

The Gifts of the Body, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1–11

Code: 1311

INTRODUCTION

God wants to reach this world with His truth. In the Old Testament, Israel was God's vehicle to reach the world. In the Gospels, Christ and His disciples were the vehicle to reach the world. Since the second chapter of Acts right up until today, the church is the vehicle through which God has designed to communicate to the world. And it is not only by the words that we say, but we also communicate by what we are. Jesus said in John 13:35, "*By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" And in John 17:21-23, Jesus prayed that our unity would show the world that He was sent by the Father. Our witness, then, is not only a verbal communication of the gospel, but it is also the witness of our love and unity. Unity within the church, on the basis of humility and love, is our greatest testimony.

A. The Position

All believers are one, in terms of position. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul says, "*For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*" We have been made one in terms of the Holy Spirit's ministry putting us into the body of Christ at salvation.

B. The Practice

Though we are one in fact, we are not one in terms of our activities and actions; and we're certainly not one in spirit and witness. Christianity's testimony has been decimated because the church has been fractioned and hacked up into lots of little groups. Though we are one positionally, the world doesn't see us as one in practice. We do not have a singular testimony of humility and love.

Now you know that if God wants us to be one, Satan wants to be divided. So, while the prayer of Christ was that we would be one, and while the activity of the Spirit is to make us one, all of the energy of Satan is spent to fraction us. Whenever you become a divisive issue within the body of Christ, you are an agent of Satan, because Christ wants to unify - Satan wants to divide. Unfortunately, Satan has been tremendously successful in dividing the church through the large number of uncommitted Christians.

* *Is Denominationalism Scriptural?*

There's no scriptural justification for the existence of all the present divisions of the church. Denominationally, there weren't any divisions in the New Testament. None at all! In fact, all the divisions of the church today are totally and explicitly contrary to the straightforward teaching of the Word of God. The whole intention of Christ in forming the body was that we may be one body---not

all fractioned up into little parts. The body was formed in unit.

C. The Patience

In the book of Acts, the body of Christ, the church, was formed in a prayer meeting in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem. The disciples of Jesus had gathered there to pray. Out of their faith, obedience, and watching in prayer, God brought the church into existence. These disciples were made up of humble people. There weren't any great or mighty ones, just holy men and women filled with the Holy Spirit and possessing spiritual gifts. They went down out of that upper room into the streets to preach Christ crucified and risen, and the day of God's free grace.

Now Christ had told them that the church would be born in Jerusalem and that they would evangelize the world. Now, had Christ said that to today's church, we would immediately start master-planning, getting the committees going, electing a chairman, etc. But do you know what they did? They just prayed and waited. They didn't even have an evangelism committee or an organizational structure. They just prayed and waited--the hardest thing in the world to do. In fact, they were told to begin world evangelism (Acts 1:8), but they didn't begin it for seven years. You say, "That's terrible! No. They just wanted a solid foundation and strong capable evangelists--and that takes time!"

D. The Participation

When the church began, they all went out of that upper room and evangelized. That's the way it ought to be! It is every believer's responsibility to evangelize. Every member that was a part of that prayer meeting was engaged in the activities through the Spirit's power. And from that moment on, every member has been added to the church the same way--by the Spirit's power, placing him into the body of Christ.

The early church was exciting. This was because:

1. THEY ALL WERE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT.
2. THEY ALL WERE EXERCISING THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFTS.
3. THEY ALL WERE PREACHING THE GOSPEL.
4. THEY ALL HAD A UNITY OF LOVE.

The results of such a church? They have such a tremendous witness that "*the Lord added to the church daily*" (Acts 2:47b).

In order for the church today to be an effective witness as a body, as the early church was, it must be as healthy as the early church was. Not just organized, but Spirit-filled. Not just super-committed, but exercising the spiritual gifts, and all preaching the gospel. The standard for us today is no different.

*** Why is it so hard for the church today to be like the early church?**

There is a missing ingredient in the church today - persecution. Do you know what persecution does? It drives out all the tares and gets rid of them. If, all of a sudden, the United States Government declared that Christianity was illegal and that everybody who was a Christian was going to be shot, what do you think church attendance would be like? But, of those who came, do you know what we'd have? We would have Spirit-filled, redeemed, committed people; all the rest would

fall by the wayside. Persecution really weeds out those who are uncommitted. Even though our church today is missing the ingredient of persecution, we still have the same standards as the early church. We are to be mature, functioning, loving, humble, Spirit-filled, exercising our gifts, and preaching the gospel - just like the early church.

E. The Plan

Christ wants the church to be powerful, mature, functioning, growing, witnessing and manifesting His love. Now in order to do that, God designed a plan within the confines of the true church, His body. This is God's plan: In order to make the church grow and have a unified witness. God designed that every body member would have a certain function or functions within the body, resulting in the health of the total body--growing, maturing, functioning and witnessing. The human body is an illustration of this. It has all kinds of organs and limbs that interact. If just one of the organs doesn't function, the whole body is sick. Every organ has a function that results in the health or sickness of the whole body. The same thing is true of the body of Christ. Every believer has a vital ministry as a vital organ of the body. And if the body is to be healthy and mature--a single, dynamic, edified, built-up testimony to the world--every believer must actively and intensely involve himself in the function which God has given him. Your service and your ministry makes the body healthy because it carries strength to the other vital parts of the body. On the other hand, your failure to serve, your unfaithfulness, your carnality, your self-centeredness, your divisive spirit, and your spiritual laziness make the body sick and crippled, and retards its growth, maturity, and witness. If you're a Christian, God has designed you to be a vital, functioning organ. Therefore, if the body is to be healthy, you must minister to it!

F. The Purpose

God's will for the body is that we be like Christ. Ephesians 4:13 says, *"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* The total body is to be like Jesus Christ. He wants to manifest His own character and person through us--not only as individuals, but as a body. To accomplish this Christ-likeness God gives every member of the body a function that ministers to the rest of the body. The Holy Spirit then uses these individual spiritual gifts to manifest Himself to the whole body and to bring it to maturity and health.

G. The Person

All the gifts were, in their fullest sense, complete in Christ. For example the gift of preaching. Could Christ preach? Could He preach! The gift of teaching; could He teach? The gift of showing mercy; could He show mercy? The gift of helps, ruling...no matter what the gift, it was complete in Christ. And the reason God gives each member a different gift is that He wants the body to manifest a composite Christlikeness. Every gift that the Holy Spirit gives the church is a characteristic of Christ because God wants the church to be as complete and full as Christ.

The only way that you, as an individual, will ever be a man in full stature in Christ, is when you have all the gifts being ministered to you. A Christian will never be like Jesus Christ until he has been built up in all the areas represented by the spiritual gifts. As every member ministers their spiritual gift to each other, we are all built up, as individuals, to be like Christ and to show forth His attributes. Collectively, as a body, we will also manifest the total person of Christ.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1 Cor. 12:1)

Why are spiritual gifts important? Because the body can't be like Christ unless the gifts are ministered and Christians all grow together in maturity in all the areas that characterize Christ. Unless believers minister their spiritual gifts in the energy of the Spirit, the body is not built up. And if it is not built up, it is not like Christ, I'm not like Christ, and Christians are not what they ought to be--a body to manifest Christ to the world.

The importance of spiritual gifts is seen in Paul's statement, "*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.*" (1 Cor. 12:1). Unfortunately, people are ignorant! The Corinthians were grossly ignorant, and people today are ignorant. Some people abuse the spiritual gifts--some neglect them. Some Christians emphasize only the sign gifts, the miraculous gifts, and ignore the edifying ones. The understanding of spiritual gifts is so critical to the life of the body of Christ and the testimony of the gospel in the world, that it ranks with the essentials of salvation and the gospel. This is essential--not a passing fancy. The total body will never be what it could be, or what Jesus prayed that it would be, or what the Holy Spirit gifted and empowered it to be until we are no longer ignorant about spiritual gifts.

II. THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1 Cor. 12:11)

Where do spiritual gifts come from? Verse 11 says, "*But all these (the spiritual gifts) worketh that one and the very same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.*" The Holy Spirit is the source of the spiritual gifts. In fact, in 1 Cor. 7:7, Paul makes reference to a believer's spiritual gift as "*his proper gift of God.*"

A. The Definition

A spiritual gift is a Spirit-given ability which acts as a channel through which the Holy Spirit ministers to the body. The spiritual gift is not the end in itself; it is only the channel through which the Holy Spirit operates.

B. The Degree

Spiritual gifts have nothing to do with spirituality. Every believer has spiritual gifts, regardless of their personal spiritual development. Even carnal or backslidden Christians have them. The possession of a spiritual gift doesn't mean a person is "spiritual," because all Christians possess them. Spiritual gifts are only Spirit-given channels through which the Spirit of God ministers to the whole body. The only question is whether the channel is clear or whether it's all plugged up.

C. The Distribution

At the end of verse 11 it says that the Holy Spirit takes the various gifts and distributes them to the body member. The day that you received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, the Spirit of God distributed to you certain gifts. And through those gifts, the Holy Spirit wants to minister to you and to

the rest of the body. He gives the gifts by divine will and divine choice because He knows what gifts are needed, where they're needed, when they're needed, and who is to receive them.

D. The Deviations

1. NEGLECT

You can have the gift given by the Holy Spirit and be doing nothing about it. Timothy fell into this problem and Paul had to tell him, in 1 Timothy 4:14, "*Neglect not the gift that is in thee.*" Timothy had become sidetracked by certain people who were pressuring him, and he was getting upset. He didn't lose his gift, he just neglected it. In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul had to put it another way: "*Wherefore, I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God.*" In other words, "Get going, Timothy. You've got it - use it!"

2. NATURAL ABILITY

A spiritual gift is not the same as a natural ability. You can't say My gift is making pie. That's a wonderful ability but it's not a gift of the Spirit. Some may say, My gift is to work with my hands, or My gift is to sing. But these are not spiritual gifts, they're natural abilities. The Apostle Paul was a graphic illustration of this. He obviously had a natural ability to express himself publicly - he was glib, sharp, and really quick. He had a natural ability to talk; but it is clear that Paul never regarded his ability to talk as a gift of the Spirit. He was a man of tremendous learning and could have used his knowledge of philosophy and literature to compose eloquent, convincing orations, delivered with magnificent ability. But he said this: "*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God... And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*" (1 Cor. 2:1,4). The Holy Spirit expresses Himself through men, and He uses a man's knowledge and ability; but it is in a supernatural way apart from man's own ability. God may elect to use your natural ability, but He also may bypass it and give you a gift that has no connection.

3. ENERGY OF THE FLESH

Christians can either minister their spiritual gifts in the energy of the Spirit or in the energy of the flesh. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, "*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another. If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it in the ability which God giveth.*" Did you know that a man could have the gift of ministering and still minister in the flesh, or stand in the pulpit and preach in the flesh? That's what it's saying! Just because you have the gift doesn't necessarily mean that every time you exercise it you're doing it in the Spirit. So Peter says, "*Let him do it as the ability which God giveth.*"

4. INFALLIBILITY

1 Corinthians 14:32 says, "*And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*" That means that even the prophets had to be subject to their own spirits. 1 Corinthians 14:29 says, "*Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge.*" Even the prophets aren't infallible. They had to check with two or three other prophets, work it out together, and then have somebody else judge who was right. Having a certain spiritual gift is no guarantee that you're always right.

III. THE POWER OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1 Cor. 12:2-6)

A. The Power for Understanding Spiritual Gifts

Because the Corinthians had such a fouled up background in idol worship, they could know nothing about Christianity or spiritual gifts except the Holy Spirit teach them. In verse 3 Paul said, *“No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.”* In other words, Paul was saying to the Corinthians, “You couldn’t even know something as basic as the Lordship of Christ unless the Holy Spirit told you about it.” When Peter said to Jesus, *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,”* Jesus replied, *“Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven”* (Matt. 16:16, 17). If the natural man can’t even understand the Lordship of Christ, how could he understand the work of the Holy Spirit through spiritual gifts? He never could! The Holy Spirit is the power for understanding spiritual gifts.

B. The Power for Operating Spiritual Gifts

Jesus said, “Ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you” (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit is the power for understanding and operating spiritual gifts. Whatever we do in our own flesh, in our own fashion, in our own will, and in our own design, is failure and mockery. But whatever we do when we’re filled with the Holy Spirit, as we exercise our gift in His power, is borne along by divine energy. If you operate in the energy of the flesh, you might as well not operate, because anything you do in the flesh is a Satanic counterfeit. That’s exactly what was going on in Corinth; they had counterfeited all the gifts. They had the gifts, but through carnality they had quenched and grieved the Holy Spirit so that no power was coming through. The Corinthian part of the body was sick.

*** *How can you operate your gift in the energy of the Spirit?***

There are four basic principles to using your gift in the energy of the Spirit:

(1) PRAYER

Constantly ask God to cleanse your life and to use you in the Spirit’s power.

(2) YIELDEDNESS

Yield yourselves as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13; 12:1,2).

(3) BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT (Eph. 5:18)

Allow the Spirit of God to permeate every part of you. Turn every decision, every thought, and every attitude over to the Spirit’s control.

(4) WALK IN THE SPIRIT (Gal. 5:16)

Align yourself with the living God in your life, and walk one step at a time.

*** *We’re plugged into the Trinity!***

In 1 Cor. 12:4-6, Paul explains the energy of the Spirit, *“There are diversities of the gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are*

diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all.“ Notice that the Trinity - the Spirit, the Lord, and God--are all working within us, with the Spirit providing the energy. We were on a divine power source, plugged into the Trinity. That’s exciting! We are plugged into divine power which should surge through our spiritual gifts to touch the body and make its witness to the world a healthy one. The power and the gift is there, but we must be yielded to the Holy Spirit to be effective.

IV. EXTENT OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1 Cor. 12:7-17)

A. How many believers have spiritual gifts?

Verse 7 says, “*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit.*“ Spiritual gifts are vehicles given to every believer through which the Spirit manifests Himself to the body. We not only profit by the exercise of our gifts, but the rest of the body profits also. The way this works is that we each profit in our areas of non-giftedness when we are ministered to by someone who has those gifts--and vice versa. We are built up in our weak areas as we build up those who are weak in our gifted areas. The body is built up and matured as we minister to each other.

B. How many gifts are there?

There are some gifts listed in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and here in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28. We will be looking at each of these gifts, in detail, in the subsequent lessons.

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