

Unwrapped Gifts – The Gift of the Holy Spirit

1/28/18 - Pastor Randy

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (ESV)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

These verses are situated within the most extensive passage in the NT which deals with the subject of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; 1 Corinthians 12-14. Because our reading is focused on one small passage in that broader context of instruction concerning spiritual gifts, it is helpful to understand Paul's main points of concern addressed throughout chapters 12-14. It is also important to set this passage within the context of the whole letter and cultural context of the original audience.

There is pretty much universal agreement among NT scholars that Paul's first letter to the church in the city of Corinth was written in response to a letter he received from this church. Most of 1 Corinthians is comprised of correctives by Paul to ethical, moral, and doctrinal errors on the part of the Corinthian church. But before we are too hard on these Christians, remember that this was a new church, comprised mostly of new believers who had been raised in a culture that possessed a radically different world-view than the Judeo-Christian world-view. Not only did they have a lot to learn, they also had a lot to unlearn. We are no different and need just as much patience.

The Corinthian Christians were probably influenced by the pagan mystery religions common in their day. These mystery religions treated ecstatic speech as a mark of connection to the divine and they likely carried over those ideas into their experience with Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues, causing them to attribute special significance to tongues, making that the

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hallmark of spirituality.

There are four things God wants to say to us today about spiritual gifts.

1. All the Gifts Are Important

In response to this situation, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was bringing a corrective to a group of Christians that had elevated the gift of tongues to a place of almost singular importance above the other gifts of the Holy Spirit. In order to correct this overemphasis on tongues, he stressed that there are a variety of gifts and God is the source of all of them.

The diversity of gifts is intended to have a unifying purpose because God's way of working reflects His very nature. Look at how Paul framed his emphasis on diversity in respect to the gifts that come from God around the nature of God as a triune being.

Varieties of gifts – same Spirit

Varieties of service – same Lord (Jesus Christ). The "Lord" is Paul's "go to" title for Jesus. He uses it to express Jesus divine nature and His authority over us. (See 1 Corinthians 8:6 & 12:3). He never uses "Lord" to refer to God the Father

Varieties of activities (works, effects) – **same God**. (Paul refers to the Father simply as God)

Paul expressed himself this way in order to communicate that the unity in diversity which is part of God's very nature is to be reflected among the members of His church and through the various gifts operating through those members.

There are a **variety of ways** the Spirit makes manifest His presence, truth, and power through the **variety of individuals** in the body of Christ. No single gift is the mark of one's spirituality. We ought to value their diversity.

2. The Gifts are for the Common Good.

The second problem Paul was correcting was a self-centered attitude towards the gifts. H. Wayne House in an article entitled *Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth* wrote,

"Christians were to use their Christian charismata for the common good, but the pagans were totally concerned about their own personal experience, an attitude also prevalent among Corinthian Christians."

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Look at vs. 7: *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* In contrast to the self-orientation of pagan Greco-Roman religious worship, Christian worship gatherings are *for the common good*.

This reiterates something I mentioned last week. The gifts God gives us are not primarily for us. They are to be put to use for the common good of the body of Christ. Paul strengthens this point by writing a lengthy, forceful argument in chapter 13 that Christians have come to refer to as the “love chapter”.

1 Corinthians 13 has often been used to teach on the subject of love in a way that is completely disconnected from the flow of Paul’s thought. Those teachings don’t necessarily distort the text of chapter 13 but where we get into trouble is when we fail to include chapter 13 in our study of the gifts of the Spirit. Chapter 13 drives home the point that love for others must be our motivation for desiring and exercising the gifts.

Paul’s powerful emphasis on the uselessness of gifts that are not motivated and directed by love set the table for his specific instructions in chapter 14 about the use of tongues and prophesy in corporate worship. His whole concern in this chapter is that the any manifestation of spiritual gifts that happens in the corporate worship service must be for the benefit of the whole congregation, not just for a particular individual or individuals.

In addition to the two issues above that Paul needed to correct there are two other points I want to draw your attention to. One is from the passage we read and the other comes from chapter 14.

3. The Holy Spirit, not the individual, determines when and how these gifts will be expressed. Paul wrote in verse 11, *“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”*

These gifts are referred to as “manifestations” of the Spirit. This expression creates a subtle yet important difference between this list of gifts and the list

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in Romans 12 which we looked at last week. The language Paul used in his description of the gifts in Romans 12:3-8 –prophesy, serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading – indicates that these gifts are ongoing in the life of the individual. He writes about “the one who teaches”, “the one who exhorts”, the “one who leads”. In addition, his main point was not to provide an exhaustive list of clearly defined gifts but to emphasize the diversity of gifts that God has placed within the church. In doing so he described those gifts as the variety of ways the individual members of the church “function”. The word “function” implies that the “gift” in question refers to a person’s modus operandi, their MO so to speak. These terms express the typical manner in which a person is “gifted” to minister to others.

Now, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks about certain gifts which he describes as “manifestations” of the Spirit. A manifestation is a “display” or “disclosure” or “revealing”. These gifts do not refer to the manner in which individual believers function on a regular basis. Rather, manifestations of the Spirit refer to specific ways in which the Spirit, on specific occasions, reveals His presence, expresses His truth, and displays His power.

These gifts or manifestations are not permanent abilities possessed by individual believers which they can exercise whenever they choose. It is up to the Spirit to determine how and when the particular gift will manifest through individuals.

Paul’s purpose was not to provide the Corinthians with an exhaustive, detailed and clearly defined list of the various ways the Spirit manifests himself therefore, the Spirit did not inspire him to provide the same for us. However, we do have a historical record of various ways the Spirit manifested himself in the early church provided for us in Luke’s account called the Acts of the Apostles. Let’s look at some of those instances that probably serve as examples of these manifestations.

Prophecy – To prophesy is to speak to others under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This gift is both in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and as such it can refer to a gift that God uses someone in on a regular basis – these persons

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would be described as having the gift of prophesy - or it can be gift that manifests now and then in a believer's life. In the NT only certain people are described as prophets, but Paul also tells all believers that they should desire to prophesy.

In 1 Corinthians 14:3 Paul wrote, "the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation." A word of prophesy can foretell something about the future but most often it is simply a divinely directed word that encourages and strengthens believers. *"And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encourage and strengthened the brothers with many words."* – Acts 15:32

In Acts 21 we have the record of a man named Agabus who prophesied to Paul that if he went to Jerusalem he would be arrested, so prophecy can have a foretelling aspect to it as well.

Word of Knowledge and Word of Wisdom – In Acts 5 the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter that two of their members had lied about a gift to the church in order to make themselves look more generous than they really were. In this instance Peter had received knowledge from the Holy Spirit that he did not gain from any human source. In Acts 15 the Apostles were faced with the challenge of how to incorporate non Jews into the church. Some thought they needed to follow the law and customs of Judaism but James had a word of wisdom that provided guidance as to how both Jews and non-Jews could be unified together as followers of Christ.

The Ability to Distinguish Between Spirits – In Acts 8 Peter rebuked a man by the name of Simon because Peter was able to discern that Simon was looking to exploit the power of the Holy Spirit for possibly both personal gain and aggrandizement.

Gifts of Healings and Working of Miracles – The fact that Paul listed healings and miracles separately is more evidence of the fact that his intention was not to provide a precisely defined list, since gifts of healings are miracles. Miracles not related to physical healing in the Book of Acts would include

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deliverance from demonic spirits and Philips being carried away by the Spirit in Acts 8.

The Gift of Faith – The gift of faith does not refer to the faith that leads to salvation, but to a special endowment of faith that, as it finds its expression through an individual believer, inspires and encourages the church. In Acts 6 we read that Stephen was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” His faith and courage to preach the gospel in the face of intense persecution inspired faith on the part of other believers to do the same. (See Acts 8:1-4)

Tongues and Interpretation – The gift of tongues is the ability to express oneself to God in words that the speaker has not learned. There is much debate as to whether or not these “*various kinds of tongues*” includes speaking in “heavenly” language in addition to know languages spoken by various people groups throughout our world. In Acts 2 the foreigners who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost and heard the disciples “speaking in tongues”, were amazed because they heard the disciples praising God in their own languages; languages that would not have been known to the disciples without the supernatural divine assistance.

According to Paul (see 1 Corinthians 14:1-13) speaking in tongues, which he also describes as prayer and praise to God, builds up the person who is speaking (i.e. praying) but it is of no value to the church as a whole unless someone interprets the “tongue” in the known language of the congregation. (1 Corinthians 14:1-19;28)

The final thing I believe God wants to say to us today is what Paul wrote to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 14:1

“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.”

4. Pursue love. Desire gifts. Love must be our pursuit. The only reason to desire spiritual gifts is because of love for others. Any other motivation is a corrupt motivation and will lead to manufacturing the appearance of spiritual gifts and the manipulation of people. Beware of false prophets and false

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miracle workers whose only love is their own bank account and notoriety. Years ago I pleaded with one of my Great Aunts when I discovered she was giving to a phony faith healer who had been exposed for fraud and fleecing God's sheep. Beware, but don't let false prophets cause your heart to despise prophecy altogether. Don't let those who are not genuine cause you to become cynical about the miraculous gifts altogether.

Why does God tell us to desire spiritual gifts rather than to pursue them like he says to pursue love? A desire is different than a goal. Goals are outcomes that we work towards and which we are responsible for attaining – at least partially. A desire is something we ask for, but then leave the result up to the Holy Spirit. Our job is not to make something happen. Those who fall into that trap end up attempting to manufacture the supernatural and hurt the cause of Christ when people realize the claims are false. Our job is to make sure that we love God with our obedience and love others with our service. As we do what God tells us to do and what others need us to do, God will do what only He can do!

For further reading on the subject of the Holy Spirit and His gifts go to:
<https://ag.org/Beliefs/Our-Core-Doctrines/Baptism-in-the-Holy-Spirit>