

The Gifts of The Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 12: 4 – 11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepared sermon from the LCA.

What would you consider to be your special gift or talent? Are you grateful to the Holy Spirit for it? Every Christian has been endowed with a different gift or gifts by the Holy Spirit, not just for their own benefit, but also for the blessing and benefit of others. The gifts you've been given complement those given to your fellow Church members. Some gifts, like that of leadership, are more visible than others. The less visible gifts aren't any less valuable for the work of the Holy Spirit than the more visible ones.

So much of the best work done for our Lord is done behind the scenes; seen only by Him. Christians who have accomplished great things for Christ have often done so with butterflies in their stomachs and feelings of inadequacy. You see, if everything always went well, we wouldn't need to constantly seek our Saviour's help and His transforming gift of forgiveness.

Only too aware of our inadequacies, we thank God for the wonderful gifts He has given to our fellow Church members. The mark of a true charismatic Christian is a love for fellow Christians, praying that God would richly bless them too. The Holy Spirit doesn't bless us for our own personal gain, but in order to build up others in love, confidence and commitment. We've often overestimated the value of the "extraordinary" at the expense of the "ordinary".

The Christian life is lived out amid the activities of daily life, but in an uncommon Christ-shaped manner. The Holy Spirit can transform the routines of everyday life into celebrations of love that will surprise us. The Holy Spirit isn't primarily at work doing miracles but the Spirit loves helping us in our weakness and helping us to pray aright.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness – what immensely comforting good news that is! That's why Jesus urges us to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit. **"If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13)."**

In the Christian community at Corinth, St. Paul sought to correct an over-emphasis on a few spectacular gifts of the Spirit like speaking in tongues. They had too narrow a view of the Spirit's gifts. Speaking in tongues is no more spiritual than the gift of wise administration. Some of the Spirit's gifts surface only when the need arises.

Unspectacular gifts like encouragement, discernment, service, helping others, showing mercy, practising hospitality and praying for others are more valuable for the life and growth of a Christian community than spectacular gifts. As St. Paul points out in the next chapter in 1 Corinthians, that beautiful chapter on love, spectacular gifts are of no value without the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of love.

St. Paul doesn't want us to be gullible. Not everything that claims to be from the Spirit is from Him. Every gift we employ is to bring glory to God rather than to us. We read in 1 Peter 4:11a, "**Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking with the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.**" Everything the Spirit does is for the common good of the whole Church rather than for the benefit of any one individual only.

The first gift mentioned in our text is that of wisdom. Wisdom is thoughtful application of knowledge and insight. Wisdom involves speaking the truth in love. "**The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy** (James 3:17)."

The next gift - that of knowledge, involves more than head knowledge. It involves knowing Jesus more and more personally and intimately, and experiencing Him with us in all the joys and sorrows of daily life. The Spirit's gift of knowledge centres on Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. The outcome of this knowledge involves making contributions to those in need and responding to them with words of kindness, care and concern.

Regarding the gift of healing that is given to some Christians - this gift doesn't give the ability to heal everyone who comes for healing. St. Paul didn't heal everyone or even his close friend and colleague, Timothy. Nor was St. Paul healed of his "**thorn in the flesh**". God lets some weaknesses remain in us so we never cease to depend on Him for help. We're all of equal worth with each other in our weaknesses!

St. Paul rates the gift of Christian communication or prophecy especially highly. He tells us that **“those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding, encouragement and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3).”** He rates the practice of encouraging and consoling others far above speaking in tongues. To prophesy in the New Testament involves telling others what Christ has done. To speak of the blessings and benefits He’s brought us, to Christians in need of comfort and encouragement. The New Testament calls David a prophet because of the solace and comfort his psalms offer us. Where would we be without the comfort Psalms 23 and 46 give us?

We are prophesying, according to the New Testament, when we apply verses from God’s word to someone who is in need of the help contained in these verses of Scripture. We offer them comfort from God’s word in order to strengthen and fortify their faith. We offer Christ Himself in that very word to them.

Prophecy in the New Testament deals more with the present than with the future. Prophecy in the New Testament is Christ-centred. It focuses on the immense difference for good Jesus Christ can make in our lives now, as the Holy Spirit keeps our focus on Him as our only Lord and Saviour. **“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).”** As Lord, Jesus is our Benefactor to whom we give our total and complete allegiance. **“All the prophets testify about Jesus that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name (Acts 10:43).”** Prophecy has to do with what Jesus is saying through His word to the Church today.

God’s word and His Holy Spirit are inseparable. Through the sacred Scriptures, the Holy Spirit seeks to set us on fire with love for our Lord and for one another. For love is the greatest gift the Holy Spirit gives us. **“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal ... Now faith, hope and love remain, these three; and the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:1, 13).”** Love is the greatest gift because through faith, love unites us to our Lord, and through His love we are enabled to love others forever.

From the letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, we see the Holy Spirit doesn’t give up on lukewarm churches, but pleads with them to regain their first love for our Lord. Some of the most moving words in the New Testament are addressed to the lukewarm church in Laodicea (and to all our churches today). We need to pray often, **“Come, O Holy Spirit, revive your Church beginning with me.”** Next we will ask the Holy Spirit to immeasurably bless the gifts He has given both to us and the fellow members of our congregations to bless these gifts in new and exciting ways.

“So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith (Galatians 6:10).”

A prison chaplain was so discouraged by the lack of response to his work that he was thinking of resigning. He went sailing to give himself time to think about whether or not to resign. Then the thought came to him, “Every day I stay on that job is a victory. I win by just staying there.” We too, win by staying where the Holy Spirit has placed us. He promises to bless our prayer-shaped faithfulness beyond our imagination.

Have your own way, Lord, have your own way!

Hold o’er my being absolute sway!

Fill with your Spirit, ‘till all shall see

Christ only, always, living in me! **Amen.**

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon Read by Phillip Edwards 16 January 2022

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