

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

FIRST CORINTHIANS 12-14 (SPIRITUAL GIFTS)

Basic Truths About Spiritual Gifts
I Corinthians 12:1-7

The hottest subject in evangelical churches today is that of spiritual gifts, especially the spectacular gifts such as speaking in tongues, healing and miracles. This is such a controversial issue because for years mainline denominations have forgotten to teach about spiritual gifts of any kind, and the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement is the fastest growing group in Christendom. Our goal for a number of sermons will be to deal with the various facets of spiritual gifts, trying to put a right emphasis on finding our particular gifts and putting them to work for Christ at Howell Branch Fellowship and the church at large.

You may or may not agree with my interpretation of the spiritual gifts. You may believe that the spectacular, supernatural gifts have ceased and I may believe they could be in the church today. Whatever we believe, we must show love, respect and tolerance for one another because we are all part of the body of Christ. Hopefully we will agree to disagree. Actually, I am sort of a maverick when it comes to the gifts, and while I am not a cessationist (spectacular gifts have ceased), I do not consider myself a charismatic (all gifts are in the church today in full force). My view is somewhere in between the two extremes. I choose to call myself a "continuationist." I would prefer to call myself a "cautious continuationist" or a "qualified continuationist." Furthermore, I do not claim to know everything there is to know about spiritual gifts theologically or practically, and I could be wrong in some of my understanding. As I approach this delicate subject, I do so with fear and trembling and hopefully with intellectual humility. Please pray for me for the next several months, for I admit openly I am in great need of wisdom as I deal with First Corinthians 12 and 14.

Martin Luther said in the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" the following: "The Spirit and the gifts are ours." Luther obviously believed the gifts were somehow in the Church. Yet the Reformed tradition as a whole has either: 1) minimized the gifts; 2) neglected the gifts; 3) avoided the gifts, and 4) explained away the gifts. The emphasis by many Reformed people seems to be one of what the Holy Spirit won't do rather than what He will do. Those in the Reformed tradition have overreacted to the many modern day abuses in the Charismatic movement. Yet no amount of abuse can justify the non-use of a good gift from the Lord. Reformed Christians should be reformed and reforming. This is especially true in the area of the gifts which should be approached Biblically, responsibly and with balance.

The Bible teaches the saints are to do the work of the ministry, and it is the task of clergy to train the Christians so they can carry out their God-ordained responsibility.

And He (Christ) gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastor-teachers, for the purpose of equipping the saints in order that the saints might do the work of ministry and in order that the saints might build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12).

God does not demand the Christian to do the work of the ministry without giving him the grace and the abilities to do it. He has given the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts to each Christian to accomplish the work of the ministry. A spiritual gift is a supernatural ability given by God to believers for the purpose of service. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, and these gifts are to find expression primarily through the ministry of the local church. The key to a vital local church is to have all the spiritual gifts of each Christian functioning to further the work of the church. Each Christian is to discover his particular gift and put it to work.

In chapters 12-14 of First Corinthians, the subject is about spiritual gifts. Beginning in chapter 11, the Apostle Paul has been dealing with problems in the public assembly of the church. The first problem was that women did not have their heads covered when praying and prophesying. The second problem was abuses at the Lord's Table. Now in chapters 12-14, Paul will deal with the abuses in the area of spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church was guilty of exalting the spectacular gifts at the expense of prophecy. He rebukes the Corinthians for their behavior and shows them that the spectacular gifts, namely tongues, are the least of all the gifts and sets down specific roles for how they should be used.

TESTING THE SPIRIT IN SPIRITUAL GIFTS 12:1-3

A Person Does Not Get Involved in Idolatry and Demonism (12:1-2)

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. According to 1 Corinthians 1:7, the Corinthian church had all the spiritual gifts. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gifts as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (1 Cor. 1:7). It was quite likely that disorders would arise in that local church, especially since they were a carnal church (1 Cor. 3:1-2). There would be some who would be imposters, faking their gift. Some would be dissatisfied with the gifts they had received and envy those who, they thought, had more significant gifts. Others would become proud because they had a spectacular gift, thinking themselves more spiritual than others who had less spectacular gifts. Lastly, there would be the problem of all trying to exercise their particular gifts at one time, causing confusion in the assembly. Therefore, there was a tremendous need to enlighten these Corinthians on the subject of spiritual gifts.

When Paul said he did not want them to be "ignorant" of spiritual gifts, this was a slam against their super-spirituality. There were some in the church who thought they knew everything, but in reality they were ignorant. Because some had spoken in tongues, they thought themselves to have arrived spiritually and were better than others who did not speak in tongues. They needed instruction and correction in their understanding of spiritual gifts.

You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute (dumb) idols. Paul reminds the Corinthians that before they became Christians, they were deeply involved in pagan idolatry. With pagan idolatry came the Greek mystery religions in which spiritual experiences were the norm. They had grown accustomed to being moved by some kind of supernatural or demonic force, either in a trance or a state of ecstasy. Speaking in ecstatic utterances was an everyday experience. Mystical experiences were expected and were an authentication of spiritual reality.

One of the key ways that people were led astray in the first century was emotionalism, seen particularly in the religions of Pythia of Delphi, Dodora, Dionysius, all of which practiced ecstatic utterances. It is interesting that the Dionysius cult had one of its centers in Corinth (Knofel Swan, First Corinthians).

Apparently there was a weakness in the Corinthian Christians' Greek make-up, with their hundreds of mystical religions, to follow idols, false gods and strong personalities. Paul assumes there might still be that tendency even after they were saved. While he does not state it specifically, he may be assuming that one of the marks or tests of religious error is that it gets involved in idolatry.

In the first century, these Corinthians were engulfed in literal idolatry, but as we have said in the past, idolatry may be anything we put in place of Jesus Christ. Any concept or thing that begins to shape our thinking and demands most of our time is an idol. This could be money, a job, a house, a car, a mate, a girlfriend, a boyfriend, sports, politics, recreation, TV, drugs, alcohol or a hundred other things which would be given first place above Christ.

The Apostle Paul makes it clear that men are "led astray" which seems to infer some kind of power to which men are becoming subject, and that power is demonic influence. We have already seen that behind idolatry is demonism. No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God (I Cor. 10:20). Behind all idolatry is the power of mind control exercised by demons. The Bible teaches that behind the thinking of unbelievers are demons, and we are constantly fighting wickedness in high places. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12).

There is a mind-control by demonic powers who are in control of the philosophy and thinking of men and women all over this world. Even so-called religious people have a demonic mind bent. They may use religious jargon, biblical terminology and mimic Christian practices, but they lead to some form of idolatry. How is this possible?

First, a false religious leader may become an idol for people. A leader draws attention to himself as a dynamic person and people give him adulation and worship. This can be seen clearly in movements like the Jonestown Incident 25 years ago in Guyana, where 900 people took their lives by poisoning because they worshiped a man, the Rev. Jim Jones. Or it can be seen in the recent Heaven's Gate movement, led by Marshall Applewhite, where 39 followers committed suicide.

Second, in order to follow a man as an idol, people give up their rights and liberties and their own personality. There is severe regimentation and control over the

mind. People lose their identity to follow a man in idolatrous worship. This is clearly seen in the Moonies, who follow the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the founder of the Unification Church.

Third, these leaders make idolatrous claims for themselves, such as the possession of supernatural powers, giving them special authority over others. Both Rev. Moon and Rev. Jones claimed to be a messiah for their followers.

Fourth, there is also the idolatrous solicitation of money, the central power of need of the group. One of the tests or criterion to know if a person is led by the Holy Spirit in the use of spiritual gifts is that lie is not given over to any form of Idolatry or demonism.

A Person Does Not Repudiate the Person of Christ (12:3)

Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed." The city of Corinth was filled with Greek soothsayers and priests who claimed divine inspiration in wild frenzy and foaming lips, so the more fanatical they were, the more they were supposed to have wisdom from their gods. At times, they even mumbled strange sounds. Perhaps some of these wild-eyed soothsayers, speaking in what seemed liked tongues, called Jesus accursed. Perhaps some of these Christians at Corinth either cursed Christ or heard Christ cursed in their mystery cults before they were converted. The Jews also called Christ an accursed one; that is, one who was a criminal, a malefactor, who deserved to die, who had a curse on him. The negative test is that no man speaking by the Spirit of God and under the influence of the Spirit will ever speak of Jesus as being accursed.

How do men in the 20th century say Christ is accursed? Anytime a person says that Jesus was a mere sinful man, a good teacher, a wonderful example, that person is lumping him with the rest of sinful humanity which is under the curse of Adam. Any teaching which says Jesus was only a sinful man is not from God. Jesus was a man, but a sinless man who was born of the Virgin Mary.

Every modern-day liberal Protestant who says Jesus Christ was a just a great teacher, a moral man, a supreme example but not sinless, is cursing Christ. These teachers are never speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. The positive criterion or test to know whether a person is truly using his gift in the power of the Spirit is that he exalts Jesus as Lord. The title "Lord" refers to Christ's deity: that is, He is God, come in the flesh. "Jesus" speaks of Christ's humanity. Therefore, Jesus Christ is perfect humanity and undiminished deity united in one person forever. No person can speak of the deity of Jesus Christ as central to his theology apart from the power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the earliest Christian confessions was "Jesus is Lord." This was a public confession before a hostile world. To make this confession could mean persecution and even death. Anyone can say Jesus is Lord but no public confession can be made before a hostile world unless the Holy Spirit is prompting that confession.

First century Christians died as martyrs for the truth that Jesus is Lord. Rome wanted them to confess Caesar as lord, but they would not bow to Caesar, only to Christ their God. Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord! Jesus is right now in charge of all human events! Jesus rules and reigns supreme in this world and is guiding history as we now know it to culminate at the Second Advent.

Today we hear that science is lord; sex is lord; feeling is lord; power is lord; money is lord; reason is lord; and this all culminates into one concept that man is lord! Not so. Jesus is Lord, and those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit exalt Him as Lord.

Every teacher or group who does not acknowledge Jesus as Lord is not Christian but a false religion. This includes other religions like Muslims, Confucians, Buddhists, Shintoists, Hindus or whatever. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God (1 John 4:2). This includes Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Unity, Unitarians, and every other cult in the world which does not see Jesus as full deity and full humanity.

When someone makes the claim to any spiritual gift, ask the question, "Does that person exalt Christ with his gift? Does he in any way demean the person of Christ? Does he realize that Jesus is Lord over his gift? Any person who claims to have any spiritual gift and does not exalt Jesus Christ as the God-Man is probably no Christian at all. It is by their fruits we'll know the true from the false. By their fruits you will recognize them (Matt. 7:16).

The burning desire of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus Christ. He (the Holy Spirit) will bring glory to me (Christ) (John 16:14). A mature, growing church exalts Jesus as Lord and does not exalt spiritual gifts. Mature Christians exalt the Giver of the gifts; not the gifts themselves.

This verse may also tell us what a Christian really is. A Christian is not an American, not one who goes to church, not one who believes the Bible, not one who believes in God, not one who believes in the moral teachings of Jesus, but he is a person who believes that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh and who bows his mind and will and emotions to his God, receiving Jesus Christ as Savior for his sins.

TRUE UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN SPIRITUAL GIFTS 12:4-7

Unity in Source (12:4-6)

The key to understanding this passage is in the words "same Spirit, same Lord and same God." Spiritual gifts are the work of the Trinity. Just as in the Godhead there is unity in diversity, so in spiritual gifts there is unity in diversity. Whenever we find God at work, we see unified diversity. When the local church is fulfilling its function and it is what it ought to be, we will find unity-one body, many gifts, many distinctions, many ministries within it; but there will be one group, one body in Christ. Paul argues that the unity in diversity flows out of the nature of God. He is the source of unity.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. While there are many different kinds of spiritual gifts there is only one Holy Spirit who gave those gifts or abilities in His sovereign grace. And he gives them (spiritual gifts) to each one, just as he (the Holy Spirit) determines (I Cor. 12:11). Each person has been given a spiritual gift which is a capacity to serve. The Holy Spirit has not only given different spiritual gifts, but has given different degrees of the same gift to various individuals. For instance, three Christians may all have the gift of evangelism but not to the same degree or with the same intensity.

Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. Yet, there are multiple thousands of Christians who do not even know what their spiritual gift is. They go from year to year and never ask themselves, "What is my spiritual gift and how can I put it to work in my local church?" A Christian will never be aglow with excitement for Christ as he should be until he finds his spiritual gift and puts it to work.

There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. Every spiritual gift is a "service" or "ministry. The word "service" not only speaks of service for Christ in general but also of the opportunity to use that gift. It is the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual gifts. It is Christ who gives us opportunity to use the gifts. The Lord Himself, as Head of the Church, begins to direct the Christian in the use of spiritual gifts. This is why we must be yielded and submitted to Christ in our daily experience so He can show how and where to use our gifts for God's

glory. Don't wait to be asked to do things in your church. Find your gift and begin to ask your leaders where you can serve. Don't ask "What can my church do for me," but "What can I do for my church in light of my spiritual gift?"

There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. The Greek word for "working" is *energenata*, which speaks of supernatural energy. This is God's energy at work in every Christian and flowing out into the life of the unsaved community.

The operation of God's Holy Spirit is not a theory and we must not reduce it to a matter of theoretical debate. The Spirit produces results, varied results which can be noticed: changed lives, transformed relationships, increasing congregations, effective testimony, released talents. As each of these is energized by the Spirit the Lordship of Jesus is demonstrated in as many diverse ways as there are people who possess this energy (David Prior, I Corinthians).

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts sovereignly. Christ grants us opportunity to use those gifts, as God the Father energizes the Christian so as to bring about the proper results from spiritual gifts. We know that when we exercise our gifts there will be action. Whether the result is a big up-front ministry or a behind-the-scenes ministry, it will never be dull. It will always be exciting. What difference does it make who has what gifts, for they all come from the Triune God and all are important to the proper functioning of the body of Christ.

The source of all gifts is God, so there is no room to boast about our gifts. There is no room to get jealous over someone else's gift. There is no room to think you and your gift are unimportant. Whether one person uses his gift of teaching before thousands and another uses the gift of mercy before a few, both are important and both are needed for the proper functioning of the local church. When we get this concept of spiritual gifts, it changes air attitude about ourselves, our value to the church, our worth as individuals and our importance to Christ.

Unity in Purpose (12:7)

God is not only the source of unity in spiritual gifts but also the unity of purpose in spiritual gifts. He has designed the gifts for a specific purpose—to build up the body of Christ.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given. The word "manifestation" means "to make known, produce visible glory." Therefore, spiritual gifts are not to be hidden. Again Paul is simply saying that each Christian has at least one spiritual gift. The Apostle Peter declared the same truth. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (1 Pet. 4:10). A Christian may have more than one spiritual gift as seen in the Apostle Paul, who was an apostle, evangelist and a teacher. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald (evangelist) and an apostle and a teacher (2 Tim. 1:11). We now that Paul also had the gift of tongues. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you (I Cor. 14:18). All Christians have gifts and all are valuable and important to the body of Christ generally and the local church particularly.

For the common good. Here it is stated the supreme purpose of all spiritual gifts—to build up and edify the body of Christ. Gifts are not primarily given for self-edification, for self-exaltation or to cause envy and strife among Christians. Gifts are given to the

Christian to profit others. God gave spiritual gifts for the common good of the church. Each Christian is a debtor to other Christians to use his gift within the local church for the edification of other Christians. If we are not using our gifts, we are robbing our brothers and sisters of ministry.

In my opinion, the statement "for the common good" puts a great deal of pressure on those Christians who claim to speak in tongues today to use their gift responsibly so as to edify and profit the whole church. Whatever else this may teach, it says that all gifts must profit others and not be used selfishly. Perhaps tongues could be used in one's private prayer life as some claim. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church (1 Cor. 14:4). Charismatics get around this dilemma by stating that tongues edifies the individual Christian who grows strong so as to build the body of Christ. I don't believe this is Paul's argument here. All gifts, even tongues, must somehow profit, build up or do good for the whole body of Christ. For sure, tongues should never bring glory to self, or draw attention to self, or make a person feel more spiritual than others who do not have the gift. Whatever tongues are, they must be for the common good and build up the body of Christ collectively.

Since God has gifted others to minister to Christians, every Christian can then minister to each of us. Our attitude then should be, "Every Christian, no matter how great or small, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, has a ministry to me and you personally. He gets his personal enjoyment and fulfillment in ministering to me, and I get my fulfillment and enjoyment in ministering to him."

CONCLUSION

Christian, do you know your spiritual gift? Are you seeking to discover it? Are you honestly seeking to find out how your gifts profit others? Are you serving others with your gifts through the local church? Are you doing the work of the ministry? Are you involved in the excitement and adventure of using your gifts to help others? You will never be a mature Christian until you discover your spiritual gifts and put them to work in the body of Christ. God has designed you to serve and minister to others.

We have been talking about spiritual gifts for the Christian, but the greatest gift in the world is the gift of salvation which God gives to men, women, boys and girls who receive Christ as Savior and Lord. Salvation is a gift and it is received by faith. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23). You cannot work for salvation, buy salvation or beg for salvation. You can only receive the gift of salvation by welcoming Christ into your life by faith. The moment you receive Christ you receive the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, a ticket to heaven, the person of the Holy Spirit, and you also receive at least one spiritual gift whereby you can serve Christ and His Church.