

Articles and Sermons :: The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit ~ Zac Poonen

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There are three lists of spiritual gifts given us in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11). In 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, the exercise of spiritual gifts is compared with the functioning of the members of our physical body. A man may have life and yet be blind, deaf, dumb and paralyzed. Many churches are like that. Their members are born again. But they have no gifts of the Holy Spirit with which to serve the Lord - and so they are powerless. The gifts of the Spirit are what enable the Body of Christ to see, hear, talk and walk. Godliness is the life of the Body of Christ. But what can Christ's Body do for others, without the gifts of the Spirit. What would Jesus Himself have been like if He had no gifts of the Spirit? He would still have overcome sin and lived a holy life. But without the anointing of the Spirit, He would not have been able to preach the way He did, heal the sick, cast out demons or do any miracle.

Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit at the age of 30 did not make Him any holier than He was earlier. His 31st year was not any holier than His 29th year. But with the anointing of the Spirit, He received power to serve others. If Jesus had merely gone around showing people His holy life, He could not have accomplished His Father's purposes. Neither can the church today accomplish God's purposes by merely manifesting holy living to others. Jesus had both holiness and the gifts. His Body today must have both of these too. The tragedy in Christendom today is that some groups emphasise holiness of life while others emphasise the gifts of the Spirit. But these are not "either-or" options. The Bible says, "Let your clothes be white all the time (live a holy life at all times) and let not oil be lacking on your head (live under the anointing constantly)" (Eccl.10:8). We need both.

The gifts of the Spirit do not make anyone spiritual. The Corinthian Christians had all the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor.1:7). They exercised "the word of wisdom" (one of the gifts of the Spirit) in their meetings. In spite of that, there was not one wise (spiritual) man among them (1 Cor.6:5). A word of wisdom can come through a carnal person. But wisdom itself is found only in a spiritual person. One can receive a word of wisdom from God in a moment. But wisdom itself can come only through many years of taking up the cross.

We cannot choose our spiritual gift ourselves, because it is God Who determines what gift will best fit us for our

ministry in Christ's Body. But we are told to seek earnestly for those gifts that will build up the Body - and especially for the gift of prophecy (1Cor 14:1,12). When Jesus taught His disciples to ask the Father for the Holy Spirit (Lk.11:13), He illustrated the way they were to ask with a parable of a man who went to his neighbour's house to ask for food. There are two important points to be noticed in this parable: (1.) The man was asking for food not for himself but for someone else. (2). He kept on asking until he received what he needed.

What do we learn from this parable? First of all, that we are not to seek the gifts of the Spirit for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others. If only those who have sought for the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit had kept this one principle before them, they would have become far more spiritual. And there would have been far less exercise of counterfeit gifts in Christendom today. Unfortunately, most people are taught to seek for the power of the Holy Spirit only in order to get an experience for themselves, and not in order to be a blessing to others. There are many around us who have needs that God wants to meet - and He wants to meet their needs through us. That's why He allows them to cross our path. He wants us to seek Him for the gifts of the Spirit that are needed to deliver these people and bless them.

A man came to Jesus' disciples once with his demon-possessed child. But the disciples could not help him. The man then went to Jesus and said, "I went to your disciples for help but they could not help me." Are these the words that our neighbours and friends are saying to the Lord today about us?

If we seek the Lord's blessing only for ourselves, we will remain dry. God waters only those who water (help) others (Prov.11:25). Perhaps some brother near you needs a word of wisdom to solve his problem. Another may be in need of a word of encouragement for his depressing situation. Yet another may need deliverance from some bondage. We must seek God for the gifts needed to help such people. Every gift of the Spirit is given that we might bless and edify others. Luke 4:18,19 tells us the result of Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit. He was enabled thereby to preach good news to the poor, release the captives, give sight to the blind, bring freedom to the downtrodden and proclaim the favourable year of the Lord. Notice that everything mentioned here is for the benefit of others. The gifts of the Spirit did not bring any benefit to the Lord Himself in His life. We must have a concern for others and a sense of our own inability to help them, if we are to seek for the gifts of the Spirit in the right way.

The second thing that we learn from this parable is that we must keep on asking God for the power of the Holy Spirit until we receive it. God tests us to see whether we are really eager to receive His power and whether we really value His gifts. He also waits to see whether we feel really

helpless and unable to serve Him, without His power. Many give up praying too soon because they are self-confident - and thus fail these tests.