**Foundations (35 of 60) The Gifts of the Spirit - RC Sproul**

The church is a body made up of various parts, but who decides on the roles and who assigns the diverse functions? That's our topic today on renewing your mind. When a person holds a position in the church, they're not cut out for. It's often easy to tell.

The projects they lead and the tests they try to accomplish grind to a halt and many times conflict rears its ugly head. But when people serve in areas in which they're gifted, the assignments run smoothly like a well-oiled machine. Today on renewing your mind, Dr. R.C. Sproul teaches a lesson titled, The Gifts of the Spirit.

We'll learn how the enabling power of the Holy Spirit helps us fulfill our callings within the body of Christ. Today's message comes from the series called Foundations, an overview of systematic theology. In our very first segment in our study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, I mentioned that there have been more books written in the last 50 years concerning the Holy Spirit than have been written in the whole history of the Christian church up till that point.

And for the most part, the reason for that plethora of publications has been the impact of the charismatic movement. And so much of the concern that is researched in these books has to do with the concept of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As we've looked at that in brief, more significantly and more centrally has been the whole subject of speaking in tongues.

And added to that issue, the broader question of the gifts of the Spirit as they are mentioned to us in the New Testament. And whenever we get to the question of tongue speaking, for example, there are a host of related questions that make a dogmatic position difficult to reach with respect to understanding these things. Questions like this, for example, is the glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, that is recorded for us in the book of Acts describing the events of the day of Pentecost, the same thing that Paul speaks of in his letter to 1 Corinthians.

Is the speaking in tongues in the Corinthian church the same thing that happened at Pentecost? The tacit assumption most people make is that they are one and the same thing. But some scholars in researching this have indicated that perhaps, at least at Pentecost, the miracle was not so much in the speaking as it was in the hearing. That is, that it was a miracle of translation as people from different backgrounds and regions and speech patterns were able to understand the utterances given by the Jews assembled there.

And the Scripture just is not explicit with respect to that question, so it remains a matter of speculation. The second question that is associated with tongues particularly is, was this phenomenon that occurred in the first century intended by God to continue throughout Christian history? And one of the problems we encounter at that point is the exceedingly sparse evidence of any continuity of the manifestation of tongues from the first century down to the twentieth century. If we look at the annals of church history, we find a deep silence with respect to this matter.

And so some have argued that this has eschatological significance following the idea of the former reigns and the latter reigns, that the former reigns of the Holy Spirit was indicated by the outpouring of the Spirit in the first century. And now this new revival of tongue speaking is an indication of the latter reigns as a harbinger of the final moments of redemptive history before Christ's return. That's another question associated with tongues.

Perhaps an even more significant question with respect to tongues is the question, was the tongue speaking that is indicated that occurred in the Corinthian community miraculous in its empowerment? And if it was, is the tongue speaking that is reported today equally miraculous? And again, that's a further related question. But the biggest question, of course, that people face is, is the tongue speaking that we hear about today the same thing that happened in the Corinthian church? Or is it a natural ability that people have to speak unintelligibly under the influence of the Holy Spirit? And again, that debate continues. And then beyond that, as I've already mentioned, is this question of speaking in tongues a necessary indicator of one's being baptized in the Holy Spirit? Well, let's turn our attention to what the New Testament has to say about these matters.

Just as the broadest discussion of the person and work of the Holy Spirit we have in general is in the Upper Room Discourse recorded in John's Gospel, chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17, so the most lengthy discussion we have of the gifts of the Spirit will be found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in chapters 12, 13, and 14. I mention this just to note in passing that one of the most popular chapters in all of the Bible is 1 Corinthians 13, which we call the love chapter. But we have to understand that the context of Paul's discourse on the supremacy of love is in the very midst of his discussion about the role of the spiritual gifts.

Notice how 1 Corinthians 13 opens, "...if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love," and so on. So it's part of this broader discourse that begins in chapter 12, where Paul in chapter 12 in 1 Corinthians verse 1 starts by saying these words, "...now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant." That's the first apostolic expression here, is that his desire that the people of God be knowledgeable about these things, and not be acting and behaving with the gifts of the Spirit in such a way that would demonstrate ignorance. Obviously, when we read 1 Corinthians, we know that the Corinthian church was one of the most trouble-laden churches that Paul dealt with in his ministry.

There were all kinds of internal disputes and forms of misbehavior that occasioned at least two apostolic letters that came largely as rebuke and admonition to correct the people from the abuses of the gifts that they had received. And it's also interesting to me that if you go to the end of the first century and read Clement's letter to the Corinthian community, Clement being the Bishop of Rome at the turn of the century, he is frustrated because these problems are continuing in the Corinthian community. And in his letter, he reminds the Corinthians of the original apostolic instruction that they had received from Paul.

But Paul says he hopes, he desires that the people not be ignorant. He said, you know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore, I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Now, here's his first portion of instruction of the gifts. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.

There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

Now, let me just hesitate at this point and say there is no reason to believe that when the apostle lists these specific different kinds of gifts of the Spirit that the list that he provides for us is exhaustive. The point that he's making here is that there are numerous gifts that the Spirit gives to the people of God, and that there is this diversity. So the first thing we learn about the gifts of the Holy Spirit is that they are diverse.

There are many and varied and different kinds of gifts that the Spirit gives to His people. And also Paul instructs us that the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is for the edification of the whole body. Again, in the context of this discussion of spiritual gifts, Paul gives us rich insight into the very nature of the church that Christ has established, that He has created a church, He has gifted His church with these gifts of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of the edification and strengthening of the whole body.

Now, he goes on in verse 12, For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. This is part of the didactic information on the baptism of the Holy Spirit that I mentioned earlier, that the theme that Paul is giving here is that all the members of the church of God, both Jew and Gentile, have been empowered by the Holy Spirit for ministry.

I might also add that this text is part of the roots of the Reformation principle that was very important to Martin Luther on the priesthood of all believers. That's a concept that's often been misunderstood. Many people think that Luther sought to get rid of the clergy.

That's not the case at all. What he was speaking to was that even though there are those who are in the office of pastor or deacon or elder or the other offices that are mentioned in the New Testament, nevertheless what Luther was saying is that the ministry of the church of Christ is not to be restricted to a handful of professionals. But the whole body has been equipped by God the Holy Spirit to participate in the mission of the church.

And so it's not insignificant in my judgment that when Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit, he does it in the context of the church and follows the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ because the church is an organism that is organized and it has diverse parts just like the human body has diverse parts. And Paul labors the point later on in this discourse when he says that each portion of the body of Christ has a specific task to perform and an ability that has been given in order to meet the full mission of the church just as the individual parts of the human body have specific functions to fulfill for the well-being of the whole body. In verse 14 he says, In fact, the body is not one member but many.

If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? Now, Paul here is using an old argumentative form called the reductio ad absurdum argument which takes people's reasoning to their logical conclusion and shows that the results are absurd. And again, he's addressing these people who want to make the gift of tongues, the end all and the be all, the supreme test of spirituality in the life of the church. That was what was going on there in Corinth.

And Paul is saying if you want to make tongues the only significant gift it's like saying that the whole body should be an eye. And that would make us very acute in our vision. But at the same time we would be deaf and dumb.

And so Paul is trying to show the folly of that kind of thinking. If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as He pleased. And then he goes on in verse 27.

Now you are the body of Christ and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church. First apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

It is significant that tongues is mentioned last in a list that begins with apostles being mentioned first because we know that the apostolic office in the New Testament is the chief or main office and function of authority. And so then he asks the questions rhetorically. Are all apostles, and the only answer that can be given according to the structure of the Greek here is no.

Are all prophets, and the answer must be no. Are all teachers, and the answer again must be no. Are all workers of miracles, again the answer grammatically must be no.

Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? And the structure of the Greek here, when a rhetorical question is given in this form, tells you what the answer to the rhetorical question must be. And when he says do all speak with tongues, the answer is no. So the first thing we have is the apostolic teaching that not everyone in the body of Christ has been gifted with tongues, though Paul later on expresses his apostolic desire, again by way of ad hominem argument, he says, I wish that everyone spoke in tongues.

But that's contrary to his statement, of course, that not everybody does speak in tongues, or even should speak in tongues. But he says, earnestly desire the best gifts, and yet I show you a more excellent way. Now hear those words, earnestly desire the best gifts, and I show you a more excellent way.

Those are the words that immediately precede the statement, for though I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a clanging cymbal and a sounding brass, and so on. Where the apostle is making it abundantly clear that the gift of love is far more important to the people of God than these more spectacular gifts. In verse 8 of chapter 13, love never fails.

But whether there are prophecies, they will fail. Whether there are tongues, they will cease. Whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away, and so on.

And then in chapter 14, we get the crux of his instruction. Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. Now a word of explanation has to be given here.

Again the question is what the apostle means by the gift of prophecy. And he's encouraging the people to prophesy. Is he using the term prophesy in the specific sense of being an agent of revelation, such as the Old Testament prophets were, or the New Testament apostles were? I don't think so, and the vast majority of New Testament commentaries I think would agree here, that when Paul is encouraging people to prophesy, he means to be able to articulate and verbally communicate the truth of God.

That when the preacher preaches, when the individual Christian bears witness to his faith by communicating the faith, that is a prophetic action, not in the sense of speaking as an author of Scripture or giving new revelation to the community of God, such as the Old Testament prophets did. Or does it even have primary reference to future predictions? We make the distinction about the prophetic gift, even in the Old Testament, between foretelling and forth-telling. And the primary accent is not on future prediction, but on speaking forth the truth of God.

And I believe this is what Paul is encouraging the people to be able to do. In verse 2 he says, For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God. Again, another reason why some people think that this is a difference here between what's going on in Corinth and what had happened at Pentecost, because here he seemed to suggest that tongue speaking is a kind of prayer.

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God, for no one understands him. However, in the Spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied. For he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets that the church may receive edification.

And he goes on in verse 6, But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? In other words, there is no profit to the people of God without the intelligible content of the truth of God being communicated to the people. And the problem with tongues then and tongues now is that they are unintelligible, which makes many scholars of the New Testament believe that the contemporary phenomenon of tongues is simply a human ability of sighing or experiencing ecstatic utterance under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This is not a denial that people are communicating with the Holy Spirit when they're engaged in this activity.

But the idea is that it doesn't require any miraculous enabling in order to do it. One of the problems that we face with this phenomenon of tongues in our day is that there are manifold recordings of this practice numbered among pagan religions and non-Christian, other non-Christian groups, cults for example, such as Mormons and people of that sort, who deny the deity of Christ and yet claim to have this ability and in their recordings of their expressions there's no discernible difference between what they're doing and what Christians are doing in their prayer life under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Now again, Paul then goes on to give strict instructions for how this gift, the gift of tongues, was to be used in the early church.

And the accent that he gives is on order rather than disorder and that the church is not to be interrupted by tongues unless there was an interpreter there, somebody who could make it intelligible. And great sensitivity was given in the case of somebody who was not a believer who came into their meeting and would have no idea what was going on. In any case, in brief, the Apostle Paul does not say tongues are bad and prophecy is good, or tongues are bad and love is good.

What he does make a distinction is not between the good and the bad, but between the good and the better. Tongues are fine, but prophecy is better. If you want to pray in tongues, fine, but desire the higher gifts of the Spirit for the edification of the church.

And so the great warning for us today, the bottom line, is that we not exalt this particular gift, even if it is the same thing that would happen in the Corinthian community, to the level of making it some kind of a sign of super-spirituality or of special empowerment of God. We're pleased to say that we've collected all of the resources related to this Hallmark series on Renewing Your Mind and packaged them into one set. The resources include all 60 DVD messages from Dr. Sproul, along with a CD-ROM that contains audio presentations and a printable study guide.

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