

THE GIFTS AND MINISTRIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“A Brief Overview”

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Preface

This short introduction to the subject of the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit was part of the material that Ed Stube allowed me to photocopy when during my all too brief, 2 month stay at Lawang Bible Training Center at the end of 1975 and start of 1976.

I have no doubt it is written as a brief reflection on, and response to, some of the confusion created by the emergence of the Charismatic Movement in the 1960's, and rediscovery of the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit by main line Church groups.

The information on the following few pages of information, would have been repeated in various ways to countless numbers of newly baptized in the Spirit. In fact, it is just the sort of thing that is used today too! (*Ps. Spencer Scrutton*).

Introduction

In the Book of Acts we find the early Christians receiving an experience which is variously described as:

"receive the promise of the Father" (1:4).

"baptized in the Holy Spirit" (1:5).

"Holy Spirit comes upon you" (1:8).

"filled with the Holy Spirit" (2:4).

"receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38).

From the context it is clear that these expressions indicate different aspects of the same experience. "Promise of the Father" reminds us that this experience was predicted by the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Joel 2:28), "Baptized in the Holy Spirit" reminds us of the words of John the Baptist: "I indeed baptize with water, but He (Jesus) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). This expression stresses the concept of our being totally immersed in the Spirit of God and yielded to Him. Acts 1:8 stresses the coming of the Spirit to the Church, giving power to become witnesses to Christ "unto the ends of the earth." "Filled with the Spirit" reminds us of Jesus' words likening the Holy Spirit to living water which will not only quench our thirst, but will also overflow and pour out like a great life-giving stream (John 7:37-39). The promise of receiving "the gift of the Holy Spirit" assures us that God wills this experience, and freely gives it to any who have repented and been baptized in the name of Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:33).

The prototype for confirmation is in Acts 8 in which a whole city was converted through the "evangelistic effort" of Philip. They were baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of their sins, but they have not yet received the Holy Spirit. Then "when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John" who "laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14, 17). For Anglicans, the receiving of the Holy Spirit is not a new sacrament, but rather a stirring up or realizing of the strengthening gifts of the Spirit which we have received.

In His sovereignty God can also give the Spirit before any sacramental act has been performed. At Cornelius' house, the Spirit fell on them while Peter was still preaching to them. Only afterwards did they receive the sacrament of Baptism (Acts 10:44-48).

Actually this experience of receiving or being baptized in the Holy Spirit is only a beginning, a door opening the way to many other blessings and developments.

Much confusion has arisen through failure to make the necessary distinctions among gifts or manifestations of the Spirit, fruit of the Spirit, and ministry gifts of the Spirit. So let us examine those one by one.

1. "Gifts" or Manifestations

In 1 Cor. 12:8-10 we find nine so-called "gifts" of the Spirit, which verse 7 describes as manifestations. The Holy Spirit is given to us; then He manifests Himself through us as He wills. Whether we call them gifts of manifestations, the important thing to remember is that they belong to the Holy Spirit and not to us. For instance, the Holy Spirit has "gifts of healing" for sick people. They are His gifts, and He wants to give them to the person who needs them. We are just the delivery person. Let us not in pride think that we have a gift of healing, or prophecy, or discerning of Spirits.

These manifestations of the Spirit are always for a particular time and situation. The Lord speaks to us, or acts through us to meet an immediate need. They do not in any sense become our permanent possession. If we have received the Holy Spirit and yielded ourselves to Him, then He can use us as need arises for anyone of these manifestations. If we see someone collapse on the street, we don't need to tell him to wait while we run off looking for our friend with a "gift of healing." The Lord wants to use us to deliver His gifts as need arises. All can speak in tongues (1 Cor. 1:15); all can prophesy (1 Cor. 14:31).

Then why in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 does Paul say; "To one is given ... to another is given"? Because in these chapters (1 Cor. 11 – 14) Paul is talking primarily about the Christian fellowship at worship. He is emphasizing our working together in the Body. It is not a one person ministry, but all can take part as the Spirit divides His manifestations to all, "severally as He wills." Another time the person who prophesied before may be used to deliver gifts of healing, or to use a word of knowledge. Our part is to be obedient to the Spirit and ready to let Him manifest Himself as He wills.

Word of wisdom and word of knowledge are revelations from God concerning His will or course of action at a particular moment and in a particular situation. We can often know the real problem or condition of a person, just as Jesus knew the condition in the life of the woman of Samaria in John 4:16,17. In seminary we learned to ask a lot of psychologically oriented questions to determine the basis of people's difficulties. But if God gives us direct understanding of the condition and wisdom to minister to it, our ministry can be many times more effective and God is glorified, just as He was in Samaria.

Prophecy may sometimes have predictive elements, but it is normally God speaking to His people through our mouths for "edification, exhortation, and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3). We can get very much advice and counsel from men, often confusing and conflicting. How wonderful, then, if we can hear directly from God.

These spoken manifestations of the Spirit need not be delivered formally with a "Thus saith the Lord," but can be delivered simply and conversationally in personal ministry; or they can occur almost unconsciously in preaching or teaching, if we are being guided by His Spirit. Frequently we wonder why we said something or other, but later people say that it spoke directly to their need, or revealed to them the hidden secrets of their hearts.

Discerning of spirits is tremendously necessary in the life of the church, especially for those in places of authority. We need to distinguish clearly whether our people are being motivated by the Holy Spirit, their own ideas or emotions, or some other spirit. Also every parish has people whose lives are in some measure troubled or bound by evil forces. We need to be able to bring them God's deliverance. We must remember, however, that discerning of spirits is not the same as the gifts of suspicion and criticism which are often in operation in churches. These latter are themselves suspect, and usually need to be discerned, repented of, and cast out.

Our own intelligence, education, and ability is not negated or discarded in this spiritual ministry; but these things need to be brought to the Cross and surrendered to Him. Let us never forget that His thoughts are higher than ours and His understanding deeper.

2. The Ministry Gifts

Above we said that anyone who has received the Holy Spirit can be used to deliver any of the manifestations of the Spirit.

"I want you all to speak in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:5).

"All can prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:5).

But then in 1 Cor. 12:29,50 Paul asks: "Are all prophets?... have all the gifts of hauling?... do all speak with tongues?..." So we need to recognize that in 1 Cor. 12:7-11 Paul is talking about manifestations of the Spirit, which are our supernatural equipment for meeting particular situations and needs. Beginning in verse 12 he is talking about the functions of the various members in the Body of Christ, and saying that each has their own ministry and should recognize and work together with the others. Just as anyone can deliver a letter or package, but not all become postmen, so all can prophesy, but only certain ones are called as prophets.

We should not attempt to put all these functions on the shoulders of the parish priest. The Body has many members, not one. In Ephesians 4:11 it says that Christ's gifts were "that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." In the following verses it is made clear that it is the working together of these ministry gifts which will equip the church for effective ministry and bring the whole Church to maturity.

Some people say that these ministry gifts, especially apostles and prophets were just for the early church and have now passed away. But in verse 13 of Ephesians 4 the time limit is clearly stated: "Until we all come in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, becoming mature, attaining to whole measure of the fullness of Christ." If we want to see the Church matured, unified, and perfected, here is at least an important part of God's answer.

This cannot happen suddenly, nor can we bring it to pass. God determines our ministry and our place in the Body. "God has set in the Church first apostles, second prophets, thirdly teachers, ..." (1 Cor. 12:28). As our people begin to walk in the Spirit and manifest His gifts, He will call them to specific functions. He can do this through a quiet conviction in our heart, through prophecy, or through leading us gradually into it as we are obedient to His leading day by day. If a person feels that God is calling him to a particular function, let this call be confirmed in the whole Body. Let them pray together about it, until they have a witness of the Spirit. Then let them lay on hands or pray for the person in his ministry. We are not going to function as individuals, but as members of a Body.

3. Make Love your Aim

The close relation of the spiritual gifts and Christ's commandment to love God and one another is shown in 1 Cor. 13. Not by accident did Paul place chapter 13 between chapter 12 and 14. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be divorced from the manifestation of the Spirit. Some people have tried to interpret the love of 1 Cor. 13 as a substitute for the gifts or manifestations of the Spirit. But if we examine the context, we see that love is here presented as the "more excellent way" to receive and exercise the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:31). Without love, we may minister in the Spirit, but the fruit of the Spirit is not evident in our lives. We are empty and make a poor witness through our personal life. But love without the gifts of the Spirit is merely a nice feeling or emotion. If my neighbor is sick, I can sit at home and feel love for that person. But the love of Jesus makes me go there, lay hands on him, and heal. If my neighbor is discouraged or depressed, I go in the love of Jesus and deliver a word of wisdom or prophecy for "edification, exhortation, and comfort." The proper order of things is (1) follow after love, and (2) seek spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:1). The spiritual gifts make the love practical and demonstrable; we are not content to manifest our own human love, but His. We minister to them not according to our own ability, but His.

Many people are afraid to yield to the free working of the Holy Spirit or to allow His manifestation in their churches, lest there be Counterfeit or false manifestations. But we can only surely distinguish the true and the false if we ourselves have experienced the real thing. So the safest way of avoiding the counterfeits is by a deep involvement in the fellowship and work of the Holy Spirit. We can proceed with the perfect confidence that God is our loving Father, who watches over us. If His son asks for a fish, He will not give a scorpion. So let us keep our eyes on Jesus and yield ourselves fully to Him and be always full of His Spirit.

Rev. Edwin Stube

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Edw. Stube', written in black ink.