

STEWARDS OF GOD'S GRACE, PART 2

1 Peter 4:10

Last week we began a new short series on spiritual gifts that is spring boarding off of this overall vision we have in mind this year of bearing fruit. Last year was about roots and this year is more about fruit. Titus was part of that vision, urging us to learn to engage in good deeds and meeting pressing needs so that we are not unfruitful. And so by doing this study on spiritual gifts my desire is that I can help you answer this question that has come out of Titus, “What good deeds does God have for me to do? What are pressing needs might God have me meet? Or us meet as a church?” Last week I mentioned how this is a big deal for believers. God has created us in Christ Jesus for good works and these aren't just any works – these are works that He has prepared beforehand for us to walk in. We've been saved for a purpose! **So there's no such thing as a Christian without a purpose.** And the church board's emphasis this year is to cheer you on in finding your spot where you can get involved in those things He has for you.

One of the major areas we'll need to be aware of to be fruitful is the area of spiritual gifts. Each of us needs to have an **awareness** of what spiritual gifts are and to be **exercising** those gifts. In 1 Cor. 12:1, Paul told the Corinthians that he didn't want them to be unaware of spiritual gifts because spiritual gifts are incredibly important to the health and effectiveness and unity of the church. And my prayer throughout this series is that those believers who have never heard about or studied spiritual gifts will get excited about discovering their gifts and will begin to pursue God in that regard. My other prayer is that those who know what their gifts are will have renewed zeal for exercising their gifts – like Paul told Timothy to, “kindle afresh the gift of God within you.” I hope that this study help guide all of us into a greater awareness of where God has gifted us so we can concentrate our efforts in serving Him and be a blessing to the church body.

Again, the theme verse for this series is 1 Peter 4:10. “As each one has received a spiritual gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” So we all have spiritual gifts. Each of us has at least one gift and should be employing our gifts to serve on another and to do that, is to be a good steward of God's manifold grace. And if you missed the introduction to the series, this is the full color spectrum theme comes into play. The word **manifold** is sometimes used to describe something multicolored or various colors or technicolor. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) the word was used to describe Joseph's technicolor coat. It reminds us of a **rainbow**. So basically, the analogy we have is that God has gifted us all in different ways and so when we're exercising our gifts we're adding our color to the rainbow. We want everyone exercising their gifts so that we are a full spectrum rainbow and all colors on display in the body of Christ.

Rather than spending months going through the spiritual gifts passages, I decided just to make several key observations about gifts. So far we've defined what a spiritual gift is:

1. **Spiritual gifts are the manifested power of the Holy Spirit working through a believer for the purpose of carrying out a divine assignment. (1 Cor. 12:7)**

The key word for defining a spiritual gift is the word manifestation and the key verse is 1 Corinthians 12:7, which says, “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” A spiritual gift is the **manifestation** of the Spirit of God, the third member of the Trinity who lives and dwells in us. A manifestation is like saying it's a revealing of God. So when someone is exercising their gift, this is really neat to think about, **you're seeing God**

at work through them. It is the Spirit of God doing something through the believer that the believer cannot do on his own. These gifts are supernatural abilities.

2. Spiritual gifts are a special privilege of living in the present age. (Eph. 4:7, 8, 11; 1 Cor. 13:8-13)

In the OT, the Holy Spirit didn't permanently indwell people like He does today. He would at times empower certain men for certain tasks, but He would come and go. His indwelling wasn't permanent and for all. But today, and ever since this new ministry began in Acts 2 at Pentecost, He never leaves us nor forsakes us and gives us gifts. What I want to acknowledge from that point is just how privileged we are to live in this age in which we do.

Our first new observation today answers the question of *when* do we receive our gifts.

3. Spiritual gifts are given at the moment of salvation. (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 1:13-14;)

The spiritual gifts passage that points this out is 1 Corinthians 12:11-13. Paul just got done mentioning a bunch of different spiritual gifts and says, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member but many." So the connection that Paul is making here is that the gifts are of the Spirit and He distributes them as He wills to believers individually when they are baptized by Him into the body of Christ. And we know from other passages that this spiritual baptism (there's no water in this passage) happens the moment someone believes.

Ephesians 1:13 described this well I think, saying, "after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance." There's a moment in our lives where we hear the good news that Jesus died for our sins and through the conviction of the Spirit you trust Him as your Savior and right then and there, everything changes. The Spirit baptizes you, causing you to be born again. You're given a divine nature and are a new creation. You have been sealed for eternity and given an inheritance. This baptism also places us into the body of Christ – and everyone who is a member of Christ has a purpose or a function to benefit the body. It's right after this that he talks about how some are a hand or foot or an eye or an ear. Every member of Christ has been uniquely gifted to benefit that body of Christ.

The reason this connection is important to make between salvation and Spirit baptism and the body of Christ and gifts for the body, is because there's a lot of confusing teachings out there saying that in order to receive spiritual power and your gifts, you have to undergo a second baptism (sometimes called the second blessing) or they report that someone can be a believer without being baptized by the Spirit. I want us to be aware of that and **cautious** of this teaching because it can be detrimental to a believer's security in Christ and completeness in Christ. "Second blessing" theology leads people to think that they need some greater spiritual experience to be "really saved" or complete. It's almost like they're working for something they already have. Paul makes it super clear in Romans 8:9 that if you don't have the Spirit, you don't have Christ and don't belong to Him. So there's no such thing as someone being a believer today and not having the Spirit.

The only case where the Spirit of God clearly delayed baptizing someone who believed was in a very special circumstance in Acts 8:14-17. This is where the case is typically made for second blessing theology. “Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.” So there was an evangelist named Philip who had been preaching in Samaria and people were believing in Christ but the apostles had to come to lay hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. But this was not a normal thing and the reason was that it was a unique and pivotal moment in history and important for the Church.

For centuries, there was this cultural and religious rift between the Samaritans and Jews. Jews in Judea considered the Samaritans in the north (Israel) to be mutts or half breed. The reason is because when Assyria took Samaria (Israel) captive around 722 BC, the king brought in men from places like Babylon and Damascus and they began to intermarry and that was unlawful. That’s why when a Jew went north to Galilee, he walked all the way around Samaria rather than going through it and why the woman at the well was so surprised that Jesus would talk to her and ask her for a drink. And the Samaritans, reacting to self-righteousness of the Judeans, became defiant and developed an attitude like the woman at the well. They built their own temple and had their own form of Judaism. It’s through this historical lens that we find the main reason why the Samaritans could only receive the Spirit once the apostles came from Jerusalem to lay hands on them and it was because **the Lord wanted to put an end to this rift between the Jews and Samaritans**. As one man said, “The Samaritans could not and must not start their own Christian movement apart from the church in Jerusalem,”¹ or apart from the authority of the Jewish apostles. So this moment was a unique tearing down of a long-established wall that promoted unity in the body of Christ – unity even between Samaritans and Judeans in Christ.

It was a unique moment in a transitional period in the book of Acts that we shouldn’t build a doctrine on. The clear teaching in the epistles is that you have everything you need in Christ the moment you’re saved. In Him, you have been made complete. **If you have Christ, you have the Spirit, which means you are part of the body of Christ and have gifts to offer the body of Christ out of His grace.**

Also, another point should be made here in that **natural talents or skills, though they can be used for ministry, aren’t the same thing as gifts**. Talents and skills are something we can have before we know Christ and use for Christ but gift we don’t have before Christ.

❖ **Natural talents are not the same thing as spiritual gifts.**

However, the Bible describes talents or skills as God-given just like spiritual gifts. In the OT, God described how He wanted certain things built and constructed, like the tabernacle or temple, and then He gifted certain men to be able to do those things. With the fancy and ornate priestly garments, it says God endowed men with the skills and wisdom to make them (Ex. 28:3; Ex. 31:1-6). So God is the giver of gifts, but also talents and skills. Gifts, however, are only given once we’ve are saved.

Our next observation answers the question of ‘what’s the main purpose of gifts?’

4. **Spiritual gifts are for equipping each other for the work of ministry. (Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Cor. 14:26)**

Let's look at Ephesians 4:11-13 says, "And He [Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for [here's the purpose] the **equipping** of the saints for the work of service, to the **building up** of the body of Christ until we all attain to the **unity** of the faith and of the **knowledge** of the Son of God, to a **mature** man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the **fullness** of Christ." There's so many wholesome words in there that describe the purpose of spiritual gifts there but I think the overriding word there is the word **equipping**. When everyone's exercising their gifts there is this equipping that takes place – a building up in unity and maturity and fullness to the body of Christ, making us more Christlike. I don't know what you think of when you think of the word equipped, but I think of equipment. Like **a tool belt that's full of tools**. When everyone's exercising their gifts in the church, we sort of bring all of our tools together. It's hard to when you don't have all the tools – you need all the tools to do the job well. In the Church, I have a tool that you need and you have a tool that I need. When we combine our tools, we have all that we need to complete the project. We need to think, "**Through the exercising of someone else's gifts, I am equipped. And through the exercising of my gifts, others are equipped.**"

That's the reason He gave gifted men like apostles and prophets and I would say still gives evangelists and pastor-teachers. To equip the saints – to equip every believer. **We tend to think that ministry is only for the pastor and the missionary, but this is saying that the whole point of their ministry is to equip others to do ministry.** It's not just for the pastors and missionaries. All of us are to be equipped and equip others. That doesn't mean we'll all be pastors and missionaries. We need equipped believers in every aspect of life: law enforcement, in hospitals, in the grocery store, in farming and ranching, etc.

When I went to a pastor's conference last year, I heard Ed Stetzer talk about this. He said when he was a pastor there was a nice couple who came up to him and asked him basically to lead their child to Christ. And he politely told them no because he knew them. They knew the gospel and knew how to share it. They were equipped to do that. He told them that he couldn't take that joy from them being able to lead their child to Christ themselves. They were mad at him for a while and let everyone in the church know it but later they apologized and said thank you because they had the joy of leading their own child to Christ and he didn't take that ministry away from them.

From this point we need to note that gifts aren't self-centered. They are others-centered – for others' good. To edify others. In 1 Corinthians 14:26, he said, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. **Let all things be done for edification.**" So Paul is saying, it doesn't matter what you do in the church, do it to edify others – **to edify is to build up or construct**. One of the reasons Paul says this is because if you are familiar with chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians, there was a specific gift in the earliest days of the Church that creates a lot of confusion today and back then called the gifts of tongues (gift of languages). This gift gave the believers with that gift, the ability to speak another language without having previously learned it. It had a prophetic nature to it. We would call tongues **a sign gift** that operated during the foundation period of the Church. And it was honestly a pretty fascinating gift used to authenticate the gospel message and help it spread quickly to people of other languages.

But this gift would be pretty incredible right? Being able to speak another language without having to learn it first? And it was honestly an exciting experience for the believer with that gift and why the Corinthians prized it. The only trouble with the gift was that the person with the gift of tongues needed someone with the gift of interpretation or at least an interpreter make known what was said in that language. The person speaking the language couldn't understand it themselves. So Paul said unless someone interprets, the person who speaks in a tongue should remain silent (1 Cor. 14:28). Why? Because otherwise, no one is going to be edified or taught by that gift.

Some of you who have gone on foreign mission trips know how hard this is when you're sitting in church and the preacher's preaching but it's in a language you don't understand so you go home that day with basically nothing other than the fact that you see why Paul said don't speak in tongues unless someone interprets! It's also why Paul said I would rather speak 5 words with my mind than ten thousand words in another language I don't understand (1 Cor. 14:19) because he would edify others that way. So given that, I don't believe that the tongues of the modern charismatic movement where they are speaking in some form of ecstatic and unintelligible speech are the tongues of the Bible. Biblical tongues were interpretable and could really edify people like many of the early church leaders noted even by the 3rd century, tongues ceased to operate once the foundation of the Church was laid by the apostles. So I would be cautious of the those teaching tongues are still a thing and especially teaching those who save that be saved you have to speak in tongues. Paul himself said not everyone speaks in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30).

So let's take home a couple of things:

1. If we are going to use our gifts rightly, they have to be used for the good of others. To edify others. Good stewards of God's grace employ their gifts in serving one another.

2. You discover your gifts when you get involved in the body of Christ. They were made for serving the body of Christ and building it up so it's doubtful one will ever discover their gifts apart from the body or apart from getting involved in the body of Christ. The body of Christ will actually help you realize what your gifting is. Certain people will come up to you and tell you, "You know, I was really blessed when you did this or that." You begin to realize as you interact with the body what your gifting is. The body confirms it.

However, let me say this: you may do something and it doesn't work out as well as you hoped. Don't be embarrassed or give up. Praise God because trial and error helps you narrow down and nail down where God wants you to concentrate your efforts.

Chadron Berean desires to see every believer equipped and using their gifts and talents to serve in ministry. As the board, we came up with a pretty thorough list of all the different ministries and areas to serve in that are available and that list is in your bulletin. I recommend that you go through it and prayerfully consider where the Lord might have you get involved and come and talk to me or to the board. That's our application for today.

- Worship team (more background singers/instruments)
- Tech team/sound
- Multimedia
- 1st Impressions (interior and exterior design)

- Hospitality team (greeters/ushers)
- Operation Christmas Child
- Child-care/nursery
- AWANA
- Fellowship Coordinators (meal and event planning)
- Lawn care/landscaping
- Maintenance (plumbing and electrical)
- Bible study/small group leader
- Youth Group
- Visitation
- Other: _____ (we're open to any new ministries that God places on the hearts of His people. If you've got an idea, let me know or the board know. You can present the idea to us.)

Next week, we'll look at some of my favorite observations about spiritual gifts.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spirit Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 53-57.