

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Over the next three Bible studies we shall be looking at the gifts of the Holy Spirit as described by Paul to the church at Corinth. Tonight we will be looking at the gifts of faith, healing and miraculous powers.

1 Corinthians 12:1-20

¹Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to dumb idols. ³Therefore I want you to know 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. ⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to 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. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

The first point I'd like to make is that God makes it clear from the first verse that He doesn't want us to be ignorant about these gifts. In other words, they are important and necessary for the Church to have. The gifts are not on the periphery of God's plans for us but they are at the very heart of what God wants us to experience.

Secondly, v7 tells us that they are given for the common good. In other words, the gifts are given to bless others and they are to be used wisely. Paul addresses this important matter at the beginning of chapter 13.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

¹If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Paul explains the manner in which the gifts are to be used. They are not given to elevate people, put others down, or to bring confusion, but to edify the Church and bring glory to God. Gifting is not the principal measure of a believer, character is.

In general, the gifts can be considered in three groups:

Gifts of doing:

- Gift of faith
- Gifts of healing
- Miraculous powers

Gifts of speaking:

- Gift of prophecy
- Speaking in different tongues
- Interpretation of tongues

Gifts of knowing:

- Word of wisdom
- Word of knowledge
- Distinguishing between spirits

Now when you think about it, these three areas pretty much cover everything that we are as human beings. If you take away everything that you do, everything that you say and everything that you think, there isn't really anything

else left is there? So the gifts of the Spirit go into every area of our human experience, as we might expect. Wherever we are, there He is. Isn't God wonderful!

The Gift of Faith

The gift of faith talked about in 1 Corinthians 12 is not the general faith that all believers live by, but it is a gift of faith given for a very specific work of God. The gift of faith is the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit upon a believer, to believe the Word of God at a specific time for a specific purpose. The gift of faith often manifests following a word from God to the believer.

Let's look at an example of this from scripture. Do you remember in Acts how Paul was arrested in Jerusalem after His third missionary tour and placed upon a ship to take him to Rome to be tried before Caesar? Close to Crete, the ship hit a heavy storm and the crew began to fear for their lives. We read what happened next in Acts 27.

Acts 27:21-26

²¹Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul then stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and thereby avoided this damage and loss. ²²I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you.' ²⁵So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. ²⁶But we will have to run aground on some island."

The word that God gave to Paul caused him to believe that all of those on board, including himself, would be saved. God gave him the gift of faith through the word that He'd given him. Paul's confidence in the face of such uncertainty would have been great testimony of God's provision, His power and His love.

If the gift of faith isn't sparked by a specific word from God then it will follow God dropping something into your spirit that results in you having an absolute certainty about something that God wants you to be sure about.

I remember when I was working in a factory about 25 years ago now, that we went through a period of several redundancies. At the time Sandra and I were just starting a family and we needed the security of the job. All the workers in the factory were worried about losing their jobs. I had many conversations with people who were worried about it. Have you noticed that when people are worried about something, they talk about it? Well God dropped into my spirit the fact that my job was absolutely safe. It wasn't long before people were asking me why I wasn't worried and I felt led to tell them. After the fourth or fifth redundancy, with the shop floor decimated, they began to believe that there was something in what I was saying. On paper I should have been the first out, having been one of the last in. Where did my faith come from? It was a gift, deposited within me by a word from God. What did the gift achieve? It gave me and my family peace at a very difficult time and it glorified God. People saw the peace it gave me and they saw what having a relationship with Jesus achieved.

The gift of faith may be given ahead of praying for a miracle or deliverance from a life threatening ordeal. When Peter was released from jail he boldly spoke the Word of God to the jailor and his family. As a result, the jailor's whole household was saved. Peter didn't flee from the jail despite his life being under threat. Why was this? God led him to stay and witness. God gave him the faith he needed to resist the natural instinct to flee danger.

Alternatively, the gift of faith may be given at a time of great financial need or when stepping out to preach the word to others. The gift of faith transforms the believer's outlook from a human to a divine perspective in a given situation.

The gift of faith is important for the Church for the following reasons:

- It produces unstoppable determination
- It believes for the impossible to happen
- Transforms a fallible disciple into a person with Jesus-like faith
- Takes partial faith into perfect faith (in a specific area)
- It enables the believer to act in a situation for God that without the gift of faith they wouldn't be able to do, e.g. Elijah on Mt Carmel

- It allows the truth of God’s Word to be demonstrated
- It’s often accompanied with signs and wonders to draw others to God
- It leads to the Word of God being proclaimed and believed

Gifts of Healing

Let’s go straight to an example of this in scripture.

Acts 3:1-10

¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ²Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. ⁶Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

We can see from these verses that this man, who had been lame from birth, was placed at the temple gate called beautiful every single day. This meant that Jesus and the disciples would have walked past him every time they had come to the temple. But this was the day that God was going to heal him. What caused Peter to act differently towards this man that day? I believe that on this particular day, as Peter was walking past the beggar, that God spoke to him and told him that He was going to heal him. The gift of faith was given to Peter and he was going to use it along with the gift of healing. Clearly this was a supernatural healing. Only God can heal a man lame from birth. Why didn’t God heal him before? I don’t know. I won’t even speculate about it. We just don’t know. But at this time God worked through Peter using the gift of healing to restore the man’s legs.

Now it’s important to realise that God can use all of us to pray for the sick. Those with the gift of healing aren’t an exclusive club.

John 14:12-14

¹²Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

It’s true that some have ministries where healing appears to be a special gift that they move in all of the time. This is no different however to the fact that some are called into a ministry of preaching or teaching or prophecy. Does that mean that we are not called to preach the good news to those we know? Certainly not. The fact that God may use some in an area of gifting more than others doesn’t mean that he won’t use us in that same area.

Many of you may be familiar with a German evangelist by the name of Reinhard Bonnke. God has used him mightily to bring many people to the Lord. To demonstrate the Word of God that is in him, God often moves through him to heal. God confirms the preaching of the Gospel with signs and wonders. This is the gift of healing. Reinhard doesn’t have healing power. When he prays for the sick and they recover this is the work of God.

I was at one of his meetings in Birmingham in 1988, when I saw a lady called Jean Neal healed from years of incurable back problems. She had been wheelchair bound and in great pain for many years. She had tried everything to get better but nothing had helped. One night she had a dream in which God showed her being prayed for and healed. She received her healing at the meeting in precisely the way that God had showed her in her dream. Since then she has been completely pain free and with the full use of all of her limbs again. She now travels the world testifying to God’s greatness and praying for those who are sick. She has a wonderful testimony and I would encourage you to read more about it on-line or by reading her story in her book ‘Wheelchair Bound to Heaven Bound’.

When we are prompted to pray for someone's healing by the Holy Spirit we can be assured that God will do something. Everyone who Jesus prayed for received their healing. This is also one of the signs that God gives to believers – not to a select few, but to all believers:

Mark 16:17,18

¹⁷And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on people who are ill, and they will get well.' ¹⁹After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and He sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed His word by the signs that accompanied it.

Why does God give the gifts of healing to the Church?

- To relieve suffering
- To confirm His Word as truth
- To bring glory to God

Miraculous Powers

A miracle is a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit that can not be explained by natural logic.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been dead for four days. Try explaining that by natural logic. It's impossible. It's miraculous. It's not natural...it's supernatural.

Jean Neal's doctor was asked to explain how she had been healed. The man was not a believer and he didn't want to attribute what had happened to God. Nevertheless, he admitted that medical science had no way of explaining what had happened at all. He didn't want to describe it as a miracle but by default he had to. Whether he chose to use the word miracle or not, he had to admit that he couldn't provide any explanation for it. Therefore, in effect, he was having to agree that it was miraculous.

The Greek word for miraculous is '*energema*' meaning '**the energizing power to work a miracle**'. When moving in miraculous power, the believer is energised by the Holy Spirit, empowered by Him to work a miracle. The miracle belongs to God, not the believer. It is a gift.

The gift of miraculous powers is more than a prayer by a believer that results in a miraculous outcome. When Peter was released from prison in Acts 12 by the effects of an earthquake, this was not due to him operating in the gift of miracles. God had sovereignly moved to answer the prayer of the saints. With the gift of miraculous powers there is usually an accompanying action by the believer(s) that leads to the miracle. God is giving the gift to a believer rather than simply performing the miracle independently of the Church Himself which of course He could do. It's a way He's chosen to work with us and we're thankful for it.

In the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus gave the people 5 loaves and 3 fish to share. As the food was distributed, so the miracle occurred.

Matthew 14:15-21

¹⁵As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.'¹⁶Jesus replied, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.'¹⁷'We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,' they answered. ¹⁸'Bring them here to me,' he said. ¹⁹And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Jesus was operating under the gift of miraculous powers. His actions caused something that can't be explained by any other means than God supernaturally moved. Of course we find God's miraculous powers exhibited in the Old Testament as well as the New.

Exodus 4:1-9

¹Moses answered, 'What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, "The Lord did not appear to you"?' ²Then the Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' 'A staff,' he replied. ³The Lord said, 'Throw it on the ground.' Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. ⁴Then the Lord said to him, 'Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.' So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. ⁵'This,' said the Lord, 'is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has appeared to you.' ⁶Then the Lord said, 'Put your hand inside your cloak.' So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous – it had become as white as snow. ⁷'Now put it back into your cloak,' he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh. ⁸Then the Lord said, 'If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. ⁹But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.'

I mention the signs given to Moses here for a reason, because they closely resemble the signs that God says will follow those who believe under the New Covenant:

Mark 16:17,18

¹⁷And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸they will pick up snakes with their hands [Moses staff]; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all [water turned to blood]; they will place their hands on people who are ill, and they will get well. [hand restored from leprosy]'

God gives the Church miraculous powers and miraculous signs in order to:

- Make the impossible possible
- Demonstrate the truth of His Word
- Overcome the power of the enemy
- Bring glory to God
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Application

A suitable response to learning about the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 is to ask God for them. But, you might say, the Bible says that they are only given as He wills, so should we ask for them? I believe, yes, we should. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 14:12:since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

It is a noble thing to seek the gifts of God as long as you seek them for the right reasons, i.e. to bless others and not to build up your own reputation or that of your church. The other appropriate response is to go about His business with the confidence that he will give you the gifts you need as and when you need them.

Mark 16:16,17

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷And these signs will accompany those who believe....