

To Be Continued...

The Holy Spirit & His Gifts

First Corinthians 12:4-11

In the blockbuster movie, *Signs*, Joaquin Phoenix's character is a former minor league baseball player. He holds the record for home runs, and, if I'm remembering correctly, for the longest home run.

When asked why, with all that talent, he isn't in the majors, a bystander who grew up with him says, "He holds another record, too - for the most strike outs."

To which he comments, "It just felt wrong not to swing."

The believers in Corinth were, in a sense, swinging for the spiritual fence in their use and abuse of the gift of tongues. When we get to chapter fourteen you'll see that they were all speaking in tongues simultaneously without any concern for interpreting what was being said or for the exercise of other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Tongues was their version of the home run. Paul is going to tell them that they were striking out, spiritually speaking.

He begins his argument here, in verses four through eleven.

While there is much to learn here, the main thrust - Paul's main point - is that God the Holy Spirit has provided a variety of gifts to be exercised and manifested within the church, and that this diversity is far more spiritual than focusing on any one particular gift.

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

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

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

You can't help but see Paul referring to God as three-in-one; as a trinity of Spirit (v4), Son (v5), and Father (v6). He doesn't explain it; who can? He assumes it.

- The Holy Spirit is especially associated with "diversities of gifts," in that we are later told He distributes individual gifts to believers as He sees fit.
- Jesus is associated with "differences of ministries," emphasizing the servant aspect of the gifts.
- The Father is associated with "diversities of activities." It can be translated "effectual working," emphasizing that the Father has a plan in the the manifesting of the gifts to accomplish His purposes in the church and in Christians.

Since the Holy Spirit gives out various gifts in order for us to serve others in a Christlike manner and thereby build up the church and one another according to the plan of God the Father, to concentrate on and emphasize one gift above any other doesn't make sense. There should be a variety, a diversity, if God is truly working.

The Corinthian emphasis on tongues was simply not what God intended.

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

When a gift of the Holy Spirit is exercised, we can say it is a "manifestation of the Spirit." By it He shows His supernatural presence in the assembly of believers.

His gift or gifts are "given to each one." We take that to mean that every believer is gifted in some manner; or, as some like to say, every believer has at least one spiritual gift, if not more than one.

Christians can stress over discovering their gift or gifts. There are even spiritual gift questionnaires that attempt to help you to discover your gift or gifts.

The best way to discover your gift or gifts is to be a part of a local fellowship of believers, and to assemble with them. As you do, God the Holy Spirit will prompt you to minister to others - to serve them - in certain ways. He will manifest His supernatural presence in the assembly of believers through you.

Over time you will see that He has given you a particular gift; or you will see that the way He uses you can be described loosely by one of the gifts listed somewhere in Scripture.

There are lists, by the way, here in First Corinthians twelve; in Romans twelve; and in Ephesians four.

I don't think those lists are exhaustive. We need to see that the Holy Spirit isn't bound by our definition and understanding of the gifts - as if there are only nine, or fifteen, or twenty-one, which only, always, operate a certain way, or at certain times.

A key is to realize that the gifts are "for the profit of all." Again, I must stress, a lot of what Paul is doing in chapters twelve and thirteen is laying the groundwork for his correction in chapter fourteen. All of them speaking simultaneously in tongues, with no interpretation, was *not* "for the profit of all." In fact, he will say that a person speaking in tongues, publicly with no interpretation, can only profit himself or herself.

Warren Wiersbe has a clever way of putting into perspective what Paul is saying. He says, "the gifts are tools to build with - not toys to play with."

To be fair to charismatics who emphasize tongues, conservative cessationists who, on a practical basis, emphasize only the gift of teaching are just as guilty of stifling diversity.

Granted, I'd rather hear the Word taught for a few minutes than listen to a bunch of people speaking in tongues; but the goal should be to encourage diversity in the kinds of ways Paul will make clear as he gets deeper into his correction of the Corinthians.

A list of gifts follows. It is not meant to be exhaustive. It doesn't seem to be organized in any discernible manner.

Paul had just said that there should be a variety, a diversity, of gifts being exercised to manifest the presence of the Spirit; and now he throws-out to us some of the ways the Spirit *could* and *should* be manifested. He'll include tongues, but it is certainly not exclusive the way it was in Corinth.

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

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

1Co 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.

Paul does not define any of these gifts for us. We have to do that for ourselves as we see them exercised in the New Testament, by either Jesus or His followers.

Let me give a quick, working definition of the gifts listed here.

The word of knowledge is a supernatural revelation by the Holy Spirit of certain facts in the mind of God. God gives you a revelation by the Spirit of some detail of His infinite knowledge about a person or situation that you have no way of finding out. The first thing to do when you receive a work of knowledge is to pray whether you should share it with the person, or church, or whether it should be kept between you and God so that you might intercede for the individual.

For example: Peter knew Annanias and Sapphira were lying.

The word of wisdom is an unprepared inspired word from God given by the Holy Spirit spontaneously to meet a particular crisis situation or answer some question directed at you.

For example: Any of Jesus' amazing answers to seemingly impossible questions, like, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?"

Prophecy, in it's simplest form, it is a supernaturally inspired and anointed utterance conveying what is on the heart and mind of God.

Its purpose is edification, exhortation, and comfort of the entire Body.

- Edification means that prophecy will build-up those that hear.
- Exhortation means to encourage, urge-on or stir-up love.
- Comfort means to console.

While there are examples of future prophecies, e.g., Agabus telling Paul he'd be bound if he went to Jerusalem, the more normal use of the gift in the church is the speaking forth of God's Word. Since we have the completed Word of God, a valuable exercise of prophecy is to share Scripture God puts on our hearts.

Dreams and visions (subject to being judged for their character and content) would also be manifestations of the gift of prophecy.

The gift of faith refers to a supernatural conviction that God will reveal his power or mercy in a special way in a specific instance. You know the thing desired will come to pass because it is a gift of faith that comes direct from God, not your experience or spiritual maturity.

For example: Peter and John's healing of the man at the Temple gate. Before they exercised a gift of healing, they had faith to fix their eyes upon him and know God was going to work.

Healing can take place in a variety of ways:

- By the individual praying for himself to be healed and having faith to expect the results (James 5:15, Matthew 9:29);
- By having the elders pray for you (James 5:14);
- And by praying for each other in the Body (James 5:16).

- Also, healings take place as a gift that is given by God and can occur without anything accomplished by others. It is by God's sheer grace and generosity that He may choose to heal and no one can lay claim to the reasons why the healing took place but God.

Please notice that the text calls these "gifts of healings," in the plural. That teaches us each manifestation of healing is a unique gift; **no one has the gift of healing in the sense they can go around healing at will.**

The working of miracles is also in the plural. It is asking God to do something that supersedes the natural laws that we know, in order to meet a need and glorify God.

We see many healings, many miracles, performed not just by Jesus, but by His followers. While perhaps it is true that God ordained more healings and more miracles at the time of Christ and shortly thereafter, there's no Scriptural reason to say they no longer are gifts that can be manifested.

Gordon Fee writes,

There has also been a spate of literature whose singular urgency has been to justify the limiting of these gifts to the first-century church. It is fair to say of this literature that its authors have found what they were looking for and have thereby continued to reject such manifestations in the church. It can also be fairly said that such rejection is not exegetically based, but results in every case from a prior hermeneutical and theological commitment.

In other words, the arguments that certain gifts have ceased is not from the Bible itself.

The discerning of spirits can refer to the ability to know a false teaching when presented; the ability to know whether someone is demon-possessed; or to know if someone is not what they say they are.

For example: Peter manifested the discernment of spirits when he rebuked Simon's request to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tongues is a language given to a Christian that is unknown to him. It is praise or prayer directed to God, *not* men (First Corinthians 14:2). Its purpose is to edify and strengthen the Christian exercising it. If it is interpreted, it absolutely edifies others.

The interpretation of tongues is being given the understanding of tongues spoken by someone else or yourself, even though you don't know the language. And since tongues is praise or prayer to God, not men, a true interpretation will be praise or prayer also.

"Translation" can mean "to put into words." This tells us it isn't necessarily a word-for-word translation, but more like giving the sense of what was said.

The example for tongues and its interpretation is Paul's comments that he spoke in tongues quite a lot. And, even though they did it wrong, the church at Corinth was definitely exercising the gift of tongues.

Paul listed tongues and interpretation last, not because they were the least important, but to show that they were merely part of the Holy Spirit's potential for manifesting His presence to the church.

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

The meetings in Corinth had none of the rich diversity of gifts that would have truly built-up the body of Jesus Christ.

He "works **all** these things," not just one or two. When we are gathered together, He knows what each of us needs, and can prompt another of us to exercise just the right gift.

The Holy Spirit does it "as He wills," not according to our definition of what appears most spiritual. We must be sensitive to His leading and not our own traditions.

"Distributing to each one individually" means you have a role to play in the church - a servant's role to be gifted by the Spirit to serve with the heart of Jesus to accomplish the will of the Father.

None of that is going to happen if we are always swinging for the fences; and by that I mean we cannot focus on one gift over another.

This does not mean we can't propose different meetings that have different emphases.

When we get to chapter fourteen we'll see that we have a great freedom to determine what is, and what is not, appropriate at any given meeting.

We must determine it as servants seeking what is highest and best for others who are assembled with us.