

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 31

Spiritual Gifts, Their Real Purpose

by Sharon K. Griffiee

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NIV) - *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

The genuine function [purpose] of any of the gifts of the Spirit must be accompanied by the love of Christ. If the fullness of God's love (the key ingredient), is missing in any of the gifts we have grounds to suspect satanic activity. It takes God's love to fill the gift with genuine purpose.

Several years ago, a Christian friend wrote with the following concern. She had become involved with a group who were firm believers in speaking in tongues. Though my friend did not speak in tongues, the group was constantly putting pressure on her to speak in tongues. As a result, each time she met with them she became increasingly resentful, because she was feeling judged by them. In fact, the pressure became so intense it became a stumbling block for her.

In seeking my counsel, she shared her belief that according to scripture, tongues is *one* of the gifts given *as the spirit wills*. Therefore, it is not our place to determine what our gift is to be, because it is as the spirit wills. My Christian friend was right on target in her interpretation. Scripture confirms that tongues is one in a long list of gifts, given by the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of edifying or building up the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (KJV) - *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

My friend's concern was well-founded, "If it is indeed the Holy Spirit who divides the gifts severally as he will, why all the emphasis by this group on tongues?" Why indeed? After praying about my friend's concern of how the members of the group were treating her, I was able to identify the workings of the false spirit behind their demands. The adversary, to stir up contention within the body, was using a beautiful gift that God had placed in the church, as a pawn.

Through craftiness, the gift of tongues was not being used for the genuine purpose God intended, that of edifying or building up the body of Christ. On the contrary, the gift of tongues itself was being lifted up as something to be prized and sought after, something to be worshipped. The Lord revealed the gross error of worshipping the gift, rather than God - who is the Giver of the gift. Which begs the question, is it the gift that transforms us, or the Holy Spirit working *through* the gift that transforms us? The truth, firmly embedded within the question, is our Christian safeguard from deception.

The members in this group had literally taken one gift, the gift of speaking in tongues, and made a religious doctrine out of it. Through intimidation [pressure], they in so many words were saying, *if*

you want to be a part of our [elite] group, if you want to gain the power of the spirit, you too must seek this gift. Make no mistake, the devil tried similar power tactics on Jesus, but to no avail.

Luke 4:6-8 (KJV) - *And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them...If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

My friend was being tempted with the supposed instant power this "gift" could bring her. What was to be gained, but a heightened sense of security and status among her peers? She could succumb to their pressure to seek after and serve the gift; or she could follow her heart to freely seek after and serve God.

The Holy Spirit, who leads and guides his children into all truth, manifested His light, truth, and wisdom in no uncertain terms. My friend knew in her spirit that it was time to move on - to walk away from that group. How could she do it? The answer is simple. When our focus is on the Giver (God), rather than on the gift itself, then we have the freedom to walk in faith with our Lord, totally depending upon the Spirit that empowers the use of all the gifts.

The controversy over spiritual gifts is not something new. Satan is always up to his old tricks. In fact, Paul speaks about it in the Bible. He dealt with this very issue in his first letter to the Corinthians. Since he was dealing with their carnal (fleshly) nature, he had to spell it out for them. In effect, Paul was saying to them, "*brothers and sisters listen up! The Spirit doesn't make errors in judgment. You don't have to run after the gifts. The Spirit knows what gift you need to function properly in the body of Christ.*"

I Corinthians 12:27-30 (NIV) - *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers,*

then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

Thank God, we do not need to have the same gifts, to enjoy the *same* Spirit. Paul says the Spirit has placed us in the body, as He wills, based on the gift He has given us. Praise God, "*the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*" (**I Corinthians 12:7**) All we have to do is to claim by faith and enjoy functioning in the gift God has given each of us. This is building each other up, in love, in the body of Christ!

The bottom line: The *real* purpose of spiritual gifts is for edification of the body of Christ. If our focus is on our gift, then this is a sign that we are walking in the flesh, not in the spirit. Why? If we are truly walking in the spirit, our whole focus, mission and purpose will be centered on Father God who is the Giver of all gifts.

Questions For Personal or Group Study:

1. What "key" ingredient must every spiritual gift have, if it is to carry out its genuine function in the body of Christ? (**I Corinthians 13:1-3**)
2. Who determines what spiritual gift each member of the body of Christ will be assigned? (**I Corinthians 12:11**)
3. How does Satan use spiritual gifts as pawns to tempt believers to worship him? How did Jesus deal with similar temptations? (**Luke 4:8**)
4. Controversy over spiritual gifts is not something new. Paul dealt with the Corinthians on this very issue. What was the root cause of their contention? **See: I Corinthians 3:1-9**
5. What is the real purpose of spiritual gifts? **I Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:12-13**