

“CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS: WHAT THEY ARE NOT.”

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Scripture Text: I Corinthians 12:12-31

Introduction.

I may have just developed the gift of miracles. There is another sermon outline on the back of the bulletin. But I am going to use my gift of prophecy and predict that this gift of miracles goes away soon.

In my last sermon I gave ten truths about spiritual gifts. I said that only those who are spiritual have them, meaning Christians. Every Christian has at least one and no one has them all and no single gift is given to every Christian. We can't earn them, and the Spirit decides who gets which ones.

This morning I want to give six things spiritual gifts are not or are not to be confused with. All of this is in an effort to help us not be uninformed or ignorant about spiritual gifts.

I Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

1. Spiritual Gifts should not be confused with natural talents.

A few years ago the Barna Institute did a survey and more than one-fifth (21%) of the survey respondents claimed to have spiritual gifts that aren't mentioned in the Bible. These include: a sense of humor, singing, happiness, a job, a house, compromise, premonitions, even clairvoyance.

Natural talents are a part of our natural birth and growing up. Auto mechanics, speaking Spanish, playing the piano and a sense of humor are not spiritual gifts. When we are talking about spiritual gifts we are not talking about vocational skills or abilities.

Someone with the natural gift of teaching before they are a Christian will find that as a Christian their gift will be used to spiritual purposes and will bear spiritual fruit for God's glory.

Spiritual Gifts are a part of our spiritual birth. They are given by the Spirit after we are born again by the Spirit. They are God-given and God-energized. They are supernatural, from God not us.

Both natural and spiritual gifts are all gifts from God and as Christians we seek to use them all for His glory and the good of others.

2. Spiritual Gifts should not be confused with the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is listed in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.

Spiritual Fruit shows my maturity. Spiritual fruit are my attitudes, my character, being.
Spiritual Gifts show my ministry. Gifts are my aptitudes, my function in the body, doing.

Both are the work of the Holy Spirit. The fruit is who I am to be, what I am to be like. The gifts are what I am to do in the body.

Fruit is an extension of the character of Christ.
Gifts are an extension of the ministry of Christ.

Spiritual fruit is eternal. Spiritual gifts are temporal, meaning for the body of Christ on earth. Prophecies, tongues and knowledge will pass away, but love shall abide forever.

Christian character is important for all Christians. All Christians are to manifest (display, practice) all the fruit all the time, yet only a few of the gifts.

We aren't given one or two of the fruit. They're a package deal, we are to manifest all the fruit as we grow in faith and in the likeness of Jesus.

The fruit of the Spirit is foundational and motivational, it's what the gifts rest on.

3. Spiritual Gifts should not be confused with Christian roles or ministry positions.

Organizational positions are not the same as ministry contributions. It can be explained as the difference between titles and tasks, or an office and a gift.

It's possible to hold the office of pastor without the gift of leadership or the office of deacon without the spiritual gift of serving. The offices are based on God's calling.

Christian roles or responsibilities are different from our spiritual gifts. All Christians are called to be witnesses, to serve and to share, to be generous, merciful, encouraging, and to pray.

We are all called to do these to the best of our ability. When Paul writes:

Romans 12:13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

He is writing to all Christians, not just those with the spiritual gift of generosity or hospitality.

The person who has the spiritual gift of giving or hospitality or witnessing will do these things with greater ease, with greater freedom and with greater frequency.

Can you imagine someone in dire straits and in great need going up to a Christian and asking for help and that person saying, sorry I don't have the gift of serving or giving, you need to ask someone who does? Because I don't have the gift of evangelism doesn't mean I can say I will leave sharing my faith to those who have the gift.

We all have the role of witnessing whether or not we have the spiritual gift of evangelism. Those with the gift can help the rest of us with our role or responsibility.

4. Spiritual Gifts should not be confused with spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual disciplines are things like praying, fasting, tithing, reading Scripture, worshipping, meditating, confession.

Spiritual disciplines strengthen the individual and spiritual gifts strengthen others, strengthen the body of Christ.

We should all build up our faith and our relationship with God through all the various spiritual disciplines He has given us. And we should all build up the faith of the body by exercising the spiritual gifts God has given us.

Remember what we have said. Your spiritual gifts are actually not yours, they are the bodies. You are not free to say I have this gift and I will use it when and where and how I want. When the Spirit gives us gifts He intends for us to get moving and get using it. There are needs in the body that we are supposed to fill and meet.

5. Spiritual Gifts should not be confused with counterfeit gifts.

Satan come as an angel of light, as a counterfeit spirit (II Cor. 11:14). He can imitate the real thing. During the ten plagues in Exodus some of Moses miracles were counterfeited. There are people who seem to have powers to do things or know things but their power is not of God. Scripture warns us of false prophets and false teachers and false christs.

We hear of this in Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7:22-23 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

For this reason we must heed the words of John:

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

The key question to ask is, “Who gets the glory?” Or “Who gets the credit?” Or “Who do they point to?”

There are two possible sources of supernatural power. We must learn to discern and judge the source and character of the power.

This is why the body needs the spiritual gift of discernment and the discernment of spirits, to help the rest of us know when there is a false spirit in our midst.

6. Spiritual Gifts should never become an occasion for sin.

The love chapter in I Corinthians 13 is right between two big chapters in the Bible on gifts to remind us the gifts are to be exercised with love, without love they are worthless.

I Corinthians 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 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. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

I Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts without the spiritual fruit become destructive.

We also need to exercise our gifts without superiority or inferiority. The gifts can easily deteriorate into a critical, proud, and self-righteous spirit.

I Corinthians 12:21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”

Don’t boast about our gift and use it to lord it over others.

We can do the opposite and look with envy on other people’s gifts and neglect our own gifts because we consider them too small or unimportant or unnecessary. All the spiritual gifts are equal and necessary, there is not a hierarchy of gifts, even if some are public and some behind the scenes (I Corinthians 12:22-25). The ministry going on over in the nursery right now is every bit as important as the ministry I am doing now.

It’s sin when we neglect our gifts out of fear of what others think or say. We can neglect our gifts out of feelings of inadequacy or thinking there are others who can do it better. Our focus is too much on ourselves rather than on the Holy Spirit at work in and through us. We are to be others-serving, not self-serving.

Another sin with our gifts is if we project expectations on to others. It would be like me thinking that preaching is easy and everyone should be able to do it. Or that everyone should be a leader.

I Corinthians 7:7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

Gift projection occurs when we expect others to serve the way we do. Don't expect everyone else to be like you and don't feel guilty if you can't be like someone else.

Paul addressed this problem in Corinth where there seemed to be an over emphasis on the gift of tongues, people putting it above the other gifts and pushing it on everyone. That still happens today in some Pentecostal circles where everyone is expected to have this gift as a sign they have the Holy Spirit.

Don't boast, don't compare, don't neglect. Count others better and serve others.

Application and conclusion.

I Corinthians 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

I Corinthians 14:12 since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Spiritual gifts are visible displays of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we serve one another and build up the body of Christ. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was first seen in visible tongues of fire and audible speaking in tongues.

Today the Holy Spirit is visible in the church when each member exercises their spiritual gift. A church where members are serving and ministering is a beautiful picture of the Holy Spirit. Our gifts are the channels through which the Holy Spirit shows up and is present among us. When the gifts are being exercised that is where God has chosen to be present to His people.

Consider the magnitude of what we are talking about. It's not just about our spiritual gifts, it's about the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself. God with us, God in us, the hand of the living God on all who repent and believe, who love and obey.

Few things match the blessing of knowing and using your spiritual gift and experiencing the Holy Spirit working in and through you. Consider these things and take them to heart.

And in all things give thanks to God for all His gifts and for His indescribable gift in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 9:15).