must simply be careful, be watchful, beware of grieving the Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed to the day of our redemption. Tongues are given to us select company, and to say anything else is to deny God's word.

What are the objects of these gifts? Paul points out that the gifts of the Spirit are intended to equip us for service for our Lord. In Romans 12 and verse 6, as we read, having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, our ministry, let's wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation, he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity, he that ruleth with diligence, he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness. By these gifts, it is planned that we too should glorify Christ, even as the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ.

Many have argued that some of these gifts of the Spirit ended with the apostolic age, but the reasoning is suspect. At many other periods of church history, these gifts have been seen, and it wouldn't be difficult to mount overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that such gifts are visible in the church today. There is good reason to state that the present age is one in greater need of divine manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit than in any other.

We live in a time when occult manifestations are multiplied, and in many cases there are counterfeits of the divine. God's most holy and divine plan itself can be counterfeited. The wisdom of this world is mighty in its ability to show forth the exceeding greatness of the powers of evil, and never was there a greater need, I believe, than today, for the exercise of all true spiritual gifts.

The gifts are given to glorify Christ. In so doing, they make Christ desirable. They show us that he is Lord over all, King of kings and Lord of lords.

To him has been given all power in heaven and earth. It's at his knee that everyone must bow, and every tongue must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Now, it's an utter impossibility for man to do this in his own strength.

By ourselves, we taint all we touch. We tarnish everything we handle. But when the Holy Spirit indwells us and is working in power within and through us, then Christ can be revealed.

Then the glory of the Son of Man can be perceived in the likeness of sinful flesh. We must distinguish carefully between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Fruit and gifts are not identical.

Gifts are endowments of power. Fruit is a reflection, a demonstration of character. True fruit is an evidence of true holiness of life.

But sad to say it's possible to possess spiritual gifts without corresponding evidence of Christ's likeness in our lives. Gifts may operate immediately, while fruit takes time to develop. Fruit is expected of all.

This true fruit of the Spirit in which love is supreme. Gifts are for those for whom they have been prepared. All true believers must bear fruit.

But gifts can never be a substitute for the fruit of the Spirit. It's essential that we understand the real object of spiritual gifts. They're given to glorify Christ, to glorify God the Father Almighty through Jesus Christ his Son.

But for this end to be accomplished, the gifts we have received must be used. And the whole thrust of the passage in 1 Corinthians 14, 14 is that the gift of the Spirit is intended to help the church, and that each man has received from the Spirit whatever gifts the Spirit knows is best for him to receive. Now some say that all must speak in tongues.

But St. Paul expressly asks, do all speak in tongues? And the answer is clearly no. Fruit is demanded of all. Every manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit.

It is not the case that one Christian should show the fruit of joy, another the fruit of peace, while yet another manifests the fruit of long-suffering or self-control. No. The fruit should be seen in holiness of character in all true Christians.

And all the ninefold manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit should be seen in us. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. That's the fruit of the Spirit.

And in every true Christian, by the Holy Spirit, this fruit should be known, for this is the mark of a holy life. But not so with regard to the gifts. To one is given one gift.

To another, another gift. To another. That's a scriptural principle.

To read from this that all should ever speak in tongues is a truth that's alien to the Bible. Now, many did, of course, speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. We'll read that.

To argue, however, this speaking in tongues is identical with what the Corinthian church knew is quite wrong. In Acts chapter 2, the multitude heard in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. They needed no interpreter.

But in Corinth, St. Paul expressly states that there must be no speaking in tongues without interpretation. This in itself differentiates the tongues of Corinth from the tongues of Acts. What needs to be said about this is that this gift of the Spirit is for those whom he has selected.

As is true of all the other gifts of the Spirit, you cannot come up to some counter where all the gifts of the Spirit are displayed and choose what you want. No, the Holy Spirit alone is the giver. It is he who in his divine sovereignty gives to us what he knows is best for us.

He has planned from all eternity that we should be a personality of a certain kind. And being such a personality, we can use a certain gift that he will give. To the praise and to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord, let us receive the gift he gives and use it for his glory.

I know of Christians clearly endowed by the Spirit with some special gift for the edification of the Church who have gone through life longing for some other gift than the one that they have received. This to me is very sad. True spiritual discernment, which is one of the gifts of the Spirit that I believe he's prepared to grant to all who seek it, should make clear to every Christian what special gift we possess.

It's of this simplest thinking when he writes, Let no man think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of his gift. When we are prepared for that, prepared to ask God for wisdom to know what our special gift is, then God is indeed glorified. Christ is glorified.

The Holy Spirit is glorified. We manifest the tokens of divine life and power ordained from all eternity for us to enjoy and to use. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are very exceptional.

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is himself a gift. And in the gift of the Spirit there are gifts. Wherefore he saith when he ascended upon high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.

And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Now there are diversities of administrations but the same Lord. And there are diversities of ministries but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man in order that the whole church might profit. The manifestation of the Spirit isn't always the same. There are diversities of gifts, differences of

administration, operation, and manifestation.

But it's the same Spirit who gives these differing gifts. There is a manifold variety of the one Spirit. There are varieties according to temperament, according to capability, according to grace, and equally according to function.

The failure to remember this can ensnare the unwary. We can look for experiences and gifts in others and expect that we should see them. And sometimes the gifts and the experiences we see in others we long to see in ourselves.

But what we need to remember is that the Holy Spirit has given to us the gift that in His sovereignty He knows His best. Let us take that gift and let us use it to the praise and glory of our God. And out of the gift or gifts with which we have been blessed, may Jesus Christ be exalted, glorified, and praised within His church both now and forevermore.

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