

Spiritual Apathy

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 12

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No doubt you have heard the popular and humorous definition of basketball. It is a game with 10 players badly in need of rest and 15,000 people badly in need of exercise.

This definition describes an attitude held by many people in society today. They have become watchers of those who work. Sadly, this describes too many people in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Today, the Church encounters its own brand of spiritual apathy. It shows itself in 3 ways. The work of the Church is accomplished by only a few of its members. Like the basketball game, most Church attendees watch while a handful work.

In another way, just as real but even more disastrous, the Church suffers. It experiences the practice of only a few of the spiritual gifts for the Church.

This condition results because of unbelief, the failure of leadership to incorporate and involve all of the gifts within the Church, and disobedience on the part of some who lack the desire to fulfill their parts.

In a third way, the Church suffers spiritual apathy. This one takes the form of age participation. Most frequently, those of an older age, ones who have retired, do not want to participate any longer in the work of the Church. Thus, a whole segment of the Church fails to function as God designed.

The clues that mark spiritual apathy abound. For the sake of self inventory, I will list a few of them. The following statements describe the uninvolved ones.

“I can do very little.”

“Let someone else do it.”

“I am not needed.”

“I am too old/young.”

“I have done my part. It’s time for me to rest.”

If these clues describe you, then you and the Church of Jesus Christ suffer severe consequences of your sin. You suffer because you have centered Christianity around yourself and personal gratification.

A lack of self-denial may cause you to neglect your spiritual duty. Or a lack of personal holiness, faith, and obedience may lead you astray.

The Church suffers, too. It lacks the presence and power of your gift. Thus, the Church fails to meet the spiritual needs of its members. It, too, fails to meet the spiritual needs of the world that God desires to reach through your Church.

Such failure sins ultimately against God. It denies glory to Him. It dethrones His sovereignty in your life. It degrades His character and nature and abases the truth about God. Without fail, it brings the reproof of God.

Spiritual apathy minimizes the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It reveals a refusal to depend upon the indwelling Christ and rejects Him.

This sin hinders the work of the Holy Spirit, too. It grieves Him and quenches His work in your life and the Church. It rejects His authority and ability in your life.

To sum it up, this problem identifies yet another symptom of the need for a spiritual reformation and revival. It identifies the desperate need for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to restore God's glorious presence and power your life and in the life of the Church.

At its root, it results from the neglect and denial of Biblical truth. These causes come either deliberately or ignorantly.

Regardless, they have the same effect. Then, too, by now you may have rationalized your position with the following reasons:

- a lack of ability

- a lack of intelligence

- a lack of worth or value

- age, physical and/or financial limitations

You and the Church of Jesus Christ face a crossroads: to continue down the same path, with its ever worsening effects, or to correct your current spiritual condition.

The work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life will overcome and correct your spiritual position. He reveals God's truth regarding the application of spiritual gifts in your life and in the Church.

He alone can bring you to repentance from unbelief and disobedience. Following this road will bring the glorious outpouring of the Spirit in your life that will reform and revive you.

The Bible contains numerous references and examples of the truths about spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit can use in your life.

For example, recall the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. God gave gifts to many of His children to construct it according to His pattern (Exodus 25-31; 35-43).

Again, the construction of the Temple under Solomon gave witness to the repetition of God's unique gifting for its completion (2 Chronicles 2-5).

Or who can ever forget the unusual signs of God's power in the judges that ruled Israel after they conquered the Land of Canaan. God gave them supernatural gifts to lead His people.

In the New Testament, examples fill its pages. One need only to turn to Romans 12, Ephesians 4, or 1 Corinthians 12 to find them identified and explained.

In particular, I want to examine with you the passage from 1 Corinthians 12. It defines some specific absolute truths about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their application in your life. I pray that He will clarify for you these truths and bring them to fruition in your life.

For convenience, I have reprinted the pertinent sections for you from 1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-7, 11:

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant...{4} Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. {5} And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. {6} And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. {7} But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal...{11} But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."

Author of the gifts

With great clarity, the passage identifies the author of spiritual gifts. Their source comes from the Holy Spirit. He it is Who gives them to men and women alike. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers. Note the distinctness with which the word speaks. It says that the "...manifestation of the Spirit..." is given.

In other words, the Holy Spirit expresses Himself through the gifts that He gives. They exhibit His presence and attributes. The gifts reveal Him, not the vehicle through whom they function.

This reference shows, then, the operation of the gifts. The Holy Spirit manifests Himself through them.

Too often, human talents and abilities glorify the ones who possess them. But, with the spiritual gifts, the Spirit who manifests Himself through them to the glory of God.

He energizes the child of God with His power and ability to perform that which the believer cannot do on his own.

In addition, recognize the sovereignty that the Spirit reigns over their distribution. The reference in verse 11 says that He gives them as He wills.

Neither you nor I can choose our gifts. The Holy Spirit of His own choice allocates as He deems wise.

Nature of the gifts

In verse 1, the Scriptures simply identify them as gifts. In other words, the spiritual gifts are just that, gifts. They are not earned. You cannot perform any special works for them. You cannot do anything to receive your spiritual gift. They come without merit. They reveal God's grace.

Additionally, see the spirituality of the gifts. Some confuse talents and abilities with the gifts. They then assume that because someone has a talent, say for teaching, that it is their spiritual gift.

But, not necessarily so. The gifts are spiritual in nature. They have a different quality, nature, source, and effect than do talents and abilities.

Because they are spiritual in nature, they exceed and defy human explanation. In contrast, human talents and abilities have a human explanation. Perhaps several Biblical examples will help you to see the distinction that I identify.

On every occasion, the supernatural feats of strength of Samson carry this explanation, as shown for instance in Judges 14:6:

"The spirit of God came upon him."

No human explanation fit nor described what Samson did.

Daniel interpreted dreams. He, too, shows the supernatural work of God in his gift. Daniel gives all of the credit and glory to God for the ability to understand dreams (Daniel 2:17-30).

The Apostle Paul clearly gave credit to the Holy Spirit for the wonderful effects of his preaching. The record gives his statement in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. {2} For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. {3} And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. {4} And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: {5} That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

Though other examples abound, even the prime example of Jesus Christ Himself, I will stop with these. The Holy Spirit distinguishes His gifts to men and women as above all human talent and ability.

Further, the passage identifies in verses 4-6 the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit. Not only do they differ in kind. They vary in their administration and their effects. Yet the same Spirit rules and reigns in them all.

In the rest of chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, Romans 12, and Ephesian 4, the Bible identifies the various gifts the Spirit has given and uses in the Body.

Extent of the gifts

In our study section, the extent of the gifts is stated twice. In verses 7 and 11, you will see the repeated phrase, “...to every man...” No one is excluded nor excepted.

Remember, the spiritual gifts do not rely upon human ability, but rather human availability. The Holy Spirit gives and empowers His gifts.

Therefore, you have a spiritual gift. Perhaps, you do not exercise it. Your failure may result from ignorance or disobedience. But the Holy Spirit has given you a spiritual gift.

Or possibly the Church and its leadership will not allow you to apply the spiritual gift that the Spirit has given to you.

I have, at times, experienced the profound effects of this rejection. It wounds the spirit. In addition, it hinders the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

For such actions grieve and quench His work. Such a Church cannot experience the fullness of God's glorious presence and power by the Holy Spirit. On more than one occasion, sadly, I seen this happen, not only to me, but to others, as well.

In some instances, the Spirit withholds the exercise of certain gifts as a judgment against the Church (Psalm 74.9). Thus, the lack of His gifts brings confusion and hurt to the Body.

By withdrawing His presence, the Spirit lets the Church flounder in its human efforts, a sure and certain judgment of God for unbelief and disobedience.

Regardless of the cause, the Church of Jesus Christ suffers without full employment of the Spirit's gifts. The Spirit gives them and manifests Himself through them. Without this expression, the Church languishes, droops, and dies.

Purpose of the gifts

In verse 7, our study section reveals the purpose of the gifts. The Spirit gives them for our profit. Believers and the Church become the better by their presence and expression.

First, the gifts affect the operation of the Church. In the later parts of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the example of the human body to describe the importance and function of the spiritual gifts.

The human body needs all of its parts, even the less significant ones, to perform effectively and properly. In like manner, the Church needs all of its parts to function effectively.

In fact, Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 12:26:

"And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it."

Second, the gifts provide edification for all. The Holy Spirit intends them to guide spiritually the Body. They teach, warn, counsel, guide, and comfort believers. The Scriptures clearly state this in 1 Corinthians 14:12:

"Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church."

Finally, the spiritual gifts result in the glorification of God and Jesus Christ, His Son. That's why Christ sent the Spirit.

The gifts of the Spirit abound to the glory, honor, and praise of Jesus Christ. Thus, any limitation on them degrades and dishonors God.

I pray that the Holy Spirit has identified the implications and demands of these truths upon your life.

What can the Holy Spirit do in your life today because of these truths?

First, He can correct you from sin. Where has He shown you your failure to practice your spiritual gift?

To doubt and disobey Biblical truth, whether deliberately or ignorantly, causes you to sin against God. The Spirit can correct you from your sin.

Second, He can conform you to the truth. Where has He shown how He wants to mold your actions, beliefs, thoughts, and ideas to God's word?

How, then, will you respond to them?

You will reject them by taking refuge in lies that will keep you from faith and obedience to God's word.

You will reaffirm their truth by faith and obedience. They will encourage you and bring praise to God.

You will realize what will happen in your life if you refuse them. You stand accountable to God for your sin and will suffer its consequences.

You will remember God's requirements upon your life: the duty of personal faith, obedience, and holiness; the duty of immediate repentance from sin without delay.

You will repent from your sin. In confession, you will turn from your sin unto Jesus Christ your Advocate with the Father. He will forgive and cleanse you from your sin.

You will rely upon the Holy Spirit to give you faith to believe and obey, to empower and enable you to respond to these truths in your life.

I pray that you will experience the work of the Holy Spirit in your life today. I pray that He will open your eyes to see your true condition before God. I pray that He will bring you to repent of your sin.

I pray that the Spirit will apply these truths in your life so that you will find relief through the blood of Jesus Christ. May He come to you in grace and bring a spiritual revival today.