

SPIRITUAL GIFTS - 2

Following on from the Biblical background we looked at last time, now we need to look at the practical results in our lives: How can we begin to enter into experience of spiritual gifts in our individual and church life?

What can we do about spiritual gifts?

1. Eagerly desire them!

a) We are told very clearly and repeatedly to seek spiritual gifts. See **1 Corinthians 12:31, 14:1, 14:39**. With such strong recommendation from the apostle Paul, we should at least be open to the possibility of spiritual gifts! He tells us to go for the 'greater' gifts, and prophecy is specially picked out. Love as shown in **1 Corinthians 13** and spiritual gifts are definitely not 'either-or' alternatives, they are a winning combination!

b) Just a word of caution from the story of Simon the sorcerer in **Acts 8:9-24**. He wanted what he saw, but he had seen wrong and his motivation was wrong (**8:18 & 21**). He confused receiving with giving and was looking for personal gain... we have been warned!

2. Receive them!

a) Some 'case histories' of people receiving the Holy Spirit and receiving spiritual gifts at the same time. It certainly seems to have been usual in the New Testament... more about that in a moment!

i) **Acts 8:14-17**. These people had believed the preaching of Philip and been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus but "the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them". Peter and John prayed for them and then laid hands on them, and they "received the Holy Spirit." No specific mention of spiritual gifts, but there was obviously something happening for Simon to see!

ii) **Acts 10:44**. Spontaneously, while Peter was preaching, "the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message." They spoke in

tongues and praised God. Believing must have come somewhere along the line and they were baptised later.

iii) **Acts 18:24-19:7**. Apollos had preached and taught accurately about Jesus, they had believed and had been baptised with 'John's baptism' of repentance. Paul asks them if they have received the Holy Spirit. They don't know, so Paul gives them a little more instruction and they are baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Paul lays hands on them and the Holy Spirit "came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

Three things seem clear from these cases:-

Firstly, it seems to have been 'normal' to receive spiritual gifts when receiving the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, this normally happened early in people's Christian experience.

Thirdly, believing and receiving the Holy Spirit did not always happen at the same time!

b) The difference between giving and receiving:-

Just as the basis for our forgiveness is the FACT of the blood of Jesus shed for us, so the basis for the Holy Spirit being poured out is the FACT that the Lord Jesus Christ has been exalted at the right hand of the Father! (See **John 7:39, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7, Acts 2:33-36, 39, 5:32**.) But, if this is the case, why is our experience sometimes (often?) lacking? There is a difference between being given a gift and receiving it. Hopefully the illustration with envelopes (see below *) will stick in your memory, but if you need other illustrations, think of birthday or Christmas presents bought and paid for, given or sent to you and just waiting to be opened! When are they given and when are they received? Does the fact that you have to take some action in opening and receiving them make any difference to the fact that they are a gift?

What is the most certain indication to the giver that you have received them?

c) There is no fixed blueprint for HOW we are to receive spiritual gifts. The examples in a) show several differences. **1 Timothy 4:14** shows how a gift was imparted to Timothy. If we think that God is leading us into the use of a particular gift, it would probably be useful to talk with others we trust and begin to:-

3. Exercise them!

This takes at least two factors:

a) A bit of courage! Perhaps one reason for tongues being a common starting point is that to exercise the gift we only have to make fools of ourselves on our own with the Lord. Once we have got used to 'talking rubbish' to the Lord, we may find it easier to follow his leading in exercising gifts in front of others. Please remember that gifts are not for 'spiritual brownie points' or primarily for our own individual benefit, but for the common good of the church. (See **1 Corinthians 12:7** and last time's notes.)

b) Whole fellowship support. If we do not have support around us as we launch out, we may easily falter through fear of failure or ridicule. We probably will fail from time to time! Alternatively there is the danger that we could react the other way and become 'over strong' in insisting on exercising our particular gift. There are dangers, so we need to be careful. The instruction of **1 Corinthians 14:1** is good, to "follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts". Do be especially careful not to form a clique of those who do (or don't!) want to exercise spiritual gifts and exclude the others because they don't (or do!).

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT !

4. Recognise them!

This follows on from fellowship support. Whether or not you are exercising spiritual gift(s) yourself, and even if you would prefer

not to think about gifts too much, please, please, please remember to encourage other Christians when the Lord speaks to you through them. Just to be told that someone has been blessed through what you have said or done is a tremendous encouragement and could be specially helpful if someone is 'feeling their way' in exercising a gift for the first few times.

Another way to foster development of gifts is to encourage someone who seems to have the beginnings of a spiritual gift. They are probably feeling uncertain, and your suggestion that this might be for them could be just what they need to move on a bit. Please avoid the temptation to think that you know exactly what their gift is. Even if you do, they need to develop it as they walk with the Lord.

Finally:- As we seek to know more and more of the Spirit's work revealing Jesus to us and in us, and as we eagerly desire, receive, exercise and recognise spiritual gifts, Father wants to move people into ministries, where the line between gift and sanctified personality is very difficult to see. He wants to have men and women whom he can trust with more than 'a word from the Lord'; he wants those who share his heart for the Church, who can work together with him as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." (***Ephesians 4:12***).

Dave Taylor 12th September 1993

* When this talk was given, volunteers were called to the front and each given an envelope. One contained a 10 pound note; one contained a cheque for 10 pounds and one contained a 'bank statement' saying that 10 pounds had been added to their account. Each had been given 10 pounds. Each had to 'receive' it by opening the envelope, but each one's experience was different.

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