

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (18-4-1999 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

1 Corinthians 12:12-31
Spiritual Gifts (part 2)

Introduction

The list of gifts given in 1 Corinthians 12 contains only a few of the gifts God has given. Some gifts are not mentioned in the Bible at all. Some are supernatural. Some are natural talents that are cleansed and used by God. They should not arise to pride or envy, for they are meant to build up the body of Christ and bring it to maturity.

Gifts are allotted and appointed by the Holy Spirit in His sovereignty. We all have gifts, and it is our duty to know and use them. We ought to pray for gifted workers. Leaders should be on the lookout for gifts in other people, and should encourage them.

Dealing today with the gifts mentioned in the latter half of the chapter. Then going to concentrate on the subject of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Is it a second experience we all need? Should we be seeking and praying for it?

Further gifts in 1 Corinthians 12

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration. (1 Corinthians 12:27,28).

The Apostles comprised the twelve disciples, with Matthias replacing Judas, and also James (the Lord's brother), Paul, and perhaps Barnabas. They were especially commissioned and chosen to be with Christ and to be eyewitnesses of the Resurrection. They were especially taught by the Holy Spirit, and received unique revelation. They were infallible teachers, and their teaching is the foundation of the Christian church. The 27 books of the New Testament are by the apostles or from the apostolic circle.

There are no longer apostles in this sense in the church. They had no successors. None are personally authorized by Christ and specially inspired for teaching. To speak of "apostles" in the church today is misleading and highly dangerous. There may be "apostolic zeal", but no apostles.

Secondly, prophets, who were those who uttered inspired messages from God. The Holy Spirit took over their personality to express His message. They gave clear speech, and did not need an interpreter. In the history of the church, prophecy continued after New Testament times, but reduced when the New Testament scriptures were widely circulated and the canon was fixed. The office is no longer in existence. If we reduce the word "prophet" to "preacher", this role does still exist. But the essence of prophet is the organ of direct and fresh divine revelation who spoke the very words of God, i.e. the mouthpiece of God.

God's revelation is complete, and the great danger is that if apostles and prophets still exist and if they are organs of new revelation – and God still speaks through prophecy, dreams and visions – the very dangerous situation exists of denying that God's revelation is complete, and therefore the Bible is not sufficient. This is the situation with the cults, like Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Christian Scientists, and also Roman Catholicism. They claim the Bible is not complete. It has its place, but they claim the truth about God and His will is still being revealed.

The New Testament is so clear that the truth was completely and fully revealed in the first century. **Contend for the faith that is once for all entrusted to the saints** (Jude 3). The Christian church is **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets** (Ephesians 2:20).

Thirdly, teachers are those with special gift to build up converts won through the ministry of the evangelists and preachers. The great need in the church is not fresh revelation, but faithful expositors of the complete and sufficient revelation which is in the Scriptures. N.B. teaching is at the top of the five New Testament lists of gifts.

All over the world the cry goes out for expositors. So many converts need to be taught; else they fall back and become prey to the cults and sects. Many in this country profess faith but have no grasp of the truth and are floundering because they have never been taught the basics. They may get plenty of entertainment, but precious little solid teaching. Hence the reason for preoccupation with gifts of lesser importance.

Then there are the gifts of miracles and healing. Some expect to see these things still; others say that they were used at certain times in the Bible record (e.g. Exodus, Elijah, Daniel and the Son of God). Used to vindicate new stage in God's revelation. Therefore we should not expect miracles, since the New Testament canon is complete. Though this is not to say that they are impossible, because God is sovereign. Nothing is ruled out with Him.

Similarly, healing is no longer a gift possessed by people – though that is not to say God does not answer prayer for healing. Even in New Testament times, not all were healed, e.g. Trophimus was left sick at Miletus, and Paul bore his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Timothy 4:20). So there was no healing on demand in New Testament times. Today we see God using ordinary means through modern medicine. All healing is divine.

Probably the most common gift of the spirit, and the one exercised by the greatest number of Christians, is the gift of helping others. No Christian as above ordinary humdrum and unrecognised service. This practical general ministry includes cooking, washing up, cleaning, moving chairs, giving a lift, flower arranging, secretarial help, errands, gardening, painting, welcoming people, visiting, putting out books, and 1001 little chores. Its basis is natural ability, but it becomes a spiritual gift because it is taken and energised by the Lord and for His glory.

Administrators – the Greek word used literally means "piloting" – a reference to the helmsman on a ship who steers the ship and keeps it on course, avoiding dangers. In the context of the church, God uses the right person with the right gifts to keep all

moving in the right direction, organising and arranging things to keep the church on course.

So the list in 1 Corinthians 12 contains a few of the many gifts bestowed for the up-building and maturing of the body of Christ. Every church and every Christian has gifts. They are there to be acknowledged, recognised, consecrated and used. In this sense, every church and every Christian is “charismatic”.

Source of the gifts

For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:13). What is this baptism of the Spirit and when does it take place? The Charismatics say that this baptism is a second and special experience after conversion. Tongues speaking is the gateway to this blessing, and hence it is exalted above all gifts. They point to Pentecost (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8), Cornelius (Acts 10) and Ephesus (Acts 19) as evidence of a second experience.

This approach can lead to division into first-class and second-class Christians, according to whether or not this second baptism has been received.

The New Testament position is that the baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place at conversion. All are baptised. All are given the Spirit. It is important to be guided by didactic portions of Scripture, especially the Gospels and the Epistles. Nothing here to indicate a second blessing being necessary before gifts are given, and which is marked by tongues-speaking.

It is unwise to be guided by narratives in Acts, because examples in Acts are sometimes special cases. We cannot make the special cases and experiences of some people the norm for everybody. The fact is that the baptism of the Holy Spirit happens to all Christians when they were born again. The Holy Spirit is placed within us and we were united to Christ and to other believers. He brings us into a new living country – the Christian church and the Body of Christ. We become living parts of the Body of Christ, sharing the same life. The New Testament never says some have the baptism of the Spirit, and others do not. We are never told to ask for it.

We all have the baptism of the Spirit, but not all are filled, i.e. fully controlled and possessed. We are to seek this filling. **Be continually filled** (Ephesians 5:18). “One baptism, many fillings.”

This does not deny that we have crises after conversion. Some have a clear and unmistakable second – or third or fourth – experience where they are raised to a new level of holiness of life and effectiveness of service, especially after times of backsliding. This is very clear because they make a new and deeper surrender. But what is the experience of some is not meant to be the rule for everyone.

Many Christians have known deeper experiences, e.g. D.L.Moody, Hudson Taylor, F.R.Havergal. It would do some of us good to have a deeper experience of the Lord. But this is not “baptism”, this is a new filling. All should constantly seek that.

Let's make it clear one more time. At the time of New Birth, we are baptised by Christ with the Holy Spirit, and we have potentially all we need for Christian holiness and service. We are already complete in Christ, though we do not always realize it. Generally it is appropriated more fully later. All gifts which the Spirit intends us to have are ours from the beginning. The ideal is that we gradually grow in grace by which we use what we already have. But it does not work out like that in all cases. If someone has a second and deeper experience, he does not receive new gifts, but at last he possesses his possessions, lays hold of what is his but has not so far used.

At conversion you are baptised with the Spirit. You cannot be baptised again. You are complete. But now you keep on appropriating. Ask to be continually filled. The Holy Spirit is to the Christian what fuel is to a car. Cannot walk worthily or wisely or effectively without Him. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a daily challenge. Can be filled today, but tomorrow is another story. Just as the Israelites had to gather manna daily, we have to keep being filled daily.

Many Christians do not know anything about this. They are preoccupied with themselves, pride, self-centredness, and selfish concerns. The result is they are spiritually empty. They "grieve" and "quench the Spirit". When filled with the Spirit, the Christian is totally captive to the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. It does not lead to wild ecstatic experiences, especially tongues, though we do know the joy of the Lord. But we do find the fruit of the Spirit, and grow in holiness of life and become more effective and fruitful in service.

To be filled is to say goodbye to unconfessed sin in lives. It means being yielded to the Spirit, allowing Him to work in our lives. We surrender wills and bodies, times and talents – every area of life – to His control. He has overwhelming controlling influence in life. As long as He stays in control, He fills us and we know His boldness, joy and power, and abundant life. We are very conscious of the Lord.

Conclusion

Teaching on gifts is a real challenge, even if some may not be for today. There are many individuals, in many churches, who do not contribute much to the life of the church. They believe in clericalism, which sets them free to do nothing. Their great need is not to have orthodox views about the Holy Spirit, but to be open to Him daily. To expose self unreservedly to the life and power of the Holy Spirit.

When the Christian does this, he walks in step with the Holy Spirit, and appropriates all He has to offer. Fruit in Christian living and gifts in Christian service soon appear. As he keeps in touch by prayer and Scripture and walking in God's will, he stirs up God's gift within him, and the evidence of gifts comes. The Holy Spirit anoints individuals, directs their natural abilities into spiritual service, and intervenes in situations. He raises up leaders. Rejoice with fellow believers in their gifts.

Great need is to yield to the Holy Spirit, who is already within. We need to drink of Him to enjoy the life of God. Obey Him and let Him energize life. The root of our problem is often fear or unwillingness to go so far with God. But we have to hand over completely, give Him the key to every door. It is only when Christ is glorified in Christ that the Holy Spirit pours rivers of living water.