Lesson 18 - Spiritual Gifts



In Lesson 8, we discovered that the immediate outcome of being justified by faith is the new birth experience. When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in a believer, He also bestows upon that believer one or more spiritual gifts. These gifts correspond to the function the Holy Spirit has chosen for the believer in the body of Christ, the church. In this study, we will discover that the purpose of these gifts is not for the benefit of the individual believer but of the church as a whole.

The spiritual gift or gifts each of us receives play a very important part in the life and mission of the church. It is only as each believer makes use of these gifts that the church can fully function as the body of Christ, just as the various parts of our physical body are essential to our human existence. That is why we must take these gifts seriously if the church is not to be handicapped.

These spiritual gifts may be divided into two categories. The first category of gifts such as apostles, prophecy, pastors, and teachers are for the edification or building up of the church as a whole. The second category of gifts such as miracles, healing, and tongues are supernatural signs and wonders to witness the power of the gospel (see Acts 4:33; 5:12).

When it comes to spiritual gifts, no one is excluded. However, these gifts must not be equated with the natural talents, with which we are born, even though these natural gifts are used by the Holy Spirit. Rather, spiritual gifts derive from divine grace that is bestowed upon believers so that the church may grow up into Christ and witness the power of the gospel.

1. When Christ ascended to heaven, what did He bestow upon the church? Ephesians 4:7, 8

Since the church is to represent Christ on earth, one of the first things Jesus bestowed on the believers after He returned to heaven was gifts of grace known as spiritual gifts.

2. Who is the source of these spiritual gifts? 1 Corinthians 12:4

The mission of the Holy Spirit in the church is to reproduce the life of Christ in each believer. In order to do this, He bestows on all believers gifts or divine abilities so that each believer functions as part of the body of Christ.

3. For whose benefit are these gifts bestowed on individual believers? 1 Corinthians 12:7

It is important that every believer understands the purpose of spiritual gifts. They are not for the believer's personal benefit but for the common good of the church. When used appropriately, these gifts produce a healthy church.

4. Who decides what gift or gifts an individual believer is to receive? 1 Corinthians 12:11

It is neither the believer nor the church that determines which gift or gifts each believer is to receive. That work is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are supernatural abilities and may have nothing to do with our natural talents.

5. In describing spiritual gifts, with what does Paul compare the church? 1 Corinthians 12:12

Like the human body, the church is also made up of many members but constitutes one body, the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:13, 27). That is why the greatest evidence the church can give to the world of the power of the gospel is the model of a church acting as a single body, perfectly united in love (see John 13:34, 35).

6. As Christians what is our relationship to each other? Romans 12:5

Only the gospel of Christ can unite believers of various cultures and backgrounds into one united body. Such a witness is the most powerful evidence to the world that the gospel is the power of God to save us from our self-centeredness and unite men and women in love.

7. As to the gift(s) of the Spirit, what is the believer's responsibility? Romans 12:6-8

Just as the human body needs each of its members to do its part, so every member of Christ's church is to use his or her gifts. Failure to do so is what paralyzes the witness of the church.

8. According to Paul what are the three most important gifts of the Spirit? 1 Corinthians 12:28

Of the three most important gifts, the gift of being an apostle was originally bestowed upon the 11 disciples of Christ plus Paul. These men were chosen by God to lay the foundation of the church by establishing the truth as it is in Christ (see Ephesians 2:19, 20). However, since the word "apostle" means "sent one," it could be applied to missionaries - those who are gifted in mission service.

9. Apart from the above three, what other gifts does Paul mention? 1 Corinthians 12:28

While the first three gifts are important for the spiritual growth of the church, the other five gifts are important for the mission of the church.

10. What are the purposes of the various gifts of the Holy Spirit? Ephesians 4:11, 12

The purposes of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are twofold. The first is to build up the church in Christ. The second is to equip the church for service and to witness the gospel to the world.

11. How long are the gifts of the Holy Spirit to continue in the church? Ephesians 4:13

All the gifts of the Holy Spirit are to continue as long as time lasts, until the church fully reflects Jesus Christ.

12. Why is the prophetic gift important to the church? 1 Corinthians 14:4

Today much emphasis is given to the gift of tongues with very little mention of the gift of prophecy. Yet Paul places great importance on the gift of prophecy because it is this gift that builds up the church of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 14:3).

13. To whose benefit are these two spiritual gifts directed? 1 Corinthians 14:22

(Tongues):

(Prophecy):

The purpose of the gift of tongues is not for the benefit of the believers themselves, as some use it today, but rather to give evidence to the unbelievers that the believer who manifests this gift is controlled by a supernatural power. The prophetic gift is for the benefit of the church, to edify and exhort believers in their Christian walk (see 1 Corinthians 14:3).

14. What counsel does Paul give the church regarding prophecy? 1 Thessalonians 5:20

The prophetic gift is important and must not be despised by the church. However, the Bible warns us of false prophets and therefore the apostle Paul cautions believers to test the gift before accepting it (see 1 Thessalonians 5:21). The measuring stick for all truth is the Bible alone. All other "truths" must be verified by the words of Scripture.

15. What warning does John give regarding the prophetic gift? 1 John 4:1

As aforementioned, the message given by those who claim to have the prophetic gift must be tested by the Word of God and the truth as it is in Christ. This is especially true for us who are living in these last days when Satan will use many deceptive ways to sidetrack God's people from the gospel truth.

16. What counsel does the apostle John give regarding false prophets? 1 John 4:2, 3

Since human nature is sinful, some early Greek Christians (the Gnostics) denied the real humanity of Christ (who was born of a woman, born under the law - Galatians 4:4). The apostle John identified such persons as being antichrist (see 1 John 4:3). In the same way, anyone whose message contradicts the clear teachings of Scripture must be rejected as a false prophet.

17. What did Jesus say that false christs and false prophets of the last days would do? Matthew 24:24

As we approach the end of the world, false christs and false prophets will appear and seek to deceive even the maturest believer. That is why we must be grounded in the Word of God and be on our guard.

18. With what must all messages we hear and read agree? Isaiah 8:20

19. How are we to know which prophetic predictions are from the Lord? Jeremiah 28:9

Since God alone knows the future, the predictions of a true prophet will always come to pass. When some of the predictions of a prophet do not come to pass, we know he or she is not a true prophet (see also Deuteronomy 18:21, 22).

20. Who is behind the teachings of all true prophecy? 2 Peter 1:21

One way you can distinguish true prophets from false ones is to ask and answer the following four questions: 1) Do their teachings agree with Scripture? 2) Do all their predictions come true? 3) Do their messages point to Christ rather than to themselves? 4) Do their life-styles agree with their message?

My Response to Lesson 18

• The Holy Spirit has endowed every believer with one or more spiritual gifts. These gifts are for the benefit of the whole church. Is it your sincere desire to use your gift(s) for the glory of Christ?

Response: _____

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