



1 Corinthians 12:1-7
A Spirit-Filled Summer
Use The Gifts of The Spirit

Rev. Brian North
September 6th, 2020

This morning draws to a close the series we've been in this Summer on the Holy Spirit. Next Sunday we will begin a new series, titled "The New Normal." I'll give you one guess what influenced that title. 😊 In this series we will look at different facets of living in the face of unexpected circumstances. What brings "new normals" into our lives? How do we respond? Where is God in the midst of them? These are the kinds of questions we will look at in this four-Sunday series.

But first, we need to wrap up our Spirit-Filled Summer series. And today we are looking at the Gifts of the Spirit, which ties in very closely to Back to Church Sunday on the 20th which we mentioned last week and earlier today, because the theme for National Back to Church Sunday this year is "Stronger Together." I probably should have titled today's sermon "stronger together" in fact, because that is arguably the main point of the Spiritual gift. And it is one of the most important aspects of the Christian faith for us not only to understand, but be convicted and convinced of its importance so we would live into it.

During the French Revolution, there were three Christians who were sentenced to die by the guillotine. One Christian had the gift of faith, the other had the gift of prophecy, the other had the gift of helps.

The Christian with the gift of faith was to be executed first. He was asked if he wanted to wear a hood over his head. He declined and said he was not afraid to die. "I have faith that God will deliver me!" he shouted bravely. His head was positioned under the guillotine, with his neck on the chopping block. He looked up at the sharp blade, said a short prayer and waited confidently. The rope was pulled, but nothing happened.

His executioners were amazed and, believing that this must have been an act of God, they freed the man. The Christian with the gift of prophecy was next. His head was positioned under the guillotine blade and he too was asked if he wanted the hood.

"No," he said, "I am not afraid to die. However, I prophesy that God will deliver me from this guillotine!" At that, the rope was pulled and again, nothing happened. Once, again the puzzled executioners believed this must be a miracle of God, and they freed the man.

The third Christian, with the gift of helps, was next. He was brought to the guillotine and likewise asked if he wanted to wear a hood. "No," he said, "I'm just as brave as those other two guys." The executioners then positioned him face up under the guillotine and were about to pull the rope when the man stopped them. "Hey, wait a minute," he said. "I think I just found the problem with your guillotine."ⁱ

Too often, we Christians are afraid to use the gifts that God has given us for fear of being like that last guy. **It's like there's an underlying presumption that if we get involved using our gifts, it's somehow going to lead to our demise or lead to a less gratifying life.** Maybe we fear that all our free time will be used up serving with this gift we have, or we fear that there might be relational challenges as we work with other people, or we fear that we might let someone down – or let the whole church down – because we might make a mistake or drop the ball on something we said we'd do...and it's like we fear that by using our gifts we're going to ultimately bring suffering and hardship upon ourselves – maybe not full-on death by guillotine, but hardship, nonetheless.

So are we supposed to take the gifts that God has given us and bury them in the sand because of fear? Jesus tells a parable about a few different guys who take what's been given them – and while two guys use the gifts in a positive way, one does in fact bury his, and he's later scolded by the one who gave him the gift, because he didn't use it. Strike one. Scripture also tells us that **“God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).** Strike two! That's two strikes against “fear” causing us not to use the spiritual gifts God has given us. We all know it's “three strikes and you're out” so maybe we should try a different approach.

The passage this morning that we read is kind of the tip of the iceberg on spiritual gifts and helps us get over the fear of using our gifts. Most of this chapter is on Spiritual gifts. Plus there's a big chunk in Romans 12 as well, and also a section of Ephesians 4. Those ones, along with the stuff here in 1 Corinthians, are the three most significant pieces of Scripture on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And even these 7 verses that we're looking at today, while they just sort of scratch the surface, they do give a big picture overview of the Spiritual gifts, including their purpose and role in the life of a follower of Jesus. So they're a great place to start in understanding the gifts of the Spirit.

So let's dive into the passage. **In the first three verses of today's passage, Paul is communicating that even faith in Jesus is a gift of the Spirit.** He starts to speak of the gifts of the Spirit in verse 1, and then it feels like he changes course. But he's not. He's saying that you can't confess "Jesus is Lord" without the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. That's a gift.

And then from there we are given this incredible four-verse introduction and overview of the gifts of the Spirit. **First, we see that there are many different kinds of gifts but they all come from the same Spirit.** They all come from God through the Holy Spirit. What are the many kinds of gifts? Well, some are found later in this chapter, and more are in the Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 passages I mentioned a moment ago, and a couple others in other parts of Scripture. The gifts run the gamut from gifts of administration to gifts of apostleship; from teaching to speaking in tongues; from miracles to martyrdom. You only find out once if you have the gift of martyrdom. It's not a gift that very many people ask God to give them.

We also see here the connection between the gifts and service, as he writes in verse 5, "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." Paul is reminding us here that to use the gifts of the Spirit is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. In the church where I first was a pastor – my wife and I shared a position serving as Associate co-Pastors of Mt. Olympus Presbyterian Church in Salt Lake City – there was a gentleman there who was a retired Baptist Pastor. I think I've mentioned him before. Jim Bailey was his name – he passed away a five or 6 years ago, I believe (which means it was probably 10). And one of his favorite things to reminds us of was that

the Bible doesn't advocate for people to *volunteer* their time and their gifts in the church. We are *servants* in the church. We serve, as opposed to volunteer. It's a difference of attitude, posture, mission, vision, commitment...I mean, it changes everything. And when we use the gifts that the Spirit gives us, we *serve* the Lord Jesus – even as we serve other people either inside the church or outside of it.

Then in verse 6 we see that using our gifts requires work. Here's the amazing thing that turns this on its head for us, though: It's not so much that we are working. We do, for sure. When you serve, you work in some way, shape or form. No doubt about it, and I'm not going to minimize that. Serving is work. **But underneath it all, and in it all, regardless of the work you or I may do as we serve using our gifts: God is working.** God is working, doing a deeper work in us.

You see, when you serve using your Spiritual gifts, God does something through you for those whom you are serving. Additionally, God is at work in you as well, as you serve. Serving is faith-growing. It's part of our discipleship. Too often we miss the "God is working in me" aspect when we are serving others or thinking about serving. Many of us have heard people talk about serving on a mission trip or at a homeless shelter or a nursing home or teaching a children's ministry class...or whatever it may be...and we've heard people say, "I thought I was going to be a blessing to them, but they were a blessing to me." And it's true, because God works in our working as we serve using our gifts. So God works *through* us, for sure, to bless others; but God also works *in* us as we serve.

Then the final thing that comes to us through these verses is in verse 7: **"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7).** In other words, to each Jesus follower, gifts of the Spirit are given for the common good. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have a spiritual gift. You may even have a few spiritual gifts. Depending on who you ask, there are somewhere between 7 and 30 spiritual gifts. The variation is because some of the gifts aren't explicitly labeled as such in Scripture, but it's strongly implied. I personally come up with around 25. So you could certainly have 7 or 8 out of 25 or so. If you think you have all of

them then you basically think you are Jesus, and that's a problem.

But the most important thing is at the end of this verse, and it answers the question, “Why are the gifts given?” The answer to “why” is almost always the most important information to get. *How* a thing operates is interesting. *What* a thing is, is interesting. But “why” gets down to its purpose, its mission – the *reason* it exists. For instance: the fact of Jesus coming is good. How he came into the world is, admittedly, really interesting. What he said is good and interesting. What he did on the cross is good. But the answer to “why” Jesus did all this is what really matters – it gets to the heart of the matter...the mission and the purpose. It makes all the other things important and valuable.

So why are the gifts given? Paul writes: For the common good. In other words, for the good of the Church, which is the body of Christ - carrying out Jesus' mission. It's all wrapped together. The gifts are for our good – not individually and selfishly. My gifts are for your good, for example. And they're for the good of all that we do together as a church. The way God has designed the church is that we would be like a team that comes together, with each person contributing according to the gifts that he/she has, so that we would achieve something great for God's Kingdom. Why does God do it this way? Because we *are* stronger together as I touched on earlier.

We are stronger when each person does their part, using the gifts of the Spirit that they have. So God brings people together in His church, and collectively, we work as the body of Christ, as His hands and feet, here on earth, as we serve using the gifts of the Holy Spirit. That's true at churches all over the world, and it's true even as we think of all those churches working together as the body of Christ.

Right here, God has brought together a collection of people, and together we are the body of Christ here, carrying out his mission, and each one of us is a part of it, as Paul writes later on in verse 27.

Our mission is Jesus' mission. Jesus says in Luke 19 that he “came to seek and to save the lost.” Later in Matthew 28 Jesus says that his disciples are to

make disciples, to baptize people, to teach what Jesus taught. **That's our mission: to invite people who are far from Jesus into a life of ever deepening discipleship to Jesus.** There is no greater mission to be a part of, and therefore, no greater team to be a part of, than the Church. And God has given you a gift, or multiple gifts, through the Holy Spirit, to contribute to the mission and vision of what God is doing in and through us.

What if we, the people of Rose Hill, believed this with all our hearts: that we each have a gift (or gifts) that God had given us, for the express purpose of building up the church...for "the common good" of the body of Christ? What if each of us believed that God has equipped us to benefit others – and rather than getting two strikes on us by burying that gift in the sand or letting fear lead us to ignore it...what if we *used* that gift for God's glory and the betterment of the church? If that happened here at RH for each and every person who calls RH home, we would be *on fire*. And I mean that in a good way, not like what happened to our church building back in the mid-1970's.

I actually believe that most people at RH already understand this. I am preaching to the choir today. We know this in an intellectual way...but some of us struggle to live it out. We need to put the gifts to use that God has given us...to serve Jesus as we serve others. To work for Him, even as He works in us. So here's my "ask" this morning: **What if each of us gave a minimum of 5 hours a month to the ministries of Rose Hill Church?** I know there are many of you who serve in different ways giving even more than that – please don't cut back to 5! 😊 We're in big trouble if you do, and I am SO thankful for those of you who selflessly serve many hours each month – from writing cards to giving rides to serving on Sundays to maintaining the website to serving as an Elder or a Deacon to teaching classes and leading Bible studies to maintaining and improving the church facilities...I mean, the list goes on and on. And if that's you, be encouraged by today's message and know that you have positively impacted the body of Christ here at RH.

But what if *each* of us served at least 5 hours per month? **God has given you a gift for you to use for the common good of the Church.** Maybe you have the gift of hospitality and you'd be a great greeter on Sunday mornings – checking people in during this covid era, and pointing out where the

remodeled restrooms are to guests (we need a few more people to be on that team); it could be using your gift of administration to help with organization and communication for a ministry team. If you have the gift of martyrdom...don't worry, we won't try and find a role for you to use that one. That's between you and God.

Teaching, helps, service...there are so many. And for many of these gifts, if you match it with something you enjoy – yardwork, construction, computers, being with kids or teens or homebound senior adults, cooking, writing, organizing...the list goes on – then you find the sweet spot of ministry where your Spirit-given gifts and your God-given passions mesh. And then your service doesn't even feel like work. It's pure joy, and God works through you and in you in powerful ways.

So consider how you could serve. 5 hours a month, or more. It could be in one fell-swoop on a Saturday, or it could be an hour each week. However it takes shape, God has given you spiritual gifts to use. Not to be buried. Not to be held back by fear. Some of us maybe have two strikes against us already; It's time to hit a home run. And God had equipped you to do exactly that, with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.cybersalt.org/clean-jokes/spiritual-gifts>