

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

FIRST CORINTHIANS 12b

Introduction

Some years ago one of the ladies in our fellowship caused some confusion in her family regarding the character of the man she was engaged to marry. In her letters to her family and friends she frequently mentioned her fiancé's DET (pronounced *debt*). The more she spoke of his DET, the more troubled her family and friends understandably became. Finally someone realized that she wasn't describing financial "debt"; her fiancé was in the military, where DET is short for *detachment*! Everyone breathed a sigh of relief once the term she was using was properly defined.

We want to take some time to define the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What is meant by the word of wisdom, or the word of knowledge? How is the gift of faith different from faith that every believer has and is called upon to grow in? Those are the kinds of things we need to try to nail down so that the words we are using are not causing unnecessary confusion among God's people.

Having said that, we want to remain cautious. Definitions are like dissections: You can learn a lot about an animal by dissecting it, but when you're done it is a lifeless corpse rather than a vibrant body. We want to keep our definitions and discussions subordinate to the Bible's teaching that the gifts are a vital part of a vibrant, living body - the body of Jesus Christ on earth.

To begin with I will make a somewhat arbitrary distinction of the gifts. In studying the Bible texts, commentators usually see two or three "categories" into which gifts can be organized. Bear in mind, these are only for the purposes of organizing the material into a more concise teaching; they are not categories that the Bible itself speaks of, and some gifts are hard, if not impossible, to put into a single category.

Here is how, for our purposes of study, we will organize the gifts: There are *speaking* gifts, there are *sign* gifts, and there are *servicing* gifts. The Holy Spirit gives some of you speaking gifts; He gives some of you sign gifts; He gives some of you servicing gifts.

This week we will take a brief look at the speaking gifts...

The Holy Spirit Gives Some Of You Speaking Gifts

Gifts are supernatural enablements that the Holy Spirit gives you in order that you might manifest the presence of Jesus as you minister to His people on earth. They are not your natural abilities; they are not your natural abilities enhanced by the Holy Spirit. They are the Holy Spirit's supernatural enablements. You should certainly dedicate all of your natural abilities to God for Him to use as He sees fit. But when we talk about the gifts of the Spirit, we are talking about enablements that are beyond your abilities.

What we are calling the "speaking" gifts are a good example of this. Many people have wonderful natural speaking abilities; or they have honed their meager natural abilities by much study and practice. Yet, try as you might, you cannot learn to exercise the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, tongues, the interpretation of tongues, teaching, or exhortation. These speaking gifts can only come from the supernatural enabling of the Holy Spirit. Let's look briefly at each of them.

First on Paul's list in First Corinthians 12:8 is "the word of wisdom through the spirit." As a believer, you are to grow in wisdom. Solomon said, in Proverbs 4:7, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom." As you study of God's Word, you will begin more and more to see things the way God sees them. You will grow in wisdom.

But here we are not talking about the kind of wisdom that comes from experience or exposure to Scripture. Beyond wisdom in general, there is a supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit that is called "the word of wisdom." It isn't a reservoir of wisdom that you can tap into at will; it is the Holy Spirit anointing you in a time of ministering to someone,

giving you the right words to say. It is the Holy Spirit using you to say just the words Jesus would say to the person or persons in need.

Jesus often demonstrated the word of wisdom. When asked if it were lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not - a question with a no-win answer - Jesus exercised the word of wisdom. "Show Me a coin," He said, then asked, "Whose likeness and inscription are on it?" The crowd said, "Caesar's." Jesus replied, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's."¹ It was the word of wisdom in operation.

I've shared with you before that many times in counseling I have no idea what to say to a person. I've memorized Scripture; I've had lots of experience with situations similar to theirs; but I realize that without God's help my words would be the law that kills rather than the Spirit that gives life. So I start talking anyway! And after fumbling around a lot, the Holy Spirit will put a Scripture, or a Bible story, or a metaphor in my mind that I had never thought of before. As I share it, there is a wonderful ministry of the Holy Spirit to the heart of the one whom God loves. It's the word of wisdom at work.

The word of knowledge is the next gift Paul mentions. This is not the accumulation of information you can know by acquisition or study. All of you can and should learn as much as possible about God's Word. But that is not the word of knowledge.

The word of knowledge is information given to you supernaturally. It is a divine impartation of knowledge concerning a person or situation that did not come through natural thought processes. It is information that, as Pastor Chuck Smith says, "God flashes into your mind."

The Apostle Peter, in Acts chapter five, exercised the word of knowledge in his dealings with Ananias and Sapphira. He knew by the word of knowledge that they had lied to God when they claimed to have given the church the full sales price of their property.

It's probably not the word of knowledge when someone has a general "word" that they say is from God. For example: In Honduras, the

¹Luke 20:22-26

Church we visited gave the pulpit to a visiting minister from the US. It didn't take us long to realize he was into the word-faith, positive confession heresy. At the end of his talk, he had a "word" that there were many people in the audience who had kidney problems. I'm sure there were! But generalized kidney problems are not uncommon, and it was so broad a statement that it caused me to seriously doubt that it was the word of knowledge. As Pastor Chuck says,

"Don't get me wrong. I want to be as open minded as I can be - but not so much that I am gullible... When people pass off as spiritual gifts what is not of the Spirit, their actions belittle the genuine and prejudice others against the authentic work of the Spirit."²

Prophecy is next on Paul's list. Prophecy and the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues are the subject of First Corinthians Fourteen; we will look at them more fully when we get to that chapter in subsequent weeks. For now we would define them like this:

Prophecy is a supernaturally inspired and anointed utterance conveying what is on the mind and heart of God; it is speaking forth the Word of God through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It can be a foretelling of the future, but most often it is a *forthtelling* of God's Word. It's exercise brings edification, exhortation, and comfort to the believers.

The gift of tongues is the supernatural enablement to worship God through prayer and praise in a known or unknown language you have not naturally learned.

The interpretation of tongues is obviously a companion gift to tongues. The interpretation of tongues is the Holy Spirit giving you the understanding of tongues spoken by someone else or by yourself even though you don't know the language. And it is an interpretation, *not* a translation. Translation is a word-for-word transfer from one language to another. Interpretation is something that goes farther, explaining the meaning regardless the particular words spoken. The words are not as important in an interpretation as are the concepts being expressed.

²*Living Water*, p. 116.

Prophecy, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues are often classified as sign gifts that ceased to function after the initial founding of the Church by the apostles in the first century. They did not cease to function, and they are still available to you today! We'll say something about why we believe they and the other sign gifts haven't ceased next week, and we'll see the proper way to exercise them in the Church when we get to Chapter Fourteen.

The discerning of spirits is next on Paul's list. Remember when I said earlier that we shouldn't force our categories too much? The discerning of spirits is a good example. Is it a speaking gift? Or is it a sign gift? It's a spiritual gift, and we don't want to try to minimize it by categorizing it. For our purposes we will take a look at it today as a speaking gift.

Again, all of you can and should exercise discernment. There are false teachings and false teachers that you can discern from your study and understanding of the truth of God's Word. There are passages like Second Peter and Jude that teach you how to discern false teachings and false teachers. We need to be discerning in these last days.

The gift of discerning of spirits is something more. According to the Bible, there are two realms coexisting, the natural realm and the spiritual realm. For the most part, we are not conscious of the spiritual realm. Nevertheless it has a very real influence on our lives - either for good or for evil. There is a realm of spirit beings that are hostile to you and your walk with Jesus. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." A battle is being waged in this spiritual realm, and all of you are involved in it. It is in this spiritual realm, and against these hostile beings, that the discernment of spirits comes into play. It is a supernatural enabling to know that a teaching or a prophecy is false, or that a demonic presence or influence is at work.

Discerning of spirits can be frustrating. You can be the only one who has the feeling that something isn't quite right with a person or situation. And it's tough to say to someone, "I have a discernment

about you," when, as yet, there is no tangible evidence of any problem or difficulty. Plus, your own sin nature can cause you to be suspicious or judgmental and then excuse it by saying you have discernment!

Even with all its difficulties, if you even think that you have the discernment of spirits you should act accordingly, as it is God's warning.

Those are the speaking gifts listed in our passage, but those are not all the speaking gifts listed in the Bible. Turn with me to Romans 12:6-8:

Romans 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

Romans 12:7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;

Romans 12:8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Here is another list of gifts. We have already encountered some of these gifts in First Corinthians; but new to us are "ministry," "teaching," "exhortation," "giving," "leading," and "mercy." Let's look at the two speaking gifts on this list - teaching and exhortation.

Like the other things we've talked about, there can be a call on your life to teach whether or not you have the gift of teaching. For example, if you are a parent, you are commanded to teach and train your children.

There is also a gift of teaching. The gift of teaching is the Spirit of God using the man of God to share the Word of God. Ability is not as important as anointing. An uneducated, Spirit-filled man of God is a more reliable source of the truth of God than an unconverted scholar who understands Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic.

Here at Calvary Chapel we make a distinction between teaching and preaching. Preaching is declaring the Gospel to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is essentially evangelistic, proclaiming God's good news that He has provided the forgiveness of sins through His crucified Son, who took our guilt and died in our

place. Preaching persuades people to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Teaching is not for unbelievers; it is for believers. Teaching enables those who have accepted Jesus to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of God, to enable a believer's growth and development.

If you have the gift of teaching, you depend upon the Holy Spirit to empower both your *study* and your *speaking*:

The Holy Spirit must empower your study. Facts, figures, and formulas are good as far as they go. But these alone will not reach hearts. There must be a sense in your studying to teach that God has a message for those people on that day, and that you must discover it through meditation - which is simply the Word of God plus prayer over it. You must have the experience of the Apostle Paul, who said in First Corinthians 11:3, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you."

The Holy Spirit must empower your speaking, too. In Nehemiah 9:20 you read, "You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them." Even though you have prepared, you must go on depending upon the Holy Spirit's anointing in the presentation.

If I am well-studied, I'll be well-prepared. If I'm well-prepared, the Holy Spirit can actually have a greater freedom to use me. I can be confident that I have words He has anointed in my notes. But I can also sense His prompting me to say things I hadn't yet considered, that are not in my notes. Often when this happens I am, without knowing it, exercising the word of wisdom or the word of knowledge or prophecy. It is this Spirit-led preparation and presentation that gives believers the sense that God has been speaking directly to them.

All of us are to exhort and encourage one another. The writer to the Hebrews calls upon all believers to "exhort one another daily."³ We are all to exhort one another to love and good works.

³Hebrews 3:13

There is also a spiritual gift of exhortation. People with the gift of exhortation inspire you to do what you should already be doing. They get you back on track, get your eyes focused on Jesus, and help you see things in their proper biblical perspective. The exhorter is able to direct your attention away from your difficulties and toward the Lord and His power and His love and His concern for you. The exhorter reminds you that God is on His throne.

The classic exhorter in the New Testament is James. Just read his letter and you'll get a feel for the gift. James writes to you and says, "Be mature! Do the things that you are instructed and empowered to do!"

Conclusion

The word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, tongues, the interpretation of tongues, teaching, and exhortation. As we defined them, I pray we did not reduce them to something less than the vibrant, living ministries they are meant to be.

These speaking gifts are active in the church today, and are available to some of you.

The question always comes up: "How do I discover if I have one or more of these gifts?" I've seen many formulas over the years, some good, some not so good. The biblical formula is found inbetween the last verse of First Corinthians Twelve and the first verse of First Corinthians Fourteen.

In verse thirty-one of chapter twelve Paul says,

1 Corinthians 12:31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Then, in First Corinthians 14:1 you read,

1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts...

Inbetween First Corinthians 12:31 and 14:1 is Paul's answer for how you discover your spiritual gift or gifts - First Corinthians Thirteen, the love chapter. **Walk in love towards other believers!** As you do,

you will desire to see them ministered to by God, and you will make yourself available to God. God will then prompt you how to best minister to them. You will find the Holy Spirit flowing through you and then overflowing from you into their lives. Afterward you will look at what happened and be able, to a certain extent, to call it by the name of one or more of the gifts listed in Scripture.

The place to start in discovering your gifts is not with the list of gifts; it is with your love for God and your love for God's people. Love qualifies the statement, "desire the best gifts." The best gifts are the one's that are most suited to ministering to the spiritual need or needs of the people of God who you encounter.

Walk in love, focusing on the needs of others, and you will naturally discover the supernatural gifts the Holy Spirit has sovereignly chosen for you.