

# What Are You Doing with the Gifts You Have Received from the Spirit?

Acts 2:4

November 29, 2015

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What are gifts of the Spirit? To whom does the Holy Spirit give these gifts? For whose benefit are the gifts of the Spirit? Are all the gifts of the Spirit available to every believer? Are miraculous gifts of the Spirit still given to believers or have they ceased? These are the questions we shall seek to answer in the coming sermons (by God's grace).

These are not inconsequential questions that have little or no significance in the doctrine or life of the Christian who trusts alone in Christ alone for his/her justification before God. There are professing Christian Churches that are separated one from another over these questions—there are even Reformed Churches that are separated one from another over some of these questions. Such separation within the Visible Church of Christ makes this a matter of great importance since it is our earnest desire and prayer that Christ's prayer for the visible unity of His Church be realized on earth and in history.

But in addition to the separation within Christ's Visible Church, the questions asked earlier about the gifts of the Holy Spirit have consequences in the way we as Christians live our lives from day to day and conduct ourselves in our relationship to other Christians in the Church of Christ. In other words, the answers to these questions not only are of a **doctrinal significance** in what we are to believe, but are also of a **practical significance** in the lives we live to the glory of Jesus Christ and to the edification of one another.

Let none of us shy away from God's truth. It is the truth of God that must judge and evaluate all of our experiences, and not the experience of the

Christian that must presume to judge the inspired and infallible Word of God (“Let God be true, but every man a liar” Romans 3:4). If we do not begin there, we have no certain foundation built upon solid rock, but rather we have a very shaky foundation built upon the shifting sand of experience (which varies in a thousand shapes and forms from person to person). And dear ones, when the Spirit of God graciously illuminates our understanding of God’s truth in the Holy Scriptures, we should expect to find confirmation of these truths in the history of the faithful Church (in her creeds, confessions, catechisms, and ministers). This in no wise is intended to replace the supreme authority of God’s Word. To the contrary, Christ’s ministers are given as a gift to the Church in history in order to teach, instruct, guide, and warn God’s people to walk in the narrow path of truth and righteousness and to shun the broad path of error, compromise, and worldliness (Ephesians 4:11-15).

Today we will not make much progress in Acts 2 because I believe the Lord would have us first consider together a brief overview of what the Scripture teaches about gifts of the Spirit before proceeding any farther into Acts 2. Therefore, the main points for the sermon this Lord’s Day are the following questions: (1) What Are Gifts of the Holy Spirit? (2) To Whom Are Gifts of the Holy Spirit Given? (3) For Whose Benefit Are Gifts of the Spirit Given?

## **I. What Are Gifts of the Holy Spirit?**

A. We left off in the previous sermon with the Lord Jesus baptizing the 120 (apostles and believers) with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in fulfillment of Christ’s promise (Acts 1:4-5).

1. The only reason why this New Covenant baptism with the Holy Spirit did not occur at the time the 120 were first converted to Christ was because Christ must first die, arise from the dead, ascend into

heaven, and be exalted as King of kings at God's right hand (John 7:39). This is what makes the New Covenant new—the realization of the promises in Christ. The baptism with the Holy Spirit was that blessing that united New Covenant believers with the resurrected and exalted Christ and with all other believers who are united with Christ in the Invisible Church of God's redeemed ones. The baptism with the Holy Spirit being an invisible work of Christ was outwardly indicated by the noise of a rushing mighty wind and cloven tongues of fire that rested upon each of their heads (in Acts 2:2-3).

2. Then the 120 (apostles and believers) were filled with the Holy Spirit (energized) and were graciously given the ability to speak in foreign languages they had never learned proclaiming to the Jews the mighty works of God (Acts 2:4-8). Now that the spiritual gift of speaking in other tongues (or foreign languages) has been brought to our attention in the text, it is important for us to stop there in order that we might first take a bird's eye view of the gifts of the Spirit in general, and then in a future sermon we come back to our text to consider the gift of tongues (or foreign languages) more particularly.

B. The gifts of the Spirit are listed (not exhaustively, but representatively) in different portions of God's Word: Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10-11. We'll be referring to these four chapters in the course of today's sermon.

C. Four different words are used to describe these gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (look with me at those verses).

1. **"Gifts"** (verse 4)—*charismata* from the Greek word that means grace, *charis*—these are gracious, charismatic gifts of the Spirit (all of them, even the non-miraculous gifts) not gifts which we earn or deserve or qualify ourselves in any way to receive.

2. **"Administrations"** (verse 5)—*diaconiai*, meaning services

or ministries of the Lord Jesus (these are not gifts to serve oneself, but to serve others; “deacon” is from the same root word).

3. **“Operations”** (verse 6)—*energmaton*, which means workings or energies of the Spirit (these are not mere natural gifts and abilities with which we are born, but the supernatural operations and workings of the Spirit of God).

4. **“Manifestation”** (verse 7)—*phanerosis*, which means the showing forth to others, as opposed to that which is used merely for oneself when all alone (spiritual gifts display to others a service and benefit to the Visible Church).

5. Thus, based upon the various words used here by the Holy Spirit to describe the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we might define these gifts as follows: ***Supernatural abilities that are freely and graciously bestowed upon all those who trust alone in Christ alone for their justification before God, that are to be used in the service of Christ Church, that are the workings of God’s Spirit in energizing Christians, and which are to be used as a manifestation of the filling of God’s Spirit in the life of the Christian***—all gifts are only profitable and beneficial to others when you are being daily filled, controlled, and energized by the Holy Spirit—not operating on automatic pilot, not becoming so preoccupied with the world that you forget where your true strength in the Christian life resides (as did Samson)—in Christ who fills us with His Holy Spirit (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13).

D. Before leaving this first main point (What Are Gifts of the Holy Spirit?), perhaps it would be helpful to distinguish the gifts of the Holy Spirit from the fruit of the Holy Spirit (since it was not too long ago that we had a year-long series of sermons on the fruit of the Holy Spirit).

1. On the one hand, **spiritual gifts** are sovereignly apportioned to all Christians *differently* as the Spirit wills and determines (as we will see in a few minutes). On the other hand, **spiritual fruit** is the

gracious bestowal of *the same* life of Christ (the same DNA of Christ) into the lives of all God’s adopted children (note that it is called by Paul “the fruit [singular] of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23—the fruit of the Spirit is one cluster of grapes given to all Christians—it’s a package deal, if you will, rather than individual gifts distributed differently to Christians). In other words, all Christians receive at least one gift of the Spirit, but not all Christians receive all of **the gifts of the Spirit**; however all Christians do receive all of **the fruit of the Spirit** (all the fruit of the Spirit—the DNA of Christ—is implanted within us at regeneration).

2. On the one hand, **spiritual gifts** are given in order to tell us **HOW** we are to particularly function as members within Christ’s body (the Church of Christ). On the other hand, **spiritual fruit** is given in order to tell us **WHOSE** we are (namely, Christ’s—we have His DNA) and into whose image we are being conformed (into Christ’s image). In other words, **spiritual gifts** give us our **ROLE** in the Church of Christ, whereas **spiritual fruit** gives us our **IDENTITY** in Christ—we are partakers of Christ’s moral nature.

a. How we must not become more concerned with our role and how others perceive us, than with our identity and who we are in Christ. If the fruit of the Spirit is not alive and growing in our Christian lives, we will be using the gifts the Spirit has given to us to promote ourselves and to seek the approval and applause of others (as were Christians in Corinth). Only as we are growing the fruit of the Spirit shall we be able to use the gifts of the Spirit in way that glorifies God and profits others (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

b. Dear ones, we must not only have a name that we are alive in exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit (and in professing what is faithful and true), we must also be alive in having the very life and character of Jesus living and growing within us—that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

## II. To Whom Are Gifts of the Holy Spirit Given?

A. First, gifts of the Spirit are given to all those who trust alone in Christ alone, and are thus united to Christ and baptized into the body or Church of Christ—and not to a select few Christians or even to the majority of Christians, but rather to every Christian (Romans 12:3-5; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10).

B. Second, it is the Holy Spirit that sovereignly and wisely determines which gift is to be graciously given to every believer (1 Corinthians 12:11,18). It is not up to the individual believer who says, “I don’t want that gift, I want this other gift.” This should deal the death blow to coveting the gifts of others, comparing our gifts to those of others, and either feeling pride over the gift I have received or feeling worthless over the gift I have received.

1. When Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 12:31, “But covet earnestly the best gifts”, there are three truths that Paul is teaching the Church of Corinth.

a. First, to covet “the best gifts” is to desire those gifts that edify and build up the most people within the Church of Christ, not those gifts that are necessarily the most miraculous or the most amazing or edify me the most.

b. Second, Paul has just mentioned the spiritual gifts that edify the most people within the Church of Christ—note the order in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (interestingly, note what gifts are at the top of the list and what gift is at the bottom of the list by way of edification to the Church—this is very intentional because of the abuse of speaking in tongues within the Church of Corinth).

c. Third, since it is the Spirit of God that gives the gifts of the Spirit as He desires, not as an individual Christian desires, it is most likely that Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:31 refer not to Christians

individually, but to the Church of Christ collectively—Christians as the Church collectively ought to covet (in a good sense) that the best gifts of the Spirit in ministering to others be granted and manifested in our midst.

C. Third (To Whom Are Gifts of the Spirit Given?), not every believer receives the same gift (1 Corinthians 12:28-30). There is unity in the one baptism with the Holy Spirit, in one faith and doctrine, in one baptism, and in one fruit of the Holy Spirit, but there is diversity in the gift of the Spirit that you have received from the gift others in Christ's Church have received—it is perfectly proportioned to the way that God has made you and yet it is a supernatural ability with which to glorify God. This is the reason for Paul giving to the Corinthian Church and to us the analogy of the way different members (or parts) of the human body work together—each one having his/her own function as a member of Christ's Church (1 Corinthians 12:14-21).

### **III. For Whose Benefit Are Gifts of the Spirit Given?**

A. In some churches, it is taught that certain gifts (for example, speaking in tongues) are for the private edification of the believer rather than for the edification of the Church. But the Scripture makes clear that the gifts of the Spirit are given for the edification of the entire Church of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7; "Let all things be done unto edifying" 1 Corinthians 14:26; 1 Peter 4:10).

1. Why does Paul state that the spiritual gift of prophecy is greater than the spiritual gift of tongues? Because prophecy is in the language of the people in attendance. Paul states that prophecy edifies the whole church rather than tongues, which cannot be understood by the whole church. The gift of tongues only edifies oneself, unless it is interpreted Paul states (which is not a commendation, but a rebuke—1 Corinthians 14:4-5).

2. Once again in using the analogy of the body, does Paul teach that the goal of one member of the body is to edify himself or rather to build up the entire body to work together in strengthening and encouraging one another?

3. The relative value that a spiritual gift has within the Church of Christ depends upon how much that gift is used in building up the Church of Christ (even a spiritual gift that is not as public in nature may be one that is used greatly to build up others in the Church of Corinth by means of service, encouragement, comfort, giving, preparing meals, helping with chores, babysitting, according to the Apostle Paul— 1 Corinthians 12:22-25).

As I close today, let me leave with you a couple exhortations. These are exhortations intended for your good and given in love for you.

First, if you are single, I ask you in all brotherly love, what are you doing to build up the body of Christ, those in need, those who are discouraged, or the ministry? Before you have your own family and all the responsibilities to come with being married and having children, are you praying and seeking the face of God that He would make you aware of other's needs, afflictions, trials in order that you might be a help and encouragement in coming alongside those who are struggling to take another step due to what the Lord has brought into their lives? Have you ever considered, dear unmarried people of God, that the very trials that others are facing may be brought to your attention so that you can use your spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ?

Second, let no one be ashamed of the spiritual gift or gifts God has given to you. Let none of you declare that you have no spiritual gift or gifts, for that is to call God a liar (who says each of you who has been baptized with the Holy Spirit into the Church of Jesus Christ has been given a



spiritual gift for the common good of your brethren). Sometimes I wonder if Christians minimize their gifts or deny they have any so as to excuse themselves from ministering to the saints (thinking they can hide the gift, but remember what the Lord said in the Parable of the Talents to the servant that had been given one talent and had hidden it—take it from him and give it to the one who had been given five talents and added to it five more talents.

Dear ones, the Lord rebukes our slothfulness, indifference, complacency in using the gifts He has given to us for His glory and for the benefit of His Church. I say this with love for you all having first preached this sermon to myself before preaching it to you. How important is the Church of Jesus Christ to you? That which you consider to be important to you is that into which you will invest your life and your gifts. That which you consider not to be very important to you is that with which you will not trouble yourself too much, but will likely make excuses as to why you cannot use your gifts to build up the Church of Christ. I know we are busy. I know we are weary at times. But are Christ and His Church of so little value to you that you are making all your time, talent, and treasure commitments in many other places than in Christ's Church? You are bound by covenant to Christ and His Church. God forgive us and have mercy upon us that we would repent and that we might delight in (not take pride in) the spiritual gift or gifts that we have received by His amazing grace to be used to build up our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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