

GOD GIVES YOU GIFTS – PART 3

GIFTS FROM THE SPIRIT

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In this series, we have seen that the greatest gift of all, the key without which all other gifts remain fruitless, is God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

And we have learned that God the Father has also given every one of us Motivational Gifts (as described by Paul in the 12th chapter of his letter to the Romans) that establish our diversity, define our varied personalities and temperaments, and guide our individual destinies in life.

Last week, we discovered the Inspirational Gifts that the Lord Jesus Christ has provided to promote our spiritual maturity as the Body of Christ (as described by Paul to the Ephesians).

This week, I am eager to speak to you about the Supernatural Gifts that the Holy Spirit brings to develop functional unity in the Church.

To learn about this, let's turn to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12.

Different Kinds

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NLT)

⁴ Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. ⁶ There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. ⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.

Notice that this passage identifies in summary the three sources of gifts that I've been speaking about:

- Supernatural gifts from the Spirit (v 4)
- Inspirational gifts from the Son (v 5)
- Motivational gifts from the Father (v 6)

Today's topic begins to come into focus in verse 7:

- **A** spiritual gift
- is given to **each of us**
- as a **means of helping**
- the **entire church**

I have already asserted that these supernatural gifts have been given by the Holy Spirit in order to develop functional (not theoretical) unity in the Church. In other words, to help us live as one—to help the entire church live in the love of Christ.

Arena for Controversy

Yet, it should be plain to everyone, to one degree or another, that the subject of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit has, in fact, been the cause of a multitude of disruptions in the church. People have expressed disagreement over the gifts of the Spirit in every way from contentious arguments to tar-

and-feathering and lynchings. There has been more dissension and division over this theme than any other. This is true.

For many, the disagreements have been theoretical in nature—arguments about theological understanding—both parties lacking any personal experience in the subject.

For others, differing, often bizarre, practices of the gifts have provoked bickering.

In both cases, the purpose of the gifts was overlooked, in theory as well as practice: to help the entire church live together in unity.

Supernatural Gifts

Let's read further:

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 (NLT)

⁸ *To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another he gives the gift of special knowledge.*

⁹ *The Spirit gives special faith to another, and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹ It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.*

Paul describes nine types of gifts:

- Knowledge gifts
 - A word of wisdom
 - A word of knowledge
 - Discerning of spirits
- Power gifts
 - Faith
 - Healing
 - Miracles
- Vocal gifts
 - Prophecy
 - Delivering a message in unknown tongues
 - Interpreting a message in tongues

Why have I called them “supernatural” gifts? Because each of these represents an action that goes beyond natural human ability. A “word of knowledge” means knowledge of facts that could not be known by the usual channels of observation or word-of-mouth. “Power to work miracles” speaks for itself. These are abilities beyond nature; they are supernatural, requiring the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Are these the only supernatural gifts, these nine? Hardly. Like the other lists of gifts, the list is suggestive, rather than limiting. Think of them, instead, as nine categories of spiritual gifts. For instance, a prophetic message may come as a dream in the night, or as a vision in the day, or as the sound of a voice, or the appearance of writing, or through an illuminated passage of scripture, or simply a sudden awareness—but all such manifestations present a prophetic revelation. And the prophecy may be given in a spoken message, or a song, or in writing, or illustrated by actions—all expressions of the same type of gift.

Think of the many different ways Jesus Christ healed people in the New Testament narratives. All expressions of one type of gift.

Stick to the Purpose

Once you get beyond the arguments of whether or not spiritual gifts still happen in the church—an argument which can only be made in theory, since, in fact, spiritual gifts have been operating somewhere in the worldwide church during all of its twenty centuries—the discussions that steal most of our valuable time are over how the gifts are used or demonstrated.

In public or in private? By diverse methods or similar? By some people or by all? In clarity or in fuzziness? In clamor or orderliness? By frenzy or by calm? While these questions deserve some reasonable attention, few will yield to an “either/or” approach, and everyone will not be satisfied, whatever the outcome.

Far more important than the “how” of spiritual gifts, is the “why.” In fact, if we hold their purpose squarely in our sights, the “how” issues will resolve themselves.

So, what is the purpose of supernatural gifts? Why has the Holy Spirit given them to the Church?

Some believe they are badges of merit, the medals of honor worn by the soldiers of the Lord. At least, they wear them with pride, looking down their spiritual noses at those who do not show them, as if to say, “God loves me more than you,” or, “I’ve paid the price.”

Some consider their gifts marketable sources of revenue. They prostitute themselves by offering their gifts in exchange for a contribution. They only bring them to your town for a fee. Accommodating patrons pay to watch them perform, and pay even more for the chance to be a participant.

Some consider their gifts to be tools of exploitation. They propose that they have been singled out by God for such power, and therefore deserve the blind allegiance of their people. They use their gifts to nurture dependency and favoritism among those they like, and to frighten, belittle, or neglect those they dislike.

Are these legitimate purposes for the Supernatural Gifts of the Spirit? NO!!!

What is the REAL purpose of spiritual gifts?

According to the Scripture:

“As a means of helping the entire church” (1 Cor 12:7)

Servant Gifts

They are the *servant* gifts of the Body of Christ.

Their service is accomplished in a multitude of ways:

To wisely advise the church (1 Cor 12:8)

To heal the church (1 Cor 12:9)

To provide miracles (1 Cor 12:10)

To provide spiritual intelligence (1 Cor 12:10)

To offer spiritual understanding (1 Cor 12:10)

To promote harmony and mutual care (1 Cor 12:25)

To strengthen the church (1 Cor 14:4)

To reveal the presence of the Lord (1 Cor 14:25)

To build up the church (1 Cor 14:26)

Use Them Well

It is by the supernatural gifts from the Holy Spirit that the Church develops the functional unity described by the image of the human body in 1 Corinthians 12. Harmony and mutual care grow from the proper use of these wonderful gifts. If your gifts are not developing greater harmony and increasing care for one another in the church, then you are not using them properly.

I don't care how gifted you may think you are, or how gifted you actually may be. When the spiritual gifts are operated under the government of the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ, they *always* increase harmony and mutual care. That's the Biblical measuring stick.

Who wouldn't approve that standard? Who wouldn't appreciate those values? Who wouldn't find those characteristics in a church attractive?

The Supernatural Gifts of the Spirit are not intended to frighten or confuse people, but to build them up.

Which Gift?

Is it all right to ask for a particular gift? More than all right, you are urged to "desire the most helpful gifts" (1 Cor 12:31). You can ask God for anything! But leave the final decision in His hands, for "He alone decides which gift each person should have" (1 Cor 12:11).

By the way, which is the "most helpful" gift? The one that is needed at the moment!

How shall you know which gift(s) you have been given? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you. Most often, He will not simply *tell* you which it is, He will *show* you. After you have genuinely asked Him to reveal your gift, pay attention to your circumstances to see what needs surface that require a gift from the Holy Spirit. When you think you see an opportunity, ask the Holy Spirit for the appropriate gift, listen, and then step out according to your faith to minister the gift.

If your motivation is to love and your objective is to develop greater harmony and care, you will seldom miss.

The wonderful Supernatural Gifts of the Holy Spirit are for all of God's people — both to give to each other and to receive from each other — so that we may enjoy functional unity in our life together and our service for Christ.

In conclusion, I urge you to take Paul's advice from the beginning of chapter 14: "*Let love be your highest goal, but also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives.*"