

Gifts - Introduction

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, you might want to turn back with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. This is the introduction of a new series that we're beginning. Before this summer, in the earlier part of the year, we looked at the fruit of the Spirit. So we're now going to look at the gifts of the Spirit.

So it's only 108 days till Christmas. That's good, and I can see all you're all going to go and check now on February, March, see if I've got it right. And that's great, isn't it? We're really looking forward to that already. Giving and receiving gifts is a great part of life. Wonderful. That's why we all love Christmas so much. And we don't mind that already they've got Christmas stuff in the shops, because we don't mind, do we? Because we love Christmas, and we love the thought of Christmas so much. But we're going to take 15 Sunday evenings to look at who we are as Christians in the light of the subject. And we're going to look at the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to us, and how we are to use these gifts in our Christian lives. So the aim really is through the Word, through the Bible, through the subject to... that each of us will appreciate our own value, our own purpose, and that you will be encouraged. I hope you're encouraged as we study this subject and recognize who you are and what you've been given. And above all, I hope that it will point us all to the great gift giver himself, the great God, the living God, and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, that we will see and understand more about who he is, because we love gift givers in our lives. So in introducing it, we recognize that this whole area of study, the gifts of the

Spirit, will be areas where there are a lot of differences theologically between different parts of the church. Sometimes there's confusion, sometimes there's a degree of ignorance, sometimes there's pride, and there's always deeply held views on this area. Sadly, it's often led to mistrust and division within the church and within the churches. And I would... and I don't intend to avoid speaking into some of these controversies, but I hope that I will do so with respect and with grace, because we need to acknowledge God's sovereignty in all of this, and also particularly our own failings and our own misunderstandings. Yet clearly, I hope, explain what the Bible teaches in this area. So let's... by way of introduction, set the scene, which I hope will be... the scene will speak into the gifts of the Spirit throughout these 15 weeks that we look at them in more detail. And we're reminded in the first place that God... this is a very obvious point, that God is the giver of these gifts. This chapter that we read, 1 Corinthians 12 verse 4, now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit, there are a variety of service, but the same Lord, and there are a variety of activities, but it's the same God who empowers them all in everyone. So God is the great gift giver.

God is the one who gives the gifts. Now that's very important for us, because it reminds us that He is sovereign, and it's His will, and He chooses to give these gifts. And these gifts are gifts that He gives because they reflect who He is, and they reflect His character and His creativity.

And the disposal of these gifts are for Him to decide. He gives the gifts, the timing of the gifts, and the use of the gifts, just as it is with any gift giver there at the disposal of the person who gives them. And He loves to give gifts to His people and to His church. So it's always dangerous for us to tell God what to do, to hem Him in with sometimes our own definitions and our own labels about who we are theologically, and to define ourselves in the way that the Bible doesn't define us or define Him. These are His gifts to us, and they're the manifestation, as we have in verse 7, of the Spirit working in us. So the Spirit of God works in us, and He does so by giving us gifts. God gives gifts, that's very important for us. Now we know that the period before the Bible was completed, in many ways, is a unique period in the history of the world in some ways. And we know that one or two of His gifts may specifically have been given for that period, especially the gift of apostleship. That was given only to those who saw the Resurrect to Jesus, and who met with Him and knew Him. They were the founders of the church. Ephesians 2.20 speaks about the foundational people in the church, the prophets and the apostles. And so we recognize that these gifts are no longer gifts that He gives to the church today, because they were founded. Once the foundation has been laid, you don't keep laying it. If you're building a building, once the foundation is laid, it's done, and they have done their work. But we recognize and know that all the other gifts the Bible doesn't make clear when and where and who should have them, and at what point they should be revealed. Our confession also recognizes that God is sovereign and will do what He will with His gifts. God and His ordinary providence makes use of ordinary means, yet is free to work without, above and against Him. It is pleasure. He can work in any way and can give all the gifts that He seeks to give. Some gifts might no longer be given by God, others clearly are. Some may be seen more in different traditions, in different historical settings or in cultural settings. But we should be discerning biblical and wise in all our thinking. Whatever we believe and whatever we experience, we don't deserve them. We don't deserve them. We can't earn them and can't demand them. There's no place for pride or for a dismissal of other people who experience and who practice gifts that we don't have and that we don't share and that we don't experience. Let's take it all back to the truth and to God, the great gift giver and recognize that. So God is the great gift giver and we recognize biblically that there are lots of gifts that He's given to the church. There's lots of them. Now when we looked at the fruit of the Spirit, we saw that fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. It's a fairly exhaustive list that's given to us. Love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, kindness, goodness, self-control. And it seems to be quite a tight and complete list.

[7 : 22] Whereas there's no exhaustive list of the gifts of the Spirit. There's different lists that are given and there's different overlaps that are made and sometimes it's not that clear what the different gifts are. But there are four main passages, the one we read in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. So what we're going to do is we're going to take that list and we're going to look at them over the next 15 weeks and look at each of the different gifts that are mentioned and spoken of and we'll hope to see why they're important, each of them in their own way. So there's apostles, there's pastors and teachers, there's evangelists, there's prophets, there's leadership, there's encouragement, there's giving, there's helping, there's evangel, there's administrating various kinds of tongues, miracles, healings, faith and wisdom. Lots of different gifts. We know there's foundational gifts, we know there's gifts that are more significant and more important and we know that they're there to reveal Jesus. Now these gifts are gifts that you can have when you come to Christ. You're gifted them when you come to Christ. Or they may be gifts that you already have before you're a Christian, which are heightened and transformed and used under the power of the Holy Spirit, re-channeled for the glory of God. But God is generous in His gifts,

He knows what He's doing and He knows why He gives His gifts. So, God is the giver, that's the first thing I want to see. Second thing I want to say is we all have, okay, this evening, you all have as Christians the gifts that you need. You don't lack anything as a Christian. You don't need to sit here and think, well, I wish I had different gifts. I wish there was something about me that I don't have.

We all have the gifts that we need. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, which we didn't read, but is nonetheless very significant, Paul says at the beginning of this great letter, says, so even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a Christian this evening, as a Christian in your life, you don't lack anything you need to go from here and to live out your Christian life, to glorify God and enjoy Him. You don't lack anything in order to do that. The gifts that you have as Christians, they may lie unused, you may abuse them, and they may be neglected.

But the lack is not with God. God is not unwilling, and He's not stingy, and He's not mean. Every believer has the gifts that they need. Some they share with other Christians as we share different gifts. Some are uniquely yours that nobody else has. But I want to say that there are two gifts in particular that every Christian has, and that reminds us that we have everything we need to live our Christian lives. The first is, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. You have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Verse 12 reminds us of that, for just as one body, their body is one in many members, and all the members of the body though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one spirit, we were all baptized into one body, Jews and Greek slaves are free, and all were made to drink of one spirit. So the greatest gift of all is the gift that God gives you, that Jesus Christ, when He ascended, rose from the dead and ascended, died, rose from the dead and ascended, He promised to send His Holy Spirit into the heart of every single believer who comes to faith, so that we wouldn't be alone, so that it wouldn't be orphans, so that we would have with us, as it were, Jesus, although we can't have Him in the flesh, we have Him in the form of His Holy Spirit in our hearts,

God in us, Emmanuel with us in our lives, who illuminates Christ to us, who leads us in all truth, who makes this dead dry word breathe with life. There's no such thing as a Christian who doesn't have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Every single believer has this remarkable gift, every single one of us. It's impossible not to have. Jesus is Lord, we're told in verse 3, no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are all charismatic.

[12:17] That's the great truth. We all have the charisma. We all have the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. No Christian can't be charismatic, nor do we believe that there's two stages and two different kinds of Christians, ones that are not baptized in the Spirit and ones that are baptized in the Spirit. We're told clearly here that all are baptized in the Spirit.

There's not non-spiritual Christians and spiritual Christians. We all have God's Spirit in us. All of us are baptized in the Spirit. Yes, I know that we can abuse that relationship, we can ignore it, we can quench and resist and deny the Spirit in many ways.

I know there can be renewal and there can be an intensifying and a refilling of the Spirit, because we leak. We need refilled again and again. But there's never two phases of Christian living. There's never Christ Jesus as our Savior, and then some a later time Christ Jesus becomes our Lord. There's this lifetime progression of growing in the knowledge of the gift that God has given us.

There are a variety of gifts, the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, the same Lord, varieties of activities, the same God. God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the gift-giver in our lives. It's the indescribable gift that we're given. So we all have the gifts we need.

You don't lack anything. You have the Holy Spirit. And the other gift that every single believer has that's hugely significant to remember and recognize and put into practice in our lives, is the love of God. We all have in our hearts the love of God, which chapter 13 goes on to speak about as the most excellent way, when it's speaking about the gifts of the Spirit and the work of God, it says, the most excellent way is living the way of the love of God in our lives.

[14 : 24] Gift, the word gift in terms of the New Testament is the word karris. That's where we get word karris, charismatic from. And it means a gift of love, a free gift. And the grace of God in our lives is kind of like, it's like the cement that fuses all the other gifts of the Spirit together as it were in the church. But without it, we're nothing. We can't be Christians without God's Holy Spirit, and you can't be a Christian without God's love. And these are the two gifts that primarily He's given you and given me as Christians. And I'm saying, you know, what are you lacking? What are you lacking if you have His redeeming love and His presence in your heart? Paul says, you don't lack anything. And we can spend our lives grumbling and complaining that we're not like someone else, or we don't have this and we don't have that. And yet as ordinary Christians, Joe blogs Christians, we've got the God's presence in us, and we've got God's love that comes from us because that is His great gifts. These are the two fundamental great gifts that He's given every believer. Now, beyond these gifts, God has given you and He's given me other gifts. You have your own gifts, your own gift, your own gifts as Christians. They may not be spectacular. They may not be upfront. They may not be recognized. But in your life, your skill set, your heart, your aptitudes, what you do, what you can do, what you're good at, that is God's gift that He takes. And He infuses with the Holy

Spirit so you can live it and use it for God's glory. You have what God wants you to have for a reason. You are, and I am, amazingly God's masterpiece. And we are created in Him for good works. We don't need to be different. We have all that we need in order to glorify God and serve Him. Now, there's no denying, there's no denying that we have our responsibility. We know we can bury His gifts. We can fail to recognize the gifts He's given us. We can be thankless for the gifts. We can grumble and wish we had other gifts and be covetous of what other people have. But our responsibility is to fan into flame and keep on desiring these greatest of all gifts, the Holy Spirit and the love of God, to be more and more evident in our lives and something that we recognize we have a responsibility to use in His service. So that's the second thing I want to say. We all have to say the gifts we need. The third thing I want to say is that I'll ask the question, what are these gifts for? What are His gifts for? All the gifts that I listed at the beginning that we're going to look into over these next few weeks and what we looked at tonight. What are they for?

The first thing is that they're to connect us to the living God. That's what they're there for. The Holy Spirit in us is to enable us to know God and the grace of God is there to enable us to experience God's love in our lives. The whole direction of travel in the Word and the Bible is our redemption, is atonement, is the cross and Christ crucified and risen and ascended.

And these gifts enable us to know Him. They enable us to connect with the living God. That's hugely significant and I think often forgotten when we speak about the gifts of the Spirit. They're there primarily to enable us to live in relationship with God.

But secondly, they're there to build up the church. Chapter 14 and verse 12 reminds us that, so with yourself, since you're so eager in manifestation of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. There's lots of different references to building up the church. And we read in chapter 12, verse 7, that these gifts are given for the common good.

[19 : 12] Now, this passage was written to a church in Corinth who were abusing their gifts. They were using them selfishly in a prideful way and it was causing division. And the foundation was a lack of love between rich and poor, between those who had and those who didn't have, those who had one gift and some who didn't have another. And it was doing completely the opposite of what it was supposed to be, which was to recognize it was for the common good. It was for the building up of the body of Christ. It was Romans 1 says, for mutual encouragement, one Peter 4, it's for serving one another. So each of the references to the different or the lists of the gifts of the Spirit also has the reason for these gifts being given for the good of the church, for the good of other people. The church is his body, the church as the expression of Jesus Christ in the world. Now, that can go from Paul's time to when Jesus comes back. The church can be that whole period of time. So there's all kinds of gifts in that period of time. So it can be universal, it can be the church in Malaysia and the church in America, the church in Canada, whatever, the whole church. But probably more primarily and significantly, it's out working as the local church.

That's the only New Testament model for where these gifts are to be outworked. So your life, your infilling of the Holy Spirit, your grace that you've been given, the love of God, the unique special gifts that you have as an individual that maybe nobody else has. Whatever that ability might be, it's to be used primarily for the good of our fellow Christian in the church. And you know, there's lots of imagery about that in the Bible. The imagery here is of one body with lots of different parts. And they all therefore work together, you know, and I can't see or the whole body was an eye. It's kind of funny picture. It's a bit silly, enormous cyclops. It would be a useless kind of body. And you know, the whole body can be an armament. And they're all different parts, and they all have something different to do, but they all work together under the head.

At Christ is the head of the body. And also, in the same context, it speaks a lot about buildings. The church is a building with the prophets and apostles as a foundation. Now, you know, when we were renovating this building, or when you're building any building, you need all kinds of people and all kinds of gifts, laborers and architects, surveyors, craftsmen, joiners, electricians, carpet fitters, engineers, painters, decorators, all kinds of gifts are used to build a building.

And the church is absolutely no different. It's powerful to see God working with all the different gifts. And I think one thing we miss in all of this often, maybe in our own context especially, because the New Testament idea of the church is a community, usually a community that live together.

Now, I'm wondering if that's why in many ways, Haddington has exploded so quickly, because it's quite a tight community. It's quite a distinctive, clear community of people. And we had a gathered congregation from all over the place. And I think one thing that we miss when we're a gathered community that was intended from the use of gifts is evangelism, is that the body working together with all the different parts, all the love and all the forgiveness and all the different things that were cut, the unity of Jew and Gentile, of rich and poor coming together, that that was a unique community. And it was powerfully evangelistic in a world of division and hatred and separation and distinctions. The church was united and won this community, which is why evangelism is so good in community. We've individualized it so much, go out and evangelize, go and speak to different individuals. What is so often, it's inviting people to meet our community, not necessarily in worship, but just meet the people that we share the love of Christ with. So there's that tremendous aspect of building up the church, and that speaks of unity, and it also speaks of diversity.

[23 : 51] So all the gifts we have, the gift that we all have of the Spirit and of love and whatever else we have been given are there to unite us to Jesus Christ. That's why Paul goes on to say, you can have the greatest gifts in the world. You can have faith that can move mountains, but we don't have love, which is the cement which binds it all together. It's nothing.

So we recognize that as we show mercy, as we share the message, as we have structures and as we have people who can administer everything, and all these different things, there is great unity.

We're using our gifts for the common good, for the glory of God, unselfishly. And isn't that where it's so sad that this whole area of gifts has often brought the church to be divided, to be envious, to be resentful, isolated, individualistic? We are the most unique community in the world as we live out and share our gifts with Christ as our head. Great verses there, which speak of that, verse 25 and 26, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, or rejoices, all rejoice together. Isn't that great? That as we give and as we serve, we are also receiving and enjoying. There are times when we grieve and we are surrounded by those who comfort us.

And there are times when we rejoice and we are surrounded by those who rejoice with us, because we are united in the use of our life and of our gifts for Christ's glory. But we're also diverse.

And that's where we really struggle, isn't it? We all desperately want others to be the same as us. We lack trust in others. We forget that some people have completely different temperaments, different characteristics, different characters, different gifts, that He has made the church full of variety. One of the negative things about confessionalism and denominations in the world is that it makes us, it separates us out. Maybe there has to be that, of course. It wouldn't be in heaven, of course. But the danger is that we define ourselves by what makes us different from everybody else.

[26 : 34] And we look down on others who don't have or don't express things in the same way as us. There is unity, but there is great diversity as well, under Christ and in Christ and for Christ.

And we should be humble and thankful and gracious in all our dealings with Christians from throughout the world. So can I encourage you just to focus on what you have?

The Holy Spirit and the love of God, these are the greatest gifts. You have all that you need to go out tomorrow and serve Him, because you also have the individual character and the individual gifts and gifts that He has given you. Use your life, as I need to use mine, for the glory of God and for the good, the common good, the good of other believers. And we will find that that is a powerful attraction to a world that is divided and separated. Sadly, we so often reflect that world of division and separation rather than seek to live out the Holy Spirit and in grace. So that's really the foundation to our study on the gifts of the Spirit and we'll look through some of these different gifts and see why they're important and what place they have in our lives. Let's bow our heads and pray.

Father God, help us to know and to understand and to appreciate who you are and what we have from you. Remind us that you're the generous, great gift giver and that you haven't withheld anything from us that we need. You've given us everything that we need to live our Christian lives today, that you've given us the Holy Spirit and your great grace. And we thank you that that is the cement that binds all of the other gifts together. We thank you for the diversity of the church and we pray that we wouldn't squeeze people into a mold that you haven't made for them, which is our intentions often in our lives. And forgive us when we do that. And help us to take all our individuality and bring it to the good of the gospel and the good of the church and the good of his kingdom so that we share unity and diversity for Jesus' sake. Go before us we pray and remember us in all that we strive to do. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.