

Place: Lurgan Baptist 16:1:2002

Reading: 1 Cor 12:1-13

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

11. ITS NOT THE GIFT, BUT THE GIVER

" Its not the gift, but the giver," she said as she handed the pastor a lovely wooden spice rack. She then handed our marble letter holders, wooden breadboards, leather handbags, fans and tablecloths, attractive paintings, and works of art. Mrs. Ira Porter, acting commissioner of prisons in Jamaica, was presenting gifts to a group of men from First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, during the summer of 1997. These men had travelled to Jamaica for a prison crusade and had witnessed the blessing of God. It was as they were leaving, they were presented with these gifts and the comment was made,

" Its not the gift but the giver." The Charismatic Movement has focused a spotlight on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For too long the Christian community neglected these gifts and failed to show their importance to the body of Christ. It is therefore critical that we understand these spiritual gifts because they are vital to the life of the church.

Now this topic is problematic and controversial for modern Christianity. Some people magnify spiritual gifts out of all proportion. They become prideful on the subject. The gifts are looked upon as merit badges. Some Christians may even use them to feed their feelings of superiority. There is also the tendency to exalt certain gifts. The gifts are placed in some kind of order of spiritual preference. Those who have the most preferred gifts tend to look down on those who do not have them. The Charismatic Movement which is now the fastest growing segment of Christianity, has divided it into two. The " have's," and the " have nots." Those who possess the gifts especially the more " showy," ones are the " have's," those who did not practice the gifts especially " tongues," are the " have nots." So as in Corinth so today, there is the danger of abuse concerning spiritual gifts.

For us however, the danger may not be that of abuse, the danger may be that of neglect. For many believers have never studied the subject of spiritual gifts. Now there are many questions that surround spiritual gifts.

What are spiritual gifts ? How many are there ? Are they important ? How many do I have ? How do I get them ? How do I know what they are ? Can I seek certain gifts ? What is the purpose of gifts ? What about miraculous gifts like tongues or languages and healing, are they still in operation ? Are all the gifts still in operation ? If not, which ones still are, how did the others cease and why ? Can the gifts be counterfeited ? Now these are some of the questions that we want to deal with as look at the subject of spiritual gifts.

Now, keep in mind our summary of the threefold work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.

1. The Holy Spirit does work FOR us:

This is the work of salvation. When we are Spirit-born we receive the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. Do you recall Peters words on the day

of Pentecost ? " Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38) The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in your heart and live in your life, when you believe. What an awesome and overwhelming thought. Alexander the Great, once gave a magnificent golden cup to one of his lowly servants. The servant was overwhelmed. " Your majesty," he said, " this is too much for me to take." Alexander looked at him with a smile and said, " But it is not too much for me to give." My God's gift is overwhelming. He has given to us the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit's work FOR us.

2. The Holy Spirit does work IN us:

This is the work of sanctification. As the Holy Spirit produces graces in our lives. These graces are called the fruit of the Spirit and Paul talks about them in (Gal 5) The Holy Spirit produces fruit in our lives as we yield to His control. The Spirit's work of sanctification cleanses us and changes us so that we become more and more like our Saviour the Lord Jesus ! So 1. 2.

3. The Holy Spirit does work THROUGH us:

This is the work of Christian service. Spirit-blessed service is faithfully serving the Lord by using the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us. Do you remember Mrs. Porters words, " Its not the gift, but the giver." Now we must carefully distinguish between the Gift of the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit Himself indwelling at us at salvation, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit which He bestows on individual believers so they may effectively serve the Lord Jesus. Now this I want us to consider three things about these spiritual gifts.

(1) HOW SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE DESCRIBED

I heard about a preacher that always testified that God had called him to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out devils. On one occasion he got it the wrong way round and he said " God has called me to heal the sick, cast out the dead and raise the devil." I am reminded of many who have got mixed and confused about certain things. The church at Corinth was no exception. As we come to (Ch 12) we find that one of the things they were confused and mixed up, about was spiritual gifts. Much like today certain gifts had come to occupy a place of great importance within the Corinthian church.

So Paul in these chapters wants to clear the muddy water about spiritual gifts. In so doing he describes them:

(a) THEY ARE ESSENTIAL:

Look at (12:1) This verse is we call an idiom. It is a Greek idiom for something that is superemphatic. Paul reserved it for the times he wanted to say something very important, like " But I would not have to be ignorant brethren concerning them which are asleep."

(1 Thes 4:13) Here he is referring to the Rapture ! He uses the same phrase in (Rom 1:13) He did not want them to be ignorant about the impetus he had for preaching the gospel. In (Rom 11:25) he did not want them ignorant about Israel and the plan God has for its restoration. So Paul is saying, " I want you to understand about spiritual gifts. I don't

want you to be ignorant about them." You say " Why ?" For the simple reason the church cannot function or mature without them. The gifts are essential for the life of the Body. In (Eph 4:12) Paul says that the saints must minister in order that the body might be built up. Satan will also try to counterfeit the gifts to confuse, cause chaos, and split the church. And this is exactly what has happened today ! So we must understand how to minister our gifts and to distinguish between what is and what isn't a gift.

(b) THEY ARE SPIRITUAL:

You say, " what is a spiritual gift ?" Well, let me give you a definition. " A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers to the Body." Notice the words " Spiritual gifts " (12:1) The word " spiritual," literally means " spirituals," and speaks of that which is of a spiritual nature and origin under the Holy Spirit's control. Now that is vitally important. For Paul puts some distance between the subject of spiritual gifts and human emotions when he says in (11:2) He was referring to the mystery religions which were prevalent at the time.

Just outside the ancient of Corinth is a hill, the Acro-Corinthus, the hill of Corinth. On top of that hill was the pagan temple of Aphrodite. All kinds of pagan ceremonies were conducted on this hill. Hundreds of religious prostitutes participated. The ceremonies were filled with extreme emotional frenzies. The worship was filled with ecstasies, incomprehensible babblings, sexual orgies, and perversions. Paul was reminding the Corinthians of what they used to be. The problem was they had managed to drag into their church life all of the features of their former existence.

They had not made a clear-cut separation, they had not come out from among the world to be separate, even though they were rich in spiritual gifts. (1:7) So when these infiltrated the church, it was easy for the believers in their carnal state to confuse them with the true gifts of the Spirit. Now is this not exactly what is happening to day ? Benny Hinn one of the leaders of the Charismatic Movement slays people in the Spirit. When Benny feels

" the anointing," come upon his hand, he touches his followers on the forehead or simply waves an arm at them and they fall down in a faint. Hinn, pastor of Orlando Christian Centre, occasionally " releases the anointing," on an entire auditorium causing most of the crowd to fall backward. Now is Benny Hinn's ability a unique spiritual gift ? Or is he simply using the techniques of mesmerism or power of suggestion ? One thing is certain what Benny Hinn does is nothing like any of the spiritual gifts Scripture describes.

When someone comes to you and says " I was slain in the Spirit," you say, " You may have been slain but its not in the Spirit." You say, " Why are they slain ?"

I suppose in many cases it is the thing to do, so they do it. In other cases it may be hypnotic or demonic. But the Spirit of God does not operate the gifts of the Holy Spirit when people are out of control. Paul says,

" Let all things be done decently and in order."

(14:40) When someone goes out of control into a trance, faints, speaks ecstatic language, or goes into frenzied behaviour that is never of God. (a) (b)

(c) THEY ARE INITIAL:

What do I mean by that ? I mean they are received at the initial stage of Christian experience, at conversion.

Now lets have a closer look at this word " gifts," in

(12:4) the word " gifts," is charisma in the Greek. We have all heard the word " charismatic." Sometimes this word is used in a religious way a charismatic church.

Its also used in a secular way this television sportscaster is very charismatic. What do we mean ? We mean he has an electrifying personality ! The word

" charismatic, " is from the Greek word " charis," which means " grace." Grace is an undeserved gift. Remember this, your spiritual capacity or ability is a gift of God's grace. You didn't deserve it. You can't say, " I am where I am today because of me." No, if you got where you are today because of you, then you don't belong in the church, and everyone else is paying the consequence. What you have is purely a gift of grace. The word charisma is used seventeen times in the NT

Eleven times it refers to spiritual gifts, the other times to salvation. Is salvation a free gift ? Yes ! Did you deserve it or earn it ? No ! Well, spiritual gifts are free gifts, undeserved and unearned, granted by God's wonderful, loving, gracious kindness ! And every born-again believer receives one or more gifts at salvation.

My these are your birthday gifts. The Holy Spirit is the gift, but you also receive one or more spiritual gifts.

(Eph 4:7) Now these spiritual gifts are not natural talents. Some people are naturally gifted to play the piano. Others have a marvellous gift to paint or write. We speak of those individuals as " gifted." But charismata are not natural talents. Sure, the Lord may take certain natural talents and elevate them to the level of spiritual gifts. God may take that natural gift of singing, and elevate it to a spiritual gift, and empower it with His presence. But spiritual gifts are not natural, they are supernatural. My these are your birthday gifts received at conversion. So .. gifts are (a) (b) (c)

(d) THEY ARE BENEFICIAL:

Did you notice (12:7) ? " Or for the profit of all."

" Manifestation," is a simple word meaning, " to make clear, or to make visible." Spiritual gifts are for manifestation. They are a visible, clear, manifest, public display. When someone says that he has a private gift, you ask, " How can it be private when all of the gifts are given to declare the working of the Spirit of

God ?" " Well, maybe its only to be manifest to Him ?" Well, look at (12:7) again. In other words a gift is given to every Christian " for the common good." Some say that tongues is a private prayer language. Well, Paul says God did not give the gift for the gifted person's sake. He gave it that the church might benefit.

Warren Wiersbe says, " Spiritual gifts are not toys to play with, but tools to build with." Often, there is a sense of fulfilment and enjoyment as we exercise our spiritual gifts, but my remember that spiritual gifts are not for enjoyment but for employment. The Lord has given you at least one spiritual gift. Are you utilising it ? Using it for the benefit of others ? (1)

(2) HOW SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE DESIGNED

How do spiritual gifts function in the overall plan and purpose set before us in God's grand design ? If they are intended for Christian service, how do spiritual gifts function ? Function, is very important and design is essential to proper function. A car designed with wheels on its roof and an engine on the bottom might look modernistic, but it won't function very well. A building is constructed according to blueprint specifications. Exact dimensions, select materials, and particular design are all part of the buildings function. Now (1 Cor 12) sets before us the design and function of spiritual gifts in a beautiful way ! Will you notice that (12:4) speaks of " gifts," (12:5) speaks of " administrations," and (12:6) speaks of " operations." In other words:

(a) THERE ARE SPIRITUAL CAPACITIES:

Look at (12:4) The word " diversities," is an old word that simply speaks of variety of allotments. The word describes the differences of the gifts. All the gifts come from the Holy Spirit, but there are different gifts. The word " gifts," is charisma. It means they are received by grace. You can't earn them. Spiritual gifts are gifts. They are God-given capacities through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers to the Body. Now this process of spiritual gifts functioning according to design is a beautiful picture. In (12:13) Paul tells us that we have come into the body of Christ by the Baptism of the Holy Spirit at conversion. Then in (12:14) he uses the illustration of the human body to explain spiritual gifts. The body has a foot, a hand, an eye, and an ear ! The point that each part of the body has a role. Each has a proper and vital function in the body ! Think of a hand. It functions according to design. A little baby grasps a dummy. A boy reaches for an apple. A tennis player uses his hand to hold the racket and serve. The hand has a specific function.

My as a believer you have certain gifts that plug you into the body of Christ, the church at a critical point. These are our spiritual capacities or abilities, and like a hand they help the church function better. For example I have the spiritual gift of teaching or preaching. I minister to you as the Spirit of God energizes me. This is something that I can't do humanly, but something the Spirit of God must do through me. Now your spiritual gift is not cooking, for there are good cooks who are not saved. That's a human ability. Rather, your spiritual gift is a unique capacity to minister to the body of Christ, through the channel of the Spirit of God, who supernaturally touches the lives of other people ! (a)

(b) THERE ARE SPIRITUAL MINISTRIES:

Look at (12:5) Do you see that word " administrations ?" We get our English word " deacon," from that word. The word speaks of a servant. You see for every gift there is a place of service in the church. Have a look at (1 Pet 4:10) You see, every believer in every local church has a ministry ! And your gift is to be used in your place of ministry ! Now many churches have missed this. Too many have the idea that there is to be a one-man ministry ! It seems a long time ago, when I first stepped into the Lord's work ! For these past 30 years I have been battling against the concept that the church is to be a one person ministry. That is one person is to

do it all. Just who is that person ? You get it. The pastor ! The church is the arena and the pastor is the performing superstar. Now some pastors have the same perception. They are so insecure that they won't allow anyone else to do ministry in the church.

Some churches want their pastors to be one person shows. They want him to do it all. He is to do all the ministering, all the preaching, all the visiting, all the counselling, and then if the church doesn't grow, guess who gets the blame ? Thats right. The pastor ! Now for a church to mature spiritually, its members must have an understanding of spiritual gifts. You see, a spiritually mature church understands that no one person can do everything that needs to be done. Thats why we have elders here and thank God for those who are exercising their eldership, that's why we have deacons and thank God, for those who are taking that office seriously !

But listen, too few are doing too much in the average church. Its like a football game. Someone has described a football game as twenty two players in need of rest being watched by fifty thousand in need of exercise !

My as a Christian you have one or more spiritual gifts. You have a ministry a place where you can serve and exercise those gifts.

Perhaps its in the Sunday School, with the Youth, its pastoral visitation, its door to door evangelism, maybe its working in prisons. But whatever it is just as certainly as God has given you a spiritual capacity, He has also given you a spiritual ministry ! My are you fulfilling it ? For the good of others and the Glory of God. When I was leaving Carryduff Baptist Church they presented me with a Bible and on the flyleaf this text that's better used of Tychicus than of me " A beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord." (Col 4:7) Yes, there are (a) (b)

(c) THERE ARE SPIRITUAL ENERGIES:

" And there are diversities of operations " (12:6) Literally, the word here is " energies." Incidentally, did you notice the Trinitarian emphasis here ? " The same Spirit the same Lord the same God." My we personally may have different gifts, ministries, and ways of working but " it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." (Phil 2:13) The source of the gift is God, the sphere for administering the gift is from God, and the energy to use the gift is from God. Why, then, glorify men ? Why, compete with one another ?

You see, you and I can use our spiritual gifts in one of two ways. One way is by working in the energy of the flesh. Many believers try to serve the Lord in this way. For example Paul had the gift of preaching, but he could have preached in the flesh. To these very Corinthians he said, " And I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom " (2:1) In other words, " I didn't let my spiritual gift become a counterfeit. I didn't come to appealing with human wisdom, speech and oratory." My when ministry is driven by human energy, self is glorified and problems develop. On the other hand, ministry can be performed and gifts can be exercised in the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you recall what Paul said to the church at Phillippi ? " I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (4:13) Literally, " I can do all things through Christ who puts the power inside me." You want to know what God wants you to do, the Holy Spirit supplies the Wisdom. Do you to do God's

will in the right way ? The Holy Spirit supplies the Love ! Do you want the power to do God's will ? The Holy Spirit provides the power ! Gifts ministries energies ! (1) (2)

(3) HOW SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE DISTRIBUTED

Paul speaks about the distribution of gifts in this very context. He tells us that:

(a) THEY ARE DISTRIBUTED INDIVIDUALLY:

Look at (12:7) " But the manifestation " That speaks of the gifts being made known, exhibited, expressed ! " Is given to every man " Do you know what that means ? Not one Christian is excluded. Every believer is given one spiritual gift or more. How many Christians have gifts ? All of them not just a spiritual elite. My you can't say " The gifted ones are all up on the pulpit." No, you are the gifted ones. Mine is just different. You can do what I can't do in His power. Does this not do wonders for your self-esteem ? Does this not cure your inferiority complex ? God has given you spiritual gifts because you are important to Him ! you are special to Him. People often ask how to discover their gifts. Some have found it helpful to answer three simple questions.

1. What do you feel PROMPTED to do ?

What impression has the Holy Spirit given you ? What desire has the Holy Spirit given you ? Now ensure that the Spirit is leading you ? I heard about a boy ploughing the field one day. He stopped for a moment to wipe the perspiration from his brow, and looked up into the sky. The clouds had formed two letter P.C. " Thats it," he exclaimed. " Preach Christ." He went to several churches and tried to speak. He just could not do it. Finally an old deacon set him down and said, " Son, what makes you think you've be called to preach ?" He said " I saw it written in the clouds P.C. preach Christ."

The deacon said, " Son I think you missed it. I believe it meant plow corn." My be sure its the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart ? 1.

2. What do you feel POWER in doing ?

The element of enablement comes at this point. Paul says, " Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us." (Rom 12:6) My the Holy Spirit will enable you to perform the task God has called you to do.

3. What do you receive PRAISE in doing ?

Do other people encourage you in your chosen ministry ? How do others respond ? (Prov 18:16) says " A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men." George Truett was one of America's great pastors. For more than forty years he served as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. As a young man he prepared himself to be a lawyer. People around his church began to say, " George don't you think you ought to preach." He said, " No, I'm preparing to be a lawyer." Finally, the church just announced to him, " George, God has called you to preach, we are going to set you aside for the ministry." This got his attention and he spent

several days in prayer, and God confirmed in his heart what the people were trying to do tell him. Yes, these gifts are (a) but,

(b) THEY ARE DISTRIBUTED DIVERSELY:

That is God bestows on His church a variety of gifts. As we survey the different lists of gifts in (Rom 12: 1 Cor 12: Eph 4 & 1 Pet 4) they seem to fit into certain categories. Bible scholars speak of Speaking Gifts, Serving Gifts, and Sign Gifts. The problem with the Corinthian church was they were not content with the gifts God had given them they wanted different ones.

This then, became the point of pride. " Well, what gift do you have ?" I only have the gift of helps. Sorry, too bad, I have the gift of prophecy." You see, the eye was lording it over the ear. The ear was saying, " I want to be an eye. I don't want to be an ear. I want one of the more comely parts." My do you realise that God has given a variety of gifts ? The gifts given to me have been withheld from you and vice-versa ! But all have been give gifts for the common good of the body. (a) (b)

(c) THEY ARE DISTRIBUTED SOVEREIGNLY:

Look at (12:11) Today we often hear of people seeking certain gifts. But my you can't seek a gift.

For they are given as God chooses and wills. Every believers gift or gifts were not chosen as they through a cafeteria line and picked out what they wanted, but given as God desired to give them. Thats why there is

no room for any person to brag about anything he or she does in the Lord's work ! In this very epistle Paul says, " What hast thou that thou didst not receive ? now if you didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it." (4:7) My if God has gifted you, and made you a blessing to others, there's no reason to get puffed up about it for God has given you everything you have. " Each of us is just a pen in the hand of God," said Richard Baxter, " and what honour is there in a pen ?"

Do you remember Mrs. Porters words ? " Its not the gift but the Giver."

God saves us and gives us Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. Then He gives us one or more spiritual gifts. In addition to that, He gives us a place of ministry to use our gifts. He then supplies the power of the Spirit to make sure we use these gifts effectively in ministry. Then He rewards us for using the gift He has given with the power He has supplied. My is that not a good deal ?