

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

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"Using Your Spiritual Gifts" (part 2)

REVIEW OF PART 1

We have been doing a two part series on using our spiritual gifts. God's Word is clear: God blesses us with spiritual gifts to be used in His body, the Church, and for His glory. If a church is to grow and be all that it should be, then its leadership and members must understand the gifts of the Holy Spirit and must be using those gifts.

In our study we sought to answer six key questions: **1) Who receives the spiritual gifts? 2) What are the spiritual gifts? 3) What is their purpose? 4) How do you receive them? 5) How do you know which ones you have and 6) How do we use them?**

The answer to these questions can be found in God's Word. In fact, there are three key passages written by the Apostle Paul that help give us the answers. We addressed the first three questions in part one. Let me briefly review those answers. **1) Who receives the spiritual gifts?** Every member of the body of Christ; **2) What are the spiritual gifts?** They are not talents, skills, ministries or fruit, but they are Holy Spirit given abilities. They are supernatural/spiritual given to us for Christian service and ministry; **3) What is their purpose?** Summed up by one word – GROWTH. They are given to build up the body of Christ so that we grow spiritually both individually and corporately and so that the Church itself grows numerically.

HOW DO WE RECEIVE THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

So how do we receive the spiritual gifts? Three ways: By faith, a willing heart and through prayer. In fact, it is the same way we received the Holy Spirit. We receive Christ by faith and He gives us His Holy Spirit. Before you can move forward in doing anything for the Lord you must have faith. **Heb. 11:6 says: "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."**

A basic spiritual truth is that we must believe in order to receive. The faith to believe what God has said is true. The Bible tells us that God sends forth rain on the just and unjust alike (**Mt. 5:45**). Everyone receives natural blessings through the natural life cycle. But we only can receive God's spiritual blessings through faith.

And then if we truly believe and trust the Lord, we will act on this faith. We will be *willing* to do something about it. **"Faith without works is dead."** We need to be willing to do something about it and that means we need to be willing to work. For some work is a four letter word, but not for the Lord. After God created Adam and Eve, He called them to be multiply, be fruitful and subdue the earth. He called them to take care of the Garden. God gave them work to do. In his Second Letter to the Thessalonians Paul warned that if someone was not willing to work, they should not eat.

The truth is God is not concerned first and foremost about our abilities. He is first and foremost concerned about our *availability*. When we make ourselves available then He can use us and then He will bless us with His gifts.

So once we have this attitude – one of faith – an expectant faith; and availability – a willingness to be used by God to work; then we will be ready to receive and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And the way we received the gifts is not only by faith and availability but through prayer. Jesus gave us one of the principles of praying and walking with Him. ***"You have not because you ask not, Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you."*** (Lk. 11:9). In fact, a few verses later Jesus says, ***"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"***

We are to ask for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

What does Paul say in **1 Cor. 14:1**, ***"Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts..."*** The Greek used by Paul means "to seek after."

Faith, availability, and prayer – that is the context for the reception of the gifts.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHICH SPIRITUAL GIFTS WE HAVE?

So the next step is how do we go about discerning which gifts we have? **First, we need to know what are the gifts of the Holy Spirit.** The Word of God highlights the various kinds of gifts. There are over two dozen listed in the New Testament. Sometimes our gifts might be obvious, other times we may not be so sure. So we need to know what the Word says about each gift and how they are used in the Scriptures. Everyone here should have received a list of those gifts as well as a short description about what they are.

Second, we need to go ahead and get to work on doing what we already know we need to do. Even if you think you do not have a gift or are not sure, we are all called to do the work of ministry. Everyone is called to participate in evangelism, to show mercy, to help others, to encourage and exhort. We need to go and obey God in the everyday matters.

Third, look at what you are passionate about? Usually the gifts are given in relation to what we are drawn toward. How does a person discover their singing talent? He or she is drawn toward singing and begins to sing a few songs. When we are drawn to a certain area of service or ministry it may mean that you have this gift or you are a candidate for the gift. God is a God of order. Therefore our desire and His gifts and calling are related. And through it all prayer is essential. Now once you have the inclination or once you believe you have the gift, you need to use it.

An eye is purposeless unless is it used for sight; so too with the spiritual gifts. The gifts are instruments not ornaments. The existence of a gift is a call to use it. The Apostle Paul told Timothy ***"Do not neglect the gift that is in you."*** (1 Tim. 4:14).

Finally, our gifts will be confirmed by others. The disciple named Joseph was given the name Barnabas in **Acts 4:36** because of his gift of encouragement. The seven men chosen as deacons were recognized for their wisdom (**Acts 6:36**).

You see, Christianity is not a lone ranger enterprise. We must be connected to the body of Christ, the body of believers. Staying home because you don't like something in the church or somebody in the church is not an option, that's just simply being disobedient to the Lord. In fact, it is a cop-out. It is a lie from the devil himself. Satan wants you disconnected from the body. What happens when a physical member of our body is cut off from the blood supply of the body? It eventually atrophies and dies. The reason we are part of a body is that it helps keep us alive spiritually. We need one another. The reason we are to be part of the Body of Christ is not only to be built up but to be kept accountable. So we don't become the sole authority in our own spiritual lives. The Bible teaches that the heart of man is deceitful beyond all things. We can be blind to our own shortcomings. And let me say that if you have a particular problem with many people it's not that they have the problem, it's you! Finally, how are we to use the spiritual gifts?

HOW DO WE USE THEM?

We use our spiritual gifts in humility and to glorify God. Paul said in **Romans 12:3** that we are *"not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think with sober judgment."* **Philippians 2:3:** *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility regard one another as better than yourself...have this attitude in yourselves that was also in Christ Jesus."*

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gifts each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ." **1 Peter 4:10-11.**

The gifts are tools not toys. Remember the gifts are to be used to help others grow in their faith and to glorify the Lord. It is not about us. Or as Pastor Rick Warren likes to say, "It's not about you!"

How else do we use them? We use them in the context of the Church, the Body of Christ. And that means looking at the various ministries of the local church. So whether it is the corporate worship ministries, the Bible Study and teaching ministries, the outreach and evangelism ministries, the fellowship and prayer ministries; the building and grounds ministries - everyone has a role to play in the life of the body.

Let me just add that generally speaking while gifts are life long, if we don't use them, we will never realize our full potential. Use it or lose it might be too strong of a phrase but the fact remains that if we don't use our gifts they will never do us or anyone else any good. Recall Jesus' warning in the parable of the talents. Why doesn't God just take away His gifts if they are not used? He is always waiting for us to walk in them.

7th Sunday After Pentecost, June 29, 2008, Liturgical Year “A”

GOD’S GOOD OR GOD’S BEST?

God has blessed us with a great salvation. He has given us everything we need to follow and serve Him. And this means being an active member of His Body, the Church. I believe the question for every person here is do you want God’s good or do you want His best? If you want His best then it means eagerly desiring the spiritual gifts and asking the Lord to show you how you can use them – how you can be a blessing to those around you. Let us pray...In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!