

“THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT”
2 Kings 5:1-14, Acts 4:8-12, I Corinthians 12:1-11
July 2 & 3, 2022

“The ‘Fable of the Birds’ is a story about Creation. All the newly-made animals were walking around discovering what it was like to be alive. All except the birds. They were doing nothing but complaining because God had given them a heavy burden that He had given no other animal: those awkward appendages on their shoulders. God must be punishing them somehow, they thought. Why did they have to carry these things around, making it hard to walk? ‘Why?’ they asked. ‘Why us?’ Finally, two or three of the more adventurous birds began to move their appendages, to flutter them, and soon they discovered that the very thing they had regarded as a burden actually made it possible for them to fly. And no other animal could fly. The ‘heavy burden’ turned out to be a beautiful gift.

“Many of us act like those silly birds. We regard God’s call to obedience as an awkward appendage to our lives - weighing us down. Thou shalt not! Thou shalt! Heavy burden it is until we discover that God’s Law is really the wind of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to fly as no other creature can fly.”¹

The gifts of the Holy Spirit often seem to us to be heavy burdens that are hard to bear because we misunderstand their purpose. Because the gifts of the Holy Spirit are often so very different than what we naturally have as abilities, we may find ourselves questioning God, “Why?” or “Why me?” when we see ourselves different than those around us. Yet, God gifts us for a purpose, to do specific work for Him in order that the mission of God is completed.

God is calling each one of us to be His servants, and He doesn’t expect us to go it alone with our own strength. God has promised that when we have Jesus Christ as our Savior, and when we give in to His leadership, the Holy Spirit will gift us with abilities beyond what we can expect from our own strengths. Much like He gave birds special use of their upper appendages, called wings, in order to fly, so each of us is given special gifts so that we might perform specific tasks within the body of Christ.

¹ (James F. Colaianni, *Sunday Sermons Treasury of Illustrations*, [Pleasantville, NJ: Voicings Publications, 1982] pg. 230-1)

As Christians, we are called to work for the Lord together, using all of our abilities to fulfill the work of the church in our world today. Yet no one person can perform all the tasks of ministry for the Lord, so God gives varied gifts to His followers in order that working together, using our specific gifts, the work load of each person is lessened and the whole ministry of the church is completed.

We see this demonstrated both in the Old Testament and the New Testament accounts. The work of leading the people of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land was too much for just Moses to handle, so God gave him Aaron, Miriam, Joshua and Hur as supporters to do what God commanded. Yet even that was not enough. So, taking his father-in-law's advice, Moses "*chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves*" (Exodus 18:13-26). They all worked together, using their strengths and abilities to manage the journey so that one person would not be worn out with all the responsibilities.

Then, in the New Testament, the disciples of Jesus were overwhelmed with responsibilities, too. Even with 12 disciples, they came to understand that "*it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, [they said] choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word*" (Acts 6:1-6). The 12 apostles couldn't do it all, so they incorporated the help of others to make sure that the whole body of Christ was supported. These additional helpers used their specific gifts of the Holy Spirit to assist the apostles.

And having done so, the "*Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith*" (Acts 6:7). **God gifts each of us with specific abilities in order to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ.** He gives gifts to us so that we might work together and accomplish more than what just one or two could do. It is imperative that the whole body of Jesus Christ works together to bring about God's goal of salvation for all the world.

Let me share with you what the Apostle Paul tells us about these spiritual gifts. This is found in

I Corinthians 12:1-11. (READ I Corinthians 12:1-11)

As Christians, we need the special gifts of the Holy Spirit to work alongside of our own natural abilities to help us face the great deal of spiritual warfare going on around us every day.

This spiritual warfare has supernatural dimensions that are too much for us to deal with just with our own natural abilities. The powers of this world are too much for us to bear on our own without the help of the Holy Spirit. So we have gifts given to us by God to prepare us for the spiritual battles that we face.

Some of them are communication gifts, allowing us to express the work of the Lord verbally. These include prophecy, utterance of wisdom and knowledge, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different languages, and interpreting those languages. They enable us to share the Word of the Lord with someone who is seeking a deeper meaning in life than what the world can give to them. They help us to explain the love and grace given to us by Jesus Christ with those who are hurting and need encouragement. They help us to tell of the forgiveness of God given through Jesus Christ to all people as they seek Jesus and claim Him to be their Savior. And they provide us a way to intercede for people so that they might know that God loves them. With the Holy Spirit's encouragement, through these special communication gifts given to us for specific purposes, we are able to tell the Gospel message and draw others to a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Then, **some of these Holy Spirit-given-gifts are action gifts, enabling us to work specifically to do the ministry of the church together.** These include serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, mercy, faith, healings, and miraculous powers (Romans 12:6-8). Some of these are supernatural, beyond what we can normally do as human beings. Some of them support and encourage the natural abilities that God has given to us in our bodies. All of these action gifts provide us the opportunity to work in ways that demonstrate the Gospel to those around us and demonstrate the difference that Jesus Christ makes as we claim Him as our Savior and follow Him as our Lord.

All of these gifts are given to us by the Holy Spirit for the common good of the church, not

so that we as an individual might be lifted up or exalted above someone else. They are all important and given to us as the Spirit wills. While some of them are more noticed than others, there are none that are more important than any other. No one gift makes us suitable for being a member of the church more than any other. And just because one person has a particular gift, and another person does not, that does not mean that one is a better Christian than the other. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us to compliment the work of the church, so they are not to be lifted up as competitive in nature, but as supportive. All of the gifts of the Spirit are important to the work of the church.

So a person who speaks in the tongue of a different language is not a better Christian than one who serves. The one who prophesies is not greater than the one who heals. The one who is gifted to give is not greater than the one who does miraculous powers. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us to work together, so that at just the right moment, a particular person may find the help and support and training and encouragement they need to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Though some denominations lift up one gift over another as requirements to prove that you are a follower of Jesus, this is not accurate. The Apostle Paul explains that *“there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work”* (I Cor. 12:4-6).

In fact, a little later on Paul goes into great focus, telling us that it is the Holy Spirit who decides who gets what gift. He says, *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?”* (I Cor. 12:27-30). The answer to Paul’s rhetorical questions is “NO.” **Not everyone has the same gifts given to them, for the purpose of gifting the whole body of Christ to be effective in doing the whole work of ministry together.**

To my knowledge I have never spoken in tongues to pray for someone or teach someone. And

when I hear someone speak in tongues of the Holy Spirit, I wonder what they are saying. I am not one who interprets the tongues of the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean that at some point the Holy Spirit won't gift me with that particular gift at just the right moment for just the right reason, but because I don't speak or interpret tongues does not make me a lesser Christian than someone who does. It's just that those are not my gifts. So we are not to look down upon someone who does or doesn't have a particular one of the 18 or so gifts of the Holy Spirit. **The Holy Spirit just gifts people as He sees fit so that the whole church is blessed together.** Those gifts that seem lesser in importance are just as important as the others, and just as divine. God's power is at work through them, too, even though they may be natural abilities for the person. We have to remember that it is the Holy Spirit who gives them to us AS HE DETERMINES. Some may accentuate the natural abilities of a person, and some of them may be extra-ordinary gifts that go way beyond any of our natural abilities.

So different Christians receive different gifts. "One might receive the gift of teaching, for example, while another receives the gift of administration, another the gift of healing, and another the gift of prophecy...sometimes one person receives different gifts at different times. At one time, for example, a person might exercise the gift of prophecy, and at another time he or she might be a special channel of God's healing power, and then [they might] exercise the gift of encouragement on a third occasion."²

Paul tells us, "*All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines*" (I Cor. 12:11). So it's not because we merit a particular gift over some other person, but it is because the Holy Spirit determines that we are the right one to have that gift at that particular time for the work of the Lord for that person being reached.

Sometimes the gifts are given for the long haul in life, such as healing and teaching. God enables different ones to heal others to bring life to that community, or to demonstrate God's great power and authority to an unbeliever. We saw that in our first two lessons today. The Old Testament

² (William H. Venable, *Discovering, Choosing, Following Jesus Christ*, [Pittsburgh, PA: Rivertree Christian Ministries, 1998] pg. 35)

lesson of 2 Kings 5:1-14 tells when Elisha was given the power to heal Naaman of his leprosy. But the healing only came as Naaman obeyed Elisha's command to "*go and wash in the Jordan River seven times*" (2 Kings 5:10-14).

Then, we saw the work of the apostles Peter and John healing the lame beggar, and then proclaiming the miracle done was in the name of Jesus Christ to the Sanhedrin. The healing brought about the opportunity to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ and encourage the Temple leaders to find that Jesus really was and is the Messiah sent from God. The one gift of healing was given along with the gifts of faith and speaking wisdom and knowledge.

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, was used to confront the "*rulers and elders of the people*" so that they might know that "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ is the only One who can bring salvation to us. And boldly, Peter proclaimed this to the Temple leaders, through the help of the Holy Spirit. On his own, he could easily have been afraid of what the leaders of the Temple might do to him if he were to be so bold to confront their error about Jesus. But because of the Holy Spirit's power in him, Peter shared the Gospel message with them.

Once we have the Holy Spirit in us, guiding us and directing our life according to God's purpose, He can work in and through us to interact with the lives of those around us. **God intends the gifts of the Spirit to be used: to build up others; to build up oneself; in humility, not in pride; and within the framework of order in the church.** Each gift is given to bring about the manifestation of the glory of Jesus Christ to the world so that all people are drawn to Him so that they can be saved.

Now, since it is the Holy Spirit who determines the distribution of these gifts to us (2 Cor. 12:11), there is no guarantee that the gifts will be long term. **God could use us in a mighty way to reach out to those around us, but the gift given could enable us to do that for just the one time purpose.** We have to be careful to determine if God intends it for a long term use so that we don't abuse that gift, or think that we have to pretend to have that gift to be important to the body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul was given the gift of healing a couple of times in his ministry, but he didn't have the gift all the time. In Acts 20:7-12, we have the account of Eutychus falling from a third story window, having fallen asleep, and Paul went down and "*threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'He's alive!'*" (Acts 20:10). But Paul did not go around and heal people as a part of his ministry. It was a short term gift given to him to encourage the church in Troas that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. And the church grew because of that short term gift's action.

The great temptation, however, is for us to want a particular gift so badly that we fake it so that we look important. I've known several people who claim that they can speak in tongues, and they do so at their own time and for their selfish reason to look more important than other Christians. We have to remember that the Spiritual gifts are given to us "*as the Holy Spirit determines.*" They are not for our own glorification, but for the support and encouragement of the whole church.

In the use of tongues, though there may be a language the Holy Spirit uses that we don't understand that may be used during prayers or intercessions, **the accounts of the Holy Spirit enabling people to speak in other languages is always in languages that people can understand.** On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke to the people in Jerusalem from 15 different nations using their own heart language. It was for the people to understand the Good News of Jesus Christ. The disciples were given the ability to speak a language they had no training in so that they could communicate the Gospel message to those who had gathered. It wasn't gibberish or a concocted system of sounds and noises. It was a real language that people could understand. God wants us to be able to understand His great Good News, so we have to hear it in a language we can understand to comprehend the message.

Unfortunately, each gift of the Holy Spirit can be misunderstood by unbelievers, and those filled with the Holy Spirit can be ridiculed as they use those gifts. That's what can make them heavy burdens to bear. The ones with the gift of prophecy are almost always ridiculed by unbelievers because the message is so abrupt or contrary to the common thought of the day that it's considered nonsense. Those

with the gift of miraculous powers are often questioned what trick they were using to pull off the feat of power. Those with the gift of healing are often accused of using stand-in participants who really don't have the limiting conditions they claim to have. Those with the gift of giving are often challenged why they didn't give of their money or goods to help the general public, or they are questioned why they helped that one particular person and not another. Those with the gift of faith are often criticized as people with unrealistic dreams of a future hope. **Unbelievers will often try to downplay the actions or words of the Holy Spirit given through those with their particular gifts.** But that is not to deter us from using our gifts of the Holy Spirit to benefit and uplift the church. We are to use our gifts for their specific purposes, just as birds use their wings to fly. There will always be unbelievers, but we are to be faithful in using our gifts for the fulfilling of God's purpose of reaching out to the whole world with the Salvation message of Jesus Christ.

I would invite you today to put your complete trust in Jesus Christ, ask the Holy Spirit to bless you with His gifts, so that you can do the work that God has called you to do for the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. And when we do that, God will bless us, and we will see our numbers increase, too, for the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus, who has called each one of us to be servants for Him. Thank You for the gifts of Your Holy Spirit, given to us to bring about the fullness of the work of Your Church. Help us not to be afraid to use our gifts, but to willingly receive them and use them for Your glory wherever we are, for the benefit of the whole church of Jesus Christ. Continue to guide us and direct us so that we might touch the lives of those around us with the love of Jesus, drawing them into a relationship with Jesus as we use our Holy Spirit gifts. Give us the courage to work for You, using our gifts, not being ashamed of being a follower of Jesus, but boldly manifesting our gifts to grow Your church and reach all people for You. Give us eyes to see the gifts You have for us, and enable us to joyfully use them, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.