

TWO THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

12 Now with regard to spiritual [things], brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2You know that when you were Gentiles, as you were led by means of those dumb idols, you were being led astray. 3For this reason, I am informing you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God can say, "Jesus be cursed;" and no one is able to say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4Now there is a variety of gifts, but it is the same Spirit [who gives all of them]. 5And there is a variety of ministries, but it is the same Lord [who appoints all of them]. 6And there is a variety of works, but it is the same God who performs all things in all ways. 7Now the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the common good—8to one there is given by the Spirit a word of wisdom, and to another [there is given] a word of knowledge through the same Spirit; 9to yet another [there is given the gift of] faith by the same Spirit, to another [there is given] gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10to another [there is given the ability to perform] works of power, to another [there is given the gift of] prophecy, to another [there is given the ability] to distinguish between spirits, to another [there is given the ability to speak in different] languages, to another [there is given the ability] to interpret languages. 11But the one and the same Spirit does all these things, distributing [gifts] to each one individually just as he desires. (1 Cor. 12:1-11)

Introduction

If you were asked to list the great events of the New Testament era—the events that are so significant that they are worthy of special commemoration—which events would you name? You would certainly mention Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter—and then you might stop. But there are two other very significant events that we tend to overlook, two events that are intimately related to one another.

Those two events are Ascension Day and Pentecost. Ascension Day, as the name indicates, is the day on which the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of God His Father, having accomplished the work that the Father gave Him to do. Pentecost is the day on which Christ fulfilled His promise to bestow the Holy Spirit upon His church.

Sometimes we tend to think of the Holy Spirit as “the silent partner” in the Trinity—this is partly due to the nature of the ministry He performs on behalf of Christ. As our Lord Himself testifies of the Spirit,

... when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak of his own accord; on the contrary, he will [only] declare the things he hears, and he will reveal to you the things that are still to come. 14He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and reveal it to you. (Jn. 16:13-14)

Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul is concerned that we should know something about the person and work of the Holy Spirit Himself. In 1 Corinthians 12:1 Paul writes, *“Now with regard to spiritual [gifts], brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.”*

Or, perhaps Paul's statement may be rendered, "*Now concerning spiritual [things], brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed*"—"spiritual [things]" would be a reference to the ways and workings of the Holy Spirit.

Because the Lord Jesus has bestowed His Holy Spirit upon the church, it is important for us to understand how the Spirit works in Christ's church.

I. Know that the Holy Spirit will Consistently Honor Christ (12:1-3)

When the Apostle Paul introduces his subject in verse one he is referring to more than just spiritual gifts, he is speaking about the Holy Spirit and His ministry in the broadest terms. He is going to inform us as to how the Holy Spirit works in the church of Christ—especially in the first century church before the completion of the New Testament Scriptures—but also how the Spirit works in the church throughout the centuries.

The apostle's purpose is for the church to be informed concerning the working of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be able to appreciate the workings and the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and, be able to distinguish a genuine working of the Holy Spirit from a dangerous and demonic counterfeit. The Apostle John expresses a similar concern when he writes, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 Jn. 4:1.)

In verse 2 Paul reminds these Corinthian Christians of what characterized their past religious life, when they were still spiritual "*Gentiles,*" (i.e.; as they were in their unconverted state, apart from the covenant of grace and still steeped in paganism.) At that time they were "*being led astray by means of those dumb idols.*" They were under the influence of a demonic spiritual power, note Ephesians 2:2, a passage in which Paul is referring to the devil as the demonic spirit that influences sinful mankind, "*you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now working in those who are disobedient.*"

This demonic power was leading the Corinthians astray; that is to say, was leading them away from the LORD and leading down the course that ultimately leads to damnation. Furthermore, this demonic power was inspiring them to worship "*dumb* [mute, silent, lifeless] *idols.*" Contrast this demonic activity to the working of the Holy Spirit as it is described in 1 Thessalonians 1:5,9. "*our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with great certainty ... you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God.*" In this passage Paul describes his preaching as being made dynamic and effective by the operation of the Holy Spirit, with the result being conversions unto Christ and a turning from idols unto God.

Prior to their conversion, the Corinthians were being led astray "*as they were led by means of those dumb idols.*" Paul may be indicating that there was a

capriciousness about that demonic operation, it was like being blown about by the wind or tossed to and fro on the high seas. Their former religious experience under spiritually demonic forces was intensely emotional, irrational, and unpredictable.

In verse 3 Paul contrasts that capricious demonic operation to the working of the Holy Spirit: *"No one speaking by the Spirit of God can say, 'Jesus be cursed.'"* The Holy Spirit will never inspire or influence a man to blaspheme the name of Jesus; such blasphemy is uttered under the influence of the devil, not that of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, *"no one is able to say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."* Only by the inspiration and the operation of the Holy Spirit can a man truly recognize and confess that Jesus is the Lord of glory; a prime example of this truth is to be found in Peter's confession, *"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"* ¹⁷*Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven'"* (Matt. 16:16-17.)

The first thing we must know about the Holy Spirit is that He will consistently honor the Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus declares, *"He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and reveal it to you"* (Jn. 16:14.) Conversely, any teaching or guidance that dishonors Christ is not of God and is not inspired by the Holy Spirit:

This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 Jn. 4:2-3)

II. Know that the Holy Spirit Dispenses His Gifts for the Benefit of Christ's Church (12:4-11)

In verses 4-6 the Apostle Paul emphasizes both the oneness of God as well as the diversity of His operations within the church. There is a wide diversity of spiritual gifts, (as will be considered in verses 8-10,) but they all are given by the same Holy Spirit (vs. 4.) Viewed from another perspective, there is a wide variety of ministries, but they are all provided by the same Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 5.) Viewed from yet another perspective, there is a wide variety of ways in which God works within the church, but they are all the works of the one and only God (vs. 6.) In summary, spiritual gifts are dispensed by the Holy Spirit, they are intended by Christ to be used for ministry, and, as they are employed in ministry, they are nothing less than the divine workings of God in and through His people for our edification and His glory. According to the Apostle Peter, as we employ our various spiritual gifts, we are ministering to one another nothing less than the grace of God in all of its manifold forms, *"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering the manifold grace of God"* (1 Pet. 4:10.) The unity of purpose and operation exhibited by the triune God in His church is in contrast to the hosts of demonic beings who operate at cross

purposes in many pagan religious settings unto the confusion and ultimate destruction of the worshipers.

Again in verse 7 Paul emphasizes that the Holy Spirit dispenses a wide variety of spiritual gifts, He distributes these gifts among the various members of the church, and He bestows His gifts for the benefit of the individual Christian and especially for the benefit of the church as a whole. Spiritual gifts enable each individual Christian to become useful and productive in the church and for the kingdom of God.

In verses 8-10 the apostle provides us with a list of some of the gifts the Holy Spirit dispenses upon the church:

“a word of wisdom”—the ability to perceive how the Word of God applies to a given situation; the ability to give practical biblical counsel to a Christian confronted with a perplexing situation

“a word of knowledge”—the ability to understand the meaning of Scripture and convey that meaning to others

“the gift of faith”—the ability to live one’s life in direct dependence upon God, so as to be at His disposal for a given task or for a lifetime of service, an example of this gift is to be found in Matthew 10:9-10. When the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples on their initial preaching mission, He gave them these instructions: *“Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; ¹⁰take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his food.”* Jesus was instructing His disciples to depend upon Him to supply their needs; since they were called by Christ, they could depend upon Christ to provide for their needs.

“gifts of healing”—this spiritual gift was especially given to the early disciples to be a testimony to the truth of the gospel and a demonstration of what life will be like in the fullness of health in the kingdom of God. When our Lord commissioned His disciples to go forth on their first preaching tour, proclaiming the gospel, He gave them this instruction: *“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy”* (Matt. 10:8a.) In the commissioning account given in the Gospel of Luke we read, *“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick”* (Lk. 9:1-2.)

“the ability to perform works of power”—miraculous displays of God’s power; again, for the purpose of attesting to the truth of the gospel, especially as it was proclaimed by the early disciples. When our Lord commissioned His disciples to go forth on their first preaching tour, proclaiming the gospel, He

also gave them this instruction: *“drive out demons”* (Matt. 10:8b); note, also, Luke 9:1-2, referred to above.

“the gift of prophecy”—receiving direct and immediate divine revelation, guidance, or understanding; this gift was especially necessary and prominent prior to the completion of the New Testament canon, note, for example, 1 Corinthians 14:37, where Paul calls upon the prophets found within the Corinthian church testify to the authenticity of his divine apostleship: *“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.”* From this passage it becomes evident that one of the purposes of the gift of prophecy was to ascertain and verify apostolic teaching—this was especially necessary during the time when the New Testament canon was being compiled and before the church possessed it in its completed form.

“the ability to distinguish between spirits”—the ability to distinguish utterances and operations of the Holy Spirit in distinction from the counterfeit workings of demonic spirits

“the ability to speak in different languages,” commonly called, *“the gift of tongues”*—the miraculous ability to speak in different languages, as was evident on the Day of Pentecost: *“All of them [i.e.; all of the apostles] were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them”* (Acts 2:4.)

“the ability to interpret languages”—the miraculous ability to translate utterances spoken in a different language

Romans 12:6-8 adds to this list such gifts as ...

“ministry”—rendering acts of self-giving and self-denying service in the name of Christ

“teaching, exhortation, encouragement”—the ability to communicate and apply the Word of God to in an effective way, in either a formal and public setting (*“teaching,”*) or an informal and personal manner (*“exhortation,” “encouragement”*)

“giving”—the ministry of providing financial contributions to the church for the work of the kingdom of God above and beyond the giving of the tithe

“governing,” or, *“administration”*—the ability to give leadership or provide oversight for a local congregation or for a larger segment of Christ’s body, the church

“mercy”—the ability to render compassionate and practical care to those members of the body who are suffering

The question may be asked, Should we expect to find all of these gifts present in the church at all times throughout church history? The miraculous and prophetic gifts were especially significant during the time when the church was being established. Such gifts served to authenticate and verify the truth of the gospel; note, for example, Hebrews 2:3b-4, *“This salvation, that was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”* Such gifts also served to support, guide and instruct the church during the time prior to the completion of the New Testament canon, giving insight into the meaning of the apostolic writings and, as we noted previously (1 Cor. 14:37,) serving to identify true apostolic teaching.

When the church possesses the complete Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments, and where the church has become established in a particular society and part of the world, the miraculous and prophetic gifts recede and become extinct or non-operative. However, in those parts of the world where the gospel is advancing for the first time and where the church is confronted with the powers of darkness in a direct and intense way, some of the more miraculous gifts may, perhaps, be dispensed by the Holy Spirit.

In verse 11 Paul once more emphasizes that all of these spiritual gifts, no matter how diverse, have a common source: they are all the workings of the one Holy Spirit of God. They are all distributed in accordance with His sovereign good pleasure and for the purpose of building up the church of Christ.

The second thing to know about the Holy Spirit is that He dispenses His gifts as He sees fit for the good of Christ’s church. Each individual believer in Christ has the responsibility to discover his or her spiritual gift(s) and then to use that gift(s) in service to Christ and His church.

How do you discover your spiritual gift(s)? Begin with prayer, asking the Lord for guidance and to show you what gift or gifts He has given you. In light of the lists of gifts presented in the New Testament (see especially 1 Cor. 12:8-10 and Rom. 12:6-8,) consider your natural inclinations and abilities; by way of example, if you enjoying teaching and are good at it, you evidently have the gift of teaching. Seek the advice and listen to the counsel of fellow Christians; by way of example, if a fellow believer tells you how much he appreciates your generosity and willingness to meet the material needs of those who are destitute, and encourages you to continue to carry on such a ministry as the LORD enables you, his counsel may well be taken as instruction and confirmation that you have the gift of giving.

The use of our spiritual gifts gives us an active and useful part in the life of Christ's church and His cause—the Christian life becomes more exciting and personally meaningful and fulfilling. Conversely, if we do not discern and employ our spiritual gift(s), the Christian life will tend to become boring and irrelevant. By way of illustration, having a position on the team and playing in the game is always more exciting and personally involving than merely sitting on the bench while the rest of the team participates in the game. If you “sit on the bench” in your Christian life, rather than become actively involved by the use of your spiritual gift(s), you will have a greater tendency to become critical of the ministries conducted by your brothers and sisters, and you will have the tendency to want something different rather than something deeper in your spiritual life.

Conclusion

In one sense, the Holy Spirit is “the silent partner” in the trinity, in that His task is to glorify Christ; as the Lord Jesus testified of Him, *“He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and reveal it to you”* (Jn. 16: 14.) But because the Lord Jesus has bestowed His Holy Spirit upon the church, it is important for us to understand how He works in Christ's church; namely, that He consistently honors Christ, and that He dispenses His gifts for the good of Christ's church.