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Unwrapping Our Gifts Part 3

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

There is a short list of subjects which seemingly **always** cause great debate and heated discussion in the Church, the body of believers. One of those subjects is worship. Another is spiritual gifts. The controversy regarding spiritual gifts *might* be a little less fierce if we would remember the role of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives the gifts. Note verses 8 and 9 of our text. At the outset, let us remember that we don’t pick up a spiritual gifts catalog and then go shopping, if we did, there would surely be some gifts we would rarely see operant and then other more visible, dramatic, ego-stroking gifts which we would see in abundance. Reviewing very briefly, I remind you that there are three spiritual gifts lists in the second testament. In order of appearance they are Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul tells us what motivates him to write about this matter of spiritual gift, to the Christians in Corinth: he doesn't want them to be ignorant (v.1). “The Spirit is at work in you”, says Paul. The Spirit

* corrects faulty theology (v.3)
* unites diverse, gifted people (v.4)
* unites ministry groups (v.5) and
* manifests Himself in each believer, for the benefit of the whole body (v.7).

I want to examine and define six gifts and look at how they might be exercised in the body of Christ.

1. The word of wisdom (v. 8)
2. The word of knowledge (v. 8)
3. Faith (v. 9)
4. Healing (v.9)
5. Working of miracles (v. 10)
6. Discerning of spirits (v. 10)

Tongues and the interpretation of tongues is so controversial and so divisive that it deserves a message of its own. Lord willing, I will address just those two, in the next message in this series. Before we dive into six gifts in this text, let me point you to verse eleven.

Verse 11 of our text reminds us that *whatever* gift you have been given, in *whatever* measure, it is the Spirit who is at work, distributing the gifts and working all the details out, as He will. We need to regularly remind ourselves that when we have seen the Church ministering in the culture effectively, we are seeing the Holy Spirit at work. We don’t get to take credit for anything that the Spirit does. We may celebrate and evaluate and cogitate but, ultimately, we bow to God, who, by His Spirit, equips us to do good work. Let’s look at these six gifts.

1. Word of wisdom (v. 8)- In his helpful book, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow,* C. Peter Wagner defines wisdom as:

**The special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to know the mind of the Holy Spirit in such a way as to receive insight into how given knowledge may best be applied to specific needs arising in the Body of Christ** (p. 192).

Those with this gift are like surgeons who can diagnose a problem, get to the heart of a matter, and identify the issue. Earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul talked about the false *wisdom* of the world in which the Corinthians lived (1:18-25, esp. 24). Those with the gift of the word of wisdom bring the Christly perspective in on the deliberations. They cut through the extraneous “stuff” of a conversation and deliver a word filled with Christ. The word of wisdom is partly what got Stephen killed (Acts 6:8-10).

2. The word of knowledge (v. 8) - Closely related to the word of wisdom. Wisdom (*sophia)* knows the deep, mystical truths of God. *Knowledge (gnosis)* is the scholar/researcher’s gift. The person with this gift can accumulate data, gather facts, take a complex subject and explain it. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn says, *this spiritual gift imparts the ability to perceive a fact as God sees it* (*Gifts of the Spirit.*p. 63).

3. Faith (v. 9)- This is one of those gifts that is both general and specific. That is, all believers are to have faith. We were saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Certain believers, however, have the ability to believe God and move mountains (1 Corinthians 13:2). Those with this gift have a great amount of confidence in God. While others are articulating why something won’t work, the person with the gift of faith is saying, “I believe God”.

4. Gifts of healings (v. 9)- Paul reminds us that this is a gift. If a person is useful to God in a healing, the *person* is not the healer. The person has received a gift. Some teach that it is the will of God that every sick person be healed. If that were true, when Jesus (who did the will of God) left the earth, there would have been no sick people on the earth.

I maintain that when we see healing by the laying on of hands, we are not seeing a human healer in action. We are seeing the gift of faith made manifest through someone’s hands (Acts 19:11-12). God heals in at least three ways;

1. Instantaneously
2. Gradually, through medical science
3. By death (the ultimate healing)

Cessationists would say that this was a gift that was temporarily given to the early church, as a foundational gift (Ephesians 2:20) and is not operant today.

5. Working of miracles (v.10)- Again, this is a sign gift that cessationists say we do not need or even have in the 21st century. I want to be clear here. I *believe* in miracles. I *believe* God can override science, philosophy, psychology and any other field of inquiry and do something supernatural, for His glory! When we see miracles wrought, with a human involved, we are seeing God use an intermediary, a vessel, a human agent in a divine transaction.

6. Discerning of spirits (v. 10)- Discernment is sooooo critical in the Body of Christ. I again quote C. Peter Wagner, who writes this definition:

**The gift of discerning of spirits is the special ability that God gives to some members of the Body of Christ to know with assurance whether certain behavior purported to be of God is in reality divine, human or satanic.** (ibid. p. 96).

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| Discernment in Scripture is the skill that enables us to differentiate. It is the ability to see issues clearly. We desperately need to cultivate this spiritual skill that will enable us to know right from wrong. We must be prepared to distinguish light from darkness, truth from error, best from better, righteousness from unrighteousness, purity from defilement, and principles from pragmatics.  J. Stowell, Fan The Flame, Moody, 1986, p. 44. |

See Peter’s gift of discernment in action, in Acts 5:1-10, esp. 1-4.

**Illus.**

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see *you* and that's all that matters."

Beloved, let us rise up and exercise our gifts, not bragging that we can *see* and *know*. Rather, let us rejoice that we are *seen* and *known.* Rejoice that our God sees us on the rooftop, as we are wrestling with choices regarding lifestyle, ministry, temptation, service, consistency and holiness. Oh, gifted ones of God... jump!!

Amen