

Basic Faith and Practice 13: Discovering and Using Spiritual Gifts

Introduction

The normal Christian life is supernatural. One of the main aspects of this supernatural life is spiritual gifts. It is therefore crucial that we understand spiritual gifts and use them. This is an important part of Christian maturity and fulfilling God's plan for our lives.

I. The gifts of the Spirit are instrumental in his work and in achieving his purpose of glorifying Christ.

- Earlier in this course we spoke about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Here is a simple chart that summarizes the overall activity of the Spirit:

<u>The Holy Spirit's Work</u>	<u>The Holy Spirit's Purpose</u>
evangelization → of the world	GLORIFY CHRIST!
sanctification → of the Church & believer	
edification → of the Church & believer	

II. Are the Gifts for Today? → Yes!

- A. There are good, sincere Christians who argue that some or all of the gifts have ceased (i.e. Cessationists), but there is no solid biblical support for this position.
- B. The classic argument against the gifts being for today comes from 1 Cor 13:8-12, where they are spoken of as being done away with.
 1. What is the "perfect" and the "then" (v 12) that will do away with the gifts?
When will we see "face to face"? When will we know fully?
 2. Cessationists argue:
 - a. Love replaces the gifts.
 - Not so: 1 Cor 13:1, 2; 14:1. Rather, love undergirds the gifts. (This merely affirms that the fruit of the Spirit is more fundamental/important than gifts.)
 - b. "perfect" can mean complete. This then refers to the completion of the New Testament canon or the end of the Apostolic Age.
 - But how can this be when the "perfect" is linked with seeing "face to face" and knowing fully? Not the end of the Apostolic Age but the illumination of Christ's presence at the Second Coming is being spoken of here (cf. 1 Jn 3:2). 1 Cor 13 actually indicates that tongues and prophecy will not cease until Jesus returns!
- C. The best argument against the continuation of the gifts is probably the idea that true prophecy is always infallible and on the same level as Scripture. Deut 18 prescribed the death penalty for prophets whose prophecies did not come true (no need to read the passage), and Eph 2:20 indicates that NT prophets contributed to the foundation of the Church. But we know that the canon of Scripture is closed. So the continuation of revelatory gifts like tongues and prophecy would threaten the doctrine of Scripture as the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

- What do you think of that argument? Does it seem right or wrong? Why? → Wrong!
 - a. Deut 18 seems to be about prophecy offered as authoritative for God's people; the context refers to the line of prophets who would be like Moses for leadership of God's people. Moreover, there were prophecies made in the OT period that were not and did not become Scripture (e.g., Num 11:25-29; 1 Sam 10:5-7, etc.).
 - b. Similarly, not all prophecies in the NT church became Scripture, such as any number of prophecies given in the Corinthian church in accordance with Paul's instructions to them concerning prophecy among them. NT prophecy had various purposes, not just to be authoritative, foundational revelation from God or to be Scripture. We will see that later in our study when we talk about the purpose of spiritual gifts.
 - c. Since we know the Bible is the word of God, we do not have to question whether it is authoritative. But any prophecy in the modern church we encounter has to be assessed as to whether it is true and it must be compatible with the Bible to be accepted. And if it is accepted, it does not get added to Scripture or become binding on all Christians everywhere and at all times.
 - What does 1 Cor 14:39 mean? (No trick question here!)
- D. We should desire to prophesy and not forbid speaking in tongues. We must allow the expression of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- E. Theologically, to be charismatic means to believe that all the gifts of the Spirit are for today. Faith Community Church is a charismatic church in this sense.

II. Why Talk About the Gifts?

- A. Scripture calls us to know and understand the gifts: 1 Cor 12:1; 14:1.
- Body-life – 1 Corinthians 12 (Read through the chapter together to get a general overview; not digging into the details yet.)
 - What do spiritual gifts mean for the church? → See points B-D immediately below.
- B. Spiritual gifts are an essential and integral part of the life of the church.
- C. Some people think that the gifts are gravy, something you get when you reach a level of maturity. Something to aspire to. However, the gifts are to be a part of normal Christian life.
- D. The gifts are the expression of Jesus Christ for ministry to one another and the world.

III. What Are the Gifts?

- A. 1 Cor 12:4 – Greek term “charismata” – Literally, “grace-gifts”; hence the term, “charismatic.”
- What does this tell us about spiritual gifts? → Spiritual gifts are gifts of God's grace to us. They are blessings of his unmerited favor toward us.

- Where do we get the gifts?

B. 1 Cor 12:11 – Distributed by the Holy Spirit. Hence, gifts of the Spirit, i.e. belonging to him, from him.

- What do you think the relationship between spiritual gifts and our natural talents is?

C. Spiritual gifts are supernatural rather than merely talents.

1. “Gifts” are not naturally endowed. Not talking about a “gifted person.” Tongues, prophecy, miracles, etc. are hardly natural talents.

- Does that mean that natural talents cannot be involved at all? → No!

2. The Holy Spirit’s gifting might and seems to tap into natural talents God has given us in many instances. But the key seems to be that the Holy Spirit is specifically at work in spiritual gifts, leading and empowering the user and impacting others.

- What does 1 Cor 12:6-7 tell us about the relationship of gift vs. talent? (Who is it a *manifestation of*?)

2. “Manifestation of the Spirit”, i.e. not us. Given to Christians; God at work in us.

- What does Rom 12:6 tell us about how we should exercise our gifts?

3. Gifts function via grace, not naturally. We are to exercise them by faith.

-- But aren’t we to do everything we do, including exercising our natural abilities, by faith? → Yes. But with spiritual gifts we are especially trusting God to be at work in us and through us and bringing about good for others. There is a sense in which we can brush our teeth by faith, but we are trusting God for more direct building of his kingdom and spiritual impact in the exercise of the spiritual gifts he has given us for fulfilling our role in the body of Christ+building up his people.

D. Definition: A spiritual gift is a gift of God’s grace given by the Holy Spirit as he wills, and is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, especially for the common good.

IV. What Are The Gifts For?

A. 1 Cor 12:7; 14:12, 26 → Edify the Body; God uses us to strengthen one another, help one another grow.

-- How might gifts be used to build up the church or a fellow believer? → [This is an open question; be prepared to give examples of spiritual gifts building up the church and fellow believers.]

B. Acts 5:12-16 (we looked at Acts 3:1-10; 4:4 for the same point in our evangelism study) → Evangelism

- How might gifts be used in evangelism? → [There are a variety of possible answers; be prepared to give examples]
- Other gifts cannot supersede the gift of preaching in evangelism. Other gifts can make a way for preaching, but the proclamation (speaking) of the gospel message is necessary in the evangelistic process.

C. 1 Cor 14:4 → Personal Blessing

- Is this a primary purpose? → Not normally
- a. Personal blessing is normally a by-product of the use of the gifts. They are especially to be used for the benefit of others. Blessed as you serve & minister. You don't normally use the gifts toward yourself. You don't prophesy unto yourself!
- b. Tongues seems to be an exception in that it might often be used for personal blessing, though the one with the gift of tongues should always be open to the Lord leading him to speak it out in the assembly for interpretation.

V. Who Has Spiritual Gifts?

- A. All Christians receive one or more gifts at conversion (they come with the Holy Spirit package.) – 1 Cor 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11
- B. Does any one person have all the gifts, or is there any gift everyone should have? → 1 Cor 12:29-30
1. One person never has all the gifts, and there is no one gift that everyone should have.
 2. God may manifest any of the gifts (any aspect of his power) through you at any time, if he so desires.
 3. Not a matter of us acquiring but discovering. We should ask God to show us what gifts He has given us.

Conclusion to Part 1

Spiritual gifts are gifts of God's grace given to believers by the Holy Spirit as he wills, and are manifestations of the Holy Spirit, especially for the common good of the church family. And God has given each of us who believe in Jesus at least one spiritual gift, and typically more, to be used for the good of the church and his kingdom. That is exciting! God has supernaturally gifted each of us for his purposes and for ministry to one another. Next time, we will look at a number of specific spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture, consider how the gifts function, how to discern if they are genuine, and how to discover what gifts we have and use them.

Introduction to Part 2

If you give a gift to someone, what does it say if the person doesn't even open it? Well, the Bible tells us that God has given us spiritual gifts for his purposes and for the good of his church and kingdom. And so it behooves us to discover what they are and to use them. We began looking at spiritual gifts in our last study. In this second part, we will look at a number of specific spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture, consider how the gifts function, how to discern if they are genuine or in proper use, and how to discover what gifts we have and use them. Let's begin by looking at the main spiritual gifts identified in Scripture.

VI. How Do the Gifts Function?

- A. Specific gifts: Handout: Gifts of the Spirit – Go over this handout, focusing on the explanations of the different gifts. No need to cover the various Bible passages cited. This is a 3-page handout. So you might just want to show it on a screen or cover the handout without showing it to the group. It will be available for group members on our church website.

How do you think a person comes to exercise a gift? Does God come upon them and just cause them to use the gift?

B. 1 Cor 14:32 → Not possession; we must cooperate with God as with any act of obedience. The Spirit will normally initiate and then work as we submit to him and act.

- Possession is demonic. The gifts are under our control. The Holy Spirit does not violate our will. “Couldn’t help myself” is wrong. He may deal with you personally “against your will” but not use you in that way.

C. Order and intelligibility → 1 Cor 14:26-33

- Why only have one speaker at a time and no tongues out loud without an interpreter?
→ Intelligibility for the sake of edification; cf. 1 Cor 14:2-5 where Paul indicates that prophesy is superior to uninterpreted tongues in a church gathering, but they are of equal value if the tongues are interpreted

1. The Holy Spirit does not speak over himself.

- What seems to be called for in 1 Cor 14:29? → Evaluating prophecies and judging whether they are from the Lord or not.
- Who is to do the judging? → The others, probably meaning the others present/the congregation (though some think it refers to the other prophets)
- How would we expect that judging to take place? → Paul does not tell us here, and absent alternative specification, we would expect normal Christian authority and submission to be in place. Therefore, the elders/pastors make the final judgment on prophecies and expressions of similar revelatory gifts like the interpretation of tongues, but with consideration of any input from the congregation, especially those with the gift of discernment. That is how we handle the expression of these types of gifts at FCC; the leadership renders a judgment on whether we accept the word spoken as from the Lord. Our orientation is to accept a word from a church member unless we think there is reason to reject it. (Cf. handout, “Some Guidelines for Judging Prophecy”; no need to go over this unless there is time and interest, but let students know that it is available on the church website.)

2. Discernment & spiritual authority should be present.

3. God’s government should preside over the ministry of the Spirit – elders before prophets.

D. In Church Community – The most important context for the functioning of spiritual gifts. It is the place to discover, learn, use, and grow with regard to them. (Remember 1 Cor 12.)

VII. Discerning the Gifts and Their Proper Use

A. There is abuse. How do we know when we’ve got the real thing and when we haven’t, or if gifts are being used correctly? Be careful to not toss out the baby with the bath water, the real with the counterfeits.

- Where do you think abuse of spiritual gifts comes from? Where does the counterfeit come from?

B. The flesh or Satan

1. We could use our gifts wrongly or sinfully, like the Corinthians (see 1 Cor 12-14).
 2. Many cults display supernatural gifts. Satan is a counterfeiter – but that means that there must be something to counterfeit. Satan is not an original thinker. 2 Cor 11:14-15; Ex 7:10-12, 20-23; 8:5-7, 16-19 (Pharaoh’s Magicians).
- So what might be some tests we could apply to discern if gifts are genuine or being used rightly?

C. Three Tests

- (Remember our discussion of the signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our study of the Spirit. The character/fruit of the Holy Spirit is more important and fundamental than his gifts.)
1. 1 John 4:1-6 → Scripture. Jesus is both human and divine. But note that John goes on and calls for an adherence to apostolic teaching, i.e. Scripture. Anything that contradicts the Bible is not of the Spirit.
 2. Matthew 7:22-23 (of false prophets) → Fruit
 3. 1 Cor 12:7, 13-14; 13:1-13 → Love and the Body. Lack of love, self-interest, divisive behavior, etc., are sure signs of the misuse of the gifts.
- All three of these tests should be brought into play when discernment is called for.

VIII. How to Discover and Develop Your Gifts

- So how might we go about discovering and developing our gifts?
- #### A. The Body of Christ → This is primary. No lone rangers.
- Why, how might the Body help us discover and develop our gifts?
 - a place where you are known and can try out and exercise gifts
 - where teaching, guidance, affirmation, and correction can and are taking place
 - the Body can give you vital feedback and input
 - a safe place to make mistakes
 - gifts that function independent of a Body context deny their definition
 - beware of those who function outside the Body.
 - Many of the additional points we will cover distinctly really are aspects of the Body of Christ’s role in our discovering and developing of our gifts.
- #### B. “Trial and Error”
- What gift makes your spirit jump when you hear about it? Study up on it. Try it.
 - Is this my gift? I think I have a leading.
 - Ok to make mistakes. Like learning to walk. An ability you have but must grow into.

- Reject crass “trial and error” approach of just trying gifts out without any reason.

C. Prayer & Study

- read Scripture
- read a book
- seek the Lord
- soak in prayer (includes your own personal prayer but also getting prayer from the Body)

D. Biblical standards will aid us.

- The Holy Spirit will never do anything contrary to or in addition to Scripture. The Holy Spirit wrote the Bible and has given it to us as an objective measuring rod. Mt 5:17-19; 24:35; Rev 22:18-19; Prov 30:5-6; Dt 4:2; 12:32. [We have established the authority of Scripture very strongly in this course, and so there is probably no need to go over these verses at this point, but you can do what seems most helpful.]

E. Those who have a gift of discernment will aid us → 1 Cor 12:10

- Those who have the gift of the discernment of spirits can help identify which of the three spirits the seeming expression of a gift is coming from: a) God, b) Human, c) Satan

F. Leadership will aid us – Eph 4:7-16

- How can leadership help us in discovering and developing our gifts?
 - teaching → doctrine, orthodoxy, biblical guidance (v. 13-15)
 - encourage others’ gifts; help each part of the body to do its part; practical guidance (v. 12 “equipping the saints”; vv. 15-16)
 - God’s government – Heb 13:7, 17

G. Spiritual gifts test

1. Christian leaders have put together various spiritual gifts tests aimed at helping believers identify their spiritual gifts.
2. These are not scientific or definitive but are good starting points for seeking to determine what your gift(s) might be. They mostly ask questions that clarify your experience, perceptions, and feedback you have received that can serve to reveal how God tends to use you and where you might have gifting.
3. We will make a spiritual gift test available to you. Please take it this week if you are uncertain about your spiritual gifts so that you can work on discovering and using your spiritual gifts and we can help you explore what God has for you in this area.

Conclusion: Spiritual gifts are gifts of God’s grace given to believers by the Holy Spirit as he wills, and are manifestations of the Holy Spirit, especially for the common good of the church family. And God has given each of us who believe in Jesus at least one spiritual gift, and typically more, to be used for the good of the church and his kingdom. God has supernaturally gifted each of us for his purposes and for ministry to one another. The gifts are under our control (under the enabling of the Spirit of course) and normally to be exercised

under authority with order and intelligibility, and when applicable, discernment. Let's discover and use our spiritual gifts for the glory of God! 1 Pet 4:7-11