

# THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

First Corinthians 12a

## Introduction

There is perhaps no subject concerning which there is greater ignorance in the church today than the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The ignorance is on both sides of this controversial issue, among *charismatics* and among *cessationists*.

The word "charismatic" comes to us from the Greek word *charisma*, the word for spiritual gifts. Charismatics are those who believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in Scripture are still functioning today. Sadly, many charismatics are really *charismaniacs*! Their ignorance is that they revel in the unscriptural exercise of certain gifts, and they accept all manner of wild phenomena as valid, with or without a biblical basis.

"Cessationists" are those who believe that certain gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased to function in the church today. They confine gifts like miracles, healings, tongues, and prophecy to the apostolic founding of the church in the first century. Their ignorance is that they overlook church history and they take Scripture out of context to prove their points.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and said, "Concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant." All of the gifts were being exercised at Corinth; that tells us Paul was **not** a cessationist! But Paul had to correct their unscriptural exercise of the gifts; that tells us Paul was **not** a charismaniac!

We want to be like Paul - neither cessationists nor charismaniacs. All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to us today, and we want to exercise them according to the guidelines clearly set forth in the Scriptures.

In the opening verses of First Corinthians Twelve you will learn that God doesn't want you to be ignorant (1) about how spiritual gifts

operate, (2) about where spiritual gifts originate, or (3) about why spiritual gifts are obtained.

## #1 God Doesn't Want You To Be Ignorant About How Spiritual Gifts Operate (v1-3)

Over the years I have noted that people usually have a background, and that their background can be a stronger influence on their behavior than the Bible. One time, while teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I read the words of First Corinthians 14:2 & 3,

"For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men."

The words clearly state that, when you speak in tongues, you are speaking to God - *not* to men. You speak for God to men through prophecy.

Clear as that may be, one man took issue with me and was visibly upset. You see, he had grown up in a charismatic church where people would speak in tongues and then the tongues would be interpreted as God speaking to men. He never would agree with what the Bible said! His background was a stronger influence on his behavior than the Bible.

This was a problem in Corinth, as you see in the opening verses of our text:

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:  
1 Corinthians 12:2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.

The Gentile believers at Corinth had been saved out of Greek mystery religions in which wild spiritual experiences were normal. These people were accustomed to being "carried away" in experiences that were called either *ecstasies* or *enthusiasms*:

"Ecstasies" were supernatural contacts with the pagan deities. Through frenzied hypnotic chants and ceremonies the worshippers experienced semiconscious euphoric trances.

"Enthusiasms" involved chanting, divination, and dreams.<sup>1</sup>

Ecstasies and enthusiasms were coveted spiritual experiences. In them you were carried away by the power of the deity - whom we would call a demon - having no control over what you said or did.

The Corinthians brought this background into the church! They were used to being carried away in their worship, having no control over what they said or did; they carried this practice over into their exercise of spiritual gifts as Christians. That's why, in First Corinthians 14:23, Paul could say,

1 Corinthians 14:23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

Paul told them that the gifts of the Holy Spirit do not operate like ecstasies and enthusiasms:

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Paul's correction to them is twofold: When the gifts of the Spirit are operating, the Holy Spirit will not violate *your will* nor will He violate *God's Word!*

The Holy Spirit Will Not Violate Your Will:

Look at Paul's statement, "no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed." The people had undoubtedly heard this said in their pagan ecstasies and enthusiasms; perhaps they had said this themselves while out of control. They had been unwilling participants, doing and saying things against their own will.

The Holy Spirit will not come upon you in such a way as to violate your own will and cause you to do or say something as an unwilling participant! Paul will later amplify this, saying in First Corinthians 14:32, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, p. 280.

This is an especially important principle for charismatics, so they don't act like charismaniacs...

The Holy Spirit Will Not Violate God's Word:

The Spirit cannot cause you to do or say anything that is contrary to God's Word. Paul says, "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." "Jesus is Lord!" was an early Christian creed; it was a doctrinal statement. One of the things Paul is saying here is that however the Holy Spirit gifts you, it will be in doctrinal accord and agreement with everything in God's already revealed Word. The Holy Spirit will never contradict Himself.

This is an especially important principle for cessationists.

#2 God Does Not Want You To Be Ignorant  
About Where Spiritual Gifts Originate  
(v4-6)

Sometimes it is important to state the obvious. It should be obvious that spiritual gifts come from God, but Paul takes the time to state it anyway, in verses four, five, and six:

1 Corinthians 12:4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.

1 Corinthians 12:6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

God the Holy Spirit is mentioned in verse four; God the Son, Jesus Christ your Lord, is mentioned in verse five; God the Father is mentioned in verse six. The whole trinity is involved in spiritual gifts! Spiritual gifts originate with God.

That brings up an important point: Gifts are *given* to you. They are never *earned* or *learned*. That is obvious enough; yet many ignore the obvious:

Believers see certain gifts as evidence they have earned God's favor and reward in their lives for maturity and holiness...

Other believers go to seminars to learn how to obtain certain gifts...

God sovereignly gives you the gifts that are most appropriate with His plan for your walk and work and witness.

The question always comes up, "What are the best gifts to have, and how do I receive them?" We will answer that question when we get to First Corinthians 12:31. For now, let me say this:

"Best" is a relative term. The best gift to have is the one that is most needed in the church at that time!

As to how you receive a gift or gifts: They are given sovereignly by God! You have little choice. Leave it up to your wise and gracious God to give you what He deems as right and good to benefit you and to build up others.

These verses contain a wonderful theology of the gifts, speaking as they do of the "diversity," or the *variety*, of "gifts... ministries... [and] activities."

There are a variety of gifts. Paul mentions nine in verses eight and nine; at the end of chapter twelve, in verse twenty-eight, he adds three more. There are more gifts listed in Romans Twelve; in Ephesians Four; and in First Peter Four. Next week we will occupy ourselves with a discussion of the individual gifts.

There are a variety of ministries. The NIV Bible translates the word "ministries" as *service*. We each serve the Lord in different ways, depending upon how he has gifted us. If we remember this, we will not compare ourselves to others and covet their gifts! The gifts God has chosen for you are the best gifts.

There are a variety of activities. This means that people with the same gift will exercise the gift differently. The Holy Spirit respects your unique personality and idiosyncracies. Don't try to copy the way someone else ministers! Don't feel more or less spiritual based on the style of your ministry.

This is Paul's theology of spiritual gifts: Gifts originate with God; there are many gifts; one or more is sovereignly given to you to serve the

Lord; you will exercise your gift or gifts in ways that are consistent with your uniqueness as a child of God.

### #3 God Does Not Want You To Be Ignorant About Why Spiritual Gifts Are Obtained (v7-11)

Why obtain spiritual gifts?

1 Corinthians 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

When you exercise spiritual gifts, the Holy Spirit is *manifested* through you and He *ministers* to God's saints.

"Manifested" means that the Holy Spirit makes Himself felt through the exercise of the gifts. Let's give an example. Many times on Sunday morning folks come up to me after the teaching and claim that I was speaking directly to and about their lives! What is really happening is that the Holy Spirit is manifesting Himself to you - making Himself felt through the exercise of the gift of teaching. The result is that you are powerfully ministered to - knowing that God Himself has been speaking directly to your heart.

Concerning this subject of the Holy Spirit manifesting Himself, Pastor Chuck Smith cautions us,

"The true gifts of the Holy Spirit, when manifested in a scriptural and correct way, will always focus people's hearts on Jesus Christ. Jesus said that the Spirit would not testify of Himself, but of Christ. The scriptural exercise of the gifts will always give you a fresh vision of Jesus Christ and His glory, causing you to fall in love with Him, and to be drawn to Him all over again. Your heart will almost explode with love and appreciation for [Who] Jesus is and what He is able to do."<sup>2</sup>

When someone exercises a gift, ask yourself: Who is getting the glory? Be careful when ministering to others that you don't begin to subtly promote yourself!

The gifts are "given to each one for the profit of all." The purpose of the gifts is to profit the whole church. The focus of the gifts is on others, on those you minister to.

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<sup>2</sup>*Living Water*, p. 90.

One author put it this way: Spiritual gifts are not toys you play with; they are tools you build with!

Some of those tools are listed for you:

1 Corinthians 12:8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,

1 Corinthians 12:9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,

1 Corinthians 12:10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

These and the other gifts listed in Scripture are the tools that the Holy Spirit distributes to build-up the church:

1 Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

The word for "works" is *energeo*, where we get our word *energy*. The Holy Spirit energizes and empowers these gifts, giving one or more to you as He sees fit, so you can best serve God's saints.

Conclusion

God does not want you to be ignorant about spiritual gifts!

Don't be or become a charismaniac... Don't be or become a cessationist...

Instead, take Pastor Chuck's advice:

"May nothing stand in the way of [the Holy Spirit] imparting to us those gifts that might benefit us and edify the church. Let us commit ourselves and the exercise of these gifts of the Spirit to God. Then may God empower us, and use us, as He sees fit."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 97.