

MANUSCRIPT OUTLINE: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
The Spirit-filled Church
by Peter Craig

INTRODUCTION

Since January we've been following the movement of the Holy Spirit throughout the Biblical narrative. From creation, through the prophets, to Jesus' life and ministry, all the way to the Spirit's active role in the early church and our lives today. Now, for some you, prophecy, miracles, and speaking in tongues might cause some discomfort. I mean, are those gifts still around today? And if so, why don't we see them? For others, you might be more open and think, "All right! What are my gifts and how do I use them?" And then, many of you might be somewhere in the middle. You might believe that the gifts still exist, but they stir up feelings of insecurity or intimidation. Those are just for the super Christians, right?

It's no wonder then that Paul begins chapter 12 in his letter to the Corinthians the way he does, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed." What did the Corinthians not know? They believed in the gifts. Not only that, but were walking in them confidently. Some might say, "too confidently". You see, their struggle wasn't acknowledging the gifts. Their issue was misusing them. They had a spiritual A team and B team problem where those who exhibited the more charismatic gifts like tongues and prophecy were being elevated while other people in the church were being neglected. And with division and confusion afoot, Paul sets out to not only inform the church, but also correct them.

Maybe we're not too different from the Corinthians. Maybe we could all use some insight and correction on this topic. My hope and prayer is that the Holy Spirit will provide what He desires for us as we look at three things: The Giver, The Gifts, and The Beneficiaries. Let's pray...

INTRO PRAYER

The Giver

The Greatest Gift

ILLUSTRATION: When I was in high school, my grandmother brought my cousin and me to a church revival where the youth were asked to the stage to receive prayer for a special outpouring of the Spirit and His gifts. We timidly joined 30 or so other kids, and with eyes closed and heads bowed, waited as the pastor prayed over each kid standing shoulder to shoulder down the line. He soon laid his hand on my forehead, ended his prayer with a slightest nudge and continued on. Once he was finished and the worship music raised, I opened my eyes to find my cousin and I were the only ones left standing in the crowd. Every kid to our right and left was flat on the floor. So we sheepishly returned to our seats with some questions. What happened? Did we do something wrong? Are there different doses of the Spirit and we somehow got the short end of the stick?

Fortunately, Paul answers these questions with a resounding, “No.”

Verse 2-3: “You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”

Paul busts out of the gate by acknowledging the most miraculous expression of the Spirit in a person’s life. Faith itself!

In a culture that prized verbal manifestations of the Spirit like utterances of wisdom, prophecy, and tongues, Paul is leveling the playing field by reminding the church that it’s only by the Spirit of God that a person can in faith say, “Jesus is Lord”.

And in the Corinthian context that widely denied Christ, this was as serious as it gets.

So do you struggle to believe in miraculous works of the Holy Spirit? Then consider broken and rebellious people who were led astray by the false idols of their corrupt culture, yet turned from their self-centered rebellion to live lives marked by faith in God and love for others.

And I’m not talking about the Corinthians. I’m talking about those of you who’ve put your faith in Jesus.

Think about it. We were all led astray by the things we thought would truly satisfy: Bigger paychecks, better careers, more respect, comfort, entertainment...Mute and lifeless idols.

But remember the promises of God in Ezekiel that He will cleanse us of our sins and idolatry and give us a new heart and a new Spirit. And we see here that this Spirit speaks for us and declares, “Jesus is Lord”.

If you are a Christian, by your very nature, you already believe in the miraculous works of the Spirit. And with God's Spirit inside you, there is no spiritual B team. There just one big, beautiful family of God.

This is critical to grasp before diving into the gifts, because this is the Holy Spirit's greatest work in your life!

Physical healing doesn't hold a candle to the reality of eternal healing.

Miracles, tongues, and prophecy don't come close to measuring up to the miracle of salvation and the promise of a new creation.

And for those you who haven't confessed in faith that "Jesus is Lord", you should know that this work of the Spirit is offered freely, but by God alone.

Paul shares that just as no one speaking in the Spirit would ever deny Jesus by saying, "He is accursed", the opposite is true. No one can turn from their sin and confess that Jesus is Lord apart from the Spirit.

So let me ask. Do you feel like you have been led astray by the things you've been seeking in life? Do you long for a new life bathed in acceptance, grace, and love?

Then I want to encourage you to still your heart and listen. God may be awakening faith in you. He wants to cleanse you of your sins and give you a new heart and a spirit who declares "Jesus is Lord" on your behalf.

You can respond by asking Him for faith. God is a good Father who gives good gifts and Jesus teaches God will provide the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

This is the good news of God's grace.

And as much as God's grace is free, so are His gifts.

The Giver

Verses: 4-6: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."

Like the Gospel, the gifts of the Spirit aren't dependent on who you are and what you can or can't do. You can't grit your teeth and make them happen. They are wholly dependent on God Himself.

When my cousin and I opened our eyes to find that we were the last two standing at the end of the pastor's prayer, I looked to the right and to the left to compare where I was, but my gaze soon turned inward. What did I do wrong? What could I have done better?

Church, God is not calling us to look at one another or even at ourselves. He is calling us to look up...to Him, the Giver of Gifts..."who empowers them all in everyone."

This doesn't mean that everyone gets all the Spiritual gifts. It simply means that God provides and empowers a diverse variety of gifts, as verse 11 states, "to each one individually as he wills."

This has been true throughout Scripture. Remember, Moses' elders prophesying, the disciples of Jesus speaking different languages on Pentecost, the healings of the apostles throughout the new testament, and the Corinthian church itself.

The same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God who empowers them all to each one as He wills.

God is sovereign and free to dispense gifts as he sees fit and we're responsible to recognize, use, and affirm them in one another to the glory of God.

So what does that mean for us? It means, if you are a follower of Jesus, you have been gifted by His Spirit, each one of you in beautiful and diverse ways. This should inspire both hope and humility.

Notice he repeats, "varieties." He does not say, there are better and worse gifts. Diversity is incredibly important. Just think how an orchestra would perform if there were only flutes. Diversity of gifts is absolutely critical for the orchestra...the Church..to function well and succeed.

But we don't naturally appreciate each of others gifts. We look around, like I did, and compare. Comparison kills the Spirit and dampens the gifts. It breeds envy and pride.

This is why we must remember, the most miraculous gift of the Spirit is faith in Jesus. His life, death, and resurrection makes Him Lord. Not what others think. He is Lord. Not the gifts we have. He is Lord and He wants to free us to walk in our gifts with joy and humility to beautify and strengthen His body. He is Lord.

Is there mystery to all of this? Absolutely. It's a reality that's walked out daily in faith. But the good news is there are no spiritually giftless followers of Christ.

Well, you might say, "I haven't healed anyone or prophesied this week." That might be true, but remember, there are a variety of gifts. Some will seem more miraculous and others will seem more practical. But all are equally gifts.

The Gifts

Verse 8-10: "For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the

one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”

The List

Now, it's easy to focus on this list and begin self-assessing, but Paul isn't presenting a spiritual gift menu to pick and choose from. He, once more, is drilling home the fact that all of these gifts are given by the Spirit.

Look how he lays it out... “For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit...”

Despite Paul's intent, these verses have caused division in the church for centuries. Denominations were born from them; with some intensely focused on the gifts and others believing they were temporary. Personally, it wasn't until college that I heard any preaching on these gifts. So why is that?

For one, some Christians believe these gifts ceased after the apostolic age. You might call it a Spirit-empowered jumpstart to the global Gospel movement.

They argue that, historically, the role of miracles and prophecy were only designated to specific people, chosen by God, to advance His mission during unique eras in history. Specifically Moses and the exodus, the age of the prophets, and finally the ministry of Jesus and His apostles.

But, since this viewpoint isn't explicit in Scripture, we can use faith and logic. When this letter was written...idols permeated the culture, false ideologies ran rampant, there was government oppression, growing opposition to the faith, church division, false Gospels, spiritual attacks...

Does any of this sound familiar? These exact same things are happening all around the world today. Do we need the gifts any less than they did?

Secondly, these gifts raise a lot of fears of misuse and abuse. When you hear of healings, prophecy, miracles, and tongues, what thoughts race through your mind? I know for me in the past, it all seemed like scary territory. I mean, we don't want to blow it, right?

But did that stop Paul? He didn't shut down the “Spiritual Gift Program” of the Corinthian church when they misused them. No. He taught them and trusted the Spirit to place them back on the right path.

Finally, there is a very practical reason I believe these gifts are often ignored in our enlightened, western culture: It's the belief that if things aren't possible to accomplish in our own strength, ability, or intellect, they must not exist.

The Miraculous Gifts

Now, there's not enough time to dive into these gifts in much detail, so I am going to move through them at a very high level while packaging them into two general categories: The Miraculous and The Practical.

First, the utterances of wisdom and knowledge.

These two parallel each other closely and, in general, are spiritual messages of a revelatory kind where a person is "given supernatural wisdom or knowledge from God to verbally share in a specific situation". Have you ever benefited from this gift in the church? Has someone ever shared an insight of such Godly maturity and Scriptural clarity that it breathed life and hope onto a difficult situation? Maybe in a city group or fight club?

I have a friend who is so incredibly quick to recall God's promises in Scripture when people are struggling in any way. She whips out her well-loved, tattered Bible and shares life-giving truth so naturally and gently. That's the Holy Spirit's work in her.

What about on a Sunday gathering? He's not here today, so I can brag about Jonathan. I believe he has been given this gift by Spirit to enable him to discern and communicate God's Word to us week in and week out to build us up in the faith.

I've seen the fruits of this recently. About a month ago, I got a text right after service from someone in our city group who's been struggling in their faith.

After hearing the sermon, he wrote, "I wanted to share the Lord's work. He got through the callousness around my heart and pierced into the tender. His reminders of His relentless pursuit of me had me weeping in awe this morning."

This is what a word of wisdom and knowledge from the Spirit can do. Maybe a Spirit-inspired message of wisdom or knowledge has been given to you to share with someone. This is the Spirit at work. Humbly follow His lead.

Next comes faith, healing, and miracles.

These gifts are self-explanatory and something we see throughout Scripture, ultimately, to give God glory and advance His mission. Now the faith mentioned here isn't referring to the faith that brings salvation, it's more likely a special endowment of faith to accomplish a specific task like healings and miracles. The kind of faith that "moves mountains".

ILLUSTRATION: A few years ago, I was on a 3-day boat trip on the Amazon River where a group of Brazilian pastors surrounded a man with a

severely injured ankle. They laid hands on him and prayed for healing. Once they were finished, the man stood up confidently, walked around without the slightest limp, and that was that. He was completely healed. I'm a filmmaker and I literally shot the whole thing, but did I celebrate his healing? No. I questioned it. Was this guy really hurt? What really happened? My first response was skepticism, not faith and joy. What was wrong with me? I saw it, yet doubted. I elevated my reasoning over my belief in God's promises and power.

In contrast, my Brazilian brothers and sisters were full of child-like faith that God could and would accomplish the impossible for His glory and the good of others. And what did they see in response to their faith? Healings, miracles, and a movement of the Gospel in the Amazon River Basin that's going to fill the courts of Heaven with Portuguese praises!

Don't we need miracles in our lives? If you got cancer today, wouldn't you want to be healed? If you were living in a city where 76% of the urban center doesn't believe in Jesus, wouldn't you want to see that change? Then, like the Brazilian pastors, let's believe God at His Word and begin asking Him to do the impossible for the glory of God and the good of others.

Prophecy and distinguishing between Spirits

Next, Paul returns to the verbal manifestations of the Spirit with the gift of prophecy, which is a "Spirit-inspired, intelligible message delivered for the edification or encouragement of God's people." Paul later adds, "the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement, and consolation."

I believe we got to witness this a few weeks ago when Robie shared her dream. I also believe we are experiencing the realization of another prophetic word right now. In December, one of our partners shared with the elders a vision she received during prayer for our church two years that Lord has kept bringing to her mind over and over.

It was in this room where she saw a flowing river up front and people were being released from their bondage and jumping into the waters to find hope, joy, and freedom in Christ. Yet, there were still some who weren't convinced and only watched from their seats.

When we heard this, it lined up with similar impressions we were receiving through prayer and conversations. And I humbly believe that the Lord is fulfilling this vision in 2019.

The Spirit is moving in people's hearts and inspiring them to jump into the refreshing waters of communion with Christ where true freedom is found.

Do you sense this work of the Spirit? Are you jumping into the waters? God is inviting you.

But the process of discerning the Spirit's voice isn't done haphazardly. It's done prayerfully, fearfully, and with the help of the Spirit.

You see, it's not only the responsibility of the one giving the prophecy to judge its authenticity, but it is also in the hands of the listener to discern whether or not it's from the Lord. And that's why God has given us the gift of distinguishing between spirits.

If the gift of prophecy is at work, so also must this gift. As Paul later writes in chapter 14, "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people."

This can happen in very practical ways. A few weeks I was given ministry advice from a person who had spent 3 decades serving at a global missions agency. The advice seemed wise and very practical, but I was left unsettled for some reason. After reflecting on it, I felt that the Spirit reveal to me that it was worldly wisdom, not Godly wisdom.

The Spirit speaks, yes, but the Spirit also discerns.

Tongues and Interpretation

Another pair of gifts that God has given the church are tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Now, tongues are "Spirit-inspired speech directed toward God that is unintelligible both to the speaker and to listeners".

Paul unpacks it this way in chapter 14, "For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit."

Many call this a "prayer language", because, unlike prophecy, it's unknown words of the Spirit spoken directly to God.

This is a controversial gift, both now and when Paul wrote this letter, because the Corinthians were using this gift without interpretation, which caused disorder in their gatherings.

So what was Paul's response? He corrects them by commanding them not speak in tongues without interpretation, but doesn't overcorrect by cutting off the gift completely. He shares, "So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order."

The Practical Gifts

Even in failure, Paul is encouraging Christians to earnestly desire these miraculous gifts, but he doesn't stop there. He continues the list in verse 28 "...And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second

prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.”

Whoa, wait...Helping and administrating? These are gifts alongside healing and prophecy? Surely, those are the B-sides of the spiritual gift album, right?

Let’s not fall into the trap that the Corinthians fell into. Remember, “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...”

But wait there’s more. Paul builds out these practical gifts even further in his letter to the Romans when he shares, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Yes, we have the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and faith, but the Spirit also empowers the gifts of serving, teaching, and exhortation. Yes, God gives the gifts of healing, miracles, and wisdom, but He also provides leading, generosity, and acts of mercy.

Just look at the tapestry of gifts that the Holy Spirit has given the church in all its beautiful diversity. It’s stunning!

Have the gifts of teaching, serving, and administrating ceased? No. What about the gifts of giving, leading, and showing mercy? Absolutely not.

And very few people look at these gifts and think that they are only designated for the spiritual A team. But why?

It’s because we often don’t see them as spiritual gifts, but something we can do in our own power, strength, and ability.

It’s almost the complete opposite of our view of the miraculous gifts. We struggle to believe they exist because we can’t accomplish them on our own and the practical gifts we do see, we think they’re just us.

We deny God’s power while denying Him credit. It’s no wonder why it’s hard for us to see the gifts of the Spirit at work today and why Paul doesn’t want us to be uninformed. Once again, we make them about us, not God.

But what if we began to recognize service, wisdom, faith, and prophecy as manifestations of the Spirit, not just talents within our church? What if we received those ministries as from the Spirit? How would we respond to preaching differently? How would we respond to counsel differently? To acts of faith differently?

What if we affirmed and identified these gifts in one another as from the Spirit and gave glory to God? Just think how strengthened, encouraged, and joyful we would be.

The Beneficiaries

The Good of the Church

And that leads us to our final point and it's the big question. Why? Why does the Spirit give us these gifts and what are they used for?

The Corinthians missed the mark on this point and it brought confusion and division within the church. This is why Paul reveals in verse 7:

Verse 7: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Let me translate: God has given each of His children unique gifts, because He loves us and wants to take care of us.

What do utterances of wisdom and knowledge shared on a Sunday do for us? They strengthen our faith and understanding of God's Word. What do gifts of prophecy, service, and generosity do for us? They build us up in hope, joy, and love!

Unlike the Corinthian church, we don't seek the gifts to add our spiritual resume. We seek the gifts for the common good...the church. We do it out of love for God and love for one another. Paul hits this on the head in the next chapter.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3: "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

God is calling us to walk in His gifts to serve and build up one another, because we need each other. Paul highlights this point even further by comparing Christ's church to the human body...

Verse 14, 17-18: "...the body is not made up of one part but of many...If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

We need each other as much as the hand needs the mouth to eat or eyes need the feet to walk. We are all connected and interdependent in Christ.

That's how God made us and why Paul encourages us to, "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts".

Do you want a good reason to desire the gifts? Look around the room. Do it to build up hope and faith in each other's lives.

Dream with me a little. What would our church look like if we trusted God at His Word and humbly walked in the gifts of the Spirit in all their stunning diversity?

What would it look like if we were a family that didn't use the gifts for our own glory, but for the glory of Christ and the good of others?

What would it look like if we were a people that celebrated one another's gifts instead comparing or even resenting the gifts we've been given?

What would it look like if we were a church who encouraged our wives, husbands, sisters, brothers, and even our children to walk in the Spirit's gifts with love, joy, freedom, and humility?

That's starting to sound like a pretty fit body. That's not a body with a bag of Doritos on its belly binge watching crime documentaries on Netflix.

That's a well-cared-for body that's strong and racing into neighborhoods all over the city to proclaim the life-changing news that Jesus is Lord and He has defeated sin, Satan, and death through His life, death, and resurrection.

And the beautiful thing is that the Holy Spirit is already doing a lot of this in us right now...in our city groups, fight clubs, mercy ministries, neighborhoods, and workplaces. But we still have room to grow, right?

Response

So where do we begin? Three brief thoughts.

First, we need to recognize our need for the Spirit and His gifts.

We won't desire the Holy Spirit to work in our lives if we don't recognize our need for Him.

Is it a struggle to fight for faith in this world? Marital issues, job insecurities, cancer, financial struggles, chronic depression. These are just a few of the struggles that people in our city group have faced within the past few months.

God knows we need built up and encouraged in our faith and that's why He gave us these gifts and each other. We need to humble ourselves and confess our need for the Spirit and begin walking in step with Him.

Next, we need to seek the Giver.

Remember, Jesus is Lord...not the gifts, not our fears, or what other people think. He is Lord of all, Lord over sin, Lord over disease, Lord over skepticism, Lord over every square inch of creation. And His life, death, and resurrection secures our identity in Him and frees us from needing to

seek it from anywhere else...including the spiritual gifts. So we seek Him first!

We can do this very practically by pursuing God in His word.

Do you want to know the Spirit's voice? Learn to recognize it from Scripture.

Meditate on Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Soak in the teachings of Christ. Pray over His words and ask the Lord to reveal how He wants you to respond. This will require you to slow down and listen. The Spirit is speaking. Still yourself and follow His lead.

Also, pray and confess to the Lord where you haven't been walking in faith in this area and others.

Maybe you've ignored the Spirit's gifts out of discomfort. Maybe you've come from a church that abused the gifts and are fearful. Maybe you are hurt, because you have prayed for the impossible, but haven't seen results. Maybe you've been dismissing His miraculous gifts, while taking credit for the practical ones.

Whatever it is, get close to God. Talk to Him about it. He's your heavenly Father and he is forgiving, patient, and wants to remind you who are, first, in Him.

But don't just do this on your own. Do it in your city groups, fight clubs, and with your families.

Finally, we need to encourage one another.

Get to know and watch your brothers and sisters. Be observant and expectant. When you see the Spirit's work in them, acknowledge it and give God glory.

Do you have someone in your city group who has a servant's heart, encourage them in it. Look for acts of generosity, mercy, words of wisdom, and faith that can move mountains. And when you see it, exhort them to share it for the good of the church. Don't walk in fear of the gifts. Walk in faith.

And this isn't just for the church family. Husbands and wives, encourage one another. Parents, if your children know Christ, encourage them when you see the Spirit at work in their lives.

My wife is a servant to her core and I praise the Lord for it. My oldest daughter is a leader. It's the Spirit's work in her whether she likes it or not. My middle child is a giver and a prayer. I believe God has graced her with generosity and faith.

I know this because I'm watching and I want you to keep an eye out as well. Remember, there are no giftless children of God in this church. The

Holy Spirit has equipped this family in astonishing ways for an astonishing purpose...

CONCLUSION

To close us out, the Apostle Peter shares, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 4:10-11

Let's pray