

The Holy Spirit *and* the Gifts of the Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 12:4–7, 11; Eph. 4:7; 1 Cor. 12:14–31; Rom. 12:3–8; 1 John 4:1–3.*

Memory Text: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (*1 Corinthians 12:4–6, NKJV*).

Going away on a long business trip, a man left his son in charge of the household, with a specific task to do. But the son soon realized that his father had not provided him with the necessary means and tools to accomplish that task. Frustrated, the son had to leave it undone.

Likewise, when Jesus left His disciples and went to be with His Father in heaven, He gave them a specific task: preach the good news of the gospel to the world. But Jesus did not leave His disciples unequipped. What He commanded them to do He enabled them to do, but in His name and through the power and help of the Holy Spirit. In *1 Corinthians 1:4–7* Paul gives thanks “for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him . . . so that you are not lacking in any gift” (*NASB*). Spiritual gifts are given through the Holy Spirit in Christ to build His church.

This week we will study the Holy Spirit as the Sovereign Giver of God’s remarkable gifts and look at the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 25.

The Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit have the same Author. Yet, they are not the same. No one is required to manifest a gift of the Spirit, but everyone should manifest the fruit of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts do not necessarily testify to spirituality, but the fruit of the Spirit does. While there is only one fruit, there are many gifts, and some are greater than others.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–7, 11. What is the essence of what Paul is teaching here?

While all aspects of the fruit of the Spirit are designed by God to be visible in the life of His followers, not every believer has the same gift or gifts. There is no command that all should have one particular gift, such as speaking in tongues. Instead, God sovereignly equips His believers with different gifts as He sees fit. The gifts of the Spirit are given so that we can serve others and build up the body of Christ, His church. These gifts are not given for our own pleasure and glory. They are bestowed to further the cause of God.

Therefore, spiritual gifts are worthless without the fruit of the Spirit. It is interesting that within the context of the spiritual gifts, love is often alluded to. Immediately after 1 Corinthians 12 comes the supreme description of love, in chapter 13. Ephesians 4:11–13 is followed in verses 15 and 16 with references to love. The next verses after Romans 12:3–8, where the gifts of the Spirit are mentioned, speak about love (see *Rom. 12:9, 10*).

The gifts are, after all, gifts of grace; that is, they are gifts of love. They are given out of love and serve the love of God in reaching other people. By loving others, we are revealing the love of God to them. A loving and omniscient God provides the means to accomplish what He has commissioned His people to do. Perhaps that is why love is the greatest gift of all (*1 Cor. 13:13*).

Why is love so central to all that we do as Christians? How does love, in a sense, “empower” our witness?

God, the Sovereign Giver of the Spiritual Gifts

It is not we who decide what gifts to have. The Greek word for the gifts of the Spirit is *charismata*—they are gifts of grace, distributed and given by God Himself. We do not earn them by our status, our position, our honor, our education, or our spiritual performance. They are gifts, freely given out of love so that we can fulfill the task God has assigned us to do.

Read Ephesians 4:7. We often think that the Holy Spirit is the One who bestows spiritual gifts. The apostle Paul also connects Jesus Christ with the giving of the gifts. How is Jesus involved in the giving of the gifts?

Paul says that the grace of Christ secured the right to give us gifts. But it is the Holy Spirit who distributes them to the members of the church. Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and believe in Him will be equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts “as He wills” (*1 Cor. 12:11, NASB*). The bestowal of the gifts is God’s sovereign decision.

Innate ability as such is not a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents that a person might have developed through intense education. Many non-Christians are blessed with such providential talents. While every good thing and perfect gift is ultimately from God (*James 1:17*), God has decided to equip His believers with special gifts in order to bless the lives of other Christians and to build up His church. God also can use a natural talent for that purpose when the person acknowledges that even such a talent ultimately comes from God and then prayerfully and submissively dedicates that talent to the Lord’s work.

What does Paul tell his readers in 1 Corinthians 12:14–31 about the distribution of the gifts? Why is this perspective so important for understanding how spiritual gifts function in the church?

The Holy Spirit is the one who distributes the gifts according to His wisdom and will. Since He loves us and knows best how we can serve Him most efficiently, we do not need to be envious of others and their gifts. To envy other gifts is a sign of ingratitude toward God and of doubting His wisdom in distributing His gifts.

What gifts has God granted to members of your church? What message can you take away from the fact that different people have different gifts?

The Purpose of the Spiritual Gifts

Read Romans 12:3–8 and Ephesians 4:8–12. What is the purpose of the spiritual gifts that God gives us?

The spiritual gifts were clearly given for service, not for our sanctification. They are not miraculous tricks that satisfy our curiosity, nor are they given as an antidote to boredom. Often we think about the gifts of the Holy Spirit in terms of fulfilling our spiritual needs or as empowering us in our walk with God. The result is a view of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that is more Christian-centered than Christ-centered. It is more focused on us than on God. When we try to recover a God-centered perspective of the spiritual gifts, we realize that the gifts God gives fulfill multiple divine purposes: they are given to further the unity of the church and for building up the church (*Eph. 4:12–16*). They are given to carry on the divinely commissioned ministry of the church (*Eph. 4:11, 12*). And ultimately they are given to glorify God (*1 Pet. 4:10, 11*).

This is the reason why the gifts are never given to please us. They are to edify others (*1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Cor. 14:12, 26*). They are given to bring spiritual profit and edification to the whole church. It is a tragedy when God's gifts, which are supposed to foster unity in the church, are misused so that only certain individuals are elevated. When this happens, individuals receive undue prominence. This in turn fosters disunity and gives way to divisiveness.

Too often we think about spiritual gifts only in terms of ability and talents that we receive. While talents are involved in spiritual gifts, we should keep in mind that in bestowing a spiritual gift the Holy Spirit also always gives a specific task or ministry that goes along with it (*1 Pet. 4:10*). Thus, we might say that spiritual gifts are certain capacities given supernaturally by God through the Holy Spirit. These gifts fit the person for a special type of service that will build up the church. To reach that goal, diverse gifts are needed.

Why do you think a primary purpose of the gifts is church unity? How can believers with different gifts aim at unity in the church? What needs to take place so that different gifts in the church become a blessing rather than a source of division?

The Gift, Then and Now

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1 and compare the different lists in 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 27–31; Romans 12:3–8; and Ephesians 4:11, 12. Were those gifts given only to the New Testament believers? Why are the gifts available today?

There are some Christians who think that the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament were restricted to the times of Jesus and the apostles. They argue that, with the death of the first apostles, the special spiritual gifts also have ceased to be present in the church. In support of such a view, they quote 1 Corinthians 13:10, where the apostle Paul states that “when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away” (*NASB*). Yes, there will be a time when the gifts will cease. But they will cease only when the perfect has come; that is, when we no longer see as through a dark glass, but face to face, when Jesus comes again. The Bible tells us that the spiritual gifts are given to build up the church (*1 Cor. 12:28*). Paul admonishes the believers to “desire earnestly spiritual gifts” (*1 Cor. 14:1, NASB*). They are necessary to the well-being of the body. In the absence of any scriptural proof that God has abolished them, we have to assume that He intends them to remain until the church has completed its mission, and Christ has come again.

The work of God will be completed at the end of time with power and strength far exceeding the first beginnings. As long as the church is called to prepare the world for Christ’s second coming, God will not leave the members of the church without help in fulfilling their mission. But these gifts will never supersede the Bible, nor occupy the same place as the Bible. Rather, they are a fulfillment of the biblical promise to equip the believers so that they can build up the body of Christ and prepare the world for the soon coming of Jesus.

Read Ephesians 4:11–13, especially verse 13, which says: “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (*NKJV*). What does this tell us about the present need for the gifts in the church?

The Holy Spirit and the Gift of Discernment

Read 1 Corinthians 12:10, 14:29, and 1 John 4:1–3. Why is the gift of discernment important?

While there are genuine spiritual gifts present in the church, the Bible also warns us not to believe every spirit but rather to test the spirits by their conformity to Scripture, their consistency, and whether they exalt Jesus as the Lord. It is necessary to “distinguish between spirits” (*1 Cor. 12:10, ESV*) because not everything that pretends to come from God is really from God. We are warned that there are demonic powers seeking to mislead the church and that there are devilish reproductions of the genuine gifts of the Spirit, such as false teachings, false prophecy, lying visions, counterfeit tongue-speaking, occult healing powers, misleading signs and wonders, et cetera.

Some who accept the validity of the spiritual gifts even today, however, have placed a special emphasis on *some* spiritual gifts and have given unwarranted prominence to the presence of special signs and wonders. It is interesting that Paul lists the gift of discernment immediately after he mentioned the gift of “effecting of miracles” and the gift of “prophecy” and before he mentions the gift of tongues (*1 Cor. 12:10, NASB*).

In order to preserve the church in truth and unity and to safeguard the members from following false prophets and being deluded by false signs and miracles, God gives the church the gift of discernment. Biblical maturity, knowledge, and faithfulness to God’s Word in belief and practice are needed to make proper evaluations. The basis for all discernment, however, has to be the Word of God. Only through testing everything by the Word can we know for sure whether what we are hearing or seeing is truly from the Lord or, instead, from somewhere else.

“The man who makes the working of miracles the test of his faith will find that Satan can, through a species of deceptions, perform wonders that will appear to be genuine miracles. . . . Let not the days pass by and precious opportunities be lost of seeking the Lord with all the heart and mind and soul. If we accept not the truth in the love of it, we may be among the number who will see the miracles wrought by Satan in these last days, and believe them. Many strange things will appear as wonderful miracles, which should be regarded as deceptions manufactured by the father of lies. . . . Men under the influence of evil spirits will work miracles.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 52, 53.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Agency of Evil Spirits;” pp. 511–517; “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” pp. 593–602, in *The Great Controversy*.

Some have asked, “Why don’t we see the same kind of miracles, such as the miraculous healings, today that were seen in Bible times?” First, we do hear stories about miracles. And surely some people have seen them firsthand, too. Second, when reading the Bible, we can get the impression that miracles were always happening. But we get that impression only because the Holy Spirit inspired the authors to write about events that were crucial in establishing the early church, and these events often included miracles. We could imagine that in most cases, and most of the time, things back then were the way they are today: people being taught the Word of God and then responding to the Holy Spirit. And, finally, Ellen G. White wrote: “The way in which Christ worked was to preach the Word, and to relieve suffering by miraculous works of healing. But I am instructed that we cannot now work in this way, for Satan will exercise his power by working miracles. God’s servants today could not work by means of miracles, because spurious works of healing, claiming to be divine, will be wrought. For this reason the Lord has marked out a way in which His people are to carry forward a work of physical healing, combined with the teaching of the Word. Sanitariums are to be established, and with these institutions are to be connected workers who will carry forward genuine medical missionary work. Thus a guarding influence is thrown around those who come to the sanitariums for treatment.”—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 54.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit?
- 2 How can the understanding that the gifts are given by a loving and wise God help us to appreciate the various gifts in our church?
- 3 Why are miraculous healings and wonders in themselves not a safe guide for determining truth? What do we need along with them?
- 4 “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (*Rom. 12:3, NKJV*). What crucial admonition is given to us here? How “highly” should we think of ourselves?

The Newspaper Ad: Part 1

Kim leafed through the newspaper, scanning the headlines and reading the stories that caught his interest. His eyes fell on a small advertisement in the lower corner of the page. He read it absently, then stopped and read it again. He turned the page and continued reading, but his mind returned to that small advertisement. The few sentences in the advertisement invited readers to join a Bible study that was meeting on Tuesday evenings.

Kim flipped back through the newspaper, drawn to the ad as a moth is drawn to a flame. He read the ad again, sensing that it offered something that he needed, that he had been searching for.

Kim had always been interested in spiritual things. Although his family, like most in Denmark, wasn't religious, Kim always believed in good, if not in God. Kim sensed that life was filled with struggles between good and evil. He had seen evil in the alcohol and drugs and violence that he'd encountered, and he reasoned that if evil existed, then somewhere good must exist as well.

He tried to live a good life, but his failures frustrated him. He searched for ways to embrace goodness without realizing that the good he was looking for was God.

In his search for goodness, Kim adopted a healthy lifestyle and became a vegetarian. He shared what he was learning with his family, but he was careful not to overwhelm them with too much information. Over the course of time his parents saw the wisdom in his healthy lifestyle.

As he read books on health, he was introduced to the New Age movement. New Age teachings don't deny God; instead they teach that God exists within every person as a force for good. But salvation through Jesus Christ isn't a part of New Age.

When Kim faced some personal problems, he realized that the New Age movement didn't hold all the answers. There had to be something more to life that he hadn't yet discovered. He began to question God. Was He real? Did He care about humanity? Could He love a person and help him or her in times of trouble? If God cared about him, Kim wanted to meet Him.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.