

Gifts of The Spirit (1)

Note: See introductory teaching notes to this study (What is in your hand.doc)

Background

There are some key Bible passages that speak about spiritual gifts. In these studies these will be looked at in different ways, to draw out different perspectives, helping us look at:

- Positioning ourselves to receive
- Identifying your gifts
- How you use your gifts
- Knowing where to serve
- Moving forward

Three key passages from the Bible that we need to consider are as follows:

1. Romans 12
2. 1 Corinthians 12
3. Ephesians 4

Each of these passages give us more than just a list of possible gifts. They show us a context in which we can understand the role, purpose and use of those gifts. Below are some pointers to these chapters which will help to create a framework for our understanding and study. Themes are identified against the verse in which they commence.

Verse no:	Romans 12	1 Corinthians 12	Ephesians 4
1	Living sacrifice	Be informed	Right living
2	Transformation	Right living	Humility & love
3	Humility		Unity
4	Unity	Unity	
5			
6	Diversity		
7		Diversity	Diversity
8			
9			
10			
11		Spirit	

In all three passages it is clear that we need to have an understanding of the importance of right living, unity and diversity. These topics are the essential background to an proper understanding of what the gifts of the spirit are and how they are to be used.

A: Right Living

To live in a right relationship with God and with each other is essential to practical Christian living.

- It is reflected in Jesus' definition of the greatest commandment (Matt 22:37-39).
- It is seen in the call to be holy (1 Peter 1:14-16)
- It involves being changed (Romans 12:2)
- It results in changing what influences us (1 Corinthians 12:2)
- It calls us to a new lifestyle (Ephesians 4:1)

To become people where the gifts of the spirit are seen to be in use, are effective and productive, then we need to embrace and recognise that our lifestyle matters.

We must be willing to sacrifice ourselves (Romans 12:1). Note – our bodies, not just our minds and emotions. Your physical body, what it does and does not do, is significant. The obvious areas here to note include how you treat your body (exercise, food, drink), and how your body interacts with other people (sexual relationships, violence, affection). The question is simple: who determines how your body is used, you or God?

We must also be willing to change what influences us (1 Corinthians 12:2-3). Previously we were / have been influenced by the world around us, which are under the control or influence of spiritual forces opposed to God (Eph 6:12). If we are to live with God in a right and proper way (in righteousness) then we need to disentangle ourselves from these influences. These influences are often seen in terms of our allegiances and our language (1 Corinthians 12:2-3). What influences and shapes our thinking? Often we can learn more about ourselves by reflecting and looking at the way we speak and think. Where do the phrases and little sayings come from?

We must also learn that we have been given a high calling (Eph 5:1). Our challenge is to live life, to adopt a lifestyle, that reflects this calling. This touches on every aspect of our living: our behaviour, our attitudes, our choices, our friendships, our ethics, our values – every part of daily life is covered.

B: Unity

Christian unity is centred around a person – God. He is the centre of all things (1 Cor 15:28) and we are to be united in our service of God. Hence we are to maintain and keep the unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:3). Until we understand that our unity is only found in God then we will search for alternative things to be united around – right doctrine, right practises, right values, etc.

We are to recognise that we are “one body” (Romans 12:4-5). Our unity comes from who we are connected to – Christ our “head”. We are to recognise that there is “one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6), “one Lord” and “one God”.

Individual gifting can only be understood in the context of the spiritual unity that comes from being devoted to the one God. Until our devotion to God is seen as the most significant thing (the thing that holds us together) we will struggle with conflicting agendas and ideas.

“We have spiritual gifts in order to help other people keep the faith and maintain an even keel in life’s storms.” (Piper)

C: Diversity

It is in the context of this uniting around the person, God, that we can then see and understand the idea of diversity.

Different gifts are given to different people (Romans 12:6). This is because God knows each one of us, knows who we are and how we can best serve His kingdom purposes. This diversity is not about each individual person but the “common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Each individual is to be focused on serving the whole – whatever gift a person may or may not have is not as important as how that gift is used. We need to accept that God has a plan and a purpose and he chooses how His grace is to be manifested in each of us (Ephesians 4:7). Christ determines which gifts are given to which person. It is His will we are to be surrendered to, and Him we are serving.

Positioning ourselves to receive

If you want to receive a gift from someone then it helps if you have a good relationship with them. Then you will look forward to receiving a gift, knowing that it comes from someone who cares about you and who you care about. If you are given a gift by someone who you don’t know or don’t particularly like, then you are more likely to be cautious and wary about what gift you are being given.

So, how well do you get on with the Holy Spirit?

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12: 11

It is the Holy Spirit who distributes the gifts. To receive from Him requires that you receive Him as a person.

Note: At this point it is easy to get drawn into a debate over phrases and terminology. Phrases such as “Baptism in the Spirit” and “filled with the Spirit”, “second blessing” and others can provoke serious discussion and debate. While this debate may be helpful, it can also distract us from the important point that the Holy Spirit should be invited into our lives, welcomed and cherished.

SHAPE, p118 ff talks about “Your Surrender Moment”. It says:

Have you surrendered everything to God? By everything, I mean *everything*: relationships, careers, kids, money, dreams, desires, pain, regret, worry, longing – everything that makes up your life or that you long to see included in your life plan.

The chapter in the book goes on to list specific areas where we often need to surrender to God. Here is the list:

- Give God your worries.- Psalm 55v22
- Give God your wounds – Psalm 147v3
- Give God your wrongs – Matt 11v28, 1 John 1v9
- Give God your weaknesses – 2 Cor 12v7-9
- Give God your wishes – Prov 3v5-6, Matt 6v33

Until we surrender to God we will not be in the right place to be used by God, no matter how gifted we might be.

This series of studies will be meaningless unless we make the choice to position ourselves to receive all that God has for us – which could mean gifts and ministry, or quietly encouraging others to go to serve God.

Here are four questions to help evaluate your position and ability to fully receive what God has to give you.

1. Is your life open to the Holy Spirit: does He have your permission to influence and shape your life?

Danger: scepticism, fear, and wrong teaching can prevent us from being open to God.

Can we say “Come Holy Spirit”?

2. Are you living “right”: is righteousness and holiness something you seek?

Danger: compromise and “cultural sensitivity” can deceive us, leaving us vulnerable. We need to be willing to examine ourselves and allow God to uncover the things in our lives that offend Him.

Can we say “Come Holy Spirit”?

3. Are you committed to Unity: is God’s agenda more important than your own, even if it is found in someone else’s ideas and thoughts?

Danger: confidence in our own ability to be right can produce arrogance and pride, resulting in us standing apart from others (thus creating division).

1 Peter 4:10. That in everything God might be glorified.

Can we say “Come Holy Spirit”?

4. Is diversity something you value: are you happy when someone else is used by God?

Danger: comparing the performance of others, and being jealous of the success of others corrupts us and creates a barrier between us and God.

I really believe that the problem of not knowing our spiritual gifts is not a basic problem. More basic is the problem of not desiring very much to strengthen other people's faith. (Piper)

Can we say "Come Holy Spirit"?

So how are we to respond to these questions? Are we willing to be open and humble ourselves before God, asking Him to reveal the areas where we need to change?
Can we say "Come Holy Spirit"?

From our Church paper on the Holy Spirit:

Matthew 3:11 & Mark 1:8 & Luke 3:16 & John 1:33 make it clear that the express stated purpose of Jesus' life was to "baptise us in the Holy Spirit". This is re-iterated in Acts 1:5. We should be careful then not to reject what Jesus came to give us.

We are also warned not to grieve the Holy Spirit – that is to cause Him sorrow or regret. (Isaiah 63:10 and Ephesians 4:30)

We need to respond to God, for some of us this may be an individual response, but also as a fellowship here – we pray "Come Holy Spirit", whatever He chooses to bring into our lives we welcome it as a gift from the Heavenly Father who loves us.