

Supernatural Gifting – Supernatural Power

Spiritual Gifts

If you read the third and fourth chapters of the Gospel of Luke, you will find a sequence of events at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus that helps us understand how God works. At the beginning of his ministry, at 30 years of age, Jesus was baptised. As he was baptised, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove. Then in the first verse of Chapter 4, Luke says that Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for 40 days he ate nothing and was tempted by the devil. After 40 days in the wilderness, he returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. One of the first things he does is to go to the synagogue where he reads from the prophet Isaiah. And what does he read? ***"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* (Luke 4: 18 & 19)** From there, Jesus goes off to heal the sick, to preach and teach and to do all sorts of wonderful acts which announce the coming of the Kingdom of God.

In his Gospel, Luke is labouring a point so we don't miss it. Jesus is doing all these things in the power of the Spirit. He is demonstrating what the life of a man filled with the Spirit of God looks like. It's because Jesus is full of the Spirit that he is able to withstand the attacks of the devil. It's because Jesus is full of the Spirit that he is able to heal the sick, preach good news to the poor, bring recovery of sight for the blind. It's because he is full of the Spirit that he is able to avoid an assassination attempt. The same Holy Spirit that filled Jesus is given to us. The same Spirit who gifted Jesus distributes gifts to us. The same Spirit that anointed Jesus produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control in us. Jesus is the living demonstration of what can happen to us when we live in the power of the Spirit.

Are Gifts For Today?

Over the years there has been some debate about whether the spiritual gifts are for today. Some Christians believe that the gifts of the Spirit were given to the early church to get it launched, but now they are no longer needed. Much like the booster rockets on the space shuttle. Something to get it into orbit, but then it has its own momentum to keep going. I have difficulty with that understanding of scripture. If the spiritual gifts were only for then and not for now, are we now supposed to operate with our own wisdom and our own strength? I've seen churches advertise themselves by saying "We are not a charismatic church". Really? The charismata are the grace gifts of the Holy Spirit. Does that mean that their church operates without the spiritual gifts? My understanding of New Testament teaching is that without the power and gifts of the Spirit, the church is virtually useless. It's only when we acknowledge our own weakness and depend on the power of the Spirit that anything supernatural and worthwhile happens in the Kingdom of God. I need supernatural power and supernatural gifting. If you believe you can do the things Jesus asked us to do without the power and gifts of the Spirit, I would be very interested to know how that works for you. The only way I can live the life that Jesus called me to is to be filled with the Spirit. Listen to the words of Paul to the Corinthians that I read last week.

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines". (1 Cor 12: 7-11 NIV)

Spiritual Gifts Are Not A Measure Of Spirituality.

The Corinthian church had the whole array of spectacular spiritual gifts, yet it was one of the most dysfunctional churches of its time. They had more spiritual gifts between them than they knew what to do with. Tongues, prophecy, healings, miracles – you name it. Because they had

all these gifts they became incredibly arrogant. They began to believe that the more gifts they had, the more spiritual they were. The most gifted people in the church thought they were the spiritual elite and that everyone else was a second class Christian. Actually they were incredibly immature. Spiritual Gifts are not a measure of spirituality. Nor are they prizes or rewards for spiritual Christians. They are gifts of Gods grace, and they are given to brand new and immature Christians, as well as those who have been following Jesus for a long time. So let's look at some more of these gifts.

Miracles "The God given ability to authenticate the ministry and message of God through supernatural means which honour Him"

The purpose of this gift is not to draw attention to the miracles themselves, but to draw attention to Christ. Miracles don't convince everybody. Jesus acknowledged that. But for some people, a miracle helps them believe. Here's an example. The Indonesian evangelist Petrus Octavianus once told of an incident when he was preaching in Indonesia. The night before he was due to speak, he couldn't sleep. The loud croaking of giant bullfrogs kept him awake, and finally, in frustration, he threw open his bedroom window and spoke to the frogs "In the name of Jesus Christ, be quiet!" He says that for the rest of the night, there wasn't another bullfrog croak. He slept peacefully. The next day he was speaking to a large crowd in an aircraft hangar with a tin roof. Suddenly there was a tropical downpour that was so bad, no one could hear him preach. He had been preaching about the power of God. The Lord reminded him about the frogs, and asked him if he believed he could stop the rain. So Petrus prayed and asked the Lord to stop the rain while he spoke. The amazing thing was, the rain stopped over the hangar, but it rained all around it. As soon as Petrus had given the invitation to follow Jesus, it poured again. That miracle was an authentication of Gods power that convinced many people to follow Jesus.

The gift of miracles is not to work miracles for miracles sakes, but to demonstrate that God is who He says he is. Don't you think we need this gift in our church?

Prophecy. "The God given ability to reveal truth and proclaim it in a timely and relevant manner, for understanding, correction, repentance or edification. There may be immediate or future implications."

A prophet is one who utters an inspired message from God. In its simplest form, a prophet listens to what God is saying and passes that message on. It's not the same as inspired preaching, although the intent of preaching and prophecy is the same – to build up the body of Christ. Often the preacher is inspired both in the preparation and the delivery of the message, whereas the prophet is given something by the Lord to pass on to others exactly as it is. Often we think of prophecy as being predictive, but there are only three instances in the book of Acts where a prophetic word is telling about the future. I believe this is one of the most misused gifts in the church today. So much is accepted as being from the Lord, when it is not tested as the scripture tells us to do.

The scripture tells us that any word brought as a prophecy to the congregation must be weighed and tested before it is accepted as a word from the Lord. Here are some things we can note that will help us determine if this is a genuine prophecy.

- **Who brings it?** Is it someone we know, who lives a life of integrity and maturity before the Lord. The integrity of the prophecy so often rests on the integrity of the prophet. Is this person submitted to the appointed leadership of the church?
- **Is it in line with Gods word?** The Bible is Gods word to us, and therefore is 10 out of 10. If a word brought by an individual doesn't line up with Gods word, it should be rejected.
- **How is it delivered?** Is it delivered in a spirit of humility and compassion for Gods people or in anger and condemnation? Jeremiah brought some very hard words to the people of Israel, but most of the time he was weeping when he delivered them.
- **Who is it for?** Is this something God has for the whole church, or for a group within the church, or for an individual?
- **Timing?** Does it have to be brought right now, or can it be submitted to the leaders of the church first? If it is of God, it will stand scrutiny.
- **Does it build up the church?** Genuine prophecy promotes spiritual growth and encourages believers.

There is much more I could teach on this. Much of the misuse of this gift arises out of the individualism of our Western Christianity, where people do not see the need to exercise gifts in the context of the local body of believers. There has been huge damage done to the credibility of the church by itinerant speakers who have brought what they believe is a prophetic word from the Lord, and have not submitted that word first to the leadership of the church. We need this gift to be exercised, but it must be exercised in the context of humility and the scrutiny of the local church.

Discernment of Spirits "The God given ability to distinguish between truth and error, good and evil, right and wrong, what is human nature and what is divine grace."

This gift protects the body of Christ. We need people in the body of Christ to exercise this gift, to be able to discern supernaturally what is happening when we see a manifestation of power, or something going on in the spiritual realm. For example there has been damage done in the past by well meaning Christians who have thought that some symptom of mental illness was demonic in origin. Not everything we see comes from God, and nor is everything supernatural. Sometimes we need to ask if this is something arising out of the human spirit that is perhaps just wishful thinking or immaturity on the part of a believer; or is it something that is Satanic in origin that will produce destructive behaviour; or is it something that God is doing. This gift needs to be exercised with wisdom and care.

We see an example of this gift in **Acts 16:16** "*Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.*

What this servant girl was saying was perfectly true. But the origin of her behaviour was Satanic, and Paul was able to discern that. Those who have this gift are usually slow to come to judgement, are prayerful, are spiritually intuitive. They are able to see issues clearly – even if they can't explain why in a logical manner. In my experience it's often the wife of a Pastor who exercises this gift. With the rise of cults and demonic activity, we need people who can discern truth and error.

Tongues. "The God given ability to speak, worship or pray in a language unknown to the speaker".

Whole books have been written on this gift, and discussion about the gift of tongues usually generates more heat than light. The reason that this gift has caused so much heartache is because there is no objective test that can be applied to determine whether it is genuine. How do we know if this person is speaking from an over-emotional state, is a demonic counterfeit, or it is a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit? These are the questions that have perplexed, and sometimes frightened Christians about this gift.

What are we talking about when we say someone has this gift? It's the ability to speak in a language the speaker hasn't learned, that the speaker doesn't understand, and that is not understood by the hearers. It's a communication between the human spirit, and the Spirit of God. Some Bibles translate this as ecstatic utterance, which implies that the person is out of control when they speak in tongues. There is nothing compulsive or ecstatic about it. The language is under the control of the speaker. Usually it is exercised in private prayer and praise, although occasionally it is used in a public time of worship. Those who have this gift find an incredible sense of release in their prayer and praise to the Lord. It's not a gift to be feared. It's a gift, given like all the other gifts, to build up the church.

In the brief time I have today, I want to say a few things about this gift.

Not everyone is given this gift. I'm aware that there are some who teach that speaking in tongues is **the** indicator that a person has been baptised or filled with the Holy Spirit. I have had people say to me that unless I have spoken in tongues, I haven't received the Holy Spirit at all. Scripture doesn't teach that. In fact, to insist that everyone must speak in tongues is to

take a work of grace and make a law out of it. So if you don't have this gift, don't feel as though you are a second class Christian.

It's a gift to be exercised with caution in public. Paul teaches the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 14 that when there are unbelievers present in a meeting, the use of the tongues gift is not appropriate, as unbelievers will be left in confusion. If this gift is exercised in a public setting, it will be a message given by God for the whole church that will build up the believers. That message will only build up believers if the message in tongues is interpreted.

It is a gift to be used in private. Many people who have this gift speak of the way it has been such a help to them in their personal prayer and worship. They are praying and worshipping the Lord with unknown words that are too deep for their mind to understand. The result of this is a sense of intimacy with the Lord that inspires them to serve and build up others.

If you don't understand this gift, don't despise it. There are lots of things God does that are beyond our rational thinking. As soon as we have a God that we can understand, He is too small to worship. Tongues is a beautiful gift given to believers by a loving Father who wants to give good gifts to His children. If he gives you this gift, thank Him for it, and use it.

Interpretation "The God given ability to make known to the body of Christ the message of the person speaking in tongues"

This gift goes with the gift of tongues. It's the ability to give sense of what has been said in an unknown tongue. It's an interpretation of the message for the church. You need faith to exercise this gift. The congregation has no way of checking that either the tongue or the interpretation is genuine, except where the gift of discernment is operating. That's what makes these two gifts very scary territory for Christians who like to have all their "t"s crossed and their "I"s dotted.

The Context of the Body of Christ.

Today the gifts we have studied are some of the most difficult for us to understand. They are probably the gifts that have made Christians the most nervous about the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet these are the very gifts that demonstrate in such supernatural ways that God is at work among us. One of the most astounding things I ever heard in a church meeting, was a church leader who stood up and complained about what was happening in the church. He said "There is too much emphasis on the supernatural around here!" God help the church if there is no supernatural power, and we are just doing it all without Gods intervention.

The safeguard for the use of these gifts is the body of Christ. It's the context and oversight of the body of Christ that gives us security. I'm always wary of itinerant prophets, faith healers and miracle workers who are not under the authority of any local congregation. These people breeze in, create havoc, then breeze out again, not taking responsibility for what they have said or done. It happens on a national level as well as a local church level. There needs to be a submission to recognised leadership of a local church, so that gifts can be used in a God given context. I believe there are two contexts where we should be using the gifts of the Spirit the most. The first is within our small groups, where we can be held accountable, and where we can learn and make mistakes without condemnation. But if you read the New Testament, you will find that the forum where the gifts were most often exercised was out amongst unbelievers. During the 1960's and 1970's, there was a worldwide outpouring of the Spirit which resulted in a rediscovery of the spiritual gifts. But the sad thing was, they were mostly exercised within the church. What would have happened to our world if like the early church, we had taken the power of the Spirit out into the marketplace? I believe that the desire of God is that we learn to use the gifts of the Spirit within the local church so that we are equipped to live in the power of the Spirit out in the world. Let's learn to use all that the Spirit gives us, so that the world may see the supernatural power of God. Then we will be living the way Jesus did.

David McChesney, Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland