

“Are Spiritual Gifts for Today?”

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February 4, 2007

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Our passage is intriguing. The question that often comes up as a fellowship is whether or not the gifts of the Holy Spirit are still active in a local church fellowship. The question is broad enough to warrant refinement. First, are we speaking of all spiritual gifts or a subset of spiritual gifts? The short answer is “a subset of the spiritual gifts” (i.e. sign-gifts = tongues, prophecy, healing). Second, in attempting to answer the question, the purpose of spiritual gifts must be addressed. Why do they exist? With these two initial questions asked, let us discuss the idea as to whether or not spiritual gifts are for today.

First, I believe we would be overstepping the biblical revelation if we categorize gifts beyond their ultimate function. Perhaps we can safely conclude that the gift of prophecy is of little immediate value when someone is dying where the gift of healing might be useful, but even here the gift of prophecy could communicate whether or not the individual would recover or die.

So beyond the most noticeable thought that gifts vary according to their immediate function, all gifts are a revelation of the Holy Spirit working. When gifts are exercised, the Holy Spirit is working. This work is a manifestation of Jesus Christ in and through His body.

This is an interesting thought because people often are desirous of “seeing Jesus.” But Jesus is seen every time a member of His body serves. The problem is that we often want Jesus to look like our deluded expectations, but what He looks like is you or your neighbor serving one another. Jesus is in the “one another” passages of the New Testament.

Second, regardless as to whether or not a gift is categorized as a sign-gift or not, the gift expressed is not about the channel through which the gift is expressed, but about the Triune God. The gift is not about the tool, but the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ in the midst of His people.

It is always this nagging propensity to make much of the tool that has created division within the body of Christ. It is always amazingly sad that our Christian culture “touts” those who have certain gifts. Certain individuals have made their gifting the centerpiece of ministry, as if they are the focal point. The hammer never built a house. Carpenters build houses. Knives do not make successful surgeries. Surgeons make successful surgeries. To our shame, we have made the gifting of some individuals the centerpiece of Christ’s church.

It matters little to me what the gift is, only that in the expression of the gift the Holy Spirit is seen and Jesus Christ is magnified.

Third, because no listing of spiritual gifts perfectly match, we would be safe in concluding that the listings are suggestive not exhaustive. In fact, I would argue that the expressions of an infinite God in and through His people are as diversified as cultures and personalities. God delights in the limitless diversity in which He works in and through His people for the accomplishing of His purpose. Various people groups, diverse genders, and multiple geographical locations all share similar gifts, but how they look in and through these various elements is very diverse. This is what makes the body of Christ so mesmerizing. It is the collective expression that shows us the inexhaustible beauty of our Triune God. The issue is not the gift, but the God of the gift.

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Fourth, the gifts of God are for the glorification of His name and the edification of His body. This is profound in its simplicity. The issue is not in trying to classify or define the gift, but in serving the body, and in so doing serving Christ. What can you do to edify the body of Christ? Calling a shut-in, sending a card, making a phone call, greeting the crest-fallen, encouraging the down-trodden, all of these are the works of the Holy Spirit for the manifestation of Christ to the world. We are the hands and feet of Christ. Caring, kindness, and compassion need no formal training.

For example, if someone was drowning, I would not hesitate to help even if I did not have all the necessary training. Perhaps a lifeguard would be more efficient because of his training, but the individual drowning would not care as to my training or degrees. The end result is the same: rescuing the drowning. This is equally true with the encouraging of the body. Everyone can be a source of encouragement to someone else.

This is just as valid of spiritual gifting. A class on teaching or shepherding or “tongues” can instruct as to what it might look like, but the gift itself is complete when it was initially given by the Holy Spirit. The class can only provide some needed structure and encouragement.

Fifth, since all spiritual gifts are sourced in the Holy Spirit and given by the Holy Spirit, the local church can only confirm what the Holy Spirit is doing. If I do not have the gift of teaching, then there is nothing I can do to get it. I might pray for it, but whether or not I have the gift is dependent on the Holy Spirit, not me.

Sixth, there is no gift that is shared by everyone within the body of Christ. All gifts are enjoyed by everyone, but not every member has the same gift. Thus, it is foolish for anyone to think that everyone should speak in “tongues.” By way of clarification, just because I do not have a gift does not mean I might not be exhorted by the Scripture to pursue its expression (i.e. compassion or mercy). I might not have the gift of compassion or mercy, but this does not excuse insensitivity to the needs of others.

The issue is not what are my gifts? The issue is whether or not I am living Christ to my circle of influence. So stop trying to figure it out and simply start serving. I am not overly concerned as to whether this gift or that gift has ceased or how each gift is to be utilized in the local fellowship. What I am concerned about is living Christ to one another. Herein lays our greatest need. Our local fellowship has everything we need in Christ. Now it is for us to be Christ in the community in which we live.

Where do we go from here?

First, begin by knowing that you have a gift(s) from the Holy Spirit. Just assume it.

Second, do not spend a lot of time trying to figure out what the gift is. Regardless as to what it is, its intent is to serve your brothers and sisters in Christ. Discovery is in the journey, not the destination.

Third, the issue as to whether or not this or that gift still exists is completely secondary to the great diversity of His gifting to the body of Christ for the purpose of making Him known.

Fourth, serving is living Christ to your community. When you serve, or are served, Christ is showing Himself either through you or to you. See Him in the service.

Finally, you should start right now by taking whatever steps are necessary to serve Christ by serving His body, and in so doing showing Christ to your community, your nation, and your world.