

Month of Mission
ii. God's Indescribable Gift(s)
1 Cor 12:4-11, Phil 2:5-11 & 2 Cor 9:12-15

Grace by its very nature is a gift which we don't deserve. We are saved to serve. We are saved by grace and we serve by grace. God is both Creator and Saviour. Common grace gives us natural gifts. Saving grace gives us supernatural gifts, albeit with an overlap between the two. By its very nature a gift is a spontaneous act of generosity and the gifts of the Spirit are no different.

Some have argued that some of the gifts of the Spirit, especially the more spectacular ones, were confined to the age of the apostles. One would have to argue along theological and historical grounds to sustain this point of view. However, we must allow Scripture to speak with its own voice. When we impose even a well-meaning grid causing the text to conform and confine to our particular perspective, we do a dis-service both to the Scriptures and the people of God. But there is an equal and opposition reaction whereby the gifts of the Spirit become the central focus of the church and we become preoccupied with them rather than the giver.

In Corinthians 12-14 the issue Paul dealt with was not the gifts as such, rather their abuse. Simply because a gift is abused does not mean there is something wrong with the gift itself. The church at Corinth had taken its cue from Greco-Roman society and its preoccupation with power. As a result, the exercise of gifts had become a matter of competitive control and superiority rather than service and care of others. Little wonder then, that Paul's great hymn of love is sandwiched between chapters 12 and 14 of First Corinthians. Paul speaks of the "most excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31b), the way of love. The gifts of the Spirit apart from the love of Christ are a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. We hold them lightly, not as our private possession, rather as stewards on behalf of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is quite capable of acting sovereignly on his own, but he chooses to use fallible people like us and gifts us accordingly.

If the gifts become front and centre rather than Jesus then we have problems. If we seek the gifts directly according to our desire and wants, we must be careful. The gifts come indirectly as we seek Jesus, as we reflect upon his love for us, and our love for him in return and our love for God's people. Then the motive is not that I may have a gift to possess, rather to honour God and serve others. Martyn Lloyd Jones, says the challenge in medicine is over specialization focusing on a particular organ rather than the body as a whole. Likewise, we can over focus on particular gifts especially the more dramatic ones. Just as the human body needs symmetry and balance, so too the church. We need to seek Jesus and his love. Whatever gift he chooses to give us will be the right one. C.S Lewis reminds us that physical hunger is a sign that God provides food to satisfy it. Likewise, spiritual hunger indicates that God will send his Spirit by way of saving and serving grace to fill our lives with his presence.

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