

## THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

A key part of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is equipping us to serve God's purposes in the Earth in our generation.

For our task of mission to the nations we need *tools to build with* and *weapons to fight with*. Our natural abilities are not sufficient – we need *supernatural, spiritual* resources.

These tools and weapons are to enable us to go about our task of establishing God's Kingdom on Earth. They are foundational for our spiritual lives. The Holy Spirit has been sent to us as disciples of Jesus to empower us to live holy and effective lives as we serve Jesus (*Acts 1:8*).

The apostle Paul helps us to understand these gifts in *1 Corinthians 12:1-7*. It is clear that the church in Corinth had become very excited about the work of the Spirit among them, especially speaking in other languages, but they obviously lacked understanding of the real nature of these 'gifts' and what they were intended for.

Note first of all that 'gifts' is only one way of describing these tools and weapons. In verse 1, Paul simply refers to them as '*the spirituals*' – we might say *things to do with the Spirit (pneumatika)*. The Corinthian believers were so confused and poorly disciplined that it seems there were even people saying "Jesus be cursed" and claiming that it was the Spirit! That cannot be, says the apostle, because the Spirit always testifies to the Lordship of Jesus.

He then goes on to instruct them about the *source, the variety and the purpose* of these things (*verses 4-7*).

### The Source

- There are different kinds of *gifts*, but the same *Spirit*
- There are different kinds of *service*, but the same *Lord (Jesus)*
- There are different kinds of *working (energy)* but the same *God*

The 'spirituals' come from the Triune God; it is the Spirit who decides, in agreement with the Father and Son – see *verse 11* and *Hebrews 2:4*.

### The Variety

*Gifts (charismata)* – given freely and graciously; personal and individual, suitable to our personality and character.

*Service (diakonia)* – each ability is given in order to enable the individual believer to serve the Body and play their part in establishing the Kingdom.

*Working (energemata)* – the word means 'power at work'. It is the output of God's energy and power, not the believer's own resource.

*Manifestation (phanerosis)* – this means *revealing* or *expression*; it is making visible and audible the unseen and unheard work of the Spirit.

Note the word ‘kinds’ in *verses 4-6*. This word means *divisions, varieties, categories*, and it suggests great variety and diversity in the operation of the spirituals.

### The Purpose

We note the purpose in *verse 7*: all these different expressions of the Spirit’s work are for ‘the common good’. That is to say they are for mutual profit and advantage, not for show or personal benefit.

They are tools for building up the Body of Christ and weapons for defeating the Enemy and extending God’s Kingdom. They require thoughtful and disciplined handling (see chapter 14) and they must be motivated by *love* (see chapter 13).

### The Gifts

- *Word of Wisdom*: note that it is a *word* of wisdom, not the gift of wisdom. It is a specific word for a specific situation; a practical assessment; a piece of advice, counsel or instruction that cuts to the heart of a matter. Jesus exercised it in *Mark 10:21* in his encounter with the rich young man. The word may come as a conscious revelation or unconsciously in the context of preaching or teaching.
- *Word of Knowledge*: note again a *word* – specific revealed facts spoken into a particular situation. An example in the life of Jesus is with the Samaritan woman in *John 4:17-18* where the facts revealed to Jesus by the Spirit opened up the conversation in a new way. Another aspect of this spiritual tool is hinted at in *Matthew 13:11*: “...to you has been given the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens” (literal translation). Such revelation of the application of the kingdom to various situations is vital.
- *Faith*: this is faith-given – faith for a particular objective based on God’s express word. Jesus lived in this faith. His confidence was rooted in hearing God speak and walking accordingly. There is a good example in the life of Paul in *Acts 27:21-26*.
- *Healing*: literally translated, this is ‘gifts of healings’. The double plural suggests tremendous variety and scope – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual (release from demonic oppression). In the New Testament such healing is never arbitrary; it is seen in the context of authenticating the proclaimed word (*Acts 5:12, 16*). It is a demonstration of the power of the kingdom which seems to function primarily in an evangelistic/mission context.
- *Miraculous powers*: literally ‘operations of powers’; the plurals again suggest diversity. This is power over the material world. In Jesus’s ministry this was seen in situations like the water into wine, calming the storm, raising the dead. Again such demonstrations are not arbitrary but are evidences of Jesus’s claims to represent the

kingdom of God. They are the specific application of God's unlimited resources to our needs in relation to our service in the kingdom.

- *Distinguishing between spirits*: more literally, judging or discerning spirits; the ability to evaluate the source of a manifestation as Holy Spirit inspired, demonically inspired or human reaction. If demonic, what kind of demon. It also has to do with the discerning of *motives*, as in *Acts 8:23*.
- *Speaking in different kinds of tongues*: literally simply 'kinds of languages'. These are real languages, unknown to the speakers but sometimes recognised and understood by listeners. They may be human or angelic (*13:1*). It is the one gift which is primarily given for personal use and is limited in its application in the gathered church (see *chapter 14*). According to the apostle's guidelines speaking in an unknown language is addressed to God rather than people (*14:2*). The purpose is prayer, thanksgiving and intercession.
- *Interpretation*: the word means translation, paraphrase or explanation. It is necessary when a 'tongue' is used in the church gathering (*14:5, 12*). As with the 'tongue' the interpretation will address God, but can lead into prophecy or extended prayer. Both tongue and interpretation may be sung.
- *Prophecy*: the root meaning of the word has to do with declaration, proclaiming something. It can be a declaration *about* God, exalting and praising him; or it can be the proclaiming of a word *from* God to his people. Paul sees this as the primary gift for the church (*14:1*); the purpose of the prophetic gift is to strengthen, encourage and comfort (*14:3*) so as to build up the church. It can take the form of words or pictures. The key thing is that prophecy brings a *revelation* of God's heart and mind to his people. So it awakens faith and worship. It is a declaration of the living, *present* word (the *rhema*) to the people. It comes by a direct impartation of the Holy Spirit but involves the heart and mind of the speaker (see *14:32*). Poetry and song are closely linked with prophecy in the Bible. Instrumental music and dance can also be prophetic. Symbolic actions have a place too.

The standard for 'weighing' prophetic words is the revealed word, the *logos*, the Scriptures. The prophetic may fill out the Scripture, interpret or complement but never contradict the Scripture or override it. It can often be 'triggered' by the reading of Scripture. The prophetic gift is available to all, and Paul encourages us to seek it especially, along with other gifts (*14:1*).