

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 12:1-3 - A Crash Course on Spiritual Gifts

So we are launching into another section of 1 Corinthians that I think is going to be one of the more fascinating parts of this book. It's the section on spiritual gifts. And I have to tell you I'm excited to work through this section because I think this section is going to challenge all of us in a lot of ways. Individually and as a church.

Usually when we talk about spiritual gifts a few things come to mind. The first is: what in the world is he talking about? The second is: I don't really want to take one of those spiritual gifts surveys - those are so cheesy. And the third is: "Yeah, those charismatic Christians are just plain crazy and probably unbiblical."

And I could be wrong, but I think in our circles, almost all of our reaction to spiritual gifts is negative on some level. We hear "spiritual gifts" and we roll our eyes or scoff or squirm. Maybe put a different way: our first instinct is **not** to praise God the Holy Spirit for his sovereign, personal work in our lives to minister to his church.

So if that's you - and trust me, that was me for many, many years - and you have a bad taste in your mouth about spiritual gifts I want to gently correct how we view spiritual gifts. And the big thing I want us to walk away with this week is that we should desire to understand spiritual gifts, and use our spiritual gifts for the glory of God.

Listen, whatever they are, they're good because they're given by God the Holy Spirit. And if God gives a gift it's a good thing. I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to understand all that. But we do need to be reminded.

So this morning I want to take these 3 verses and gives us a little bit of a crash course on spiritual gifts but with the purpose of helping our hearts to long for them and love them.

Why are we doing this? Well, take a look at **Vs. 1** here. **Read 1**

Remember that a lot of the letter to the Corinthians is a Q & A where Paul is simply responding to questions that the Corinthians had asked him in a letter. Well, apparently they had asked Paul about spiritual gifts. And it seems like - given the emphasis over the next couple of chapters - that the question primarily revolved around speaking in tongues and prophecy because those 2 gifts are the main focus of Paul throughout this section.

We'll unpack those over the next few weeks. But notice what he says in **Vs. 1**: I do not want you to be uninformed. Literally, he does not want them to be without knowledge, or agnostic. There's a lot of people who just don't want to deal with spiritual gifts, they don't want to talk about them or understand them. Or they've seen people abuse them and so they check out.

That's not good. We need to be informed. We need to think through these issues in a manner that pleases Jesus. These gifts are listed in the Bible and you've been gifted by the Holy Spirit with some of them and so we need to know about them.

Imagine we were building a house together and there were 60 of us and we were told by God to show up at the job site and we can't bring any tools. We just bring ourselves. And we show up to the job site and there's this pile of presents sitting in the middle of the job site and each present has a name on them. And they all say they're from the Holy Spirit. And the boxes are different shapes and sizes.

So one person sees his name on the box opens up a table saw. Another person opens up an air compressor. Another person opens up a framing hammer, while someone else opens up this puny little finish hammer. Two people get levels. One lady gets a skill saw, a drill, an impact driver, and a laser level - she hit the jackpot. The next guy gets a step ladder - that's all. And everyone gets at least one gift.

And we each open up our presents and with the totality of what we have we have the ability to build a house. We're going to have to work together and share and take turns. But we can do this thing.

This is what the Bible says God has done in the church. When a person is saved through faith in Jesus, they become a temple of who? The Holy Spirit. And the Bible says that when God the Holy Spirit comes into our lives at salvation, he gives us gifts. Gracious gifts. And the purpose of the gifts isn't to build a physical house. The purpose of the gifts is to build up the body of Christ.

So that's what a spiritual gift is: an ability the Holy Spirit gives to a believer to build up the church.

Check out some of the gifts. **Read 4-11**

Now, I don't think this is an exhaustive list. I think this is just a list of some or even most of the gifts. We will unpack those more next time.

But according to **Verse 11**, who do these gifts all come from? The Holy Spirit. That's why we call them **spiritual** gifts. Not because they're weird or mystic, but because they come from God the Holy Spirit.

Look back to **Romans 12:3-8** for a minute. We have another list back there. This is an important section as well. There's a couple gifts mentioned here not mentioned in 1 Corinthians which is why I said the list in 1 Corinthians is not exhaustive. **Read 3-8**

So a couple observations. First, is that all these gift are gifts of grace. That is, we didn't earn them. I'm not up here preaching because somehow I'm more worthy than someone else. You know why I'm up here preaching? Because God gave me this role. Maybe you're well off and give a lot of money away, you know why you're able to do that? God gave you the gift of generosity. Maybe you have the gift of leading and you like leading. Awesome - we need leaders. You're a leader because God gave you that gift.

And to be clear, no one has all the gifts. Some people have multiple gifts. Maybe you're a merciful teacher. Or maybe someone who loves to serve in simple ways and also encourage people. Maybe you've got the gift of administration and you like to exhort people.

To go back to our analogy earlier, maybe God gave you a whole bunch of boxes to open in order to build up the house. Or maybe he gave you one small finishing hammer of discernment. That's okay. God expects you to grow in your gift.

One way to begin to think through the gifts that God has given you is to simply ask: how do I like to serve other people? How do I like to encourage them in the Lord? We'll talk more about that as we go on.

Turn over to 1 Tim. 4:11-16. Here we see an important component to this whole discussion: the Holy Spirit has given us gifts, but we also have a responsibility to grow in them. **Read 11-16**

Now, it appears that during the time of the apostles, they had the ability to bestow gifts to believers. Here, it seems fairly clear that Paul and the council of elders laid hands on Timothy and gave him the gift of exhortation and teaching. I think that was probably an apostolic ability we don't have anymore.

But, the thing I want us to notice is that Timothy is called to grow in the gift that he has. It's not like God gifts someone and automatically they're the best they'll ever be. Back to our analogy: just because you get the gift of a air nailer doesn't mean your a master carpenter overnight. Yeah, you've got the tools, but now you need to put those tools to work and use them.

Maybe you know how God has gifted you, maybe you have no clue. We'll work on figuring out what gifts you have throughout this section. But know this, whatever God has gifted you in, he expects you to use your gift. And he expects you to grow in your gift. God didn't want Timothy to become stagnant, and he doesn't want us to become stagnant. If you have the gift of mercy it should be evident that you're becoming more merciful as time goes on. If you're gifted with the gift of comforting people, it should be evident that you're growing in that gift.

What we're building on here is the household of God. And we want to do that well. I want to grow as a teacher over the course of time. Hopefully you guys see that growth.

Turn to 1 Pet 4:7-11. This is a helpful section because Peter gives us a way to classify spiritual gifts into 2 categories: gifts of speech and gifts of service. **Read 7-11**

So we are called to love one another. And the expression of that love is to serve each other through God's varied grace. That's the same idea we saw in **1 Corinthians** where Paul says there are varieties of gifts.

In **Vs. 11** we see that there are speaking gifts. And in **Vs. 12** there are serving gifts.

Speaking gifts would be teaching, exhortation, prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues,

Serving gifts would be mercy, generosity, administration, leadership, comfort, so on.

So as we think through spiritual gifts - and specifically the gifts God has give to us to serve the church - it might be helpful to keep those categories in mind. Do you like to teach? Do you like to encourage or comfort people?

Or do you like doing things for people, organizing things for people, sending gifts or cards or so on?

But whatever God has given you, again he wants you to use your gift to serve the church. **Read 10**

In **1 Pet. 4** Peter God has given these gifts for the purpose of serving each other. And he wants us to use them.

You ever get a birthday gift that you just never used? Maybe it was a nice gift, maybe it was expensive, but for whatever reason you just never really cared to use it? Never had time to use it?

Maybe you regifted it, or maybe you were scared to regift it because that person would know you regifted it? So you just sit on it and it takes up space?

Yeah, God doesn't want us to do that with the gifts he gives us through the Spirit. He's given us gifts on purpose and he doesn't want us just to sit on them. He wants us to use them to build up his church. Because when we build up the church we bring him glory. **Read 11b**

What God has gifted you with is for the up building of the church which will ultimately give God glory.

Okay, let's go back to **1 Cor. 12.**

Let's talk about terminology for a few minutes. There's a lot of terminology we need to understand in this discussion.

You've probably heard words like "charismatic" or "Pentecostal" or "cessationist" or "continuist." These are words that are short hand to describe what someone believes about events.

It's like in eschatology someone could be pre trib or amil or post mil. It's shorthand for a larger framework of what they believe. It's not exhaustive, but it gives you a general framework.

The same is true with spiritual gifts. With spiritual gifts there are all kinds of gifts we listed that the Spirit has given. Healing, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, teaching, exorcism - casting out demons, mercy, service. There are a whole bunch.

The question most people are trying to answer by labeling themselves is whether or not they believe the Holy Spirit still passes out **all** those gifts.

Because there are differences of opinion on whether he does. Especially when it comes to the more miraculous gifts. Not too many people debate about whether or not the Spirit still gives the gift of mercy or generosity or teaching. Here are the ones usually up for discussion:

1. Speaking in tongues - which is the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language that you've never learned. There's even debate about that definition!
2. Interpretation of tongues - the supernatural ability to translate a foreign language that you've never learned.
3. Prophecy - prophecy is a huge umbrella of a lot of different things but specifically the discussion revolves around whether or not God communicates to us directly and if so how. And is it reliable?
4. Healing - can someone supernaturally heal another person by the work of the Spirit?
5. Words of knowledge or wisdom - there's debate about what these gifts even are, but does God reveal information supernaturally to us that we can then use to help others?
6. Exorcism - we don't usually talk about this one, but it's the ability to control demons - specifically casting them out of a person. It's one of the most common miracles Jesus performed and one we see the apostles doing throughout the book of Acts.

All of those gifts - or some of those gifts - are usually what we're talking when we're trying to describe ourselves with labels.

Let me define some of the labels. These are very general terms and very general definitions. There are basically 4

A cessationist is someone who believes that these gifts have for the most part ceased to be given by the Holy Spirit to the church. Cessation comes from the word cease. They believe that all or most of these gifts are no longer given by the Spirit. Hypothetically he could give them, but he chooses not to.

So cessationists are on one end of the spectrum. The other end of the spectrum are Pentecostals. Again, this is a generalization but Pentecostals believe that the Spirit still gives all the gifts, we should experience all the gifts in our church gathering and encourage them. On the extreme end of Pentecostalism are those who believe that all believers will speak in tongues and that being slain in the Spirit - basically where the Holy Spirit overtakes your body and you fall down and shake violently - is a wonderful gift of God.

I don't think that being slain in the Spirit is actually a manifestation of the Spirit at all but most Pentecostals do.

The term Pentecostalism comes from the Day of Pentecost - 50 days after the death of Jesus - when the Holy Spirit was poured out and all the believers spoke in tongues and there were flames of fire on their heads.

Two other terms you will hear. One is continuist. A continuist simply believes that the Holy Spirit still gives out the miraculous gifts - tongues, healing, prophecy, so on. They usually don't believe that the gifts are as prevalent as they once were. And usually a church that holds some kind of continuist position looks a lot like our church.

The other term is charismatic. Charismatic usually refers to someone who believes that the gifts still operate and that we should expect at least some of them to be used regularly in our worship services. We should expect speaking in tongues, we should expect prophecy, and we should expect healings.

Now, "charismatic" is unfortunately a really bad term. Why is that? Because, technically speaking, charismatic simply means gifts. Look in **Vs. 4. Read**

Now, when he says "gifts" and "service" and "activities" those are all just the same thing to refer to spiritual gifts. That word "gifts" is literally charisma - where we get our word charismatic. So technically speaking, if you're a Christian, you are automatically a charismatic because the Holy Spirit has given you gifts. That's literally what he's saying.

If you only have the gift of mercy, you're a charismatic. I hope we all feel uncomfortable.

In modern parlance, a charismatic is someone who believes the more miraculous gifts are going to be happening whenever the church gathers together.

Now, I'll just tip my hand: If you've got cessationist, continuist, charismatic and Pentecostal as a spectrum. I'm somewhere between cessationist and continuist. I think the phrase many people use is someone who is open but cautious; that's a term that gets used a lot. Why?

Because on the one hand we have no Bible verses that say God is no longer giving out the gift of speaking in tongues. And no Bible verses that say that healing isn't on the table anymore.

But, I look around and I don't see them happening. At least not like what the Bible seems to be describing. So is it possible for the Lord to give these gifts? Of course. But at the very least we don't see it nearly as prevalent as in the early church.

At the same time it seems as though there's been enough things that have happened over the course of 2,000 years to credible people that it's hard to deny God still works in extraordinary ways. So I don't show up expecting those things to happen, but we shouldn't be surprised if they did.

Now, look at **Vs. 3** for a minute, because I think this is important. **Read 3**

Why is that in there? Because what we need to understand is that the Holy Spirit will always lead us into further closeness with Jesus.

We can't be 100% certain, but it seems as though things had gotten so out of hand in Corinth that people were actually blurting out "Jesus is accursed" while claiming to operate under the Spirit's influence. Paul says that will never happen. No person who is under the influence of the Spirit - and every believer is under the influence of the Spirit - will ever proclaim that Jesus is accursed. That would never happen.

Just the opposite. The Spirit always leads people to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus. The Spirit's ministry in this age is to work in the people of God to praise the Son of God. And that praise comes as we further recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all our lives.

Whatever else the Spirit is doing in the life of a believer it's that He is drawing them closer to Jesus.

And here's how he uses the gifts: He uses these gifts in us that we would encourage one another closer to Jesus.

Do you have a heart for people? You see when they're down and need encouragement? Maybe you have the gift of mercy. You know what it does when you show people mercy? It draws them closer to Jesus.

Do you have a heart to teach people about the Word of God and help them grow in their understanding of the Lord and his Word? Maybe you have the gift of teaching. You know what the gift of teaching does in peoples' lives? It draws them closer to Jesus.

Maybe you like administration and numbers and organization. Let me tell you, you minister to me! I don't have that gift. I have trouble finishing up the bulletin every week that's how much I love administration. Your administrative gift draws people closer to Jesus.

Maybe you like to just serve people, or give to people. The Spirit has given these amazing gifts to build up the body of Christ so that Jesus would be shown to be amazing. And as we study this section my hope is that you're not nervous, but encourage at how the Lord uses gifts for our good and for his glory.

Pray