

The Power of Spiritual Gifts: Serving God and Edifying the Church

In the early days of Christianity, as recorded in the book of Acts, we witness a remarkable continuation of Jesus' ministry through His disciples. The promise Jesus made to His followers before His ascension was profound: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). This promise wasn't just for those immediate disciples, but for all who would come to believe in Him.

The fulfillment of this promise began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a gift promised to all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ. As Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself" (Acts 2:38-39).

This indwelling of the Holy Spirit breathes life into the church, which is described as the body of Christ. Through the Spirit, the ministry of Jesus continues, not just as a historical memory, but as a living, active force in the world today. The man named Jesus, whom the world rejected and crucified, is not only alive but has been glorified by His heavenly Father with all power and glory!

One of the most visible manifestations of the Holy Spirit's presence in the church is the distribution of spiritual gifts. These gifts, outlined in passages such as Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30, and 1 Peter 4:9-11, are not meant to glorify individuals but to glorify God and edify His church.

It's crucial to understand that these gifts do not originate from human ability or merit. When Peter and John healed the lame man at the temple gate, Peter was quick to redirect the amazed onlookers: "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" (Acts 3:12). The apostle Paul echoed this sentiment when he wrote to the Corinthians, "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

The purpose of spiritual gifts is clear: they are for the edification of the church. As Paul exhorts, "Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church" (1 Corinthians 14:12, NLT). These gifts are not meant to puff up individuals or create a spiritual hierarchy, but to build up the body of Christ as a whole.

While signs and wonders can be awe-inspiring, it's essential to remember that they are not the end goal. Jesus Himself pointed out that even the most spectacular miracles won't necessarily lead people to faith. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we're reminded that "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

Indeed, the greatest miracle of all is the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. When the disciples returned from their mission, excited about their newfound ability to cast out demons, Jesus redirected their focus: "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:20). This perspective shift reminds us that our ultimate joy and purpose lie not in what we can do, but in who we are in Christ.

The apostle Paul beautifully expounds on this truth in 1 Corinthians 13, often called the "love chapter." He argues that without love, even the most impressive spiritual gifts are meaningless. We may speak in tongues, have prophetic powers, understand all mysteries, have mountain-moving faith, or give away all we possess, but if we don't have love, we gain nothing.

This love - the selfless, sacrificial love that God has shown us in Christ - is the greatest gift of the Spirit. It's the foundation upon which all other gifts should be exercised. It's the motivation that should drive our service to God and others. It's the evidence that we truly know and follow Jesus.

As we consider the various spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture, it's important to remember that every believer has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. To each of us, a measure of faith has been given. While our gifts may differ, we all serve the same Lord and are all part of one body (1 Corinthians 12).

The challenge, then, is to discover, develop, and deploy the gifts God has given us. We're called to use these gifts not for our own glory or gain, but to glorify God, edify His church, and lead a lost and dying world to the gift of eternal life in Christ.

As we do this, we participate in the ongoing ministry of Jesus. We become conduits of His power and love in a world desperately in need of both. We fulfill the promise He made to His disciples - that they would do even greater works than He did.

So let us eagerly desire spiritual gifts, but let us desire them for the right reasons. Let us seek to build up the church, to serve one another in love, and to point people to Jesus. Let us remember that the greatest gift is not any particular ability or power, but the love of God which leads us to know Jesus Christ and experience His salvation.

In a world often enamored with spectacle and power, may we be a people who value love above all else. May we use whatever gifts we've been given to glorify God, strengthen His church, and share the good news of Jesus Christ. For in the end, it's not about what we can do, but about what God has done for us in Christ, and what He continues to do through us by His Spirit.