

The Gift and Gifts of the Holy Spirit

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There is something uplifting and encouraging about seeing the sun shine through the black clouds of a storm. The warm rays that filter through seem to warm our spirits and tell us that God is still there. The black clouds of despair and hopelessness and confusion have all too often darkened the vision of the people of God, and our own generation has been no exception. One of the warm rays of sunshine breaking through in our day is the rediscovery of (and a new emphasis upon) the gifts of the Spirit. The Church has been operating too long as a “big business” and her spiritual life has been sterile and cold. Man-made programs have taken precedence over the leadership of the Holy Spirit far too often. The Scriptures are very clear about the fact that the Holy Spirit does give gifts to individual persons so that the whole Body (the church) can be edified and can perform her function in any given age (**Ephesians 4:7-12.**)

Revival in the church however, like progress in any area of life, can also be fraught with dangers. Someone has said, “We are like the pendulum on a grandfather’s clock; we go from one extreme to another.” In discovering one new segment of truth, there is danger of failing to see this truth in the context of other truths just as important to the total plan of God. The inspiration and joy of it can so enthrall us that we lose sight of everything else and begin to ride it as our hobby. The only way to be guided through new experiences and waves of truth breaking through to us, is to test these by the Word of God. Let us look at several basic facts taught in the Word about the gifts of the Spirit to the church.

The “gift of the Spirit” and the “gifts of the Spirit” are two distinct dimensions of the work of the Holy Spirit to the believer. **Acts 2:38** was Peter’s response to the many who on Pentecost cried out, “**Men and brethren, what shall we do?**” His answer was, “Repent and be **baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.**” Several things seem to come through from these words of Peter. He is not referring to any gift such as teaching,

preaching, healing, prophecy, tongues, or discernment. He is simply stating that the Gift which is to be received is the Holy Ghost Himself. Furthermore, these must have been “first-timers” in coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. This was not a subsequent experience, because all the basic elements of a first-time commitment were present—repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This is the route for all of us when becoming Christians. One of the problems of confusion about the work of the Holy Spirit is that we have a tendency to identify Him with some subsequent work of grace after one is saved. But the simple truth is that the new birth involves receiving the Holy Spirit (**1 Peter 1:4**). God promises that believers become partakers in the divine nature. “Divine nature” simply means “the very nature of God.” The Holy Spirit brings that new life (the life of the Spirit) to me personally, and shares with me the nature of God himself.

Having received the Holy Spirit and being born into God’s family, a very simple question needs to be answered. What is the purpose of God’s wanting to indwell His children by His Spirit? Some people believe it is just to make the individual feel good. But that can hardly be the reason. Others think they are saved just to go to Heaven, but that is not the primary reason because that will come when life is ended. The only answer that fits the Bible teaching is that we are saved to serve here and now. **Isaiah 43:7** infers that we are created for God’s honor and glory. To put it very simply, I was created to fulfill the purpose and plan of God now. That’s why I wasn’t born one thousand years ago. This is my day to live for Him. Salvation is God’s way of bringing me into the kind of relationship with Him so that I can fulfill the plan He has for me now.

To perform service for the Lord requires that one be qualified and empowered. It is precisely for this reason that the Holy Spirit gives “gifts.” The Scripture passages which name the gifts are **Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and Ephesians 4:7-13**. From these verses we learn certain basic truths about spiritual gifts.

There are dangers lurking along the pathway of any Christian believer who is conscious that God has given him a special gift by the Holy Spirit. First of all, there is the danger of using the gift for personal gain and prestige. “Look at me; I am somebody special; God has given me this unique gift, and I am the only one for miles around who has it.” There are some who get caught in the net of “a good feeling.” As with other dimensions of our Christian life, there is the possibility of some trying to exercise their gifts entirely apart from the larger Body. They develop a “go it alone” strategy and set out to build their own little kingdom apart from the church. All must guard against these dangers.

Paul mentions three positive purposes for the giving of gifts to individual believers in **Ephesians 4:12**. First, we are given gifts “*for the perfecting of the saints.*” The perfecting of the saints means the maturing of the believers. God wants us to grow up

and be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. When something is perfected, the wrinkles are ironed out, the lamp is trimmed and cleaned so that we can better accomplish our purpose in the kingdom of God.

Secondly, Paul says the gifts are given *“for the work of the ministry.”* The word “ministry” here is taken by some to mean the work of the preacher or pastor, but this is not the primary meaning of the word. “Ministry” simply means “the work which the church is called to do for her Lord.” As Christians we have a ministry to perform for Christ. We are commanded by our Lord to preach the Gospel to every nation and then baptize the believers and teach again all those things that pertain to Christian living. The gifts which the Holy Spirit divides among individual believers are for the purpose of fulfilling this command.

Paul also says that gifts are given *“for the edifying of the body of Christ.”* The word “edifying” comes from a word meaning “to build up morally; to make strong.” Christ wants his church to be a powerhouse for good in a world that has gone mad with sin, rebellion, and blindness. Jesus said we would be a light to the world, but it takes power to shine out in a dark world. So, the various gifts of the Spirit are given to the church to help her be a true representative of her Lord in any age, regardless of how dark the world about us is.

Now let us make some personal applications of this blessed truth. We must remember that although the church is a body and alive because Christ is her head, Paul also says we are many members making up that Body. And everyone of us as an individual Christian affects the Body in some manner. How are you using the gifts God has given to you? Remember, the Holy Spirit has given you gifts not to be enjoyed by yourself and used selfishly, but to be shared so the whole body of Christ will benefit. Did not Jesus tell the story of the talents being handed out, and one man even buried his while the others used theirs and they increased? If you do not use the gift God has given you, you are not only being disobedient to God, but you are also cheating me. No doubt you will receive a gift that I will never receive, but if you exercise that gift as God intends, then my life will be enriched as you share with me. The opposite is also true as I use my gifts. Many churches are spiritually poor because this truth is ignored. We lose spiritual depths and love and power when we fail to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us in these matters.

Some confusion exists within the church today because there is a tendency to single out certain gifts as being of more importance than others. This can not only distort the whole symmetry of God’s plan for the church but can be the cause for disunity and even disruption within the fellowship of believers. When we single out one of God’s gifts and play this up out of proportion to other gifts, we are throwing ourselves open

for confusion, heresy, and even spiritual shipwreck. Hobby-riding with the doctrines and truths of the Scriptures always brings problems within the church. People who champion their “private interest” always become spiritually anemic and cannot function as God intends we should. Personally, I cannot afford to be without anything that God has for me. I need all the ingredients to be a well-rounded and balanced Christian. And there is no better way for me to attain this goal than for the church to recognize all the gifts that God has given to his people and be sure they are exercised.

We must learn to appreciate each other’s gifts and thank God for those brothers and sisters who can minister to us with their gifts. The believer’s spiritual profile cannot be measured by the kind of gift he has received. Our spiritual status and height is measured by obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. Let it be understood that every Christian has received the Holy Spirit as a gift from God and any who have not received Him are not yet Christians. The question, “Have you received the Holy Spirit?”– is always a valid one. But the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life is not evidenced by any one gift of the Spirit. Whether I have the gift of healing, of prophecy, of teaching, the gift of tongues, or any other gift, is not the test of whether or not I have received the Holy Spirit. Paul makes it very plain in **1 Corinthians 12:27-30**, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” The implied answer is, no! Not all do have the same gifts. Let us never look clown upon the brother or sister who does not have the same gift as we do, and imply that they are in some lower class than we are. Let us praise God for His gifts to the church whether we have them or not.

A further word needs to be said to our congregations. We must come to the place in our church life where we make allowance for the various gifts to be used as God leads. Sometimes we are so inflexible in our church programs that the Holy Spirit doesn’t have a chance. More often than we do—we should make out a bulletin and then tear it up after we sing the first hymn of the service! This wrong kind of rigidity is seen in both conservative and liberal churches of our day. We adopt a certain form and follow it to the “t” and please let no one interfere. This is not a plea for loose, freehand sensationalism which is typical of some services, and they call this being led of the Spirit. It may or may not be. Surely there can be order without a cold, sterile formalism. Is it possible that the Holy Spirit might just lead us to stop right in the midst of our “outlined procedure” and have a special prayer for a specific need we just learned about; to ask if anyone has been having physical problems and might want to be anointed right then; to hear from some brother or sister about a special experience

that happened to him the past week? The church must make allowance for God to do something different once in a while.

The church must not only make allowance for the exercise of the various gifts of the Spirit to the believers, but she must also give guidance at this very point to keep individuals from splintering off to themselves. The Holy Spirit not only speaks to the individual believer, but also to the Body, the community of believers. And this makes a good check and balance to keep things on the level. That individual person who believes God is calling him to do a certain task through a gift he has received, is wise in having other believers pray with him about it. In **Acts 15:28**, at the Jerusalem Annual Conference of the early church, we have this spelled out very clearly: **“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.”** The individual must recognize the Holy Spirit’s word of the church, and the church must also recognize the word of the Holy Ghost to the individual. These need not be in conflict as much as we are prone to think at times, but do very often give us the opportunity to test the spirits whether they be of God or not. Our personal feelings, our traditions can deceive us, and we must learn to wait upon God as we work our way through to a consensus with the church. Praise God for the gift of His Spirit to us, and for the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they are distributed to the believers within the Body of Christ.