

TALKING POINT #10
LIVING IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY #3: WHOSE GIFT IS IT?

WHAT'S THE FUSS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

In recent times, there has been growing talk about Spiritual Gifts. A lot of that discussion has focused on the different types of gifts and who has them. Some people say that we should expect the spectacular gifts while others say that those times have passed. It's a minefield for most of us so we just stay out of the discussion. However, as we read the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, we see that Spiritual Gifts are an integral part of healthy Church life.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

There are a few key passages about Spiritual Gifts and we're going to look at each of them:

Exodus 31:1-5 is the first time the Bible mentions someone being specially empowered by God for something. It says, "Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts- to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship."" People are often surprised that the first mention of God giving special ability is for craftsmanship but this small passage sets an important precedent. The gift is given for the building of the Tabernacle where the people would worship God. In other words, the gift was for the benefit of the wider community of God's people.

Romans 12:3-9 gives a list of gifts that are given for use in the Church. In this passage, the emphasis is not so much on the gifts themselves as much as on the way we see ourselves in the body of the Church. Paul starts by telling us that one is "not to think of himself more highly that he ought to think," (v3) and finishes with v9, "Let love be genuine." Gifts then, are how we express our membership of the Body in love. They are not an end in themselves.

1 Corinthians 12-14 is probably the most famous and most detailed passage on Spiritual Gifts in the Bible. Here, while Paul gives clear instruction on the gifts themselves, notice what stands out in the middle of this passage – ch 13 on Love!

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. ... So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (13:1-8a, 13)

With all the chest-beating that goes on these days about which gifts to have, it is significant to note that the end-goal of gifts is love. The gifts are not given to the individual but the Church – the individual Christian is the privileged vessel through whom the gift is given by the Holy Spirit.

As for the different things said about Spiritual Gifts, let's examine Scripture:

1. "Can we earn Spiritual Gifts as a reward for growth as a Christian?" The simple answer to this seems to be 'No.' It's not a "gift" if it is a reward. Gifts are sovereignly given by the Giver – in

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this case the Holy Spirit (which makes these Gifts ‘Spiritual’ Gifts). It is up to God, not us, as to what gifts we receive – we can possibly ask but it’s up to Him as the Sovereign Giver.

2. “If we have particular gifts, should we have greater prominence in Church life?” Again, the answer is “No.” In fact, Paul addresses this question directly in Romans 12:3 above.
3. “Cessationists” believe that the age of gifts ended with the Early Church and we should not expect them any more – are they right? The Bible doesn’t give an end-date for gifts and many Cessationists say this because they don’t see evidence any more. However, God is sovereign and He is still doing amazing things in many parts of the World, including Forest Lake!
4. “Is it ok to speak in Tongues?” Yes. Paul himself spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 14:18). But, he also gives instruction for their use in Church. He is very clear that, in the corporate gathering, tongues should only be spoken aloud where there is an interpreter (1 Cor 14:28). So, when I am asked, “Are you in favour of tongues?” My answer is “Yes, in the right way.”
5. “What about prophecies?” Again, Paul clearly says that these are acceptable and to be encouraged (1 Cor 14:3). However, like tongues, Paul gives guidelines and, in the case of prophecies, the guideline is that the prophet and prophecy need to be weighed up (1 Cor 14:29) – that’s the job of the Church leaders.
6. Does everyone in the Church have a gift? Yes, just as each limb of the body has a unique function with the body, so each person is gifted to play their part (Rom 12:4-6).
7. How do I know what gift I have? The Bible doesn’t say to do a course but gives an implicit answer: Rom 12:7 “if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching.” In other words, we find out by doing. When I was younger, I had a go at teaching Sunday School and found out quickly that that was not my gift. Then I had a go at Youth leading and found that I could do that well. We’ll find out what we’re gifted in as we serve and as others see it!

HOW IS IT DONE AT FOREST LAKE BAPTIST CHURCH?

At FLBC, we believe that we “are not lacking in any spiritual gift.” (1 Cor 1:7) God has given us every gift we need to accomplish His purpose for us at the moment. But those gifts are given via His people. We see those gifts as each person steps up to serve and exercise their gifts. We believe that God has placed YOU in our Church for a purpose and has gifted YOU to take your place in the Body.

We believe that the role of the Church leaders is to provide a place where people can exercise their gifts under spiritual leadership so that the Church is built up and so that God is glorified by His people pursuing His mission.

We believe that as we each exercise our gifts and serve God and each other, we will see the truth of 1 Cor 14:24-25, that if “an unbeliever of outside enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” How exciting is that!!

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

What is your part to play? Which limb are you? Where can you be serving and exercising your gift? Give me a call and let’s talk about it some more.

CONCLUSION

Next month, we’ll continue our series on “Living in the Church Community” as we look at Worship.