

The Gifts of the Spirit

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[0 : 00] While we're working our way through a series on the Holy Spirit, this is the penultimate week on that. Next week we'll finish. And tonight we come to the gifts of the Spirit.

And the gifts of the Spirit is a topic that Paul treats really from 1 Corinthians 12 to 14. That's the most significant section of it. We can only do a small bit on the gifts of the Spirit tonight right here at the end of the 1 Corinthians 12, the beginning of 13.

You know that people like to debate about the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit is one of the big debates in the Christian church and has been for a long time ever since the beginning.

And tonight we want to be practical as much as possible. And that's really to say, do you know about the gifts of the Spirit? Do you believe in the gifts of the Spirit?

And do you use them in your life? Now there are two problems that if Christian friends tonight, there are two problems that everybody, everybody's in one of these two places tonight.

[1 : 08] One of them that maybe a few of us, one of the problems that maybe a few of us have, maybe only one, maybe zero, I don't know.

Is that you, maybe you overestimate the gifts? And do you know what that, to overestimate the gifts of the Spirit is to say things like, you know, if you don't know the gift of the Spirit that God has given you and you don't have certain gifts of the Spirit that are more visible, more tangible, then you're not really a growing Christian.

That's to overestimate the gifts of the Spirit. Now for most of us tonight, that's not our problem. Our problem is that probably we underestimate the gifts of the Spirit.

And to underestimate the gifts of the Spirit is to say the gifts of the Spirit, that's charismatic stuff. Now that's not really our church tradition.

And instead, Paul here says that every single Christian has at least one gift of the Spirit. And the gifts say to us that we're weak, that we're needy, that we lack strength as Christians, and the gifts of the Spirit are ministry power.

[2 : 22] They're ministry power. They're ministry power inside the church. So Paul says they're for all of us to equip and give gifts to one another, but also they're ministry power outside of the church.

And so let's think about three things here that Paul brings up. First, the reality of the gifts. Second, the equality of the gifts. And then finally, the gatekeeper of the gifts.

Okay? So first, the reality, the fact of the gifts. If you've got a Bible, you can look down at verse 27 into chapter 12 where we started our reading.

And Paul says now, now. Little preposition there. It could be therefore so. This is Paul's summary line when he says now, he's saying, let me summarize everything I've already said.

And what he says is you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Now this is what Paul says that if the Holy Spirit has come into your life, Christianity does something incredible.

[3 : 27] It doesn't take away your individuality. It establishes it. You see, he says you are the body of Christ and individually your members of it.

That means that Christianity says that God has come into your life individually. Christianity says that you're valued by God. You're valued so much by God that God by the Spirit came to you personally, that Christ died for you personally and at the same time.

The Spirit doesn't take away your individuality, no. But the Spirit does take away your individualism. So you're individually a member of the body, but you're a member of the body.

And that means that you're an individual valued by God. God says to you, I want you. I want you in my family. And you exist not for yourself, but for the body, for the corporate.

So you're both an individual, but no to individualism. That's what the Spirit does right here out of the gate. That's what Paul says. Now, so what, what does that have to do with the spiritual gifts?

[4 : 33] Here's the so what verse 28, right after that, another preposition. It's all about the prepositions. Verse 28, the preposition is and, and.

And he's still summarizing all that he's already taught. And you see what he does. He says, and God has appointed in the church first Apostle, second prophets and so on. He's saying, all of you individually matter.

God has worked in your life and stamped that into your heart and you exist now for the body and that means that God has given us individually spiritual gifts for the sake of the whole, for the sake of the body.

So it's individuality, not individualism and spiritual gifts are your individual gifts that exist for the corporate, not for yourself. And then he gets in to say, well, he's saying, what is he saying? That means the reality of the gifts. Every single Christian has a gift of the spirit. It's a fact.

[5 : 39] And then he tells us what they are and he gives us these famous lists. Now the lists of the gifts of the spirit show up in chapter 12 here and Ephesians four, first Peter four, Romans 12, we've got different lists.

And when you add them all together, all the different gifts, it adds up to 21 different gifts that are mentioned in the New Testament. Now let me list them for you really quickly.

Okay, here they are. Apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healing, helping, administrating, tongues, service, exhortation, generosity, leadership, evangelist, shepherd, interpretation, administration, hospitality, discernment, faith, wisdom, and the gift of knowledge.

So those are the 21 gifts that are listed across the New Testament, about eight or nine, seven or eight of them right here in verse 28 to 30. And it's probably the case that many of these are synonyms, but it's also probably the case most scholars and theologians have thought for a long time now that there are more gifts of the spirit in that than that, that some just aren't listed.

So for example, sometimes God takes our natural gifts and then the spirit comes down in your life and baptizes that natural gift and makes it a gift of the spirit.

[7 : 00] So one of those that's not listed in the New Testament is music, but one of the great gifts of the spirit is music, ability to lead God's people in worship and music. Now here's the definition then of the gifts.

Here's the definition. The gifts of the spirit are inclinations and capabilities. Inclinations desires actually in you, that the spirit gives you inclination, desire, and capability to help you do ministry inside of the church and outside of the church.

They're from God. They're not earned. They're given. And if nothing else tonight, I think for us here, the application is this, the gifts are real.

The gifts of the spirit are real and you've got one. Are you a Christian tonight? Then you've got a gift of the spirit, at least one, and they are a sign that the Holy Spirit is acting and active in your life. Now very practical, you say, I don't know my gift of the spirit. How do you know? And here's how you look down at verse 31, there's this line in 31 where he says, but earnestly desire the higher gifts.

[8 : 22] We'll come back around to the higher gifts, but he's saying there that it's good to desire the gifts and to want the gifts to want to know and to want to work in, walk into the gifts and get better at them, to know it and to get better at it.

That's what verse 31 says. In other words, they're both given. They're not earned, they're given, but also you seek them at the same time.

And here's, let me just say three things before we move on about very practical about how to do this. One is to say, actively discern your gift of the spirit.

In other words, don't be passive about the gifts. Think about them, act into them. Say I want to search this out, I want to figure this out.

I want to know, and the way to do that is not by a spiritual gift inventory. So if you have to work it out on paper through a quiz, then you're not finding out your spiritual gift.

[9 : 22] That's not how you do it, not at all. Instead, how do we do it? Well, this is what Paul says. Paul says that the gifts are for the building up of the whole body and for ministry power outside of the church.

So how do you find out your gift of the spirit? You get stuck in to the things that build up the whole body and the ministries outside the church. You do ministry in the church, and you do ministry out of the church, and then you see what emerges from that.

You get stuck into hospitality, service, generosity, mercy, encouragement, evangelism. And then you say, where are my desires? Where are my abilities?

And where's the opportunity? And oftentimes the gifts of the spirit emerge when you see desire in your heart, ability, and what you've been able to do, and then opportunity, need out in front of you. And all those three things come together, and there you find, I'm gifted. I'm gifted towards this. This is the ministry I really want to be a part of. This is the thing I really want to do.

[10:25] Secondly, find your gift. Lean into all sorts of type of ministry to find your gift, and when you find it, lean into it even more. And here's a way to do that.

Be a ministry entrepreneur. Be a gifted, you are gifted, be the gifted ministry craftsman.

Don't just be gifted, but be a craftsman at the gift of the spirit that you've been given. Verse 31, one commentator says this, although the gifts are supernaturally bestowed, they must be pursued and developed.

They must be sought. Seek the gifts. Now here's an even more practical way to do it. We all say this in churches.

I've said this in every church I've ever been a part of, and I know you say it in our church. We look out and we say, why aren't we doing this ministry?

[11:22] Why aren't we doing this ministry? Here's a need. Here's a gap. Here's a place that we could fill into. Here's a ministry on the royal mile we could get involved in. Why aren't we talking more about this?

Why aren't we doing more about this? And that's the right instinct. That's the right question. That's the right attitude. And maybe the reason that that question about that particular need is coming up in your heart is because that's where you're gifted.

That's your gift of the spirit. If you're gifted in mercy, you probably are regularly saying, man, we could be doing this. We could be doing that with mercy. We could be reaching out to the poor in these ways.

If you're gifted in evangelism, you've probably got your eyes open to saying, we need to be evangelizing this way. We need to be creating a bigger evangelism culture. If you're gifted in generosity, you may be thinking, we've got to be planning about the next church plan.

We've got to be putting money away for it. We've got to be doing this and that. And Paul says in Ephesians 4, something that he mentions just in the list in verse 28, he says, the third gift is the teacher, which I think is a synonym for the minister, the pastor, or the shepherd.

[12:31] In Ephesians 4, he says that the teacher's job is to equip all the saints for their ministry, for the ministry of the body and individual ministry at the same time.

And that means that in some ways, the job of the institutional church is when you say, what about this? The institution, the teacher, the gift of the teacher is to say, let's do it.

Do it. Let us help you get it started. Let's get it off the ground. That sounds like that might be your gift. Let's go for it. Let's chase after it. And so I think Paul is saying here tonight to you, be a ministry entrepreneur.

Look for needs and maybe the needs that you keep seeing are actually exactly the gift that the Spirit's given you, the ministry gift that you've been empowered to. Now lastly, thirdly, verse 30, you can see Paul says, Paul says, does every verse 29 and 30, does everybody, is everybody an apostle?

Is everybody a prophet? Is everybody a teacher? Does everybody work miracles? No. And there's an implication there. He's saying we don't all have the same gifts and that really does mean that we've got to have a philosophy of ministry, a vision for ministry that's not from the top down, but from the bottom up.

[13:51] You see what he's saying? He's saying every single person has a gift. We're all here in this. We all have a ministry gift. And so ministry really does work from the bottom up, not the top down, that it's actually about the grassroots movement of all of us seeing needs and chasing after them, of using our gifts in all sorts of different ways.

In other words, the very fact of the gifts means that it's not the case that employees or staff or anything like that do the primary ministry even, but that everyone does it.

Everyone does the primary ministry. Every Christian has a gift. Every Christian does the ministry, all of us together and at the same time. All right, so all of us, all of us are gifted ministering saints, gifted ministering saints.

What's your ministry? Where's the needs around you? What are you stepping into? What's your ministry? Secondly, briefly, to answer that a little bit more, let's think about the equality of the gifts. Back to the same issue. Paul says, verse 29 and 30, is everybody an apostle? And of course, we all know the answer. He's saying is no. We know that there were only about 13 or so of those guys, probably a few more.

[15 : 13] But to be an apostle, you had to have seen the risen Jesus in the flesh and been appointed by Jesus to be an apostle. Not everybody's an apostle.

And one of the things we see here is that he's saying that there is first a healthy inequality to the gifts, that not everybody's an apostle, not everybody's a prophet, not everybody's a teacher, that different people have different gifts.

There's a healthy inequality that we can't all do the same thing and be the same thing. But secondly, at the same time, there's a fundamental equality to the gifts.

And if you were just to cast your eyes backwards just a little bit in the passage, you can see back up at the top of the previous paragraph, verse 21, he made that argument. He said, the eye cannot say to the hand, I've got no need of you.

The eye can't say to the hand, this gifted person can't say to that gifted person, I don't need you.

The eye, the hand, the toes, all of it, the ears.

[16 : 12] In other words, Paul's saying that there's a healthy inequality. We don't all have the same gifts. We're not the same. We can all do the same ministries all the time.

And there's a fundamental equality, and that's that every single one of us and our gifts are totally necessary. And however small you think your gift may be, every single Christian is essential to the body of Christ.

Let me say it even stronger than that. Every believer has a place in the body of Christ that no other Christian can fill.

Every single one of us has a place in the body of Christ that nobody else can fill. And the reason you know that is because of verse 27, Paul says, you are the body of Christ, you individual person, you're part of it.

And that means that Christianity says to you what nothing else can say, that there's a supernatural eternal reason why you matter.

[17 : 21] A supernatural eternal reason that God from before, the very creation of the world, said your name and knew you and said that you take a place in the body of Christ that nobody else can fill.

And so God, God believed that so much. God knew that so much. God loved you so much that Jesus Christ died for you personally on the very cross of Christ.

And that means you're totally necessary. And that means if you're a Christian tonight and you say, you know, I'm not sure I have a use, I feel like I just come, but I'm not sure that I've got a gift.

I'm not sure I've got something that could contribute. You're wrong. You do. You're necessary. We can't do it without you. You are an essential part of the body of Christ because you are part of the body of Christ.

Jesus Christ has named you and you have a gift. You have a place that no other Christian can fill.

Now the third and final thing and we'll move on is there's not only a healthy inequality and a fundamental equality, but there's also another type of equality and that's the equality of calling.

[18 : 33] Now you can't get this directly from the section we just read here, but when you read this little paragraph in light of everything Paul writes, we know when you look through Paul's writings that Paul says to every Christian, you're a Christian.

You need to give to the church. You're a Christian. You need to share your testimony with somebody in your life about what Jesus has done in your life. You're a Christian. You need to encourage people. You're a Christian.

You need to open your home and be hospitable to the fellow Christians. You need to do all of it. You see what he's, there's an equality of calling, in other words, we're gifted individually for certain things and every single one of us is called to every ministry at the same time.

So giftedness does not mean you don't say I've got the gift of generosity so I don't do evangelism. No, actually every single one of us is called to every ministry.

If you're a teacher, you're called to every ministry. If you're a helper, you're called to every ministry. If you're a servant, you're called to every ministry. If you're a mercy person, you're called to every

ministry.

[19 : 39] All of us are called to all the ministries. Everyone's job is to do all the jobs, actually. And the reason that the gifts exist, the reason that they exist is so that those gifted in particular areas can be leaders and examples, leaders and examples in those particular areas of ministry.

And there are all areas that we're all called to at the same time. So look, find your gift, lean into it, know that you're necessary, and know that that's what the Spirit of God says.

All right, thirdly and finally, no, not thirdly and finally, excursus. Let me take two minutes before the final point to answer the question that I'm not going to answer.

And that's what you expect to sermon here on the gifts of the Spirit to be about, which is what do we say about most of the things that Paul lists here, which are miracles, healings, tongues, prophecy, desire, the higher gifts.

The highest gift Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14-1 is prophecy, the ability to speak the very revelation of God. What do we say about, are we saying to seek these things tonight?

[21 : 01] These are called the extraordinary supernatural gifts. Do they happen today? Now let me just try to do this in 90 seconds and say, God does what He wants.

Of course, God does miracles. Of course He does. Does the Spirit give individuals today the capacity to heal, to give new prophecy, to speak unknown languages, which is tongues, at their own discretion, at their own will, which is what these gifts mean in the New Testament?

If you say yes to that tonight, you're known, you would be in a group called a continuationist Christian. If you say no, I don't think so, then you would normally be called a cessationist, a Christian who's a cessationist.

Now that's a spectrum, not one thing. There's all sorts of ways to be a continuationist or a cessationist. And the truth is that we are all both.

Everybody who's a continuationist is also a cessationist and vice versa. Because all the continuationists agree with the cessationists that the apostles have ended, that there's no longer an apostolic gift, an apostolic office.

[22 : 19] We all believe that that has ended. And all of us cessationists believe that most of the gifts still continue. And so we're all actually both at the same time. But just let me say what I think personally in the way I read the Bible and this, I think that tongues, miracles, and prophecy, the three extraordinary gifts in particular, have largely ceased, stopped after the era of the apostles.

And I'll give you two reasons and we'll move on. One is this, that God gave tongues the ability to speak languages that a person does not know, to preach the gospel suddenly in a language that a person does not know.

He did it, I believe, in a particular era so that one, the Gentiles would know right after the ascension of Christ that the gospel was not just for Jews, but for everybody.

And secondly also so that in the first era to establish the gospel, the gospel could be preached immediately to anybody without learning a new language.

Now the second reason is just a couple of verses and here they are Ephesians 2.20. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Paul says.

[23 : 32] The church was built on a foundation and that foundation is apostles and prophets. And we all agree that there's no longer any apostles and I think Paul is saying there, the apostle, office of apostle and the ability to prophesy new revelation ceased after the foundation was laid.

Ephesians 2.20 or here's another one, Hebrews 2.4. The gospel went forth being affirmed, confirmed in the early days by signs and wonders, the signs and the wonders, the ability of many to perform a miracle at their own will gifted by God in that way.

That happened. It was a deal that happened in a season and it was to establish the foundation of the church as it goes forward in the world and I'll move on. God can do what He wants to do.

And so here's what I know, I do know about this issue and that's that we don't know. We don't know much. That's what I know about it. And if you want to talk more about it, please come and talk to me.

Thirdly and finally, thirdly and finally the gatekeeper of the gifts. We'll close with this. We're going to take four minutes to talk about 1 Corinthians 13, the passage on love.

[24 : 44] We can only say a few things about this, but this is of course the great wedding text. But when you read it in the light of chapter 12 and 14, you realize 1 Corinthians 13, it's not really a wedding text though.

If you used it at your wedding, that's fantastic. I love that. It's a great wedding text. And 1 Corinthians 13 in context is really about when you can use the gifts of the spirit and how. That's actually the context and here's what it says. 1 Corinthians 13 says this. It says that the gifts do not make you great.

The gifts do not make great Christians. Love makes great Christians. And that is to say that the gatekeeper to the gifts is love.

Love is the great gatekeeper and if you want to step into the world of ministry and use your gifts rightly and well and not quench the spirit, you've got to walk through the gate of love. Love is the gatekeeper that you've got to walk through.

[25 : 44] And if you don't got love, you've got to do with your gift. You've got to do with the gifts what Gandalf did on the bridge of cause I'd doom.

What did he do? He said, thou shall not pass. Without love, the gifts can't go any farther. The gifts have to stop. The gifts can't be used properly. You can't cross over.

You got to stay in the minds of Moria unless you've got love. And you see Paul bears this out in 13, just the first few verses. What he's doing here is exaggeration and hyperbole.

He says, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but I don't have love, I'm noisy. If I speak, if I can speak every known human language and even the angel, the language of the angels, he's being hyperbolic.

But I don't have love, even if I'm the greatest gifted tongues person ever. But without love, it's just noise. And he goes on, he said, even if I know every mystery, knowledge, if I'm the greatest of prophets without love, I'm nothing.

[26 : 44] Even if I give away all that I have, if I'm the greatest ascetic of world history, if I'm so generous that I give away all that I have, I'm materially poor, but I do it motivated by something other than love.

It's noise. It's not music. In other words, he says, you make great music in the church. The church together makes melody whenever love and giftedness come together, whenever we exercise our gifts through the gatekeeper, through the gatekeeper of love.

Now eternal love, verse eight, sorry, verse eight, you see it, he says it. Why? Because here's why. The gifts are going to pass away.

The gifts are temporary. The gifts only exist in a time where we need them to do ministry, but love never ends. Verse eight, love continues forever. In other words, he's saying love is so much important, more important, because love is eternal.

The gifts aren't. And that you can't really exercise your gift well unless you've experienced eternal love. And that means that the very fact that love could be eternal means that love is no mere everlasting emotion, not at all.

[28 : 00] The reason love is eternal, it never ends is because love ultimately is a person. It's personal. Love is personal. And in fact, it is a person.

You know what John says? John says, verse John four, we're preaching through on Sunday mornings. He says, God is love and this is love. What is love? It's love that God sent his son to be the sacrifice for your sins.

The Bible says that love will never end because love is personal. Love is a person. God is love. And his love is most manifest in all of world history at the moment of the cross.

This week, many of you will know last week, Chadwick Boseman doesn't appear in the new Black Panther II, went out and saw Black Panther II and Wakanda forever.

And the star of Black Panther, the Black Panther himself is not in it. And instead at the beginning, there's a funeral on the screen for him.

[29 : 07] As many of you will know, Chadwick Boseman, who played Black Panther, he died in August of 2020. He had a four year battle with a very aggressive colon cancer and he was 43 when he died.

Now, there were, before he died for years, there were all these pictures of him that arose on social media in children's cancer hospitals all throughout the U.S.

And there were videos of him hanging out with all these kids and all these hospitals and these cancer wards. There's an interview with him actually a couple years ago, just before his death, not long before his death, where he was naming some of the children that he had known in these hospitals and talking about losing them too early.

And he was in tears just talking about him. Now Chadwick had a secret, many of you know this already, but Chadwick had a secret and that was, Chadwick was visiting all these cancer wards with these children because he had cancer.

Because he was dying and he was there at the hospital as a patient. And nobody knew it.

Everybody was saying Chadwick Boseman, he loves to love on the children.

[30 : 15] But nobody knew what kind of love he was giving. And the love that Chadwick was giving, he loved all these kids so well and so often because he was just like them.

And he suffered as they suffered. And he loved them in a way that they felt was unique, but they couldn't put their finger on it. Nobody could until we all found out Chadwick suddenly died and it was the first time we found out he was there with them suffering alongside them as one of them.

Look, God loves, eternal love itself, who is God, loves you so much in your individuality and corporately, all of us together, that the Son of God became one of us.

He loved us so much that he entered into our very suffering. And there's a wonderful essay on the emotional life of Jesus, the human by Benjamin Warfield.

And in it, we'll close with this. He says that above all, when you look at the emotional life of Jesus throughout the Gospels, there's one thing that dominates. And it's this line, Jesus, he had compassion on them, which in the Greek text is literally his heart went out to them.

[31 : 35] And we also, we've carried that over into English. We say that too. My heart goes out to you. Well, that's very literally what it says when it says he had compassion for them. And my favorite way that the Gospel say it is in John 13 when it says he loved them to the very end.

And he got down on his knees and he washed his disciples feet. He washed his own servants feet. He became the servant of the servants that very night. This is love.

He was forsaken by God. He became like us. He suffered in ways that we can never even know he suffered with us and for us so that we together could make music so that we could be accepted and gifted so that we could not so that we could stop making noise, clanging symbols.

We could together make music, melody. And the way we do that is by experiencing the power of his love and then seeking it.

And so this is the, this is the last word. This is, this is what Paul's saying. The gifts are only truly operative when our motivation is cruciform like Christ taking on the very love that Jesus had for us in the cross.

[32 : 50] When we, when we swallow that and take that into our own hearts and seek to act out of that, that's when the gifts are most powerful. That's when we make melodies in our ministry, not noise.

Now when you see a need, step into it and pray, pray while you're, while you're doing ministry, pray while you serve and pray, pray this, Lord, give me Christ like love for this person, for these people. Give me as I serve the love that Jesus had for me on the cross when he named me. Give me this as I seek to serve through the gifts that you've given me.

All of theology is comprehended in this. Jesus loves me. This I know for the Bible tells me so. So love others because you've been loved and use your gifts.

Let's pray together. Father, we ask now that you would give us the love of Christ and that you would reveal to us our giftedness and help us to walk and lean in.

[34 : 09] And we ask for that help in Jesus' name. Amen.