

BEGINNING LESSONS ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:2–7

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1 Corinthians 12:2–7 (NIV)

“You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Last week, we spent the morning looking at the first verse of chapter 12, “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” Our theme at that time was spiritual gifts, unopened or misused. One of the problems with spiritual gifts today is that many parts of the body of Christ simply haven’t opened the gifts that are available to us. This was not the problem though with the church at Corinth. They had opened all the gifts and had opened them more than once. But their problem was misusing the gifts. That ignorance of use was what Paul was writing to correct. Today’s passage finds the apostles speaking, under guidance of the Spirit, giving us some foundational truths in the exercise of the gifts or beginning lessons on spiritual gifts. Three words that we’ll key in on which are alliterative: validity, variety, visibility.

I. Validity.

How do we know that a spiritual gift truly comes from God? This is evidently a question at the back of the Corinthians, as Paul writes verses 2 and 3. Many of them had come out of pagan occult practices, where there had been phenomenal things going on. Supernatural things. Even

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though they were worshipping dumb idols, those idols had caused an influence on them. It may very well be that some of them had had ecstatic experiences under which they had spoken in other tongues. We know that the oracle at Delphi fell into a trance and spoke of strange things while in that trance. So the Corinthians were looking at spiritual phenomena happening in their midst, and Paul was saying, “You need to distinguish between what is valid and what is not.”

It may come as a surprise to some in the body of Christ that the gifts of the Spirit are subject to imitation. Maybe another way to put it is they may be reproduced on an inferior basis. But, nevertheless, gifts may be imitated. Tongues, of all the spiritual gifts, is perhaps the most easy to imitate. Evil spirits may possess persons, and persons under the domination of evil spirits may speak in other tongues. We know this to be the case in my family’s experience as missionaries to Tibet. Persons under the impulse of demon spirits may speak in other tongues.

Tongues are very easy to imitate, in the sense that tongues can be made up. A person can simply recite a bunch of gibberish and sound like he or she is speaking in other tongues. We’ll look at valid tongues later. But tongues are easily imitated. It’s, therefore, not hard to understand why some people in the body of Christ are extremely suspicious of it.

The gifts of miracles can also be imitated. We find, in Acts 8:11, an example that Simon Magus was such a person. While under the influence of a power other than God, or other than Jesus Christ, he exerted a miracle. They followed him because he amazed them for a long time with his magic. He was a strong leader in the area of Samaria, because of his ability to do things out of the ordinary. For an Old Testament illustration, we only have to go to Exodus 7 and 8, and find Moses’ contest with the magicians of Egypt who we know in the New Testament as Jannes and Jambres. When Moses threw his rod down and it became a snake, the magicians of Egypt did the same thing. Moses’ rod, of course, being stronger, swallowed up the Egyptians’ rods. When

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Moses smote the water and it became blood, the Egyptian magicians did the same thing. When Moses called forth frogs from the waters, the Egyptian magicians had the same power. After the third plague, though, they were unable to reproduce Moses' miracles. But they did have the ability to operate in the miraculous.

Jesus has told us that false christs and false prophets would appear and perform signs and miracles "to deceive the elect if it were possible" (Matthew 24:24). He very clearly told us that in the end times (and we can start the end times from the Day of Pentecost, which is when the end times began until the return of the Lord) All that is the end times, the last days. During that whole period of time, there would be phenomenal things occurring under the inspiration of evil or cultic power.

In our family's collection of memorabilia from Tibet, there's a thighbone of a young Tibetan woman, which was given to my dad by a converted Tibetan priest. It is the custom, within Tibetan religion, which is very much filled with the occult and evil influences, to call upon the gods of the evil spirits to do things for them. When there is a calamity that affects the whole region, much prayer is sent up to the evil spirits, that the calamity might be changed. As a step of last measure, when something like a famine or a drought has become so severe that nothing has worked, it is within the Tibetan religion and practice for a priest of the area to ask if there is a young virgin girl who will let herself be a sacrifice to the gods so that the calamity might be broken. A young girl will volunteer, go to the pinnacle of the cliff, jump off and so kill herself. When the priests reach the body, they will excise the thighbone, leaving the rest of her as is, as part of the Tibetan burial practices, for the vultures to come and devour the body. But they take the thighbone, especially consecrate it, and at a ceremony, they actually use the thighbone like a horn, and blow through it, summoning the spirits to change the situation. Within the Tibetan

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religion, wherever this practice is used (and it is used very infrequently) there is an immediate answer. Being exposed to that kind of atmosphere as a child, it never even dawned on me there was a possibility that there couldn't be a world in which there was the miraculous. Obviously, there is the miraculous in the world. Some, of evil forces, and others owe their origin to the power of Jesus Christ. We'll talk in a moment about how to distinguish the two, but gifts of miracles can be imitated.

Gifts of healing can be imitated. Christian Science practitioners can recite to you endless accounts of testimonies that occur, not by praying to Jesus of Nazareth, who was born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, died an atoning death and physically rose again from the dead. Not by praying to that Jesus at all, but by praying to a mysterious, philosophical Christ of faith, and the results are displayed.

The difference in this regard, between Christian healing and non-Christian healing, is that Christian healing is a sign of something else. It is a window through which we look into a fuller room. Suppose there is a non-Christian miracle of healing. You see a window, but if you look closely behind the window, there's nothing more than a boarded-upness. There's nothing to see. Just the miracle itself. But with Christian miracles, looking through the room—what do you see? You see that the miracle is a sign of the fact that the body is included in the saving work of Jesus Christ and that this present healing miracle is but a tip-off to the fact that the body itself is embraced in a greater miracle of the coming resurrection. Christian miracles of healing are signs of something greater and yet to follow.

If gifts can be imitated, the question might be asked—why should we bother with them at all? There are people in the body of Christ that say that. If the gifts are so easily to imitate—tongues and healings, for example—why bother with them at all? That's about like saying, since money

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can be counterfeited, why use it? It's because the genuine article is so much better than the counterfeit. Some of the Corinthians would have been concerned about this matter. They were pagans led astray and moved by dumb little idols. That's what Paul calls them. The word that he uses is the word for "little idols" means household gods or little goddesses that sit on a mantelpiece or something like this. And he calls them "dumb." Then, he in a paradox, says, "You were led astray by them" (1 Corinthians 12:2). That is, Paul holds no idea that an idol is simply a neutral force. But behind the idol is a manifestation of an evil presence, which led persons astray who give themselves over to that.

Probably in American culture, people are too smart and too sophisticated on a general level to think that an idol should be paid any attention to. So by and large, they're missing. We substitute things like Ouija boards and popular games like Dungeons and Dragons, which appear of themselves to be very neutral and harmless, but exert powerful spiritual forces as one gets into them.

The little gods were dumb, but the demon forces behind the little dumb gods were violating and destroying life. Therefore, Paul says, "While the gifts can be imitated, the source of the gifts can always be discerned." And the discernment is on a negative and a positive scale. The negative scale is, "No one speaking by the Spirit of God says Jesus be cursed" (1 Corinthians 12:3). And the positive side is, "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Let's look a moment at each of these phrases.

Anyone who says, "Jesus is cursed" cannot be exercising a gift of the Spirit. Paul is evidently referring to something that has happened within the Christian church. We aren't quite sure exactly what may have happened. How could it be possible that someone in the course of a worship service at Corinth would be saying "Jesus be cursed"? That's what Paul is correcting

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here. He's saying, "When that happens, you know that would not be the Spirit of God." The Spirit of God would never say "Jesus be cursed." That leaves us open to several possibilities of interpretation. Let me go over them just momentarily.

Perhaps some at Corinth were worried that a Christian could be violated by an evil spirit while he was praising God in other tongues. After all, when one speaks in an unknown tongue, he does not know what he is saying. It is a peculiar spiritual gift in which the speech mechanism is outside of our control. It is anointed by the Spirit. Therefore, perhaps some of the Corinthians were saying, "How are we to know, when praising God in an unknown tongue, that we are not, in some real spiritual language or some other foreign language, cursing Jesus Christ?" How can we be sure that this gift is operating as a right force rather than something that is evil? Could it be possible that Satan could infiltrate our praying in other tongues?

I have a particular view of prayer; it can't necessarily point to a proof text, but in the modern vernacular, something like this: our communication with the Father in prayer is not subject to being bugged. Nobody can get a tap on the line. It's too hot of a line. And when we pray to the Father, that is really privileged communication.

If this is what is happening at Corinth, then Paul is laying that to rest by saying, "No, not at all. No one speaking under the power of the Spirit could say 'Jesus be cursed.'" I think that should lay to rest any fear of a born-again believer who truly trusts in Christ, a fear of being violated when exercising a spiritual gift. That it might somehow result in the praise of Satan or be involved in the diminishing of Christ. That cannot happen. Because the presence of the Spirit of God protects the believer.

Some others have looked at this text and thought that perhaps it meant that there were unbelievers who would come to the meetings of the Corinthian church and stand up in the

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meeting and curse Christ. Probably Paul would not have been asked about this matter if that had been the case, because the Christians at Corinth would have quickly known that was not a Christian utterance. No question needs to be raised if obviously someone stands up and says “Jesus be cursed,” everybody knows that that person can’t possibly be speaking by the Spirit of God.

There are others saying that this may relate to a backslidden Christian standing up, doing the same thing. But again, that would have shocked the Corinthian church as much as it would have shocked us for someone to do that—unbeliever or backslidden.

Some have looked at this and said, “They were Jews.” Jewish people among the Corinthian church who quoted Deuteronomy 21:23, “Cursed be anyone who hangs upon a tree.” But again, this is a Christian meeting, not a synagogue meeting. It was doubtful that was happening.

So the best possibility was either the fact that Paul was laying to rest the fear of some who were speaking in other tongues, that they could be violated by evil spirits. He’s either saying that or he’s saying this. We know that in the Early Church, not very many years went by before there arose a group of people who were beginning to deny the reality of Jesus, and beginning to substitute philosophical concepts of Jesus under the guise of the word “Christ.” They made a divorce between Jesus and Christ. Jesus was one thing, Christ was another. As these persons came along—called “Gnostics”—they went under a variety of names in the church, from Christian Scientists to liberal Protestant theologians. There is a difference between the Jesus of history and Christ of faith. These persons come along and say it really doesn’t matter what you regard Jesus of Nazareth as, you really can’t know a lot about Him, as Albert Schweitzer said in his book *Quest for the Historical Jesus*. He comes to us as one unknown. Schweitzer really didn’t know who Jesus was—he was a great humanitarian but not Christian in theology. A view

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that it really isn't important whether Jesus was born of a virgin or not, whether He lived a sinless life, whether He was who He said He was. Because it's a view of that particular segment of persons who masquerade as the church that somehow the Early Church invented Jesus and made Him bigger than He was. So, to get to the heart of the Christian faith, we need to find out what the Early Church invented and what the real Jesus was. And stick with the real Jesus, who basically, by and large, is a good ethical leader—not the Savior, not the Son of God in the flesh, not God himself, not the one who atoned for our sins, not the one who physically rose again from the dead.

It's very possible that already at Corinth, as happens a few decades later in the church to which John writes, John talks about those who are denying Jesus is the Christ. And John says that every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God (1 John 4:2). That problem had already begun to occur.

The earthly Jesus was an embarrassment to a great many Christians through the years who have sought to carry the name "Christian." Somehow the earthy Jesus embarrasses them. Paul says that no one can devalue Jesus and be speaking by the Spirit of God. It can't be done. It's no small wonder, therefore, that the charismatic renewal by and large has not been poured out upon liberal Protestantism. Because of the fact that there is no base of belief in the Jesus of the Scripture. No one can say Jesus be cursed and be speaking by the Spirit of God.

The positive aspect of that is no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Spirit. True confession of Jesus' lordship comes by the Spirit.

Paul does not mean to tell us here that everyone who verbalizes the statement "Jesus is Lord" is thereby speaking by the Spirit. He is simply saying that no one can truly say that unless he is

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speaking it by the Spirit. But not everyone who says the verbal term is actually speaking out of the Spirit.

The New Testament tells us—the Lord tells us—“Some in that day will say ‘Lord, Lord,’ and He’ll say ‘I never knew you’” (Matthew 7:23). In other words, there are some who will say “Lord, Lord” who have not repented. And, therefore, they are not speaking by the Spirit. Some will want sort of an escape mechanism from hell and will verbalize the name of Jesus, but it involves no moral repentance, no kneeling down before Him and saying, “I must give myself to You because if I don’t, I perish.”

Others use the term “Lord, Lord,” such as demons. In the New Testament, we find that the demons of all the groups that are around Jesus, the demons are the first to know His identity. In the Gospel of Mark, there are seven chapters in the Gospel before the disciples ever said, “Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God,” but the demons were saying, “You are the holy one of God” (Mark 1:24). And Jesus was having to shut them up, because He didn’t want their testimony. He forbade them to speak. So demons can say, “Lord, Lord.” As James tells us, the devils believe and tremble (James 2:19), but they don’t believe with saving faith.

In Acts 19, there is a kind of confession of Jesus as Lord which is also not of the Spirit. I’d call it a “manipulative confession.” It’s done by seven sons of a Jewish high priest (probably called “high priest” because he’s into the occult, deviating from his own faith in Judaism). These seven sons are used to using code words to do miracles. And they come across a new powerful code word circulating in Ephesus (which specialized in charm words, by the way. It was a city where, if you got the right “abracadabra,” everything loosed in the occult). They thought they had the new abracadabra, and the name was “Jesus.” So they used it on a demon possessed man—it’s one of the funniest stories in the New Testament: The evil spirit that was in the man says, “Jesus

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I know, and Paul I'm acquainted with, but who are you?" The possessed man leaps on the seven men, and they run from the house naked and in great fright. What had they done? They had tried a manipulative confession of Jesus.

It's surprising how many people manipulate the name of Jesus.

There are some people who want to marry a Christian person and they will manipulatively use the name of Jesus until they get the person to the altar and then later, it was just a tactic. There are perhaps other examples that you could think of, where the confession of Jesus is simply manipulative.

There is such a thing as a self-made confession. Self-made confessions is where we say, "I have the right to determine who Jesus is. I accept my own definition and not anyone else's."

This is all in all in contrast to the true confession, which the Spirit makes. Confession really is a Greek word, which means "to say the same thing:" *homologeō*. A true confession is one that says the same thing about Jesus that He said about himself. The same thing about Jesus that the Scripture says about Jesus. No one can make that kind of true confession which involves moral change and repentance, except by the Spirit.

When, therefore, we say what Jesus said about himself, we are recognizing that the Spirit is the source of that confession. And the presence of Jesus is a guarantee of the validity of the gifts. If the focus gets to be simply on the gifts and not upon Christ, then the gifts quickly wither and become perverted or fall into misuse. Jesus Christ must be front and center. The validity of the gifts rests upon a true confession of Jesus.

II. There is, then, a variety of the gifts, which we see in verses 4 and 5.

A diversity in spiritual gifts, which Paul says, "Flows out of the unity that is in God." God the Spirit, God the Son, and God the Father. There are different kinds of gifts. The word "gifts" is

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the word *charismata*, from which we derive the word “charismatic.” It is the plural form of the word for “grace.” Spiritual gifts, therefore, are grace gifts. Grace gifts. The source of the gift is outside of ourselves. It is directly a gift from the Spirit as the source. It’s not some inner, native ability or talent. It is a gift from God.

Perhaps the word that best translates “spiritual gifts” is the English word “present.” When you give presents. When we put out the presents on Christmas Eve for the children, those are not something they have got themselves. They have been purchased by loving parents for the children. They are grace gifts. Hopefully, they’re not simply based on merit.

God gives grace gifts. If they’re a grace gift from the Lord, this means that a present from God will never be bad for you. Some people worry, “If I express a gift, like speaking in other tongues or prophesying, it might be bad for me.” A gift from the Spirit of God can never be bad for you. He is the healthy Spirit, the Holy Spirit. To look down on one of His gifts, therefore, is to—in effect—insult Him as the giver.

The variety of *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12. Basically, the nine gifts fall into three categories. There are gifts which involve the mind—knowledge, wisdom and discernment. There are gifts which involve actions—faith, healings, and miracles. There are gifts which involve speech—tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy.

We’ll look at each of these in turn. There’s a variety of gifts. One Spirit. One Spirit is the origin of them.

In addition to there being a variety of gifts, there are varieties of services. In verses 4 and 5, you’ll find different kinds of gifts, different kinds of services, different kinds of workings. Some say these are synonyms, all referring to spiritual gifts. They all mean the same thing. Others see a subtle shade of difference.

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The word “different kinds of service.” The word “service” is from the Greek word from which we gain the word “deacon.” It means “to serve.” It perhaps expresses the idea of the gifts being real in action. The word *charismata* talks about the gifts as to their source. Here we’re talking about the gifts as they flow into action. There are varieties of action in respect to the unfolding of any gifts. For example, Paul exercises the gift of discernment. But the way that that one gift operates is different when he uses it on several occasions. In Acts 13:9, he immediately repudiates Elymas. He discerns that Elymas’ spirit is of a sorcerer and not from God. So he immediately stops it. But in Acts 16:17–18, there are days he’s followed by a slave girl who’s possessed by an evil spirit. She’s confessing that these were men sent by the most high God, and he doesn’t do anything about it. The reason why he’s waiting for the right time in the Spirit to implement it is that there’s a variety of operations. The same gift—discernment in both cases—but they function differently.

Prophecy also may operate differently. Sometimes, prophecy may come as a general exhortation to everyone. Other times, it may come as an individual exhortation. Sometimes, a general prediction. Other times, an individual prediction. Have you noticed, when one of the spoken gifts is used—like a word of prophecy or a word of interpretation of tongues—that someone might give it in a very strong and forceful way and consistently do it that way? Another person might be consistently soft and low key. That explains the varieties of service, the varieties of ways in which the gifts operate. Someone might have the gift of healing, and their gift might operate in such a way that when a person even comes close to them (like Katherine Kuhlman), that person is immediately slain, so to speak, in the Spirit. And someone else is laid hands on and they get healed, but nothing dramatic happens, so to speak, except the healing, which is dramatic enough. The gifts operate in different ways.

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“There are also,” Paul says, “different kinds of working” (1 Corinthians 12:6). The root word for “working” is “energy.” There are different kinds of energizing, which speaks of the theme that the gifts have different effects on people. Something actually happens when a gift functions, but the gift has different effects.

For example, with the gift of tongues with interpretation, it affects different people in different ways. There are some for whom it doesn’t pertain to their immediate situation or need, but others for whom it came as a straight arrow, a liberation and insight from the Spirit of God, because there are different kinds of effects.

Some, when a prophecy or an interpretation of tongues is given, will be moved to ebullient praise. Others, to reflective thoughtfulness. Others, to quiet weeping. All of this is because the gifts have different effects. Peter’s gift of knowledge, for example, affected death in one instance, in Acts 5, when he knew about Ananias and Sapphira supernaturally. But he also knew that Simon Magus was full of bitterness and captive to sin. The gift of knowledge. But it didn’t result in Simon Magus’ death. So you couldn’t make the statement, from watching Peter, that the gift of knowledge always leads to death. There’s a different variety in energizing.

Paul is saying, “Let’s appreciate the variety of gifts, the variety of operation, the variety of the results that go with the spiritual gifts.”

III. The third key word in this passage is the word “visibility,” in verse 7.

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Visibility. The Spirit is unseen. The Spirit is the non-visible person of God. How does the Spirit become seen, how does He become evident? How does He become manifest? Paul is telling us the Spirit becomes manifest by the exercising of the gifts of the spirit. There is, by the

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way, a great deal of difference between being alive and manifesting yourself. Let me give an illustration of this.

I've only been cut into once in my life, three or four years ago, when I had an appendectomy. I'm scared to death of the surgeon's knife. I've never had a broken bone in my body. I've never had an operation in my life. I was sure, going into that surgery, that this was it. I just knew, when they put me under, that was going to be it. I'm glad I didn't have a lot of time to think about it. It came on suddenly. I had about eight or nine hours, and that was it. I remember, in the waiting room, waiting to get wheeled in. The next thing I knew, I was lying there and I didn't know whether I was just going into surgery or coming out. I was alive. But I was having a terrible time getting in touch with my environment. I wanted to ask the nurse a question and they kept going by. Finally, one came to the foot of my bed to check on me and I summoned every reserve in my body to inquire, the loudest that I could—which I'm sure only came out as a whisper, but to me it felt like I was yelling across a football field—"Is the surgery over?"

When we're born into the family of God, we're born through the power of the Spirit. The Spirit of God dwells in every born-again Christian. No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Spirit. But there are different ways or levels or manifestedness the Spirit has. The Spirit wants to be in contact, through us, with his environment, the Word and the body of Christ. Sad to say, many times the Spirit's dwelling in us finds Him only alive in us but Him not being manifested in us. He wants to be manifest, through us and through His body, in the mind gifts, the vocal gifts, and the action gifts. There's a way He expresses His healing, restorative personality. In fact, the text specifically says "the manifestation of the Spirit was given for the common good." The word "common good" means to bring together, and it can carry the idea of restoration. To put back something that has been destroyed. The Spirit seeks to restore. And not only for the common

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good, in the sense of restoration, but the Spirit wants to come to build up His people and to heal the broken world. So this is why the Spirit is made manifest. He wants to be in contact with us and through us.

When the Spirit wants to do this through us, then the glory does not belong to us when a spiritual gift is exercised, because the spiritual gift has not been given so that one person might be honored, but that the Spirit might express His will and mind and heart and devotion, and that the body of Christ might be built up. I like what Mother Teresa said. She said, “I’m just a little pencil in the hand of God.” How appropriate to describe a spiritual gift. “A little pencil in the hand of God.” No glory in the pencil, since it’s the hand that moves it.

Pierson has given us this helpful summary of 1 Corinthians 12, “Everyone has some gift. Therefore, all should be encouraged.” Paul specifically says, “To each one has been given a manifestation.”

How do you develop the gift? We’ll be looking at that in weeks to come, but one of the keys is, first of all, to go to the Scriptures. Another is to go to the Lord in prayer. Another is regular commitment to the body of Christ, which will encourage and call forth the spiritual gifts. There are more spiritual gifts than the nine that are in 1 Corinthians 12. There is another group in Romans 1 and another in Ephesians 4. No one has all the gifts, therefore, all should be humble. All gifts are for the one body. Therefore, all should be harmonious. All gifts are from the Lord. Therefore, all should be contented. All gifts are mutually helpful and needful. Therefore, all should be studiously faithful. All the gifts promote the health and strength of the whole body. Therefore, none can be safely dispensed with. And all gifts depend upon His fullness, therefore, all should keep in close touch with Him.

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Donald Gee—a great Pentecostal minister who’s little book *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* has been such a blessing to the body of Christ—shares this story about his days as a boy. One of his real delights was his father’s old school atlas, drawn somewhere in the mid eighteenth hundreds. He loved the atlas, especially when he came to the continents of Asia, Africa, and Australia. He would find that the interior of those continents would simply be marked “unexplored” on the map. Rivers ran only in dotted line, because the person who was drawing the atlas doesn’t really know where the rivers go. He could only guess. So he shows it with a dotted line. Lakes were of uncertain shapes. Places would be marked twice over, with question marks, because one wasn’t sure quite where the place was on the map. How different, he says, it is today. Everything has been surveyed. Railroads. Highways. Air routes now cross great expanses, where at one time, these expanses were only uncharted and unknown.

The Holy Spirit may be to you, a whole continent of truth unexplored. But the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Jesus gives us that step in saying to us, “If you, then, who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven given good gifts [Luke says “Holy Spirit”] to those who ask Him” (Matthew 7:11).

I do not want the ministry of the Holy Spirit—either for this church or for us as individuals—to remain as a continent of unexplored truth, but that we become exceedingly familiar with the operation of the Spirit of God and what is on His heart. We can never be content in looking at the Holy Spirit by simply arriving at a certain parcel of knowledge regarding the Spirit. In fact, we are really never told in the New Testament to believe in the Spirit. We are told, instead, to experience the Spirit. It is described of the Spirit that He fills, that He is in us. More important than a head knowledge of the Spirit of God is a relational experience with the Spirit of God. It is in that experience that He becomes manifest to us and to His people.

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Closing Prayer

Our Lord Jesus Christ, even as we speak of the Spirit as being a continent of unexplored truth, I recognize that, for some here today, You in Your own person may be a continent of unexplored truth. There may be friends here today for whom Your personality and Your life largely remain a mystery, an uncharted expanse. Or perhaps judgments have been made of You, which carry over from childhood, which are caricatures. Some may see You as simply a meek and mild, insipid kind of personality, or simply someone who's around for people when they die. They have not seen You as Pilate did, who prophetically cried out, "Behold the man!" (John 19:5). We would today, Lord, to be impressed with You. With Your great life, with Your incredible power, with Your manliness and with Your "godfullness"—You are fully filled with God, because You are God's only Son. And You fully represent us before God as the perfect Man. Sinless, powerful, tender, strong and pure. We praise You. We would seek to know You more. We realize that, in knowing You more, we would come to know the Spirit which You have sent, from the hand of the Father as well. We want to be caught up in You, to be enthralled with You, to experience You in our life. It may be, Lord, that we have settled down to levels of possession of You, that we have grown comfortable with our quart-sized containers, and You are now calling us, in the Spirit, to see the extensibility in us and the infinity which You have to give us. And You're saying, "I want to disturb Your peace, I want to disturb your settledness. I want to expand you and possess more of you." Lord, we open ourselves to that today. We say, on this Pentecost Sunday, with the early disciples, "Spirit of God, come upon us, descend upon us." We know that we will never be the same when Your Spirit resides in us and manifests himself through us. We ask this as people of the Spirit and the church of the Spirit in which the gift of salvation is the most freely prized gift and the gifts of the Spirit after it are flowing from Your own heart. For

BEGINNING LESSONS ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:2-7

these gifts, Lord, are simply an expression of Your love and of Your power. Grant this prayer,

Lord. It pleases You to do this. In Jesus' name. Amen.