



ROL Gifts Class

Understanding Spiritual Gifts

Welcome

Opening Group Activity:

1. What has been your experience with spiritual gifts?
2. What would you like to learn or experience in this class?

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Introduction:

Why a class on spiritual gifts?

This is not meant to be an exhaustive study. It is intended to be a training to help believers understand spiritual gifts. The goal is to help people in the practical application of the gifts and how they are intended to operate in and through the Church. Certainly, someone wanting to do a deeper more theological approach could look at Dr. Gordon Fee's, *"God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul."*

There have been many books written on the gifts of the Spirit that could be considered classics. I will include some of those in the bibliography. I was impressed to write this book to address some of the current issues regarding spiritual gifts. Controversies in the past twenty years in the prophetic circles and the Holy Spirit's stirring in the church regarding the restoration of the gift of apostle have left many wondering what the Bible really does say about supernatural gifts, especially the gift of apostle and prophet.

The lists of gifts primarily mentioned in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, and Ephesians 4 are gifts from God to us. The Word tells us that God has given each believer gifts, that we should eagerly desire these gifts, and that the church cannot mature without the gifts that He has given us.

After attending prophetic conferences where opinions and preferences have shaped the way the gifts operate, I am convicted that it is time to go back to the Word and re-examine God's heart regarding these gifts. In this hour as God is refining His Church we need to press into maturity in this area.

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The Great Divide

Several years ago, I had been meeting weekly with a group of intercessors that were committed to praying for our church, the leadership of our church, and the spiritual awakening of the Church in general. We spent one of those meetings doing a spiritual assessment of the churches in our area. We were all astounded at the spiritual map that emerged as we considered the history of the Evangelical Church in the Cleveland-Akron Metro area. One of the stark realities that divided the churches in our area into two clear camps was how we approached the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The churches we looked at were all solidly Evangelical: They believed that the Word of God was inspired and inerrant; that God existed in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that Jesus was born of a virgin; that Jesus was the only begotten Son of God and the only way to salvation. In fact all of those churches could have affirmed the ancient creeds of faith that define Christian orthodoxy. However, the one thing that separated them clearly into two camps was how they defined spiritual gifts and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As our intercessors shared anecdotes from their own lives a clear picture began to emerge. There was a perception among Christians in our area that a believer had to make a choice between a Church that was strong in the Word or a Church that was open and yielded to the Holy Spirit.

On the one hand we found churches that were perceived to have a strong tradition in the teaching of the Word and Christian education, but they were “spiritually dry” when it came to worship. Many of these churches were founded in “dispensational cessationism”, which means that they believe that the gifts of the Spirit were for the first generation of the church. They believe that once the books of the New Testament were compiled, there was no need for these gifts. In certain cases, we became aware of a couple churches that actually had a policy that leaders in these churches were required to abstain from the use of the more charismatic gifts like prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing.

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On the other hand were the churches that were defined as Charismatic, Pentecostal, or “Empowered Evangelicals”. These churches, in our experience, tended to have exciting worship. Some also had a strong tradition in teaching the Word and making disciples, but we also discovered that leadership in these churches tended to be less stable. They experienced division and church splits more frequently and the number of leadership failures seemed, anecdotally speaking, higher than the first group. Many of the second group of churches had a reputation of being exciting and dynamic, but not very strong in the Word. This confirmed what I had been hearing from Christians for years, that they had to choose between a strong “Word Church” or a spiritually dynamic church.

My challenge to those who love the Word but feel the gifts of the Spirit ceased long ago is to look again at the Scriptures and context of the Word. Consider reading a book like *“Surprised by the Power of the Holy Spirit”* by Jack Deere, or Mike Riches’ article on how the Holy Spirit came to Clover Creek Church. These are men who were convinced that the gifts had ceased but their churches were invaded by the Presence and power of God. In both cases they went back to the Word.

We need to answer the questions: Can we really accomplish the true work of the Cross without the power of the Holy Spirit? Shouldn’t the Church today be doing the same ministry as Jesus and his apostles did? If we are doing ministry a different way, isn’t the result going to be different? Can we base our faith on “Christian Rationalism” alone, a faith devoid of spiritual power that the early church saw in the Book of Acts?

To my Charismatic and Pentecostal friends I say that it is time to be honest. There is a reason why many Christians are afraid to jump into the spiritual gifts. They have seen our excesses, they have been in our meetings and have felt unsafe. They have heard pastors and leaders say, “We don’t want to shut this down because it may be the Holy Spirit.” (Gift of discernment badly needed here). They have heard prophecies that have not been “weighed” carefully by

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Scripture) of people who disrupted meetings by emotional outbursts and rude behavior, they have seen the lives of people who seem to have power and true Charisma, but they lack the depth of character and true holiness, which is the Fruit of the Holy Spirit.

We sometimes boast that we are recreating the New Testament Church. Unfortunately, we have created a New Testament Church and it looks a lot like the Corinthian church! We fall behind in no gifts as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, but there is confusion, disorder, division, factions, fleshliness and pride. It is time to heed Paul's admonitions to the Corinthian church and grow up.

I believe it is time for the Church to bring the Word and the Spirit together. It is time to break down the great divide and heal the wounds of the Body of Christ.

I believe it is also time for each follower of Jesus to step fully into our identity rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ. We also need to understand and pursue our destiny that God has chosen for us. Ephesians 1:10 tells us, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." - NIV We can most effectively do the works God has prepared for us to do when we have a clear understanding of our gifts and how to use those gifts for His glory!

Class Overview:

Understanding Spiritual Gifts?

- Common errors in approaching the gifts
- A look at the leadership offices/anointings in Ephesians 4
- How God wants the Church to function as an apostolic center
- A look at the motivational gifts in Romans 12
- A look at the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12
- Prayer to impart and expand the gifts in your life and ROL
- Times of discussion and impartation

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The Barna Research Update: Shift After 2000

“Awareness of Spiritual Gifts Is Changing

The Bible speaks about the followers of Christ receiving special abilities, known as spiritual gifts, to enable them to serve Him more effectively. During the past five years, millions of the nation's born again adults have changed their views on the gifts - and a growing number proclaim that God has not given them any gifts. During the same period, the gifts that pastors report having has also changed substantially.

We discovered that:

- The percentage of Christian adults who say they do not have a spiritual gift rose from 4% to 21%.
- Among all believers, just three in ten identified only gifts listed in the Bible.
- The most common gift listed by pastors was teaching; the most common gifts among the laity were teaching and helping others.
- In other words, most people don't have a clear understanding of spiritual gifts and the trend is getting worse.”

The Barna Research Update: Shift After 2009

“Two-thirds of Americans (68%) who say they are Christian noted they have heard of spiritual gifts, according to a national survey by The Barna Group. That represents a small decline from past surveys, which found 72% awareness in 2000, and 71% in 1995.

- Awareness of spiritual gifts was most common among self-described Christians who live in the South (75%) and West (71%), and least common among those living in the Midwest (63%) and Northeast (58%).
- Such awareness also varied within the various segments of the self-described Christian population. For instance, 99% of evangelicals have heard of spiritual gifts, far more than the 74% among non-evangelical born again Christians and 58% among nominal Christians.
- Similarly, there was a large gap between Protestants (75%) and Catholics (54%) in awareness. Even within the Protestant community there was a noteworthy gap between those who attend a mainline church (68% awareness) and those who attend a Protestant congregation not associated with a mainline denomination (78%). God wants you to know about spiritual gifts”

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Three Common Distortions of Spiritual Gifts

1. De-spiritualization

Cessationism

- “Concentric Cessationists believe that the miraculous gifts have indeed ceased in the mainstream church and evangelized areas, but appear in unreached areas as an aid to spreading the Gospel (Luther and Calvin, though they were somewhat inconsistent in this position).
- Classical (or Weak) Cessationists assert that the miraculous gifts such as prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues ceased with the apostles and only served as launching pads for the spreading of the Gospel. However, these cessationists do believe that God still occasionally does miracle-like activities today, such as healings or divine guidance, so long as these “miracles” do not accredit new doctrine or add to the New Testament canon (Warfield, Gaffin). John MacArthur is perhaps the best-known classical cessationist.
- Full Cessationists argue that along with no miraculous gifts, there are also no miracles performed by God today. This argument, of course, turns on one’s understanding of the term, “miracle”.
- Consistent Cessationists believe that not only were the miraculous gifts only for the establishment of the first-century church, but also so-called five-fold ministry found in Ephesians 4 was also a transitional institution (i.e., There are no more apostles, prophets, but also no more pastors, teachers, or evangelists).” - wikipedia.org
- Confusing gifts and natural human talents

2. All gifts are created equal

- Each of the three types of giftings are different in nature and application and should not be lumped into one group.
- Let’s read the context of each of the groups of giftings:

Ephesians 4

Romans 12

1 Corinthians 12

Notes:

3. Super-spiritualization

- Irresponsible teaching that makes the gifts seem so mysterious and lofty that normal people run the other way.
- Prophecy for instance means you go into a trance and lose consciousness.
- Mischaracterization brings reproach and alienation.
- I Corinthians 12 – “I don’t want you to be ignorant brothers...”
- In I Corinthians 14 – Paul likens the Church to a human body – each person having a part.
- God gives every believer spiritual gifts.
- We need to learn to use them or rather be used by God in them.
- The Body of Christ will not function fully as the community God intended until all understand their gifts.

