

## **Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

In this lecture we continue studying the ministries of the Holy Spirit and now we are up to the gifts of the Spirit. I have seven principles to cover and we are not going to solve every problem. I will mention a few books before we start. An outstanding book is D.A. Carson's book *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*. He is one of my favorite writers in general. Carson will totally please no one but he tries to be very faithful to Scripture. His own conclusions are to claim that second blessing theology is a mistake. On the other hand, he says that attempts he has seen to show that some gifts—other than perhaps apostle or prophet—have ceased, are not convincing to him either. He really tries to work with Scripture and I respect his treatment very much. One godly writer who thinks the gifts have ceased is Richard Gaffin, in his book, *Perspectives on Pentecost*. Another worthy book is *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, by Gordon Fee. He takes a charismatic perspective although he is not exactly a traditional charismatic in some ways. Gordon Fee is an Assemblies of God minister and a world-famous professor of the New Testament. He is now at Regent College in Canada. *God's Empowering Presence* is certainly an important book. I think that he too rejects the second work of grace, but he certainly holds to the gifts offered today. We must make decisions in a very careful way, working with the apostle Paul and avoiding the excesses that others have made. Another work that is more toward the cessationist side, the idea that some of the sign gifts have ceased, is by Anthony Hoekema, called *Tongues and Spirit Baptism: A Biblical and Theological Evaluation*. One of the evaluations on the back cover of that book says it is "irenic in spirit." That is characteristic of Hoekema. He does not attack other believers. And his book shows that peaceful spirit. I am not going to have all the answers on this issue. But at least some things seem clear in this area. Frankly I have not studied this as much as I would like but I am making a beginning. So bear with me and let us see what good things we can discover in God's Word.

The gifts of the Spirit bring up the issue of the divine sovereignty-human responsibility tension. One of the perspectives on the Word of God that I have found most helpful is this tension—this paradox between God's control of all things and genuine human accountability—we saw under the fruit of the Spirit when we said the Spirit gives the fruit. He is sovereign but human responsibility is not denied. We are still to walk in the Spirit. We find the same tension, as a matter of fact, all the way through the Bible in its presentation of almost everything. The cross of Christ is one example. Human responsibility is in view in that it is the greatest crime in the history of the world. Caiaphas, Judas, and Pilate are guilty of great sin. At the same time, God's eternal plan is fulfilled precisely in the cross. So here we have both God's control and human responsibility, even human culpability, in the same event. You can see that tension in Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27-28. I will just mention the passages and let you look at them on your own. The conspiracy against Christ that highlights human responsibility only accomplishes what God's power and will had decided beforehand should happen, which certainly accents divine control. I find this a common biblical perspective. On the one hand, 1 Corinthians 12 says the Spirit is sovereign in the bestowal of gifts. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:11 that "all these are the work of one and the same Spirit and He gives them to each one just as He wills." The Spirit is sovereign in the bestowal of gifts.

I know some believers who have been frustrated that they did not have the gift of teaching. There is nothing wrong with seeking gifts. We are going to see that in a moment. It is fine to test one's ability at teaching and ask the Lord to bless one's ministry. But some believers are needlessly frustrated. Through trial and error you may honestly seek God and attempt to serve God under the authority of the elders or leaders in your local church. In that process, along with the pastors and so forth, you may conclude that you do not have certain gifts. If the Lord has not given you the gift of teaching, He does not want you to spend all your days being frustrated about that, but rather to find out what gifts He has given you and for you to use them to the glory of God. And He wants you to be content with how He has made you and

equipped you. So God's sovereignty is in place here, but so is human responsibility because believers are exhorted in a couple of places to seek spiritual gifts. The last verse in 1 Corinthians 12 says, "Eagerly desire the greater gifts." And 1 Corinthians 14:1 says, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." Thus there is God's sovereign bestowal that keeps me from frustration. But it is not a let go and let God and do nothing theology either. If, in the name of God's sovereignty, we are passive as Christians, then we are wrong. We have not worked it all out well. We are to be active as Christians and we are to desire spiritual gifts. We are to be open to God's equipping us to serve Him and we are then to get active and serve the Lord. So it would be good to serve in a number of different capacities in order to test our gifts and our service and ministries in that way under the Lord.

We see from the first few verses in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians that there is a danger of abusing the gifts. Paul writes, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." Apparently they were ignorant, at least to some extent. 1 Corinthians 1 says they were loaded with gifts as a church. But as you know from reading through the letter, they are also loaded with problems. So being gifted by the Holy Spirit does not do away with all problems. Paul goes on to say, "You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." It is hard for me to even imagine that they might consider you could say "Jesus is cursed," and that could be of the Spirit of God. But certainly they were having some difficulties and some of the things he writes in the verses that follow are designed to correct abuses. Some felt superior because they had certain gifts and apparently they were telling others that they were superior too. Others felt inferior because they lacked certain gifts. Here too, Paul writes to correct abuses in their church.

Here is an interesting thing that I learned—a wonderful thing. The gifts reflect both unity and diversity. Here is how. The gifts are given by the Trinitarian God Himself. They are thus a reflection of the Trinity in the life of the church. Here is what I mean. First Corinthians 12:4-6 says that there are different kinds of gifts, which means diversity. But the same Spirit gives them, which means unity. There are different kinds of service, which is again diversity. But the same Lord ensures unity. There are different kinds of working, which indicates diversity. But the same God works all of them in all people.

Let us interpret Spirit, Lord, and God. I think it is pretty plain that "Spirit" means the Holy Spirit. "Lord" most often in Pauline writings means the Lord Jesus. Thus God would be a reference to God the Father. I thus detect a Trinitarian reference. The same Holy Spirit, the same Lord Jesus, and the same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ are all mentioned. I admit it is an interpretation. But I do think it is correct because of the combination of the three. We have a sameness emphasized three times. It is like saying it is the same Trinity, the same Trinity, the same Trinity, except all three persons of the Godhead are mentioned, and with each one we have diversity. It is one and the same God, the Holy Spirit, who gives different kinds of gifts. So while we have a diversity of giftedness in the church, Paul is also arguing for unity. That is why he keeps saying "the same" when he mentions different persons of the Godhead. The diversity of the gifts is perfectly compatible with the unity of the Spirit because the same Spirit gave the gifts. Furthermore, there are not only gifts but there are ministries, which seems to be what the word "service" means. There are different kinds of ministries of service but the same Lord Jesus Christ. The ministries are presented here, as I read between the lines trying to understand what Paul means, as ministries done unto the Lord Jesus Christ. They are acts of service done to Christ. This will color the whole way I serve in the church if it is the same Lord Jesus who is responsible for all these different ministries going on in His name. Once again we have diversity, this time of ministries instead

of gifts. Presumably we have the gifts to perform the ministries. This time it is the same Lord Jesus Christ and there are different kinds of working.

I see a progression. Gifts are given to us that we might serve the Lord, but even there we need the power of God at work in our ministries if there will be any lasting fruit. We can be gifted and we can serve in our own strength and for our own glory, but to forget love or to build our own little empire would not honor God and edify other people. We are to seek God's blessing and His working with our gifts through our ministries because He is the same God and Father who works all of them in all men. Paul here is setting up for what He is going to say in the verses that follow. He emphasizes the unity of the body of Christ, the diversity of the members, and the various gifts God has given them in the various ministries in the local church to which He has called them. They have unity in the working of God the Father in all those different people and in their ministries. Is that not a beautiful thing? I rejoice in that.

Because the Trinity is one, these gifts, service, and working are unified in God's plan. It is probably already time for us to take a little spiritual checkup. Are we using our gifts in the service of the Lord in our local church? There is just no such in the New Testament as a Christian who is not serving, who does not have some kind of a ministry. That is part of your devotion to Christ. It is part of your service to Him. We each need to get busy. You might say, "I am trying to be a faithful husband, a faithful father. It is impossible to also try to have a ministry." I can understand the need to balance things. I have encouraged students over the years to cut back on their commitments when they try to do too much in a local church. But you have to do something, even in a busy lifestyle. There are some who are real activists and their temptation would be to do seven ministries when they are going to school and not do enough reading. On the other hand, there are those who are passive and whose temptation is to stay in that library forever. You can hardly root them out to go to the church services. You need to find a balance. Wherever your instincts lie, do not neglect the other side.

In all we need to promote the unity of the body of Christ. If your use of your gifts is not to create unity, then something is wrong. I am impressed with Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1 where he says the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. I have known certain people with a real gift of teaching but there is a problem in the way they use it because it does not promote love. If we are gifted by God in the area of teaching, we should see fruit in our ministries in this way. We should see greater love for God and greater love for other people. I have seen good minds and gifted teachers use their teaching to turn Christians against each other. There is a time to confront error, to correct it, and to point it out as error. But our teaching had better promote love or something is wrong with us. First Corinthians 13 is crucially placed. The love chapter is in between the two spiritual gifts chapters. It is no accident that it is there. Love is the lubrication that makes the machinery of the church and the spiritual gifts run the way they should. We really need to always be reminded of the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, and then the rest. Likewise we find the same thing in 1 Corinthians 13. So the gifts reflect unity, or at least they should. They should promote unity and diversity. We should rejoice when others have better gifts than we do in certain areas. We should rejoice because that too is to the glory of God and we need their gifts and ministries even as the body of Christ as a whole needs ours.

One might ask if the gifts should also promote godly diversity. The answer, of course, is yes. Our goal is not to make little clones. Our goal is not to make everybody have exactly the personality of the pastor. Pastors should realize that they need the saints to do the work of the ministry. More and more Bible-believing pastors are seeing their role as equippers to train the church leaders and then the people in the church to do that work of ministry. It is not just the gifts that promote diversity. It is the Godhead who promotes diversity. After all, God is one, but God is three in one. The gifts the Spirit bestows, the

ministries done to Christ, and the working of the Father are varied. They vary with person, with age, with sex, and with the particular situation in life—and they are wonderful. We should rejoice in that great diversity. Pastors need to promote the people to have ministries for the Lord. Sometimes the Lord leads the church in ways that surprise us because there are ministries that we did not plan to lead. We need to let the Lord lead us. Leadership is to exercise leadership. Everybody is not to do what is right in his own eyes, but godly leaders are open to the Spirit's leading even through the people. When somebody gets a burden for a particular ministry, the elders and leaders need to really take that into account and seek the Lord and be open to a diversity that was perhaps from the Lord that they did not even plan or realize. So both elements are to be emphasized. Diversity and unity are both important for the proper functioning of the body of Christ.

The various gifts are given by the Spirit as He chooses in order to promote the common good of the church. Let us look at how the concepts of diversity and unity are weaved throughout 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Paul begins by saying, "Now to each one," which indicates diversity. Then he says, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good," which is unity again. Whatever gifts and ministries and workings we have are given for this purpose. First of all, they are for the glory of God. That goes without saying. It is assumed. But in terms of the work in the church, they are for the common good of the body of Christ. Paul continues by saying, "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues." Notice he has listed all different gifts. There is diversity again. All these in their diversity are the work of one and the same Spirit. That is unity again. And He gives them to each one just as He determines. So once again the principle continues. Different gifts are given by the same Spirit and in this context they are given sovereignly for the good of the whole. It is a beautiful harmony that God envisions.

We have body imagery throughout the passage. It teaches us a number of things. One thing is that believers belong to each other. They are one in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:12 Paul says, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body." When you think about it, it is a marvelous thing indeed the way our bodies are made. Our eyes are just tremendous cameras that last for so many years and continually take color pictures of the world. It is an amazing thing. And so it is with many of our members. After that previous statement about the human body, Paul goes on to say, "So it is with Christ." He makes a comparison of the human body with its many members and its unity to the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul explains this by saying, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." We belong to each other because by virtue of the work of God the Holy Spirit, we were incorporated into the one body of Christ. Then Paul continues by saying, "Now the body is not made up of one part but many." Then later he says, "As it is, there are many parts but one body." Here it means many parts of the church but one body of Christ. There is that notion of belonging to each other. With our differences we are yet one. Consequently, Christians need each other.

We not only belong to each other, but you can meet a new Christian tomorrow or tonight that you never knew before and in a manner of minutes you can feel a kinship. Is that not true? You can feel that you have more in common with that new acquaintance than you have with friends or even relatives that you have known for decades or all of your life. There is a spiritual bond there for which God gets the glory. Consequently we not only belong to each other but we need each other. The church needs your gifts. And you need the gifts and ministries of others in the church. We need each other if the church is to function as God intended.

The inconspicuous gifts are as important as the conspicuous. In 1 Corinthians 12:14 Paul says, “The body is not made up of one part but of many.” Can you picture a body being one huge eyeball? We would have problems getting around, no doubt. We have our imagination, but we are not made that way. “Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.” An inconspicuous part of the church is as important to God as the people in the limelight. Whether because of authority, office in the church, gifts, personality, or whatever else, some are more in the shadows. Others are in the limelight. They are all important, God says. You show me a pastor and I will show you somebody who appreciates the hard workers when it is vacation Bible school time. That requires a team effort. It is a work of the whole church. And pastors appreciate people who faithfully pray for the work of the ministry. We need each other. And Paul goes on to say, “If the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.” The ear would just not be thinking right. And Paul is writing to those who thought themselves relatively unimportant next to their flashier brothers and sisters. He says to them, you are just as important: “If the whole body was an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body was an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wants them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” So those of you who think you are an elbow, a kneecap, or a heel, rejoice. The body needs all those parts and more as well. I am being ridiculous, of course.

Furthermore, each member of the body needs the other members. No one is self-sufficient. We are all dependent on the others. First Paul talked about the inconspicuous, those who saw themselves as unimportant. And he told them that they really are important. Now he talks about those who were perhaps more in the limelight and who thought they were really important—those who may think something like: “I can sing like a nightingale. I do not need those other people.” “You do need the other people,” the Lord says. You are not sufficient in yourself because you are not the whole body. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I do not need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I do not need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” A bit later Paul writes, “But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it so that there should be no division in the body but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” That is how the church should function. We should share the sorrow of others as if it were our sorrow because in a very real sense it is. We belong to that person. You might say, “But honestly I do not like that person so much. I would never choose him or her as a close friend.” That is right; you do not choose. God chooses and you may not have to be intimate friends with everybody in the church. You cannot be. But we do need to love each other, to understand that the others need our ministries and that we need theirs and to affirm that unity of the body of Christ. Likewise, when God gives honor to members of the church, we should rejoice with them and not be jealous because in a sense, we are being honored since they are part of us even as we are part of Christ and part of them as well.

Apparently God has done some ranking of gifts according to importance. In 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 we are told, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” I do not have all the answers on the cessationist question. I would have a hard time with somebody today trying to convince me that he or she is an apostle in the biblical sense since apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ and commissioned by the Lord to be His witnesses. Consider Acts 1 where a successor for Judas was chosen. It looks to me like apostles in that

sense have ceased. I am nervous about prophets. I know there are different definitions of prophets, but they are spokesmen for God throughout the Old Testament and on into the New. I am nervous about those as well. In any case, I am ahead of myself.

There is a ranking here of gifts by God himself. Is it according to importance? Maybe it is. Certainly the apostles and the prophets were the foundation. On the very cornerstone Christ they laid the foundation of the Christian church. And we are their debtors in that way. It is a mistake, according to verses 29 and 30, to say that possession of any one spiritual gift is essential, either for salvation or for service. If you belong to a church that thinks otherwise, I will respect you. I just ask you to hear me out on this. I will try to persuade you based on Scripture. If I cannot, then I do not even want to try if I cannot do it on the basis of the Scriptures. But we are allowed to disagree with each other in love. Our fellowship is based on the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word of God. And we have that in common. So our fellowship is not at stake here.

A very precise translation of those verses would be, “All are not apostles, are they?” Without turning this into a full-blown Greek grammar lesson, I will tell you that Greek has two different negatives that it uses in questions in order to reveal the expected answer in the mind of the speaker. This is not infallible. If the speaker is the devil, it is likely to be a lie. If the speaker is some fallible human being, that could be mixed up too. But here the speaker is an apostle speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so it is not a mistake. The terms indicate whether a positive or a negative answer is expected. Here it is consistently the same adverb, the same term, which is used in the questions to indicate a negative answer is expected. The meaning is, all are not apostles, are they? No. And right on down the line. Every one uses the same term. All are not prophets, are they? No. All are not teachers, are they? No. All do not work miracles. All do not have the gifts of healing. All do not speak in tongues, do they? No.

Then remember 1 Corinthians 12:13, which says, “We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.” That is the universal experience of every member of that church. On the other hand, there is no one gift that they all have. That is a good way to say it according to verses 29 and 30. According to verse 13, they all received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, incorporating them into the body of Christ, making them Christians. On the other hand, there is not even one gift that they all possessed. Therefore possession of one particular gift is not essential for either salvation or service. The possession of the Holy Spirit is essential for salvation. He is the one who applies salvation to us in the first place and that is the first place we started when we talked about the ministries of the Spirit. And He has given every one of us a gift, or more than one gift. We are not denying that. But we are just saying I cannot hold up my gift and say that if you do not have that one then you are really not spiritual or you cannot serve the Lord.

Some have even said historically that you are not a Christian unless you have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace evidenced by speaking in tongues. I am thankful that that is a very rare teaching now. More have said that you do not have the Holy Spirit for service unless you have spoken in tongues as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I do not see how that can be justified by this passage. D.A. Carson agrees in the book I mentioned to you earlier. Actually, all four of those writers, if I understand Gordon Fee correctly, an Assemblies of God minister, agree on the point I just said. I give Fee great credit for going with the Scriptures. He still identifies himself as a charismatic Christian, but he begs to differ with his own denomination on that point, that there is not one particular gift that is an infallible and necessary evidence of possession of the Spirit. I say this to help you understand my spirit in sharing my view. There is no rancor.

Maybe the most important thing to say of all is that love is indispensable for the proper functioning of the spiritual gifts. Without love the gifts are not what God intended them to be. Paul says, “If I speak in

the tongues of men and of angels but have not love I am only the resounding gong, or a clanging cymbal.” You can have the most tremendous gifts of speech and teaching and anything else, but if you lack love, it is going to sound like noise. Paul then says, “If I have the gift of prophecy and fathom all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing.” It is better to be quiet in the church if you are not going to edify. Paul mentions self-sacrifice saying, “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing.” First Corinthians 13 is strategically placed in order to warn us, lest we get excited about the gifts and forget the Giver of the gifts. We might become excited about what God is doing in our great ministries and forget about God whom we are serving and the people we are supposed to be building up. We can hardly put too much emphasis on love in this regard.

The Corinthians were filled with gifts. But they needed to be taken back to kindergarten and be taught to love each other the way they should. They were getting carried away. They needed some order, some discipline, and they needed lots and lots of love. It is remarkable. It is described for us. He will not let us get away with some kind of vague description of it. He says in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” That is a great description of love. We are turning up all kinds of good passages for devotions in this study. Here is the remarkable thing: the other gifts will pass away according to the following verses. My understanding from the context is that Paul is speaking of the second coming of Christ. What do I think of using this as a proof text to teach cessationism, by saying that “when that which is perfect” is a completed Bible? I do not think very much of it. It is not what he is talking about in the context. The gifts will pass away but love will last forever. That is a remarkable thing. So we want to strive to be excellent in love. That is more important than any gift. “These three remain, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.”