
Smooth Operator

Jonathan Srock / General

The Holy Spirit / 1 Corinthians 12–14

When we follow the Holy Spirit's lead, he uses us in powerful ways.

Introduction

We've been talking about the Holy Spirit this summer and as we discuss the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Lord did not just give us gifts without guidelines for using them. Paul left principles especially for public meetings. Chaos accomplishes nothing and hinders God's purposes. Pagan groups considered spiritual people to be so affected by their gods that they would be rambunctious with ecstatic experiences. But God is not confusing.

Consider the gifts of the Holy Spirit as bullets. A bullet doesn't do anything alone. It needs a firearm to be effective. Some of the gifts can be used on their own but many are most effective in community. Paul's instructions on public use of the gifts maintain order so that everyone can benefit. As the Holy Spirit uses us, we learn how to be more effective with gifts. We must remember that Paul's reason for 1 Corinthians 12-14 began out of correction of misuse of the gifts that benefits us all today.

The same Spirit uses us in our gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 11).

1 Corinthians 12:4–6 *ESV*

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

- The Holy Spirit is in charge of the service. While there are many and various gifts of the Holy Spirit is the only one who distributes them.
- Each member of the Trinity works through believers to encourage and exhort his people through three types of manifestations:
 - Gifts – Demonstrated in services and listed in Scripture (1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11).
 - Service – Things we do for others when guided by the Spirit.
 - Working – the effect of God’s power in us for the benefit of others.
- The gifts serve others, and they are the working of the Holy Spirit through us.

Illustration: The Specialist. Each person has one or more gifts to edify the body. Today specialists use their unique skills to help in ways others cannot. The Holy Spirit uses your unique gifts to edify the church. Your unique gifts add flavor to the whole suit of the congregation, making us more savory as a local body of Christ.

- Although Paul talks about different gifts, he may be stressing the Trinity’s work in distributing gifts. The emphasis would be on God the Giver rather than the gifts he gives.
- Think of the gifts as spontaneous. The Spirit decides what gift to use in each moment. He leads the individual by prompting them to use their gift.

1 Corinthians 12:11 ESV

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

- Paul restates his first point from 1 Corinthians 12:4. Two important observations can be seen here.
 - a. We serve the church with different gifts distributed by the same Spirit.
 - b. The Holy Spirit decides which gift and which person once to use. Just as God decided what traits you have, he also decided what gifts to use in you. We must not be envious of one another’s gifts because God uses each of us in a unique way.

- Each Christian usually receives one to three gifts. We learn how to use our gifts to serve the body. But what if the Holy Spirit wants to speak through prophecy while one with the prophetic gift is absent?
- He may choose to give that gift to someone not usually used in it. This is why we must know when the Holy Spirit is prompting us.
- **Application:** God wants to use you in a unique way. As you become skilled in your gifts this is a safe place to learn how to hear the Holy Spirit and obey his prompting. If you aren't sure about his prompting, God has put in place great leadership to help you grow in your gifts.

The Holy Spirit directs the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

- Romans 12:4-5 offers the same language about the body of Christ and its members as 1 Corinthians 12. Here are several principles to benefit us.
 - a. The gifts bring unity to the church.
 - i. Each member works in concert with other members to encourage, edify and exhort the whole body.
 - ii. Our gifts bind us together so that we feel for one another in their situation. If one member is honored, all are honored and if one member is persecuted, all are persecuted.

Illustration: There is no "I" in team. Everyone plays together and helps one another. There are no superstars in Jesus' body except Jesus himself. We benefit one another best when we do not try to do more than the Holy Spirit needs of us in each moment.

- i. Paul asks seven questions (1 Corinthians 12:29-30) that expect a negative answer. It is clear, especially from teaching in 1 Corinthians 14, that he is referring to public use of gifts. No person has every gift.
- ii. For example, speaking in tongues is experienced in Spirit-baptized believers as a physical sign that continues in their prayer language. Paul

does not say only a few speak in tongues. Later, he wishes that everyone speaks in tongues as he does. He distinguishes between private tongues and their public use (1 Corinthians 12:30).

b. How do you know the Spirit is prompting you to use your gift?

1. Listen to God's voice. I've found that oftentimes the Holy Spirit brings a holy hush before he uses a gift.
2. He might prompt you with a verse in Scripture or a biblical idea to share.
3. Sometimes what God is speaking in your personal life may also be meant for the body of Christ.
4. Your mind may focus on an issue continually until you speak out about it.
5. The Holy Spirit uniquely prompts us and he may speak to you in a way only you sense.

c. The gifts bring diversity to the church.

- i. Each member has his or her own gifts to benefit the body, so that they add a rich blessing to the rest.
- ii. Our diversity comes from being unique members of the body. Our unity comes from working together as the body.
- iii. What is meant by, "Eagerly desire the greater gifts"? If the Spirit gives them, how can we desire greater ones?
 1. The idea here may be that we eagerly desire to use our gifts in a greater capacity.
 2. It might refer to the Spirit's prompting for the right gift at the right time.
 3. The greater gifts may refer to those that more easily encourage, equip and enhance the whole body of Christ.

- iv. Paul makes reference to our private parts that we cover-up. Some people prefer to serve with their gifts behind the scenes rather than in public. The body needs both.
 - v. Your gifts are not a badge of spirituality but for Jesus' body in his timing and at his command.
 - vi. You and your unique gifts complete Christ's body. Others benefit from your gifts when the Spirit prompts you.
 - vii. None of the gifts lists in the New Testament contain a complete catalog of them which shows their diversity.
 - viii. The gifts are not automatic and must be continually used. They can be rekindled (2 Timothy 1:6), neglected (1 Timothy 4:14) and quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19).
 - ix. Every gift is necessary for the body. The greatest gift is the one used as the Holy Spirit directs.
- **Application:** You are part of a team. You don't have to do it all yourself. God didn't give you all of the gifts because each of us needs one another. You must become comfortable in your gifts so everyone can benefit from each other.

The gifts are exercised in love (1 Corinthians 13).

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 ESV

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

- Chapter 13 is between the other two chapters because it's the first rule in the spiritual gifts manual. This chapter's theme reminds us that our gifts are worthless if they are not driven by love.

- In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 Paul alludes to several gifts, referring to them all, as insignificant without love.
- Love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Spiritual gifts are secondary to the character the Holy Spirit is cultivating in us.
- **Application:** Nothing you do is worth anything to anyone if it's not powered by love. Loveless acts can hurt others around you. The Holy Spirit can be more effective in an atmosphere of love with the gifts. Use your gifts in love for greater impact.

Principles for operating in the gifts (1 Corinthians 14).

- In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul distinguishes between private and public gifts in service and gives principles for their public use.
- Speaking in tongues is a major topic of this chapter and Paul encourages its use in public only with interpretation. This gift's usage depends on its context (1 Corinthians 14:26).
- In private, speaking in tongues doesn't need interpretation because it edifies you. As Paul says, "I will pray with the Spirit and with my mind." During prayer, the believer feels a personal connection to God's presence while speaking in tongues
- The Spirit chooses and uses you in whatever gifts he deems necessary in each moment. He may use you in different than you are used to.
- Following the Spirit's prompting maintains order. Chaos would destroy the Spirit's work among the body. Seek to build up the body (1 Corinthians 14:12, 19).
- During the public operation of the gifts, speaking in tongue must be interpreted to be understandable to everyone present. Otherwise, the speaker should edify themselves privately.

- Speaking in tongues can be a witness of the Holy Spirit to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22-25).
 - When unbelievers hear a person speak a foreign language they haven't learned followed by interpretation from another person, they will conclude that the foreign language comes from God.
 - There are instances of foreigners hearing believers using their native tongue followed by a perfect interpretation from another person not knowing their language. The language can be either angelic or human (1 Corinthians 13:1).
- Use your gift in concert with the order of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:26-33, 40).
 - The Holy Spirit will direct the activities of the service. Everyone is edified as long as we follow his leading.
 - If someone speaks out of turn, godly and discerning leaders sensitive to the Holy Spirit will address it. Scripture tells us God has placed them in authority over us (Hebrews 13:17). They are called to lead in a loving and gentle manner.
 - We are all learning and growing in following the Spirit's leading in using gifts. Misusing gifts can be a teachable moment.
 - Prophets must also be orderly (1 Corinthians 14:29-33). Just as only a few speak in tongues with interpretation, only a few prophets speak. Others with the prophetic gift carefully weigh what is prophesied.
 - Everyone, including prophets, can control their gift (1 Corinthians 14:32). The Holy Spirit is the conductor of the symphony bringing harmony to many musicians.
- Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. We must be careful to exercise our gift without misusing it or quenching the gifts (1 Corinthians 14:39-40). Don't stop one another from using their gift.
- Although misusing the gifts is possible, the Holy Spirit must have free reign among us. The benefits far outweigh the dangers.

Conclusion

Paul outlines many detailed principles for public use of the gifts and following the Holy Spirit's lead. As long as we exercise our gifts as the Spirit prompts, we can confidently edify others and glorify God. As we grow in our gifts they edify and encourage the believers around us. This brings unity to a diverse body. Use the powerful gifts the Holy Spirit gives you and do not be afraid to follow his leading. Seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit with fervor! They are vital to Christ's body.