

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

A great deal of interest in the nature and function of the gifts of the Holy Spirit has risen world wide in recent times within the Church of Jesus Christ. Much has also been written and spoken on the subject of the Holy Spirit and his (or God's) gifts. The following article outlines the major emphases of the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada with regard to these important teachings.

Spiritual Gifts Defined

We believe in the Holy Spirit and his ongoing ministry in the Church of Jesus Christ and in the world. We believe that part of the work of the Holy Spirit is the equipping of believers with gifts for service.

What do we mean by "gifts" of the Holy Spirit? Spiritual gifts are God-given abilities enabling the believer to function in the Body of Christ with effectiveness and satisfaction. Some gifts are the enhancement of natural ability for service, others are endowments with special ability. Natural ability as a speaker, musician, teacher, etc., does not necessarily mean that one has or will receive a gift in that area. Every believer has been given gifts by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:7) to assist in ministry within the church.

In I Corinthians 12:4 the term used to describe gifts is the Greek word *charismata*. The term comes from the root *charis* which means "grace", and signifies that these endowments come from the free bounty of God's grace and love. They are not rewards for holiness, spirituality, or spiritual maturity. Out of his love God gives just the gift or gifts we need to be of help and blessing to our fellow believers. (I Peter 4:10)

Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

Ephesians 4:11-13 serves as an excellent basis for defining the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit. They are given to equip members within the church for ministry so that the whole body may be edified and built up toward maturity in Christ. We believe that all the gifts will be in operation until Jesus comes.

(I Corinthians 1:7 - "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ").

These gracious endowments are part of God's plan for his people. He disburses them through his people, sovereignly as he chooses, for the glory of God the Father. All believers have the privilege of being channels in manifesting his gifts. (I Peter 4:10) When there is a need in the church, and believers are sensitive to the Spirit's leadership, his gifting will minister to that need. God's Spirit can be trusted to provide what is needed to build up the Church and provide for its enlargement.

It is wrong to become obsessed with only a few of the more spectacular gifts. All are given by and are the work of the same Spirit. Let us seek the gifts God wants to give us, for the sake of building up his church as we are involved in it today. Let us not be found guilty of disparaging or unduly emphasizing any gift of the Holy Spirit.

The gifts listed in I Corinthians 12 seem somewhat spectacular, and thus our interest often focuses exclusively on these. This is unfortunate. In Corinth, a misplaced emphasis on some gifts and a preoccupation with only a few of them resulted in pride and division. In that passage Paul insists that all of the gifts proceed from the same Holy Spirit even though the manifestations may differ. "It is the same God who works all things in all men." (I Corinthians 12:4-7)

Diversity of Spiritual Gifts

There are at least three different lists of spiritual gifts found in Scripture (Romans 12:6-8; I Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11). Even a brief look at these lists readily indicates that while they all make reference to the gifts of the Spirit, each has a different orientation. Ephesians 4:11 is a list of gifts that equip persons, who are Christ's gifts to the church, for various offices. Romans 12:6-8 catalogues some of the basic functions that gifts, which are performed in the church, serve. I Corinthians 12 is more a list of supernatural abilities not associated with natural human service. As a result it becomes very difficult to come up with a definitive

list of the gifts.

Some injustice has been done to New Testament teachings by the practice of referring to a list of nine gifts as though only nine exist. In fact, in several "lists" of gifts, one can count at least twenty-one gifts which are mentioned by the Apostle Paul! Scripture does not limit their number.

As one looks at these gifts listed in Scripture, it is clear that there is a diversity of gifts. Some of these gifts are miraculous; some are more natural, some are verbal, some are mental; some are powerful, some are administration - but all are described within the context of building up the Body of Christ and are activities of the same Holy Spirit. When people concentrate on a limited number of gifts, forgetting their great variety, the result may be a partial, incomplete ministry, and a loss of blessing and effectiveness. All of these gifts, and as many more as the Church has need of to fulfil its mandate and ministry, are available from the good hand of our God.

Tongues Speaking

One of the gifts listed in I Corinthians 12 and 14 is tongues speaking. Because much attention has been given to this gift, it is specifically discussed here. Paul believed it is a genuine manifestation of the Spirit (I Corinthians 14:18,19), but he believed in the necessity of careful control of this gift by the one so gifted. (I Corinthians 14:26-28)

Paul discusses tongues speaking as an aid to personal prayer and praise. Tongues speaking is addressed and directed to God, not to man. (I Corinthians 14:2,4,14-17) It is usually incoherent to the hearer. Here is a gift given to enhance the prayer life of believers who have the gift. The believer edified by it is, in turn, to edify the church. It is not necessary that all Christians possess this gift. (I Corinthians 12:29-31) The Scripture clearly states that the Holy Spirit dispenses all the gifts sovereignly to recipients. (I Corinthians 12:11) Therefore, if he chooses to give us any one of the miraculous gifts, he will do so regardless of whether we expect or seek it.

As to the public use of the gift of tongues, the procedures laid down in Scripture are to be followed. If one speaks in tongues publicly, there should be an interpreter so that the whole group may be edified. Only one should speak at a time and no more than two

or three at a session. (I Corinthians 14:27) If no one is present to interpret (whether the speaker or some other person) then the would-be speaker should keep silent and restrict the use of tongues to personal devotional practice. (I Corinthians 14:28) In I Corinthians 14 Paul prefers the exercise of the gift of prophecy -- that is the telling forth of the Word of God in the vernacular for edification, exhortation, comfort and evangelism. (14:3-5, 23-25)

Since Paul implies that speaking in tongues publicly was a problem in Corinth (I Corinthians 14:20); since he surrounds the practice there with these restrictions and qualifications (14:26-28); since he urges that prophecy rather than tongues should be the norm in public Christian gatherings (14:11-19); and since public tongues speaking is not mentioned as a common practice in other New Testament congregations; it is out of order for an undue emphasis to be placed on the public use of this gift. (14:39)

The gift of tongues should not be considered a standard of measurement for one's spirituality, or as the necessary evidence of the Spirit-filled life. It is just one of the many wonderful endowments given by the Spirit to bless and enrich the lives of believers and the life of the church of our blessed Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Churches in the modern world which put a great deal of stress upon the Spirit's gifts are called "charismatic" fellowships. Paul insists in I Corinthians 13 that no matter what gift a believer possesses, without love (agape) it is worthless. Thus love, though not one of these gifts, is vital to the proper use of each. Charismata (gifts) and agape (love) are both important components in the life of the Church and the life of a believer; but the greatest of these is love. Let us pray that the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada will be Spirit-led and Spirit-filled. Above all, however, let us pray that the love of Christ will characterize us as a denomination. If we are God's people filled with his agape, the Spirit of God will see that we are also people who manifest genuine charismata.

*Adopted by the Board of Directors of the
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