

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

First Corinthians 12c

Introduction

I am struck by the Apostle Paul's almost nonchalant mention of extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit right alongside those we commonly consider more ordinary. For example: In his lists of the gifts he mentions "healings" and "helps"; he mentions "miracles" and "ministry"; he mentions "tongues" and "teaching." Healings, miracles, and tongues seem so extraordinary to us; Helps, ministry, and teaching seem so ordinary.

Paul evidently intended for us to realize that all of the gifts are to be regarded as *both* extraordinary and ordinary:

Gifts - all of them, no matter how ordinary they may seem to us - are to be regarded as extraordinary. They are the supernatural enablements given to believers of every age by the Holy Spirit.

Gifts - all of them, no matter how extraordinary they may seem to us - are to be regarded as ordinary, in this sense: It should be our ordinary expectation that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit be at work in the Church.

Keep that in mind as we continue our discussion of the gifts. We have put the gifts in three categories: Speaking gifts, sign gifts, and serving gifts. All are extraordinary, yet it should be our ordinary expectation that they be at work in the life of our Church.

Last week we took a look at the speaking gifts: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, tongues, the interpretation of tongues, teaching, and exhortation. This week we want to look at the sign gifts and the serving gifts: faith, gifts of healings, the working of miracles; helps, administrations, ministry, giving, mercy, and hospitality.

#1 The Holy Spirit Gives Some Of You Sign Gifts

This is where believers can begin to differ. Faith, gifts of healings, and the working of miracles are believed by some to have ceased. Normally prophecy, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues are put in this same category. Other believers - including myself - see no compelling Scriptural reason to believe that these gifts have ceased to function in the Church.

Pastor Chuck Smith, in his book *Living Water*, encourages us to "fight the right enemy." He says,

"Oh, that we could see the oneness of the body of Christ, that we would stop competing with or opposing others just because we don't agree with their particular doctrinal slant... One of the great catastrophes of the Church is her failure to properly identify who the real enemy is... The real enemy is Satan, and it is our task to bring men and women out of his kingdom and into the glorious kingdom of God."¹

Did certain gifts of the Spirit cease? Were they given only in the first century to authenticate the message of the apostles for the initial founding of the Church? Those who believe the answer is "Yes" to those questions we call *cessationists*.

The most compelling cessationist argument from Scripture, the one most often used, is Paul's statement in First Corinthians 13:8-10, which says,

1 Corinthians 13:8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

1 Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

1 Corinthians 13:10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

Two *sign* gifts are mentioned - "prophecies" and "tongues." They are seen by cessationists to represent all the sign gifts. They are said to cease and pass away "when perfection comes." "Perfection" is interpreted by many cessationists to refer to the completion of the New Testament; therefore, with the completion of the New Testament, the sign gifts "ceased."

¹pps. 94-95.

In recent years cessationists themselves have realized that "perfection" in this context is not a reference to the completed New Testament. John MacArthur, himself still a noted and vocal cessationist, honestly writes,

"[Perfection] is not the completion of Scripture... [It] is the eternal heavenly state of believers." ²

This is not the only argument from Scripture that the cessationists use, but it is their most common. Other arguments can be just as easily dealt with. As I said, there are no compelling arguments from Scripture that certain gifts have ceased.

The Holy Spirit gives some of you sign gifts: faith, gifts of healings, and the working of miracles.

The gift of faith needs to be distinguished from the faith all believers have. We would say that there are different kinds of faith.

There is *saving* faith. Saving faith is the measure of faith given to everyone that enables them to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith. Grace is the fountain, and faith is the pipe or conduit through which grace flows to our hearts by which we receive Jesus Christ. Saving faith is trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior, believing that He paid the price for your sins. It is believing that the blood of Christ was shed as a sacrifice and accepted by God. As your substitute, Jesus took your sins upon Himself and died in your place, that by your believing in Him you would not perish but have everlasting life. That is saving faith.

There is also *trusting* faith. Once you are a believer, you are called upon to commit yourself to the Word of God and believe His promises. This is the kind of faith that can and should increase and grow as we walk with Jesus.

The gift of faith is neither of these; it is a supernatural enablement given to some and not to all by the Holy Spirit. It is the enablement to discern with supernatural confidence the will and purposes of God in

²*First Corinthians*, pps. 364-365.

a given situation or circumstance. It is the Holy Spirit endowing you with the confidence that God is going to work a certain way in a specific instance. It is a gift of faith planted in your heart by God.

Read the biography of George Muller and you'll see the gift of faith in operation. Muller, a century ago, had a gift of faith to build orphanages for God. He was undaunted by any and all obstacles - *including a five million dollar price tag!* The money all came in, even though he had adopted a policy of not making the needs known.

Gifts of healings are next on Paul's list. This is the only enablement that is mentioned in the plural; they are gifts of healings, not the gift of healing. If you have gifts of healings, God can use you to encourage others to believe God will heal you. But you cannot go around healing at will; it is under the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit.

Healings occurred with some frequency in the Old Testament. Healings were a large part of the New Testament : They were a major part of the ministry of Jesus; the apostles had gifts of healings. This naturally gives rise to two questions: Why, then, the lack of healings today? and, Why, then, isn't everyone healed?

Both questions can only be answered by saying that God is Sovereign over gifts of healings! In the life of Jesus and in the ministry of the apostles there were times that gifts of healings were not exercised. In the life of Jesus and in the ministry of the apostles there were times that not everyone was healed.

I like what Pastor Chuck says:

"If you are sick, I encourage you to pray and to believe and trust God for your healing. I know that God can heal you, and I encourage you to trust in Him for that healing. Let medical science do what it can, but know that it has limitations. God is not limited, however, and God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think... He does heal. ³

The working of miracles is an event that supersedes known natural laws. Moses parting the Red Sea; Joshua parting the Jordan River; Elisha raising the Shulamite's dead son; those are miracles. The

³*Living Water*, p. 138.

Gospels are crammed with miracles. The Book of Acts is crammed with miracles.

Again the question is, Why, then, don't we see more miracles today? Again the answer is, The sovereignty of God! But, in addition, let me point out some other things as well.

Miracles are frequently reported by missionaries working in the field. Gospel for Asia missionaries regularly report wonderful miracles that are verified and documented.

There is one miracle that is often overlooked: **Salvation!** Salvation is a miracle. It achieves something humanly impossible - the creation of a new spirit in your heart. The presence and power of Jesus Christ that transforms lives is a miracle.

What is humanly impossible is divinely simple. As long as there is a God there will be miracles.

Sign gifts have been misused and abused. But there is no compelling Scriptural reason to say that they have ceased. Let God be sovereign; the Holy Spirit still distributes faith, gifts of healings, and the working of miracles as He sees fit.

#2The Holy Spirit Gives Some Of You Serving Gifts

The serving gifts are helps, administrations, ministry, giving, administrations, mercy, and hospitality. As we take a brief look at them, don't think them ordinary because they seem more common to you. The same Holy Spirit Who enables healings enables helps; the same Holy Spirit Who enables miracles enables ministry.

All believers are considered ministers - servants of Jesus. But there is a supernatural gift of helps that many are given. "Helps" is first mentioned in First Corinthians 12:28. The gift of "ministry," mentioned in Romans 12:7, is the companion to helps. Helps and ministry involve seeing a need and then doing something to meet it. Helps is the attitude; ministry is the activity.

The Book of Acts records the story of Peter raising a woman named Dorcas from the dead. Overlooked because of the working of the miracle is Dorcas' gift of helps:

Acts 9:36 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

Acts 9:37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

Acts 9:38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.

Acts 9:39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

There are many needs among God's people; no one person can minister to them all. God will show you a need; when He does, it could be that He is also calling you to meet it in His power. It could be anything from making sure there are towels in the bathroom to establishing a ministry. Be open and submissive.

If you have the gift of helps you will want to serve with joy, no matter how tedious the task. And you won't be discouraged by lack of encouragement or recognition. Those graced with the gift of helps do their service for the Lord and look to Him for their reward and recognition.

In First Corinthians 12:28 you read of the gift of administrations; this is called leadership in Romans 12:8. The KJV calls it "governments."

Most of you, at one time or another, will be in some position of administration or leadership. This is true if you are a husband; this is true if you are a wife; this is true of all parents; this is true of many occupations. All of us should lead others by love, looking to Jesus as our example.

There is also the gift of administrations. This is the supernatural enablement to manage the affairs of the Church with both diligence and compassion.

The Church has often gone wrong at this point. Often we look for a measure of material success in someone's life as the indicator they are a leader or administrator. While financial or occupational success

does not disqualify you for leadership, it does not necessarily qualify you, either. Like the other gifts we must keep in mind that it is the supernatural enablement of the Holy Spirit that is needed to properly govern the Church and not the methods and machinery of human business and government.

At this point we need to turn to Romans 12:6-8. There you find another listing of gifts, including some serving gifts we want to discuss.

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.

"Giving" is a spiritual discipline that all believers are to practice. When we talk about giving we're definitely talking about money. It's true, you also give of your time and talent; but the Bible has a lot to say about giving of your money as well.

The New Testament principles for giving are found in Second Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul says that your giving is to be motivated by grace as you have personally purposed in your heart; that it is to be willing, honest, unpretentious, regular and cheerful. *You are left to discover the amount!* Paul knew that, when grace is your motive, you will give generously, because you will be reflecting upon the grace that God has so richly and generously bestowed upon you in salvation.

Besides the discipline of giving, there are some who have the gift of giving. Notice in Romans that Paul qualifies the gift of giving by using the term "liberality." The gift of giving is the enablement the Holy Spirit gives some of you to contribute your material resources with great liberality in order to meet the needs of others.

Barnabas had the gift of giving. In the Book of Acts, he is reported to have sold a piece of property in order to give all the proceeds to the Church for the needs of the ministry.

"Showing mercy with cheerfulness" is next on the list of gifts. One author described this as "joyful compassion; getting on the inside of another person while bringing a cheerfulness to their wounded heart; the ability to empathize with another person going through difficulties and help them realize the great love and forgiveness God has for them."

You need to show mercy, whether you have the gift or not. Jesus commanded you, in Luke 6:36, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Since God is merciful - not giving you what you deserve - you will be merciful if you have His nature in you.

The gift of mercy is something more, something given to certain members of the Church as the Holy Spirit sees fit to do so. You will be drawn to people who are in distress and you will desire to express God's love and forgiveness towards them.

The Youth Crisis Hotline is a good example of exercising the gift of mercy...

That exhausts the gifts listed in Romans 6, but I want to mention one more gift. In First Peter 4:9-10 you read,

1 Peter 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Most Bible commentators list hospitality as a gift of the Spirit. We are all called upon to show hospitality in caring for the needs of others; but some have a gift for it. You don't have to have the biggest house, or the nicest set of dishes, or anything like that. The gift of hospitality is a spiritual enablement that transcends your physical possessions. It is a thoughtfulness for the care of others that really thinks of their needs.

The gift of hospitality isn't just opening up your home to others; it involves opening up your heart to truly serve their needs. For example: When ministers or missionaries come to visit our fellowship, I always ask them if they would prefer to stay in a hotel or a home. Many are relieved to stay in a hotel! You see, so often they are put

up in homes but, rather than being ministered to, they are expected to entertain their hosts. They get little or no sleep and even worse food!

Conclusion

We have now talked briefly about these gifts:

The speaking gifts - the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, tongues, the interpretation of tongues, teaching, and exhortation.

The sign gifts - faith, gifts of healings, and the working of miracles.

The serving gifts - helps, administrations, ministry, giving, administrations, mercy, and hospitality.

We will look at prophecy, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues when we arrive at First Corinthians Fourteen. We won't look at some gifts we could have discussed - apostle, evangelist, and pastor-teacher. Those will have to wait for another time.

What should our response be? It's summed up by Paul when he says, in First Corinthians 12:31, "earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way."

The more excellent way is to walk in love towards others, described so masterfully in First Corinthians Thirteen! Determine to walk in love and you will desire the gift or gifts that will most help you share God's love with others.

Gifts are not the goal; they are the gateway. They are the gateway to revealing the presence and love of Jesus to His people, the Church. Determine to walk in love and you will discover your gifts.