

Week 5 – Holy Spirit – The Gifts of the Spirit

Over the next couple of weeks we are going to look at the subject of gifts of the Spirit or spiritual gifts...

Today is an introduction and an overview. Next week and the week after we will look at the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy.

What are spiritual gifts?

Tim Keller: "Differing abilities given by the Holy Spirit to each believer to meet needs in such a way that it creates a community of people who are growing into the fullness of the character of Christ."

New Testament lists of spiritual gifts

No list is meant to be exhaustive – not even the addition of all twenty or twenty-one entries from the five lists should be taken as exhaustive.

1 Cor. 12:8-11

Message of wisdom / Message of knowledge / Faith / Gifts of healing / Miraculous powers / Prophecy / Distinguishing between spirits / Kinds of tongues / Interpretation of tongues

1 Cor. 12:28

Apostles/Prophets/Teachers/Miracles/Gifts of healing/Helping/Guidance/Different kinds of tongues

Romans 12:6-8

Prophecy/serving/teaching/encouraging/giving/leading/showing mercy

Ephesians 4:11

Apostles/Prophets/Evangelists/Pastors/Teachers

1 Peter 4:11

Speaking/serving

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes to address misuse of spiritual gifts in the church and the assumption that exercising these gifts somehow elevates their users to a higher spiritual level or a place of superiority. In all likelihood he is inserting himself between two groups – those that exercise spiritual gifts in an excessive and unbridled manner, thinking themselves somehow more spiritual than others – and those that look on and want these people to sit down and shut up.

Things we learn about the gifts of the Spirit:

1 Corinthians 12

12 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, **I do not want you to be uninformed.**

The Holy Spirit distributes them as He wills

There are different gifts, but they are given by the same Spirit

Gifts are not for you – they are for the common good

In C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Father Christmas gives the Pevensie children magical items to aid in their quest to defeat the White Witch, famously declaring: "These are your presents... and they are tools, not toys. The time to use them is perhaps near at hand."

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the **manifestation of the Spirit** is given for the common good.

¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

The different passages speak of gifts (*charismata*) and manifestations (*pneumatikos*)

Pneumatikos – spirituals / spiritual things / stuff the Spirit does

Language of spiritual gifts – people often think “spiritual superpowers”

Manifestations of the Holy Spirit

This is the kind of stuff the Holy Spirit does – if you open your heart and life, this is the kind of stuff that will manifest in your life. All of this is potentially available to all followers of Jesus.

“We should be like an orchestra: each part making its own unique contribution to the symphonic harmony.” D.A.Carson

“God establishes his brand of harmony by a lavish grant of highly diverse gifts, each contributing to the body as a whole.”

D.A.Carson

We are given a portion. We are unified but diverse. We differ a lot in what we see and what resonates with us and what we think is important and what annoys us and what thrills us because of the

gifts that we are given. There are considerable difference within a local church but also between local churches – depending on the gift mix at play.

We have unity and diversity in the Body

These gifts are given by the grace of God

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Romans 12:4-9

⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ **We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us**

Practical implications of this:

There should not be any passive, unemployed Christians in the church.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

There are certain things and tasks where you are absolutely the best person for the job. You were literally made for this.

There are some challenges around our different giftings.

In small churches, people end up doing a lot of stuff that they are not particularly gifted at.

In bigger churches, some people attend and like it that they don't have to do anything, or struggle to find their area of gifting. Some people come because they can get lots of input without any output. Not doing anything in church – just attending – is not what you are supposed to be doing – you are violating the will of the Holy Spirit for your life if that is the case....

It is so important that there are no passive Christians

We ought to expect a level of creative tension and conflict in the church because of spiritual gifts

Tim Keller – first church pastorate as a 24-year old

3 people came to see him in his first week.

Trailers – we don't have a heart for evangelism

Trailers – poor people – we don't have a heart for poor people

Trailers – problem with our church, we don't know how to organise and strategize

All three were right – all had gifts – there is contention. The reason I see things the way I do is that I have a gift – there is going to be an amount of chaos / anarchy – bubbling up all over. There will always be a certain amount of contention on what we should be doing and focusing on.

There should be no jealousy or pride

(Gift envy)

Some gifts have more prominence. Some have an elevated position. No pride if you are given a gift or position. No jealousy or envy if you aren't.

No gift envy or projection.

1 Corinthians 12:21-27

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

We should not try to coerce or force the work of the Holy Spirit

The gifts are distributed and the manifestations of the Spirit occur when he wills...

Only God can make the wind blow – Sam Storms

Imagine that you've decided to go sailing. The problem is that you know next to nothing about sailing! So, you go to the store and you find several books to find out what's involved. You

carefully read them and then you talk to a veteran sailor who answers questions for you. The next day you rent a sailboat. You take the sailboat out onto the lake. Your excitement is at fever pitch, though you're also afraid. But you follow the instructions you've read and the counsel you have received from the experienced sailor, and you launch your boat into the water. You carefully monitor each step and hoist the sail.

At that precise moment you learn a crucial lesson. You can study sailing. You might even be able to build a sailboat. You can seek counsel from the wisest and most veteran of sailors. You can cast your boat onto the most beautiful of lakes under a bright and inviting sun. You can successfully hoist the sail. But – and this is a big “but” – **only God can make the wind blow.**

You and I can study the Bible. We can learn everything there is to know about spiritual gifts. We can honour and submit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. We can orchestrate a worship service according to biblical guidelines. We can do everything that lies in the power of a Christian man or woman. **But only the Spirit can make the wind blow!**

We cannot compel the presence of the Spirit. We cannot create the operation of a spiritual gift in accordance with biblical standards of conduct. ... If the Spirit chooses not to move, we cannot, indeed we must not, attempt to coerce him. And we should not give up ever trying to sail again because of a calm day when the wind wasn't blowing. Most important of all, don't try to blow into the sail yourself or forget the wind and use paddles instead. That's not sailing.

The Holy Spirit wants to be pursued but refuses to be pushed. Never lose sight of the fact that whether or not a particular spiritual gift is manifest and to whom it may or may not be given is

entirely up to the Spirit himself. Gifts are bestowed and operate at his discretion, not yours or mine.

I'm saying this as a word of encouragement to those who are hungry for the Spirit's power, who carefully do everything that the Bible and practical wisdom requires, but who see little or no results. Don't give up! Don't look for someone to blame. Don't conclude that the gifts are "not for today". Rather, resolve in your heart to bring your boat to the lake every day until Jesus returns! Launch onto the waters and pray for wind! I'm simple-minded enough to believe that God will honour that sort of persistent obedience and propel your boat by the wind of his Spirit. (Sam Storms)

How can we use the spiritual gifts rightly?

Love and desire

We are told **four times** to **eagerly desire** spiritual gifts.

The Holy Spirit wants to be pursued and will not be pushed.

1 Cor. 14:1 "Pursue love and **eagerly desire** the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."

Eagerly desire:

Don't be cynical. Don't be closed down. Don't just be intellectually curious, open-minded – be zealous for, burn with passion for ... Eagerly desire spiritual gifts.

But exercise them in love.

Love is sandwiched between the two key chapters of 1 Cor. 12 and 14 in 1 Cor. 13. It is absolutely central to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

D A Carson reminds us of the indispensability of love.

“No matter how exalted my gift of tongues, without love I am nothing more than a resounding gong or a clanging symbol”

“The least he is saying is that under these conditions I become empty, meaningless noise. There is no spiritual significance to my gift of tongues.”

“In none of these instances does Paul depreciate spiritual gifts, but he refuses to recognise any positive assessment of any of them, unless the gift is discharged in love.

“The greatest evidence that heaven has invaded our sphere, that the Spirit has been poured out upon us, that we are citizens of a kingdom not yet consummated is Christian love.”

“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:16)

This is a genuine work of the Holy Spirit and one that we desperately need in these days...

Paul reminds the Romans

“God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5)

And just in case we get some mushy sentimental idea of what love is and what it looks like, Paul reminds us of some natural behavioural traits that demonstrate and epitomise love:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (1 Corinthians 13)

1 Cor. 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit

Community group questions:

1. **According to 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, what do we learn about the source, purpose, and distribution of spiritual gifts?**
 - How does this challenge common misunderstandings about spiritual gifts?
2. **Tim Keller defines spiritual gifts as abilities given by the Holy Spirit to help build a Christ-centred community.**
 - How have you seen spiritual gifts strengthen and serve others in the church?
3. **Paul compares the church to a human body in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.**
 - What does this analogy teach us about unity, diversity, and our dependence on one another?
4. **The message emphasizes that spiritual gifts are "tools, not toys."**
 - What is the difference between using spiritual gifts for personal recognition and using them for the common good?
5. **Read Ephesians 2:10.**
 - How does this verse support the idea that there should be no passive Christians?
 - In what ways are you currently serving God and others with the gifts He has given you?
6. **Geoff notes that different gifts can create different perspectives and priorities within a church.**
 - How can we handle disagreements and tensions in a way that honours both diversity and unity in the body of Christ?
7. **Read 1 Corinthians 12:21–27.**
 - Why is jealousy, pride, or "gift envy" harmful to the church?
 - Have you ever struggled to appreciate your own gifts or the gifts of others?
8. **Sam Storms uses the illustration of sailing to describe our dependence on the Holy Spirit.**
 - What does it look like to faithfully "hoist the sails" while still recognizing that only God can "make the wind blow"?
9. **Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 and 14:1.**
 - Why does Paul place the chapter on love between his teachings on spiritual gifts?
 - What dangers arise when gifts are exercised without love?

10. **The message encourages believers to "follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit."**
 - What practical steps can you take this week to pursue both greater love for others and greater openness to the Holy Spirit's work in your life?