

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

An Introduction to Spiritual Gifts Selected Passages

Keywords: Strange Fire, Spiritual Gifts, Charismatic Movement, Unity, Tongues, Prophecy

PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: In light of the Strange Fire conference through John MacArthur questions are raised regarding the nature of spiritual gifts. In this brief series Pastor Henry seeks to give his perspective upon the conference and then a positive exposition of how he understands the bible instructs the Church regarding the gifts of the Spirit.

I. Introduction.

- A. A couple of months ago my former pastor hosted a conference entitled Strange Fire.
 1. Based out of Leviticus 9-10 and the High Priest's sons offering what was called "a strange fire" that resulted in their death by YHWH.
 2. The conference centered on the premise that there was a form false worship (strange fire) that was pervasive in the Church today and that the vehicle through which it moved was the Charismatic movement (explain this movement) and an improper understanding of how "spiritual gifts" function.
 3. John MacArthur pointed out that during the time that Moses was receiving the Law from God that the people of Israel were already in sin, worshipping the Golden Calf.
 - a. However they were treating the calf as YHWH. The result was the slaughter of many Israelites for their sin.
 - b. The point is that how we approach God is important. What we call a manifestation of God is important.
 4. Along with this point John argues from Hebrews 10:29, "How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?"
 - a. To insult the Spirit of God who brings the saving grace to us through Jesus Christ is inexcusable.

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- b. To be flirting at the edges of doing so is something a professing Christian should shy away from.
 - c. This led to the point that to wrongly attribute something to being the result of the Holy Spirit is blasphemous.
 - (1) Note "the" blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
 - (2) But blaspheming Him.
5. From here the conference has various speakers teach on the nature of the works of the Holy Spirit and the nature of spiritual gifts.
- a. At the core of these messages is that in many ways the Charismatic movement reduces the person and work of the Spirit rather than uphold Him and exalt Him before the Church.
 - b. R. C. Sproul showed how Acts 2, a watershed passage for many Charismatic Christians (explain why). However, in focusing upon the coming of the Spirit and the presence of tongues, the real import of this event is missed.
 - (1) He points out that the purpose of the powerful and unique expression of the Spirit was not tongues, but to give evidence that a key event had occurred.
 - (2) The Old Testament spoke of a key event known as the "last days". And one of the marks that it was inaugurated by God was the outpouring the Holy Spirit (from Joel 2).
 - (3) How would you know this happened? God chose to use what is known as speaking in tongues. As the vehicle. Hard to argue that people who would not know foreign languages suddenly can speak them perfectly.
 - (4) The Apostle Peter takes this event and the effect it had upon the Jews who witnessed it and spoke bluntly.
 - (a) Not about the tongues, they were really a side-point.
 - (b) But about the fact that this event was what was prophesied by the prophet Joel and it was now here!
 - (c) What does it mean? And from there he showed them from the Old Testament that Jesus, whom they killed, was the one God promised to come as their savior and king.

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (d) But that though they killed Him, he was not dead and was ascended into heaven until all His enemies were as a footstool for Him.
- (e) This is where the people began to rightly fear and many converted.
- (5) All of this to say that Sproul rightly showed that to see Acts 2 as something we are to pursue as Christian is incorrect. All Christians now have the Spirit and have been baptized with the Spirit.
- 6. Others made important contributions as well in the conference.
 - a. Joni Erickson Tada spoke about how so many in the Charismatic world want to pray for her healing and she wants them to pray for her sanctification—that she might grow in Christ-likeness.
 - b. Phil Johnson spoke on some of the egregious personalities in the movement.
 - (1) The Brownsville revival and all of the problems attached to it.
 - (2) The gross errors flowing from Trinity Broadcasting Network (Paul Crouch just recently died).
 - (3) Todd Bentley and the Fresh Fire Ministries that ended in travesty and yet even now he is being raised up again by this very movement.
 - (4) Rick Joyner who has many problems but is known for his Holy Ghost Hokey Pokey.
 - (5) Bill and Beni Johnson from Redding, California and their frightening antics regarding healing, God and prophecy of some of the strangest sorts.
 - (6) The bottom line in this message was that these people are not being called out upon by the Charismatic world even though there is massive evidence of their false prophecies and false teachings.
 - (7) Not only do they not speak out against it, but many of them support the various events. This includes even some of the more serious, conservative Charismatics.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (8) He makes a strong point that when Christians call themselves "open but cautious" regarding the spiritual gifts that too often they are cautious in the wrong direction.
 - (9) This led to a significant focus upon the rise and popularity of prophecy in the church today. He is very concerned about its abuse and the tendency to receive anything as being from the Lord.
7. John then preached on how to test the spirits in accordance to 1 John 4:1', "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."
- a. Suffice it to say that he finds it ironic that if a pastor speaks against something within the Charismatic movement that it is turned back upon him as being the divisive person.
 - b. This opens the movement up for great error since the pressure is put upon the one who questions rather than the one who professes that his experience, vision, belief, thought or action is of God.
- B. My thoughts:
- 1. First, if you have made conclusions on your own regarding the conference but have not heard the actual messages then go to GTY.ORG and listen to them (search 'strange fire').
 - 2. Second, though I love my old pastor I do not think that the conference was truly helpful.
 - a. Threw too large of a loop with not enough opportunity to explain the nuances and exceptions.
 - (1) Example, they invoked a man like John Piper but though I think it was done reasonably fairly it left one with too many lingering questions that it just became a distraction.
 - b. It was not properly focused in my opinion.
 - (1) Was the conference to be on the nature of healing in the plan of God? No, but much time was given to that topic.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (2) Was the conference on whether prophecy is something that is still working within the Church? No, but much time was given to that topic.
- (3) Was the conference upon the cessation of certain gifts in addition to prophecy? No, but it too was a focus of much time.
- c. It was not helpful to those who needed the most help.
 - (1) For those who are strongly situated on either side of the nature of spiritual gifts little changed.
 - (2) For those who are honestly struggling to understand such a vast subject as the manner and means of how the Holy Spirit works in the Church I doubt many questions were answered but many new ones were raised.
- d. It was not very redemptive from my perspective.
 - (1) I would find it more helpful to do the conference in a different format.
 - (2) If it was to expose and rebuke the clearly false teachings flowing from some of the various outlets like Bill Johnson and TBN then bring in speakers from a broader range of the Church to speak as well.
 - (3) If it was to open up a debate upon the nature of the spiritual gifts then try a format where time is given by both sides to exegete a passage or address a theological point. Have a Q&A session where both parties are able to show their common love of Christ and respect for each other.
- C. However, the conference did happen and it did open up many questions in the minds of many people. It is still a topic that wanders upon the internet and it is a topic I want to spend time developing for a few weeks here at MDF.
 1. Our position is not known by all of you who hear this and it is important for those who have come to MDF since 2008 to understand a bit better where we stand on the nature of the spiritual gifts.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

2. Second, it is unhelpful to only talk about some of the gifts, such as tongues or prophecy, without speaking about how the Scripture handles all of the gifts.
 - a. Why were the gifts given to us? To understand that properly is to help answer so many foundational questions.
 - b. How are the gifts to function in the Church?
 - c. What is the proper focus to be within the Church?
- D. Today I want to give a quick introduction to the nature of spiritual gifts to set the stage for the next few weeks. **Turn to Romans 12:3-5.**

II. Unity Is The Point.

- A. Notice first of all the "for" in vs 3.
 1. What does that mean?
 2. This points us backward to vss 1-2. I did 16 sermons on that passage so I won't do that again, but I do need to show the connection.
 3. As we reject the constant pressure to conform to this age and its desires and values we grow in our discernment.
 - a. Therefore as our mind is renewed and matured we can know of what God approves and what is proper for a Christian.
 - b. And one of the ways that we struggle in this is understanding who and what we are in the Church and before God. Which is why Paul moves us into these next verses.
 - c. Many of us will think too highly of ourselves at one point or another, but the reality is that we are not quite what we think we are. The challenge is to rightly understand who and what we are and not worry about everyone else.
- B. Unity.
 1. Paul tells us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.
 2. We are to be humble. **And if we are to understand unity and the nature of spiritual gifts, we must embrace humility.**
 3. We are to remember that all is by the grace of God.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

4. Therefore we are to have a sober view of who and what we are.
 5. We all have a sense of identity—who we are, what we are, and how we fit into life in general.
 - a. And the way we develop that identity is through self-assessment.
 - b. Where do we fit into our world? Who are we in relation to others?
 - c. And Paul is saying that as we assess/judge ourselves in relation to the rest of the Church we need to do it with humility.
 6. **But why** are we to have a humble view of our self? What is the reason that Paul gives for us to not think too highly of our self? Look again at vs 3.
 - a. It isn't because of our sinfulness.
 - b. It isn't because of the greatness of God.
 - c. The reason given is the measure of faith that has been given to us.
- C. The “measure of faith.”
1. What is meant by this? It is an difficult phrase.
 2. Many see it as speaking of the saving faith that is a gift of God, much like it is mentioned in Ephesians 2:8-9.
 3. But this is not a good understanding of this phrase.
 - a. Notice that it is closely connected with vss 4ff “for. . . .” And that helps us understand it.
 - (1) In vs 3 there is a ‘measure of faith.’
 - (2) In vs. 6 there is ‘grace given to us.’
 - (3) In vs. 6 there is a ‘proportion of his faith.’
 - b. And all of these are in relationship to the possessing and using of spiritual gifts.
 - c. Along with this there is the meaning of “measure” that speaks of quantity.
 - d. Therefore I conclude that it is speaking of the amount, the quantity of faith that each believer possesses.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (1) This idea of varying quantities of faith is developed even more in chapter 14 (vss 1-2).
 - (2) Within the Church not everyone has the same measure of faith and belief. It varies and with it is the variety of how we can use the spiritual gifts that are given to us.
- D. But how does this fit with the discussion of the spiritual gifts that he is actually talking about?
1. It is here that the sense of unity that Paul is driving toward is brought out.
 2. In vss 4-5 he speaks of us belonging to one Body, in Jesus.
 3. In other words, as we consider how we fit into the Body of Jesus we need to have a humble, sober view of ourselves.
 - a. How we fit is not up to us, it is up to the Lord.
 - b. He has assigned to each of us a place and a level of giftedness.
 - (1) Look at how he speaks of this in vss 6-8. What is the point there? Note who gets what gift. Not to try for a different giftedness. But to faithfully use your gift to the fullest you can.
 - (2) On an aside note that there is no mention here of tongues, miracles, interpretation of tongues, healing, as well as other gifts that are mentioned in 1 Corinthians. This should give us pause to question why.
 - c. And his point in this whole thing is that we will operate and use our gifts to the level/measure/quantity of our faith.
 - (1) The implication is that we cannot rise beyond that level and that we should be content with it.
 - d. And if we are to grow in a love for one another and we are to operate properly as those who have been dealt mercifully by God, then we are to pursue a right and humble view of our place in God's church.
 - (1) Think of this as a woman incredibly gifted with mercy and a man who has only been granted a small amount of mercy.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (2) One could easily be arrogant while the other becomes envious.
- (3) Neither should though because both have their giftedness by the grace of God. There is no room for anything but humble thanksgiving.
- (4) Contrast this though within the church of America where you have men and women parading across the stage proclaiming their greatness in some form or another.
- e. But when we understand that we are recipients of grace then unity becomes a burden in our hearts for we realize we do not exist alone.
- f. And we realize that all that we have is merely a gift from God rather than a personal talent that gives us bragging rights.
- g. Therefore there is no boasting that can occur in us. And to the degree that we do boast only reveals a spiritual disconnect in our hearts.
 - (1) Again, when you see a man or women extolling the greatness of how God is working in them.
 - (2) When you see them lifting themselves up as examples of great faith.
 - (3) You don't see something to follow and emulate but something to be wary of.
 - (4) The same with people who are emphasizing a specific spiritual gift or all of the gifts. Gifts are not the point, Jesus is the point and how through the Holy Spirit he has distributed gifts for the well-being of the Body.
- E. **The preeminent unity that the Church possesses is not** one in doctrine, relationship, vision, or purpose.
 - 1. **The unity we possess in due to our union in Jesus Christ** (“*En christou.*”) which flows through the Holy Spirit. And everything other type of unity in the church flows out of that relationship.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

2. And that phrase, 'in Christ' is such a wonderful phrase that finds itself flowing through the very core of the Church in every possible manner.
 - a. 1 Corinthians 1:4, we receive grace in Christ.
 - b. Romans 3:24, our redemption is in Christ.
 - c. Galatians 2:17, we are justified in Christ.
 - d. Ephesians 4:32, we have forgiveness of sins in Christ.
 - e. Romans 8:1, there is no condemnation in Christ.
 - f. 2 Corinthians 5:17, we are a new creation in Christ.
 - g. Romans 6:23, we have eternal life in Christ.
 - h. Philippians 4:19, God supplies all our needs in Christ.
 - i. Ephesians 1:3, we have every spiritual blessing of heaven in Christ.
 - j. Colossians 1:28, we will be presented to God perfect in Christ.
 - k. Romans 8:32, we cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ.

III. Conclusion.

- A. As I unpack the nature of gifts within the Church I want to encourage each of you to listen and consider how it impacts you.
- B. Remember that spiritual gifts are not the point, our unity because of our relationship to Jesus Christ is the issue.
 1. Let us rejoice first that God has redeemed us through Jesus Christ and we share in the Holy Spirit.
 2. Let us walk humbly before one another and before God for we are but sinners saved by God's grace.
- C. Let us approach this short series with a desire to know the will of God and know how God has enriched us through these gifts.

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Small Group Questions

- What is your background in relationship to understanding and practicing/pursuing spiritual gifts?
- What possible questions or challenges do you have regarding spiritual gifts? (CGLs I would appreciate a short email letting me know the questions and challenges raised—obviously without names).
- How often do you consider what spiritual gifts you may possess? How often does it affect how and what you choose to do in the church?