

Lesson 11

The Spirit and Spiritual Gifts

Introduction

The work of the Spirit may be divided into two parts: His *saving* work and His *equipping* work. Thus far we have concentrated on His work of convicting, regenerating sinners, and His work of sanctifying Christians. The last three lessons will focus on the work of His bestowing special ministries and abilities upon specific individuals, enabling them to perform needed services for the people of God. This type of work was done by the Spirit throughout the Old Testament era, where we read of His giving special abilities to prophets, craftsman, and administrators.

In the New Testament era, the Spirit continues His work of equipping, enabling individuals to perform specific tasks necessary for the building of the church as the spiritual house of God. In the church era, it seems that every Christian is equipped by the Spirit in one way or another.

A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good:

– 1 Corinthians 12.7

Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.

– 1 Peter 4.10

From these passages we learn that each one has received a gift. We also learn that each of us is under an obligation to use that gift. And finally, we must use that gift for the sake of others.

What is a “Spiritual Gift?”

First, we should remember that the Spirit Himself is a gift to Christians in the New Testament era, Acts 2.38b. The Spirit’s indwelling is bestowed in baptism is a gift from God to each individual believer. Also, the Spirit is not only a gift given, He is also the giver of gifts. He brings regeneration and sanctification. He also brings certain abilities or ministries that equip us for service.

The term *spiritual gift* appears only once in the New Testament, Romans 1.11. While many come away with the idea that Paul was speaking of his apostolic ability to impart miraculous gifts such as prophecy or tongue speaking, etc. Others believe that the gift Paul wanted to bestow upon the Romans was a deeper meaning of the gospel.

The terminology of *gift* or *gifts* does appear frequently in the New Testament however. As a verb, it is used three times.⁷⁷ As a noun we find the word used in Ephesians 4.7-8. Another term that is frequently used is the word for “grace,” or *charisma*. The basic meaning of this word is “a gift that pleases or brings joy.” It can be used for gifts other than saving grace. In fact, it is used in a few cases to refer to equipping gifts of the Spirit. Peter does this in 1 Peter 4.10 where he speaks of the entire package of spiritual gifts as

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 12.7; Romans 12.6; 1 Corinthians 12.8.

the manifold grace of God. Most often when the word *spiritual* is applied to gifts, we are speaking of a gift bestowed by the Spirit.

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

The saving work of the Spirit meets the needs of the individual, but His equipping work has a different purpose. The Spirit gives ministries and abilities to individuals, so that these individuals may use these gifts to meet the needs of God's people as a whole.

The Interdependence of the Members of the Body

Peter says we must exercise our gifts in such a way that God be glorified, 1 Peter 4.11. The more immediate purpose of one's gift, though, is to *employ it in serving one another*, 1 Peter 4.10. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12.7, each gift is given *for the common good*. Paul often illustrated this by comparing the church with the human body.⁷⁸ Though the human body is comprised of many different parts, each having its own unique purpose, the body is nonetheless a single, unified organism that only functions properly when each part fulfills its purpose. The well-being of any individual member of the body is dependent upon all the other members carrying out their respective responsibilities.

This is the way the church works. The church is the one body of Jesus Christ, and each Christian is like a member of that body – an eye, an ear, a finger, etc. Each Christian's spiritual gift constitutes his function as a member of the body. Thus, by exercising his or her spiritual gift, one contributes to the well-being of every other member of the body as well as to the proper functioning of the body as a whole. As we read Romans 12.4-5 and 1 Corinthians 12.14-26, we come away with the conclusion that we need each others spiritual gifts.

More specifically, our spiritual gifts have been committed to our stewardship so that we may use them to build up or edify the church as a whole. We are to seek to abound in the edification of the church, 1 Corinthians 12.14, 26. The work of church leaders is for *the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ*, Ephesians 4.12. Through the proper use of these gifts, the church will grow toward maturity. When each individual part of the body exercises its gift, the church will:

...grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

– Ephesians 4.15-16

Note how Paul stresses *love* at the beginning of v. 15. The conscientious use of our gifts thus is required by the compulsion of our love for one another. See also 1 Peter 4.8-10. Not to use our gifts, then, is selfish and unloving. "The intent of individual giftedness for service, therefore, cannot lie in individualism but always points to the higher goal of the corporate body in togetherness. *Charismata*,

⁷⁸ Romans 12.4-5; 1 Corinthians 12.12-27; Ephesians 4.12, 16.

although bestowed upon individuals by the Holy Spirit, are meant for the service unto, and for the upbuilding of, the community as the Spirit directs.”⁷⁹

Categories of Gifts

There are four main listings of spiritual gifts: Romans 12.3-8; 1 Corinthians 12.8-10; 1 Corinthians 12.28-30; and Ephesians 4.11:

Romans 12.3-8	1 Corinthians 12.8-10	1 Corinthians 12.28-30	Ephesians 4.11
prophesying	message of wisdom	apostles	apostles
serving	message of knowledge	prophets	prophets
teaching	faith	teachers	evangelists
encouraging	gifts of healing	workers of miracles	pastor/teacher
giving	miraculous powers	gifts of healing	
leadership	prophecy	ability to help others	
showing mercy	distinguishing of spirits	administration	
	various kinds of tongues	kinds of tongues	
	interpretation of tongues	interpretation	

These lists are not all-inclusive. There may have been other gifts not named in the New Testament that were bestowed by the Spirit.

Sign gifts, Speaking gifts, and Serving Gifts

In general, when we think of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, they may be divided into three broad categories: sign gifts; speaking gifts; and serving gifts. In 1 Peter 4.10 Peter differentiates between speaking gifts and serving gifts.

Sign Gifts

These gifts were accompanied by miracles and were unique to the apostolic age. They were specifically given for the purpose of **confirmation** or identifying the authentic message of the gospel. They were demonstrated by miracles, signs, and wonders. See 2 Corinthians 12.12; Hebrews 2.4; and Mark 16.20. The two listings in 1 Corinthians 12 mostly refer to this type of gifts, which came to end at the conclusion of the apostolic age, 1 Corinthians 13.8. The reason they came to an end was that circumstances and needs that were present in the early decades of the church changed. Spiritual gifts designed to meet those temporary needs then ceased to exist. Regarding this, Cottrell writes:

The historical situation of the church in its early years was completely unique, and very different from its circumstances after only a few decades and certainly from today. From the day of Pentecost forward, God’s

⁷⁹ Schatzmann, p. 68.

people were living under a totally New Covenant, with a new kingdom administration, new worship practices, new evangelistic responsibilities, and new divine realities to be understood, proclaimed, and applied. Yet they lacked an authoritative written revelation, a canon of Scripture comparable to the Old Covenant Scriptures, that explained God's will for His people under these new circumstances. In other words, they did not yet have the written NT, something that did not become completely available until at least the second century and something that we take for granted today.⁸⁰

Another scholar writes:

“When the building is done the scaffolding comes down because it is no longer necessary.” As applied to the church, “In the beginning of the new covenant of grace there were the signs, wonders, miracles, and mighty acts of God used to validate the apostles’ message. But when the gospel was fully known, the ‘scaffolding’ came down. The sign gifts were no longer necessary”⁸¹

Speaking gifts

These gifts are non-miraculous in nature. A listing of them can be found in Romans 12.6-8 where Paul mentions the gifts of prophecy, teaching, and exhortation. Prophecy probably stands out to us as we often think of it only in miraculous terms. And in the days before God's revelation was completed, there was a miraculous component to it. But the basic term for *prophecy* refers to the interpretation of God's will . . . as well as its public delivery. Think public speaking when you think of the gift of prophecy. *Teaching* and *exhortation* would also be examples of speaking gifts.

Serving Gifts

Some of these are mentioned in the Romans account. Others are found in the 1 Corinthians account. Examples would be: *servicing*, *giving*, *leading*, and *showing mercy*.

Both speaking and serving gifts have been given for the ongoing life of the church.

An Important Distinction

It is important to distinguish between spiritual gifts that enable someone to work a miracle, and miracles performed directly by God Himself without the intervention of a miracle-worker. In the former case, e.g., a person with the gift of healing may be the channel through which God's healing power works. In the latter case, God may heal directly simply in answer to prayer. To say that the *gift* of healing has ceased does not necessarily mean that God Himself has ceased healing the sick; or to say that *miraculous gifts* have ceased does not mean that *miraculous works of God* have ceased. We should avoid the tendency to confuse spiritual gifts with God's miraculous works.

It is very important to make this distinction. God does continue to heal many sick people and to perform many wonderful works, especially in answer to prayer. As said earlier, any act of God is certainly a *supernatural* event, and cessationists do not rule out the supernatural. The question is whether we should call such supernatural deeds “miracles,” though, since they usually do not function as signs intended to

⁸⁰ Cottrell, p. 403.

⁸¹ Leggett, Marshall, J. “A Neglected Emphasis: the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.” 2 parts. *Christian Standard* (5/23/99) 6-8; and (5/30/99) 6-8.

confirm revealed truth. It depends again on how strict we want to be in our terminology. In this case we should call such direct acts of God *special divine providence*.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Into what two parts can the work of the Spirit be divided? Use the space below to describe what they are.
2. In the church, who has been equipped by the Spirit?
3. How is the term *grace* defined as a gift?
4. For what purpose have spiritual gifts been given? See 1 Corinthians 12.7, 14, 26; Ephesians 4.12, 15-16.
5. How does Ephesians 4.15 describe the spirit with which these gifts are to be used?
6. What are the three main categories of gifts?
7. What was a sign gift? For what was their purpose? When did these gifts end?
8. What were/are *speaking gifts*?

9. What were/are *servicing gifts*?

10. Why is it important to make a distinction between miraculous gifts worked by humans (which have ceased) and miraculous gifts worked by God (which have not ceased)?