

Spirit Filled Gifts

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Preacher: Chris Bowditch

[0 : 00] Well, let me pray for us before we begin. Father God, we thank you that you have saved us.

We thank you that it is by your son, Jesus, that we can be forgiven. And Lord, we thank you that when we put our trust in you, that you gave us the Holy Spirit as a seal of our inheritance, that we would be with you in heaven one day.

And so, God, we ask that tonight, as we look at this area of spiritual gifts, that you would remind us that the only reason we have these is because of the greatest gift that you've given, which is your son, Jesus.

And so, God, please use me, open our hearts, and encourage us and teach us tonight, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, spiritual gifts. When Jono and I were sitting in one of the back offices a few months ago, trying to work out what we're going to preach on these four weeks in December, we decided that it would be being filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and we were sort of working out what some topics could be, and we decided that one of them would be spiritual gifts.

[1 : 21] And in my brain, I thought, great, but that one's definitely going to Jono, because I don't want to touch that one, because it's a very contested topic.

It's very difficult. I read in one book this week that a guy who said, on Monday to Wednesday, I think this, and on Thursday to Sunday, I think this other thing.

So, if the great theologians who can write books can think that, what hope do I have, I thought. But, tonight, I hope that I am able to give you a fairly good picture of what the Bible says about spiritual gifts, to give you some things to hold on to, and not to just keep it in the realms of theological discussion, but to actually say, well, what practically does it mean for us as a church to have spiritual gifts, and how does that look?

So, that's what I'm going to try and do tonight, and I hope that I get the gift of teaching and succeed. So, we are in a four-week series tonight.

This is week three, and the series is on being spirit-filled, and Jono has given us a great definition of being spirit-filled, which is being spirit-filled is marked by boldness and fruitfulness in living out the Great Commission.

[3 : 01] And we should be seeking to be constantly filled with the Spirit, and as we do that, becoming more and more like Jesus.

And so, I guess I'm trying to take an angle tonight on spiritual gifts that unpacks what role spiritual gifts play in us being bold and fruitful in living out the Great Commission, in being spirit-filled.

Now, for all of the complexities of spiritual gifts and the like, when you sort of boil Christianity down and take away all the complexities, I really am thankful to God that it isn't actually that complex a thing.

Take away controversies, take away fights, and you get left with some pretty basic things that everyone who is a Christian holds on to.

That Jesus is Lord, that we need to love and serve Him, and we also need to love and serve each other. And in tonight's reading, we saw that it's the Spirit that enables us to say that Jesus is Lord.

[4 : 16] And spiritual gifts are given to us to help us live out our lives together as Christians in light of the fact that Jesus is Lord.

So, there are four questions I'm going to try and answer tonight. And they are, What are spiritual gifts? Why does God give them if He does?

Do they work the same today as they did when the Bible was written? And do all Christians have a spiritual gift? And then if they do, how do you find out what yours is?

Okay. So, we'll start with the first question. What are spiritual gifts? And it doesn't really seem like there's a straightforward answer to what a spiritual gift is.

So, the best place to start when we are trying to define what things are is to look at the Bible. And there are four places in the Bible where the idea of spiritual gifts seem to come up.

[5 : 22] And the first one of them is in Romans 12, verses 6 to 8. So, you can flick there if you like. But there are a few things that Paul lists there. Gift of prophecy, of ministry or of service, teaching, exaltation or encouragement, giving, which is like generosity, and leadership.

Which he talks about leaders being diligent in their leadership. And mercy slash compassion, which is associated with being cheerful.

And while you're looking there, just note that he lists these gifts in the context of a body metaphor, which is a bit like what he does tonight.

And I think that's important for us as we try and understand what spiritual gifts are. So, tonight's reading, which is where we're up to next. And this is probably the most extensive list of spiritual gifts.

We have an utterance or a word of wisdom. An utterance, sometimes called a word of knowledge or utterance of knowledge. Faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

[6 : 43] And we have the thing about the body. And then in verses 27 to 31, we get apostles, prophets, teachers, deeds of power, gifts of healing.

And they seem to be ranked there. And then in Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 11, we get a list that's a bit like the end of chapter 12 in 1 Corinthians.

We have apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor or teacher. And there we see that they're given to equip, which I think, again, relates to this idea of the body that we're going to get to shortly.

And then, not in a letter written by Paul, but in one written by Peter, in 1 Peter 4, verses 10 to 11, we get two things, speaking and service.

And we're told there that we should serve each other with our gifts. So, there's what the Bible lists as spiritual gifts.

[7 : 53] So, are they the spiritual gifts? Well, I'm not sure that these are necessarily the complete A to Z list of spiritual gifts.

And so, for example, tonight's reading where Paul lists a whole bunch of gifts, he may actually just be listing these things because Paul and the Corinthians were having a debate about certain things.

And so, he lists the ones that the Corinthians are interested in, but there may be others. So, I'm quite prepared to accept the idea that the Bible does not contain an A to Z list of the spiritual gifts.

But I do think that from these lists, we can get a good sample of what spiritual gifts might be.

So, let me suggest that there are three sorts of spiritual gifts. There are gifts of service, such as serving other people.

[9 : 06] Perhaps, it's a bit fuzzy where some of these might fall, but perhaps teaching is a form of service. Then there are miraculous gifts, which are things that clearly have nothing to do with anyone's natural ability.

They are clearly a supernatural happening that can only come from God. These include things like healings and miracles, perhaps a gift of special faith.

And then the third kind of spiritual gift might be something like an inspired speech or an inspired utterance.

So, a prophecy or a word of knowledge or a word of wisdom or tongues and its interpretation of tongues might come in that category. So, there are three types, forms of service, the miraculous and inspired speech.

And I think it's important to note that when Paul is talking about spiritual gifts, he doesn't, as we can in the modern church, make a big deal about those gifts which seem more supernatural to those ones which seem more natural.

[10 : 17] So, Paul is at pains to sort of say all are spiritual gifts and sort of flatten out those things that we might just call an ability.

He seems to want to raise up to the level of a gift from God. So, we want to affirm a couple of things, a few things. That all Christian existence is to be led by the Spirit.

We are to bear the fruit of the Spirit. And we are to be empowered by the Spirit in the way that we live our lives. And the spiritual gifts are given to us by the Spirit because God is a gracious God who likes to give us things that are helpful for us.

And we also want to affirm that as well as those things that are clearly supernatural, a gift of the Spirit could be perhaps a natural gift that has been invested with supernatural energy by God.

And by that I mean you may be a painter or a pianist or something, and God gives you some sort of ability to use that ability for the service of His church in a way that maybe if you weren't a Christian you wouldn't use the gift or something like that.

[11 : 39] God is in the habit of redeeming our God-made imageness. So, we're made in the image of God, and God, when He saves us, He's in the process of redeeming us to become more like Him.

And He does that, and I think He gives us gifts of redeeming our character to be used for His service. So, we are led by the Spirit.

We bear the fruit of the Spirit. We are empowered by the Spirit. And God gives us spiritual gifts because He is a gracious God. Spiritual gifts may be supernatural.

They may be empowered natural gifts. So, a working definition I have here, and you saw this a bit in the first part of tonight's reading, is that a spiritual gift is a manifestation of the Spirit through an individual in an event or an enabling for the service of God and or His people.

A manifestation of the Spirit through an individual in an event or enabling for the service of God and or His people. So, that's what a spiritual gift is in broad terms.

[12 : 57] Why does God give spiritual gifts? Well, spiritual gifts are given primarily for the benefit of others. Though, I think spiritual gifts could involve private or personal benefits that help us relate to God in an individual way, provided they are then moving us to be strengthened in our faith so that we can better serve God's people in God's church.

And in 1 Peter 4 verse 10, which we were looking at just before, we're told to serve each other with our gifts. And in Ephesians 4 verse 12, he says God gives people certain gifts to build up His church.

And in tonight's reading, we also get an answer to why God gives us spiritual gifts. See, Paul goes on this description of the church as a body, as one body with many members.

And as Christians, we are part of that body. And God has arranged it so that you, all of us here tonight, would be here at Holy Trinity, and our friends who aren't here tonight but are usually here.

He's arranged that we would be part of this church at this time, and I think He has probably gifted each of you in ways that are designed to bless us corporately as a body.

[14 : 38] See, the way we do church, and not just here at Holy Trinity, all around the world, and particularly in the Western world, is people come and they sit and they consume and then they go home.

But God did not bring you to Holy Trinity tonight and every Sunday night that you come along so that you could learn about spiritual gifts or some other interesting factoid in the Bible.

Nor did He bring you here so that you could be moved by the music. No, God brought you here to Holy Trinity to be part of a body.

And every part of the body is a necessary part. You know, I sometimes think about my body. I try not to do it too much.

Or some might call me body conscious, but look at me. I can't possibly be. And we think, you know, if I lost my little finger or if I lost my little toe, I'd probably be okay.

[15 : 51] I'd be alright. I don't need my little finger to do much. My toes don't do much. I'd be alright. But, you know, then I think, well, if I was walking along one day and suddenly I'm wobbling a bit because I've got none of my toes and apparently they're useful for balance, I'd probably start thinking, you know what, I do actually need that toe.

Or maybe I'm trying to type up some sermon or budget submission or something at work and every time I want to start a new paragraph, I can't reach enter because I don't have my pinky.

You know, we do need each part of our body. We can get by, sure, if we don't have parts of our body.

You see people with disabilities get by all the time. But to function at a highly tuned rate, we need every part of our body firing.

Look what Paul says, verse 21. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect.

[17 : 24] God has arranged the body giving greater honour to the inferior member that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

See, I think God gives His church gifts, spiritual gifts, to enable them to love and serve Him better and to love and serve each other better.

And He gives different gifts to different people to fulfil different roles within the church. And so, if you can't take anything away from tonight, I want you to take this thing away.

You are part of the body and you have gifts that we need you to use. And you cannot sit there and do nothing wishing that you could sing as well as Dave does or preach as well as Jono does or pray as well as Jono does or Naomi does or...

I was trying to think of who prayed before and it was Jono, so there you go. I should have said preach as well as me. But... No, we need you to come as you are with your life, surrender it to Jesus and serve us with whatever gift God has given you.

[18 : 57] God gives spiritual gifts so that His church may be strengthened and in so doing, He enables us to be better at what we're meant to be doing.

And what are we meant to be doing? Living out the Great Commission with increasing boldness and fruitfulness. I think that is why God gives spiritual gifts to enable us to do that better.

So, the big question in Bible scholar land is do Bible... Do, do Bible. Do spiritual gifts work the same today as they did when the Bible was written?

I personally don't think unless I started reading other books I would have asked that question which may give away where I end up falling on this issue.

But some of you also because it is a real thing where there are churches that divide divide and whatever on this issue of how spiritual gifts are meant to look. You may be thinking hang on Chris this is great yep, serve each other in the body no worries but it says gifts of healing miracles what's going on I want to know about these things are they real do they happen can I be a miracle worker can I be the next Benny Hinn?

[20 : 26] So does God still give miraculous gifts to the church?

We're happy I think most of us to say he still gives us gifts of pastors and teachers and people who are gifted in administration but what about tongues?

What about prophecy? What about a word of knowledge or a healing or a miracle? Now basically to paint two big stereotypes there are two types of people in the world when it comes to this issue there are those who are called cessationists which is has at the root of the word there cease i.e. stop so really they should have just been called stoppers but hey and then there are those people who say that spiritual gifts do continue like they were back in the early church and then within that group there's a range of options but they're the two big ideas now the cessationists believe that God gave miraculous gifts like the one the ones we've talked but I've just mentioned tongues and prophecy miracles etc they were given to the church up until the point that the canon was finished and the apostles

Peter Paul etc finished their work and they used some verses which I'm going to give to you but not look at in too much depth except for one like Ephesians 2 18-22 Hebrews 2 2-4 and 1 Corinthians 13 8-13 and say that these these prove this point and I'm the kind of guy who likes to when someone says something really conservative to me I like to engage I like to think that they might be right because I the way I've been brought up the fact that I've had a liberal arts education at a university I am naturally inclined to not have conservative views on things so I try to always have to give conservative people and conservative viewpoints full my full attention because they're probably more right than I unfortunately like to think

I'm often finding myself taking the side of conservative people even though at first point there's something in myself that makes me want to not do that maybe you call that sin I don't know but in this case I can't be this conservative I am not convinced by their arguments from scripture and I take 1 Corinthians 13 because it was the argument that I could best understand though in good faith I have to say not all people who argue cessationism hold 1 Corinthians up as part of their belief but let's look at 1 Corinthians 13 8-13 it says this love never ends but as for prophecies they will come to an end as for tongues they will cease as for knowledge it will come to an end for we know in part but when the complete comes the partial will come to an end now what the cessationists say is that this text means that the complete that it talks about there is the

[24 : 29] Bible the closing of the canon the end of the apostles work and I just cannot I cannot I'm not convinced that when Paul wrote this when the people read the letter that they thought the complete there is the Bible I think that what they had in mind and probably what Paul had in mind was that these things will cease when the complete comes and the complete is Jesus' return that seems to me to be the best reading of that text and other texts as well I just couldn't I tried my hardest to be convinced but I could not be convinced so that pretty much tells you where I've decided to fall I believe God is a God who is still giving gifts even miraculous ones to his church today and

I think we should expect to see them at work amongst us but I want to add some cautionary notes I'm not saying anything like if you don't speak in tongues then you don't have the Holy Spirit or if you don't manifest a miraculous gift of the Spirit then you do not have the Holy Spirit now Jono has said in previous weeks and I'm going to say now that all Christians when they confess that Jesus is Lord when they do that for the first time they receive the Holy Spirit and there is no such thing as an inferior non miraculous working Christian God gives different gifts to different people remember the last few verses of our reading tonight verse 27 says we are all part of the body of

Christ and Paul says that apostles and prophets and teachers are seen as greater than miracles or healing tongues and we should strive for these greater though perhaps less supernatural gifts we are not less Christians if God does not give us miraculous gifts now I say all of this because I think that we and I include myself in this need to be more open to the miraculous and supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in our church life together I think we should be trying to figure out ways where we can hear those of us who think that God maybe has given us a word of wisdom or given us some sort of message or prophecy for our church and we should be testing them and weighing up what they say against scripture in the past

I've had people say they've had a prophecy for me and one time it meant nothing it just didn't make any sense to me at all but another time it did and it spoke to me right where I was at and it actually helped me understand what I was thinking and why I was thinking it and I've heard people give powerful testimonies which I have no reason to doubt we heard one of them what two weeks ago when Jeffrey from RMIT was here talking about how he was lost at sea for six days without any water and they drank sea water and it tasted fresh I mean that's crazy I've heard of people healed with no medical explanation and I think we need to not be afraid or sceptical of a God who is powerful who can do powerful awesome scary perhaps and even exciting miraculous things God is still in the business of giving spiritual gifts to his church he still manifests his spirit through individuals enabling them to serve him and or his people so do we all have our own spiritual gift and if we are supposed to have a spiritual gift how do we figure out if we've got this gift or that gift or what's going on here well I think that the answer to the question do all

Christians have a spiritual gift is yes and perhaps more than one even and I'm also I also think that spiritual your spiritual gift may change from time to time maybe John will no longer be able to play the guitar at Marul Barc Baptist as they already have 25 guitar players no well there you go you might keep that one but at the start I want you to remember I said that as well as the supernatural gifts a gift of the spirit may be something more natural a natural gift that is invested with supernatural energy by God God redeems our man God made imageness our character for his service so I think if you are sitting there wondering what your spiritual gift might be but you happen to have learnt piano all your life or you can sing very well in front of a mirror or you have some other talent that you managed to work on as a younger person because that's when we seem to get all those kind of talents then maybe the reason

[30 : 41] God has saved you and brought you a holy trinity is to bless this church in your use of those gifts in your use of those natural talents or maybe you're sitting there thinking I don't know what my spiritual gift is but you're one of these people who isn't easily annoyed by people who some of us might be easily annoyed by people who take lots of time and effort to care for then let me tell you your gift your spiritual gift is a gift of service I have a friend his name is Aaron and he is one of the most patient people that I know when I have said hello to someone and realised that they're going to annoy me for the rest of my life he is still there gently quietly calmly talking he's the one who takes them home he has a special gift of patience a special gift of service that

I desire I desire that gift so how do you find out what your spiritual gift is there are many courses there are many many different ways that people suggest but here is my suggestion for you a good place to start is to find out what you're good at ask your friends your fellow body parts here at Holy Trinity ask them what they think you're good at stop being so darn modest and just admit that you would have preached this sermon a hundred times better than me and then go and find some opportunities to use your gift of teaching see to work out what spiritual gifts God may have given you I think you need to go and find opportunities to just do it as they say that's why you cannot come and sit here on

Sunday nights and expect for things just to happen to expect to just figure it out one day you can't sit around waiting to get involved after finding out what spiritual gift you has because you know I don't think you'll find out what your spiritual gift is by doing nothing you've got to start getting your feet wet maybe you could do something like this Chris I'm not really sure what my spiritual gifts are but I know you're the youth minister and always looking for great people and I'm a great person would you consider me to be a youth leader and I'll say I'll consider it and then I'll say because that's got great opportunities for you to pastor to practice teaching to serve people and then as I watch you do those things I'll say you know what I don't think you're gifted no not true

I'll say wow you're taking my job I'm leaving this church I'm not needed anymore or maybe you'll go and see Dave and Sharon and say I want to help you run the junior sebs and the girls group and find out if you've got gifts of pastoring or teaching or serving or caring or working with young people or whatever gifts are needed there see Holy Trinity is a church of over 500 people every Sunday 500 people or so come through the door sit in these pews and some chairs out there and that means there are heaps heaps of different ways to get involved and to use your God given gifts and to find out what your God given gifts are and not only that but there are many many mission organizations and parachurch organizations we talk about

CMS often and AFES often but they are two of many many different organizations that just need Christians to just do something to be active in the use of their spiritual gifts the church is a body and it cannot thrive cannot thrive unless all of us do something there is nothing wrong with us desiring a gift that we don't think we have there is nothing wrong with us asking God for gifts that we don't think we have but we must not let it cause us to envy those who have those gifts you desire we must not let our desire for some other gift to stop us using the gifts God has already given us we need to be content with what

[36 : 07] God has given and we need to use what God has given us to love and serve God and to love and serve each other that's what spiritual gifts are all about helping us to love God and to love each other Paul gives us some very good advice at the end of 1 Thessalonians in chapter 5 verses 19 to 22 he says this do not quench the spirit do not despise the words of prophets but test everything hold fast to what is good abstain from every evil if nothing else let us be people who do not quench the spirit but who seek to be more and more filled with the spirit as we seek to live out the great commission with increasing boldness and fruitfulness let us be people who are open to the work of the

Holy Spirit both in our lives individually and also corporately and I and I think we will be a people and a church that will be marked by increasing boldness and fruitfulness in our mission to make more and more disciples of Doncaster and the world around us so let's make that our prayer avatar