

SLIDE ONE

Holy Spirit X

Last Sunday we spent some time looking at the various gifts of the Spirit that are mentioned in the New Testament. We want to come back to the gifts in a few moments, but I wish to preface that with a brief review of our last point from last week.

And that is simply this. Paul reminds us that the use and operation of the gifts must always be done under an umbrella of love.

In fact, this exhortation of Paul's applies not just to spiritual gifts but to everything that we as followers of Jesus do in life.

Stephen Covey, the author of the seven habits of highly effective people talks about our relationships with one another in terms of a bank account. He points out that we have the opportunity to make regular deposits into our relationships.

We have the opportunity to make our relationships stronger and more resilient as we consistently demonstrate love in words and deeds.

If we consistently do this, when a rough spot comes along, we have some reserves to draw on, so that while there might be a strain on the relationship, there will be sufficient reserves in our account to weather the storm.

When we engage in the work the Lord has called us to do, when we begin to use the Spiritual gifts God has given us, we are not perfect. Sometimes our best efforts in ministry may result in a glitch in a relationship.

This reality is why we need to be consistently building those relationship bank accounts, constantly topping them up with acts of love.

For example, one of the gifts of the Spirit is prophesy. Now when we hear this word we tend to automatically think about predictions for the future.

But most of the biblical prophecies were not about the future, rather they were situations where God spoke through people to challenge the nation or challenge individuals about their spiritual condition.

And if you are open to the gifts of the Spirit, God may choose to use you to speak to me or someone else about something of a spiritual nature.

These kinds of discussions can place a strain on relationships, so it is so important that we always operate under the umbrella of love and continually strengthen and augment those relationship bank accounts.

So, an overriding principle is to live and operate the gift or gifts that the Spirit has provided under the umbrella of love.

The second major principle is to realize that the gifts of the Spirit are provided with intended purposes.

All ministry activity, and indeed the life and actions of the believer should be directed to the advancement of God's purposes.

Let's consider some of those key purposes.

First: Growing the Kingdom.

SLIDE TWO

Remember that as our Lord was leaving this earth, he gave his disciples what we have come to know as the great commission. It is found in Matthew 28:18-120 (NLT) where we see Jesus saying:

"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

One of the purposes of our lives is to make disciples and teach them the way of Jesus.

Our denomination emphasizes the need for us as believers to be engaged in the way of Jesus. (The little cards)

And one of the markers for us to evaluate ourselves with respect to actually living out the way of Jesus, is to ask whether we are actively engaged in coaching and encouraging others to be a follower of Jesus. In other words, actively engaged in our calling to make other disciples.

I think we all have room to grow in this calling to make disciples and one of the first steps for growth in this area is to accept the great commission as our own, to be in pursuit of the Spirit to help us, and to be desiring the Spirit's gifts to make our coaching and encouraging more successful.

A **second** purpose for our ministry and the operation of the Spirit's gifts in our ministry is for the edifying or building up the church, that is the body of believers, or the body of Christ.

Paul spends a great deal of ink in his first letter to the Corinthians teaching them this important principle. It would seem that they certainly were apparently big on the use of Spiritual gifts such as prophesying and speaking in tongues.

But they were missing the key point that the operation of these gifts needed to harmonize with the purposes of God.

SLIDE THREE

Listen to Paul's words from I Corinthians 14:5 (NIV)

*I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, **so that the church may be edified.***

The Greek word translated as edify means building up or strengthening. So, we see then that Paul is reminding the Corinthians that using the gifts must have purpose, in this case building up and strengthening the church so that it might be more effective in its great commission purpose.

A **third purpose** for our ministry and the operation of the Spirit's gifts is that the church, that is the body of believers and individual believers, might be encouraged.

There are many words of encouragement to be found in the New Testament letters. Obviously, the writers and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit resulted in encouragement being a key theme in these New Testament letters.

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And as we noted last week, one of the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of encouragement. Remember Paul's words from Romans 12:8 (NLT)

If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging.

I believe that this is one of the most under valued, one of the most underappreciated, one of the most easily used, but one of the most under used of all the spiritual gifts.

I think we tend to down-play its usefulness because it is not what we might term one of the supernatural gifts and so we malign its value and fail to use it as we should.

And yet the need to encourage and the value of encouragement is mentioned over a dozen times in the New Testament.

We are told to desire spiritual gifts. So, why not desire the gift of encouragement?

Ask God to reveal to you who might need a word of encouragement. That in essence is asking the Holy Spirit for the gift of a word of wisdom so that you can minister effectively to others.

And don't constrain yourself to within the church family but think about our community. Think for a moment of all of those who have worked under trying conditions during this pandemic.

The using the gift of encouragement harmonizes with the goal of building up and strengthening the church.

A **fourth** purpose for the Gifts of the Spirit is that their operation through believers would produce the fruit of the Spirit. It only makes logical sense that if we are being equipped with Spiritual gifts then we would be producing spiritual fruit.

I have in my collection a wide variety of tools collected over the years. They were used to produce a number of things. Houses were built, and houses were remodeled. Furniture was built and repairs made to a wide variety of things too numerous to mention.

How silly it would be to collect a workshop full of tools but never use them to produce anything.

God gives Spiritual gifts with the intention that they would be used to produce Spiritual fruit.

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We now go to Galatians 5:16 (NIV) where Paul paints a contrast between the lives of those who are not led by the Spirit with those that are and the fruit each demonstrates.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

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The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

SLIDE SEVEN

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

We have only to look at our own Canadian secular world culture around to validate Paul's assessment of lives lived who have not yielded to the Lordship of Christ and the leading of the Spirit.

By stark comparison those who have come to Christ and yielded to the Spirit's leading are producing, or should be producing, a much different kind of fruit.

Now as we mentioned a couple of sessions ago there can be considerable discussion about the evidence of being filled or baptized in the Holy Spirit. And one of the ways that we test the validity of those claiming to Spirit filled is to examine the fruit being produced.

The bottom line is that a Spirit Filled life should be producing spiritual fruit.

And a Spirit filled life should be devoid of the issues that Paul characterized as typical of the secular world.

So, we have briefly covered four God given purposes for our lives and the gifts that the Spirit provides to us as believers to accomplish God's purposes for our lives.

It is important to remember then that the operation and use of Spiritual gifts must harmonize with God's general purposes and the purposes he has for our individual lives.

Now for our last thought today I want to speak about two important but seemingly contradictory words when it comes to the operation of Spiritual gifts. These words are 'caution' and 'confidence'.

As previously mentioned, the infilling of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit are the God given powers to individual believers and collectively to the church.

Satan is the sworn enemy of God, the church, and the individual believer. So, we need to exercise caution knowing that we will do everything he possibly can to sow confusion and discord among believers, and to discredit the church in the eyes of the unbeliever.

One of the tools at his disposal is the imperfection of our human nature. Sometimes when we try to operate within the leading of the Spirit our human nature may result in a less than a perfect result.

So here is an important point to remember. We need to be cautious and exercise scriptural safeguards but avoid being over cautious. Being over cautious results in the gifts of the Spirit being left dormant and the blessing and benefits that God intended not being realized.

Let me give you an example. Many years ago, a well meaning individual, someone who loved the Lord, came to me on a Sunday morning and said pastor the Lord is telling me you need to get the solar panels off the roof before it collapses.

Now it so happened that I had helped put the huge roof trusses in place during the construction and in addition when the solar panels were installed it was necessary as per building code to have an engineering assessment. And in reality, the panels were considerably lighter than even a moderate snow load.

This situation is perhaps an extreme example, but it illustrates a very important principle. When we are not sure about the leading of the Spirit seek affirmation. In this case, because the individual consulted another person before sharing the information with the church any confusion the enemy might have used to his advantage was thwarted.

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We see an example of this in Acts 13:2 where the apostles collectively prayed to discern and affirm the direction of the Holy Spirit.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

So, don't be over cautious, but if the Lord is laying something on your heart you are not sure about or doesn't seem quite right seek other trusted Spirit filled believers to help you pray it through seeking confirmation.

Now I want to share with you one other story that happened many years ago. I was travelling to small Eastern Ontario churches with a youth team, doing children's ministry and sharing the word.

We were in the Sunday night service during the praise and worship time and the Lord laid on my heart a word of knowledge, a word that there was someone on the right hand side of the congregation that the Lord wanted to fill with the Holy Spirit.

I resisted sharing that word initially but eventually I tapped the pastor on the shoulder who was leading the service and shared what the Lord had given me. We stopped the service and prayed. An older man stepped out of his seat came to the altar and God filled him with the Spirit in an amazing way.

A couple of key points about this story. God still works the miraculous through his Spirit.

God's purposes were fulfilled. I'm sure the individual was given more power and anointing to share his faith and live for the Lord going forward.

The church was edified and built up. God was glorified.

But sometimes the story doesn't end quite so perfectly. I've shared words that I believe the Lord laid on my heart and there was no response.

None of us are perfect, we operate within the bounds of our human imperfection. And I readily admit that I may not have had that word quite right on that occasion.

And then there are occasions where I share a word and there is no response. No response that is until the next morning or the next week when some calls and says O pastor that word was for me. Unfortunately, the late confirmation negates the church being edified and built up,

Listen carefully. Having the freedom and confidence to share with others what God is laying on our hearts, and receiving confirmation is a powerful affirmation that God is indeed at work in our midst in powerful ways.

If you are in a position to affirm what is being preached, what is being taught in a small group, or being heard though a word of wisdom, offer that affirmation. Affirming the work of the Holy Spirit brings glory to God and is in alignment with God's purposes.

This brings us to the end of our series on the Holy Spirit.

In summary, be in pursuit of more of the Holy Spirit in our lives. You and I need more of the Spirit, we and the church need more of the Spirit to actively combat the forces of the enemy in our sin sick world around us.

Be desirous of the Gifts of the Spirit. They are the God designed tools tailored exactly to the needs you have to succeed and thrive in the ministry God has planned for you.

Test your operation of the gifts to ensure the results are in alignment with God's purposes and are affirmed by the production of Spiritual fruit.

Be cautious but be bold. Use scriptural principles to test, try, and discern the validity of the spirits. Don't let your gifts lie dormant giving an advantage to our enemy.