

Sam Storms
Bridgeway Church

Sermon Summary #1

Life in the Spirit: Experiencing the Grace and Gifts of the Holy Spirit 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

As we begin this new series on the person and power of the Holy Spirit, in particular the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, I want you to look with me at two articles in the Bridgeway Statement of Faith. Article 1 is our statement on the inspiration and authority of the Bible, and Article 6 is what we believe about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1. We believe that the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of his will for the salvation of mankind, and the final authority for all Christian faith and life (Matthew 5:18; John 10:35; 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

6. We believe that the ministry of the Spirit in signs and wonders continues to be as broad, tangible, and powerful among believers today as it was in the early church. We also believe that all the biblical gifts of the Spirit continue to be distributed by the Spirit today; that these gifts are divine provisions central to spiritual growth and effective ministry; and that these gifts are to be eagerly desired, faithfully developed, and lovingly exercised according to biblical guidelines (John 14:12; Acts 2:14-21; 4:29-30; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 12:28-31; 14:1-33; Galatians 3:1-5).

You may be surprised to discover that there are a good number of Christians who say you can't believe both. If you truly embrace the authority and finality and sufficiency of Scripture, so they say, you can't believe that the Holy Spirit still bestows gifts such as prophecy and tongues and word of knowledge and discerning of spirits. If you are the kind of Christian, so they say, who enjoys digging deeply into God's Word and thinking deeply about biblical truth, you can't be open to the possibility of miracles and healing and prophetic revelation. Or if you hunger for spiritual gifts and pray for and pursue them, it must be that you lack sufficient confidence or trust in the power of God's Word.

That is why people will often walk into Bridgeway and are shocked by what they discover. They discover that we are very serious about the written Word of God, that we teach it and preach it and live under its authority, and govern our lives, both individually and as a church body, according to its principles. The shock comes when they also discover that we are free and exuberant in worship and that we expect the Lord to speak to us prophetically and to work among us through all the spiritual gifts described in the Bible. They are shocked and wonder how it is that a church can maintain its sanity when we both preach the Bible verse-by-verse and then at the close of our services pray for the sick to be healed and for God to reveal himself to us through words of knowledge and prophecy.

Most Christians expect us eventually to move in the direction of one of these two emphases to the exclusion of the other. Given enough time, so they say, *either our emphasis on the Bible will quench the Holy Spirit, or our openness to the supernatural and spiritual gifts will lure us away from God's Word into the land of sensationalism and subjectivity.*

You can't be wholly and sincerely and thoroughly committed both to the Word and to the Spirit, or so they say. I say: bologna! I say: nonsense! I say: what makes you think that God has given us the option of

choosing one over the other? I say: where in God's Word does it ever suggest, much less teach, that Christians should ever think that being grounded in Scripture quenches the Spirit, or being open to the Spirit undermines the authority of the Bible?

Let me illustrate what I mean.

In January, 1991, I accepted a friend's invitation to attend a conference in Anaheim, California, hosted by the Association of Vineyard Churches. There were some 7,000 people in attendance at the five-day event, many of whom had come from countries other than the U.S. The week was filled not only with biblical preaching but also exuberant and extended times of worship, prophetic utterances, prayers for healing, and other emphases and practices that had come to be associated with John Wimber and the Vineyard movement of which he was the leader until his death in 1997.

At the end of the conference, I boarded a plane and returned home to Oklahoma. With only a day or two of rest, I again took flight, this time in the opposite direction (some would say both geographically *and* theologically!). I traveled to Orlando, Florida, where I was to speak for the second consecutive year at a conference sponsored by R. C. Sproul's Ligonier Ministries. Again, there was Christ-exalting worship (but without guitars or dancing), lots of Bible teaching, and plenty of prayer, but few if any for physical healing.

A lot of people insist that these two perspectives or approaches to Christianity are as far apart theologically as Anaheim and Orlando are geographically! So they say, you can't live simultaneously on both the west coast and the east coast. You've got to choose! Likewise, you can't embrace two such radically different perspectives/practices of Christianity. You've got to choose!

Many of my friends and colleagues over the years have questioned my wisdom, if not my sanity, in seeking to live and minister in both worlds. Some of those from "Orlando" have insisted, often zealously, that people who speak in tongues rarely engage in serious theological reflection. They've tried to convince me that people who pray expectantly for miraculous healings are inclined to minimize the importance of Greek exegesis. Quite a few have suggested that my belief in the sovereignty of God is inconsistent with belief in the spiritual gift of prophecy.

Those from "Anaheim" have also voiced their concerns. Some fear that my unflinching affirmation of the sovereignty of God will either kill my evangelistic zeal or undermine any sense of urgency in prayer, or perhaps both. They are often suspicious of my emphasis on the mind and the critical importance of history and tradition. Although few have said it openly, I can sense their uneasiness with my persistent and meticulous habit of subjecting all claims of supernatural phenomena to the test of Scripture. Beneath it is the worry that excessive devotion to biblical precision will either breed dogmatic arrogance or quench the Spirit or, again, both.

I didn't buy into such false dichotomies then, and I don't now. Yet there are many who continue to insist that the theological differences and the personal divisions between cessationists and charismatics are perfectly illustrated by the geographical distance between Orlando and Anaheim. These same individuals would conclude that the possibility of bringing them closer together in anything other than a superficial way is remote at best.

Before we go any farther, let me define a couple of terms:

Cessationism / Cessationists = those who believe that certain spiritual gifts, usually the more miraculous or supernatural sort such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge,

healing, etc. ceased to exist at the close of the first century when the last apostle died or when the last words of Holy Scripture were inspired of God.

Continuationism / Charismatics = those who believe that all spiritual gifts mentioned in the NT continue to exist and continue to be given by the Spirit according to his will. The word “charismatic,” unfortunately, carries a lot of cultural baggage and many want to abandon it. When some hear the word “charismatic” they immediately think of Benny Hinn or Oral Roberts. Others point out that people such as John Piper and Sam Storms believe that all spiritual gifts are valid today, and hardly anyone would put those four men in the same camp. So maybe the word ought to be abandoned. Maybe, but I think it’s here to stay. So I will use the term to refer to anyone who affirms the authenticity and validity of all spiritual gifts in the life of the local church.

There’s no escaping the fact that a serious, and occasionally hostile, breach exists between Word-based evangelical cessationists and their more experientially oriented charismatic cousins. Can anything be done about it? Well, I’ve devoted the last 23 years of my life and ministry to doing something about it, and I don’t plan on giving up anytime soon.

So let’s explore for just a moment what this division looks like. In most cases, you can walk into a church service and within the first 10 minutes identify which side of the spectrum they are on. You can’t do that here at Bridgeway, and I’m very happy that such is the case!

**Word
(Cessationist)**

**Spirit
(Continuationist)**

Centrality of Sermon _____

Centrality of Worship

Predictability _____

Spontaneity

Principles _____

Power

Prizes knowledge _____

Prizes experience

Focus on the Intellect _____

Focus on the Affections

The Bible: emphasis on meaning _____

The Bible: emphasis on significance

Explanation of what God has done/said; focus on past achievements (preserve them)

Expectation of what God will do/say; focus on future purposes (pursue them)

Penchant for the archaic _____

Penchant for the novel

Insists on biblical precedent _____

Insists on biblical prohibition

Process oriented _____

Event oriented

Christian life is the progressive outworking of an original deposit _____

Christian life is the repetitive experience of a fresh power

Reformation	_____	Revival
Biblically informed wisdom	_____	Spiritually imparted discernment
Observation	_____	Intuition
Guidance: confidence in objective principles	_____	Guidance: confidence in subjective promptings
Focus on the “Not Yet”	_____	Focus on the “Already”
Potential for defeatism	_____	Potential for triumphalism
A focus on quality; a desire for better	_____	A focus on quantity; a desire for more
Tendency to embrace suffering	_____	Tendency to expect healing
Struggle with Flesh	_____	Struggle with Demons
Mundane	_____	Miraculous
The seen	_____	The unseen
Tendency to deify tradition	_____	Tendency to demonize tradition
God has spoken	_____	God is speaking
Prayer is monologue	_____	Prayer is dialogue
Reliance on natural talents	_____	Reliance on spiritual gifts
Lack of appreciation for the supernatural and surprising	_____	Lack of appreciation for the natural and routine
If a natural explanation is possible, it’s probable	_____	If a supernatural explanation is possible, it’s probable
Tendency to be skeptical	_____	Tendency to be gullible
Proclamation evangelism	_____	Power evangelism
Focus on the NT	_____	Focus on the OT
Focus on the Epistles	_____	Focus on the Gospels
Emphasis: God’s sovereignty	_____	Emphasis: man’s responsibility
Stresses Christ’s Deity	_____	Stresses Christ’s Humanity

Worship = proclamation of biblical truth _____

Worship: focus on understanding God (worship is theological) _____

Worship: God's presence is a theological assumption to be extolled _____

Worship: focus on God's transcendence _____

Worship: fear & reverence _____

Worship: concern with form _____

Worship: controlled & restricted _____

Worship: sing about God _____

Sacramental _____

Emphasis: "Instrumentality" _____

Faith in God _____

Obedience to God _____

Focus on Justification _____

Lower expectations of prayer _____

Angels: a theological belief _____

Emphasis on intellectual impact of divine principles _____

Fearful of emotionalism _____

Tendency to draw the boundaries of orthodoxy more narrowly _____

Potential for arrogant exclusivism _____

Grounds for unity:

Worship = personal encounter with God

Worship: focus on enjoying God (worship is relational)

Worship: God's presence is a tangible reality to be experienced

Worship: focus on God's immanence

Worship: joy & love

Worship: focus on freedom

Worship: emotionally & physically expressive

Worship: sing to God

Non-sacramental

Emphasis: "Immediacy"

Love for God

Intimacy with God

Focus on Sanctification

Higher expectations of prayer

Angels: a functional reality

Emphasis on emotional impact of divine presence

Fearful of intellectualism

Tendency to draw the boundaries of orthodoxy more broadly

Potential for naïve sentimentalism

Grounds for unity:

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

There's a crucial principle we need to understand from the outset: Spiritual gifts are not God bestowing to his people something external to himself. They are not some tangible "stuff" or "substance" separable from God. *Spiritual gifts are nothing less than God himself in us*, energizing our souls, imparting revelation to our minds, infusing power in our wills, and working his sovereign and gracious purposes through us. Spiritual gifts must never be viewed deistically, as if a God "out there" has sent some "thing" to us "down here". Spiritual gifts are God present in, with, and through human thoughts, human deeds, human words, and human love.

The word I want you to see is in v. 7, translated "manifestation" (*phanerosis*). This is Paul's way of saying that the Spirit is himself made manifest or visibly evident in our midst whenever the gifts are in use. Spiritual gifts are concrete disclosures of *divine* activity, and only secondarily *human* activity. *Spiritual gifts are the presence of the Spirit himself coming to relatively clear, even dramatic, expression in the way we do ministry*. Gifts are God going public among his people.

To reject spiritual gifts, to turn from this immediate and gracious divine enabling, is, in a sense, to turn from God. It's no small issue whether one affirms or denies these manifestations of the divine presence. For in affirming them we welcome him. In denying them we deny him. This may sound harsh, but I'm not suggesting that the conscious intent of cessationists is to resist God's activity. *But it is the practical effect of their theology, conscious or not*.

Whether spiritual gifts are for today is not some secondary, tangential issue that exists only for theologians to debate. It directly touches the very mission of the church and how she lives out her calling. How we speak to the world, the way we encounter the enemy, the expectations with which we minister to the broken and wounded and despairing is bound up in how we answer the question: shall we or shall we not be the church of the *Bible*? Shall we or shall we not build the church with the tools God has provided?

Why are we going to study these three chapters in 1 Corinthians? Why study spiritual gifts? Why even go close to the fire of something that burns with such controversy? There is a simple answer to that question: ***The church desperately needs an infusion of the supernatural activity of God into its life and ministry.*** I'm not advocating a sensationalistic approach to Christianity, nor do I believe that one with the gift of prophecy, for example, is more essential (or more spiritual) than one with the gift of teaching or leadership or mercy. But the church is woefully short of the life-changing, Christ-honoring power of the supernatural activity of the Spirit. Knowing that such gifts are available and understanding how they function is essential if the ills of the church are ever to be overcome.

So, here's why I'm preaching this series. First, I want us to be ***educated*** about spiritual gifts. Much of the resistance to spiritual gifts that comes from cessationist, Word-oriented evangelicals is due to widespread ignorance about what they actually are and how they actually operate in the church.

Second, I also want you to be ***equipped*** to use the gifts God gives. Knowing what the gifts are is only half the story. We have to possess the practical wisdom, the spiritual skill, in knowing how and when and for whom the gifts are designed to operate.

Lastly, I want you to be ***expectant*** about what God can do for you and for those he's called you to help with his power. I want your faith and confidence in both God's goodness and his greatness to grow and intensify. Skeptics about what God can and will do rarely experience his power.

What's in a Name?

We call them “spiritual gifts,” but what does the Bible call them? The most familiar term used by Paul is the Greek word *charisma*. Its plural form, *charismata*, is the word from which we derive “charismatic”. *Charisma* refers to a gracious work of God or something God’s grace has bestowed. For example, “eternal life” is a *charisma* (Rom. 6:23), as is “deliverance from physical death” (2 Cor. 1:11). Even “celibacy” (1 Cor. 7:7) is a *charisma* (see also Rom. 5:15,16; 11:29; but note especially 1 Cor. 12:4,9,28,30,31).

If *charisma* points us to the origin of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:4), *diakonia*, often translated “service” or “ministries”, points to their purpose (see 1 Cor. 12:5). All spiritual gifts are designed to serve and help others. The point is that spiritual gifts are less privileges than responsibilities. Gifts are not for personal adornment, status, power, or popularity.

Spiritual gifts are also described by the term *energema* (v. 6), translated “activities” (ESV) or “effects” (NASB) or “workings” (NIV). It points to Paul’s emphasis on gifts as the effect or fruit or product of divine power. All spiritual gifts are “energized” by the power of the Holy Spirit in and through the believer. Gifts, then, are the concrete operations of divine energy through individual believers.

If the Holy Spirit is sovereign in giving gifts, he is also sovereign in *withholding* them. All is dependent on what God desires for that moment in his church. We must be hesitant to “claim” a gift, but rather submit to his sovereign will (cf. v. 11). When we put these words together we discover that all spiritual gifts (*charismata*) are acts of service or ministry (*diakonia*) which the Triune God (*pneuma* [Spirit] in v. 4; *kurios* [Lord Jesus] in v. 5; *theos* [God the Father] in v. 6) produces (*energema*) through us.

In light of this, we may define a spiritual gift as a God-given and, therefore, gracious capacity to serve the body of Christ. It is a divinely-empowered or spiritually energized potential to minister to the body of Christ by communicating the knowledge, power, and love of Jesus.

Myths and Misconceptions

Now let’s consider a few of the more common misconceptions that surround the subject of spiritual gifts.

Myth #1: Only ordained pastors or other super-saints have miraculous spiritual gifts. Right? Wrong! The apostle Paul says that to “each one”, male and female, young and old (1 Cor. 12:7a) has been given the manifestation of the Spirit. According to Rom. 12:3,6, if you have grace, you have a gift (see also Eph. 4:7; 1 Pt. 4:10). Peter cited the prophecy of Joel on the day of Pentecost to prove that gifts such as prophecy and tongues would be given to “all mankind,” including “your sons and your daughters,” “young men,” “old men,” as well as “bondslaves, both men and women” (Acts 2:17-18). Gifts are *not* the exclusive privilege of elders, deacons, pastors, house-church leaders or some unique class of alleged super-saints.

When I read 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, nothing suggests that only apostles are endowed with these gifts. On the contrary, prophecy, faith, miracles, and other supernatural manifestations are given by the sovereign Spirit to *ordinary* Christians in the church for the daily, routine building up of the body. Not merely apostles and elders and deacons, but housewives and carpenters and farmers receive the manifestation of the Spirit, all “for the common good” of the church.

It’s also important to keep in mind that whereas all of us are to be witnesses, not all have the gift of evangelism. All are to give, but not all have the gift of giving. All pray, but not all have the gift of

intercession. All have a responsibility to judge and weigh prophetic words and to differentiate among the "spirits" (1 John 4:1-6; 1 Thess. 5:19-22) but not all have the gift of discerning of spirits. All have faith, but not all have the gift of faith. All can teach (Col. 3:16) but not all have the gift of teaching. All can prophesy (1 Cor. 14:24) but not all are prophets. All may receive wisdom (Eph. 1:17) without exercising the gift of word of wisdom.

Myth #2: All the gifts you will ever get you got when you were converted. Right? Wrong! Quick: name one verse in Scripture where it says all spiritual gifts are given at the moment of conversion. The fact is, on several occasions (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1,12,13,31,39) we are told to "seek" or "pursue" gifts that we desire but don't yet have. In fact, it's not only biblical, it's mandatory. To a *Christian* audience Paul says: "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:1). This is not mere permission or even a suggestion: it is a command. If you are not earnestly desiring spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, you are sinning!

Myth #3: Miraculous gifts were given primarily to authenticate apostles. Right? Wrong! The primary, but not exclusive, purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify others. Gifts are "other-oriented". Some have erroneously concluded from 1 Cor. 12:7 that it is sinful and selfish ever to enjoy one's gift or to be personally edified from its use. But this is to confuse the *immediate* or direct purpose of gifts with their *secondary* or indirect effect. It's virtually impossible to faithfully exercise one's spiritual gift, regardless of the context, and not experience a blessing of some sort. If the use of your gift sensitizes your heart to the grace of God and facilitates your maturity in Christ, you can't help but be better equipped to serve and edify others. Although the *ultimate* purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify others, that is *not* their *only* purpose. Jude 20 actually *commands* us to "edify" ourselves!

My point is this: *all* the gifts of the Spirit, whether tongues or teaching, whether prophecy or mercy, whether healing or helps, were given, among other reasons, for the edification and building up and encouraging and instructing and consoling and sanctifying of the body of Christ.

Myth #4: Seeking spiritual gifts means you probably don't believe in the sovereignty of God. Right? Wrong! But doesn't Paul say that the Holy Spirit decides who will get what gift (see 1 Cor. 12:11,18)? Yes. But if it is God who bestows gifts according to *his* will, how can we pray for and seek after gifts according to *our* will? The answer is that our desire is itself often the fruit of God's antecedent work in our hearts, stirring us to ask him for what he wants to give. Let's not forget that although salvation is subject to God's sovereign will, we still pray for, preach to, and persuade unbelievers. In fact, Paul says that God "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (see Eph. 1:11), but that doesn't eliminate or diminish our human responsibility to obey the many commands of Scripture.

Myth #5: If people abuse spiritual gifts, they should cease to use spiritual gifts. Right? Wrong! I find it nothing short of remarkable that to a church obsessed and glutted with spiritual gifts, to a church awash in spiritual gifts (1:5-7), indeed to a church that had *abused* spiritual gifts, Paul says: "*Earnestly desire spiritual gifts*" (1 Cor. 14:1)! This is stunning, if only because it is so different from the sort of counsel we might have given the Corinthians. The Corinthian believers came in second to no one in the charismatic race. Yet they had seriously misunderstood and abused these gifts. My first response is to assume that Paul would tell them to slow down, if not declare a temporary moratorium on the exercise of these gifts. At the very least he should have told them to stop praying for and seeking after such miraculous phenomena as tongues and prophecy. So much for my wisdom!

What he tells them to do is really quite amazing. To a church aflame with *charismata*, Paul *commands* them to earnestly seek for more (12:31; 14:1,39)! Whereas we might have doused their zeal with water, Paul appears to pour gasoline on the fire. The point is this. *The solution to the abuse of spiritual gifts is*

not prohibition, but correction. We might have been tempted to say to the Corinthians, "Don't do it at all," whereas Paul simply tells them, "Do it right!" In other words, "Don't do it less. Just do it *better!*"

I could understand if Paul issued such counsel to a church with great character and little power. But Corinth was a church with little character and great power. This counsel strikes some as unwise, if not dangerous, like throwing a life-jacket filled with lead to a drowning man, or saying to a recovering alcoholic, "Hey, buddy, have another drink!" Yet, to the very people guilty of elitism and fanaticism, Paul says be eager and zealous for more gifts than you've already got. We, on the other hand, would most likely have said: "Cool it, Corinthians! Settle down. Forget about gifts. Your spiritual focus is way out of balance. Don't you realize that spiritual gifts are what got you in trouble in the first place?" But, of course, the problem was *not* spiritual gifts. The problem was *immature and unspiritual people*. The point is that *suppression of spiritual zeal is never the answer. The solution to abuse is not disuse but proper use.*

Myth #6: If you can ever use a spiritual gift, you can always use it. Right? Wrong! Many mistakenly believe that if you have prophesied once, you can prophesy at will, or if you have ever prayed and someone is healed, you can heal at will. The issue at stake here is whether spiritual gifts are *permanent* (what some have called "residential") or *occasional and circumstantial*.

Perhaps the best answer is to say that some gifts, such as teaching, leading, tongues, mercy, etc., are more likely permanent and can be exercised at will, whereas others such as prophecy, healing, and miracles are always subject to the sovereign purpose and timing of the Spirit. More on this later in our series.

Myth #7: Spiritual gifts always operate at the same level of intensity and accuracy. Right? Wrong! Spiritual gifts often vary in intensity, strength, and accuracy (see 1 Cor. 14:18; Rom. 12:6; 2 Tim. 1:6)

It seems obvious that some teachers are more eloquent and effective than others, that some evangelists see a greater harvest of souls, that some church leaders are more successful at mobilizing people for ministry, and the list could go on. One should expect that some will pray more fervently in tongues than others do (as apparently Paul did; see 1 Cor. 14:18) and that some will have a comparatively greater capacity for faith. The efficacy and accuracy of spiritual gifts will vary depending on our personalities, our spiritual maturity, our facility in the Word of God, the depth of intimacy we have with Jesus and any number of other factors.

Myth #8: Those with more spectacular gifts are more spiritual. Right? Wrong! This is a myth that few people will affirm but many believe. It's not unusual for those with gifts such as mercy and hospitality and helps to feel inferior to those with prophecy and teaching and tongues. Worse still is that those with the latter gifts often make them feel that way. People with gifts that draw attention and applause are especially prone to measure someone's personal value by their gifting (or their lack of it).

This was certainly a problem in ancient Corinth. Their tendency (ours too!) is to elevate the esteem of those whose gift(s) is characterized by a greater and more conspicuous supernatural display. We mistakenly think that if the manifestation of the Spirit is more explicit the individual is more mature, or at least more favored of God, or surely, if nothing else, more useful to the church. Or we think that because someone has more than one gift he/she has more of the Holy Spirit. The fact is, a person with ten gifts may be less mature than a person with only one.

In conclusion, let us pray this simple prayer: "Come, Holy Spirit!"