



Pentecost 2020

WEEK 3 - Answers

17. CAN SATAN COUNTERFEIT SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

Satan observes God's plan of operation and is often able to counterfeit it. Jesus warned us about this: *"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect"* (Matt. 24:24). Prophecy is one of the gifts. Signs and wonders imitate such gifts as miracles and healing. The gift of teaching is clearly counterfeited in liars who by *"deceitful spirits"* teach *"doctrines of demons"* (1 Tim. 4:1).

The apostle John says we must *"not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God"* (1 John 4:1).

18. WHAT ABUSES OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS SHOULD WE AVOID?

Almost every gift can be abused. Spiritual gifts are no exception. Following are four ways in which spiritual gifts sometimes are misused in the church:

1. Gift Glorification

In some circles, possession of certain spiritual gifts (notably the "sign" gifts, highly prized in some charismatic communities) brings glory to the bearer. This also happens in the "institutional" church, where certain leadership positions can also carry prestige. Glorifying certain gifts results in a two-level Christianity, in which some gifted members become "special," while those not possessing the same gifts are discounted. This leads to pride in some and inferiority feelings in others. Paul warned the Corinthian church sternly against exalting certain gifts (1 Cor. 12-14).

2. Gift Projection

Peter Wagner identifies this abuse. He observes that Christians can project certain gifts outward in such a way that others feel they should be able to function as well in the same areas. In Wagner's words, they seem to say, *"Here's what I do, and God blesses it. If you just do what I do, God will bless you in the same way."* People with a gift projection syndrome want the whole body to be an eye. They impose guilt and shame on fellow Christians. (Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church, pg. 54)

3. Gift Denigration

When a gifted person is put down as unimportant in the church, spiritual gifts are being abused in yet another way. Overly confident, overly independent members of the body may fail to see how much they need to be ministered to by the so-called weaker members. Paul counteracts the tendency to say, *"I have no need of you"* (1 Cor. 12:21) by reminding us that the parts of the body which seem weaker are really indispensable and those we think less honorable are really worthy of greater honour. God, he says, has made these adjustments in the body so we may *"have the same care for one another."*

4. Gift Individuation

This is the tendency to over-individualize spiritual gifts. Gifts are given to individuals, but they are given within the context of the Christian community. They are not meant for private use. They are given that the body of Christ may be edified. Howard A. Snyder says, *"The Biblical conception is that the community of believers acts as the controlling context for the exercise of gifts, thus discouraging individualistic aberrations and gifts must operate in this way."* *"The Church is"*, to use Gordon Crosby's phrase, *"a gift-evoking, gift-bearing community. And when the church really functions in this way, the various gifts not only reinforce each other, they also act as check-and-balance to prevent extremes."* (The Problem of Wineskins, page 132)

Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that gifts are *"for the common good."* They are *"for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* (Eph. 4:12-13). Paul does not speak of a maturity in isolation, but of a maturity in community.

19. WHY HAS THERE BEEN SO LITTLE EMPHASIS IN THE PAST ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

A great deal of silence, ignorance, and confusion has persisted on the subject of spiritual gifts. Splinter groups periodically overemphasized certain spiritual gifts. Mainline churches mostly ignored them. Three major factors have significantly affected the church's thinking about spiritual gifts:

1. Institutionalism

In the pre-Reformation period, the church was equated with an institution. Certain gifts became associated with the clergy. Other gifts, finding no expression in particular offices of the church, were completely overlooked. The church member was made to depend on the work of the professional religious leader. The church members themselves became passive and uninvolved in ministry. Though the Reformation corrected many of the abuses of the institutionalized church, it did not go far enough in reclaiming the rightful position of the lay members.

2. Rationalism

Liberalizing trends of the eighteenth century played down supernatural elements of the Christian faith. Spiritual gifts were humanized and were equated with natural aptitudes and talents. There was no longer anything unique about the efforts and activities of believers. Activities of every kind were considered to be the same as ministries.

3. Emotionalism

One reaction to the above rationalistic tendency was the pietistic movement of the late eighteenth century. This movement focused attention chiefly on emotional aspects of spiritual gifts. The experience of the gifted person became more important than the ministry he was to perform. Holiness groups and revival movements of this type were in some ways forerunners of today's charismatic movement.

20. WHY THE RENEWED INTEREST IN SPIRITUAL GIFTS TODAY?

This interest has been kindled by several factors:

1. The impact of the charismatic revival

The charismatic movement, though sometimes extreme, has brought a new interest in the work of the Holy Spirit. Partly because of the excesses of the charismatics and partly because of their vitality, mainline churches have taken a new look at spiritual gifts.

2. A new concern for the ministry of all believers.

Within the last few decades, a great concern for the place of lay persons in the church has developed. The clergy's tendency to dominate has been called into question. Increasing interest in the ministries of all believers has also caused the church to look again at the scriptural role of all its members.

3. The search for intimate, less institutionalized structures

Many church leaders today are discontented with the crusty structures of the church and desire to find new and better forms for Christian communal life. Their quest has led them back to the Scriptures. They have taken a fresh look at life in the New Testament church. One cannot study and understand the New Testament church without being impressed by the place spiritual gifts occupied in the life and ministries of the church in that period.

4. A return to the Scriptures

We should recognize that increased interest in spiritual gifts today has resulted partly from a new concern to take seriously the Scriptures which speak of spiritual gifts. As we have increased our focus on these passages, our understanding of them has also increased.

21. CAN CHRISTIANS USE SPIRITUAL GIFTS WITHOUT BEING AWARE OF THEM AS GIFTS?

Many church members today are using spiritual gifts without recognizing them. The church would not have grown this far if its members had not used their gifts in ministry. Why have we been so hesitant to think about and identify our gifts? It may be that church leaders have thought of gifts almost exclusively in terms of office. Certain Christian activities seemed so mundane that the church hesitated to think of them as Spirit-related. Perhaps we regarded as gifts only those abilities that were used within the official structures of the church. Whatever the reason, it is time now to begin to be informed about spiritual gifts. Remember the words of Paul: "*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant*" (1 Cor. 12:1).

We can gain much by thinking seriously about spiritual gifts. We need more than a mere identification of gifts. We need a fresh perspective on the importance of each church member to the congregation. We must see again the believer's need for greater community life. We must see the church more and more as a dynamic living organism, as a body with living members.

22. WHY DO I NEED TO KNOW MY SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

Knowing our gifts will assist us in finding God's will for our lives. God has a ministry for each one of us. Since our spiritual gifts are the key to what God would have us do, discovering those gifts is like uncovering our spiritual job description. Once we know what our gifts are and sense the goals God has for our lives, we will be able to concentrate on what God has intended us to do.

Elizabeth O'Connor has written, "When one really becomes practical about gifts, they spell out responsibility and sacrifice." Later she adds, "The identifying of gifts brings to the fore the issue of commitment. Somehow if I name my gift and it is confirmed, I cannot "hang loose" in the same way. I would much rather be committed to God in the abstract than be committed to Him at the point of my gifts. Commitment at the point of my gifts means that I must give up being a straddler. Somewhere in the deeps of me I know this. Life will not be the smorgasbord I have made it, sampling and tasting here and there. My commitment will give me an identity." (Eight Days of Creation, pages 42-43)

Knowing our gifts helps us overcome feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Each of us has received certain abilities which are important to the church. Each has a God-appointed mission. There are no second-class citizens. The discovery of a spiritual gift can turn a frustrated and guilt-ridden Christian into a happy and effective disciple of Christ.

Knowing our gifts will result in more effective service. We do best and accomplish most when we are doing that for which God has equipped us. A gift discovered can be a gift released for service.

When we know our gift we can take our appropriate place in the community of Christ. God has given us each a place in the body. "We are individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5), This means that we must recognize not only that others need us, but that we need them. We are not meant to stand alone, nor to function apart from the support of the Christian community.

We will be able to see ourselves as channels of God's grace. There is no greater privilege than to be a servant of God, a channel of his grace. Knowing our spiritual gifts allows us to cooperate deliberately with the movements of God's Spirit within us.

On the other hand, once we know our gifts, we also gain a sense of freedom in areas where we are not particularly gifted. When others project their gifts outward, subtly suggesting that we should be able to do as they do, we can avoid feeling guilty, knowing we have our own gift-mix which God expects us to develop.

Discovering our gifts not only makes us more willing to be involved in our gifted areas, but also helps us pull back from too great a commitment in areas outside our gifts.

23. IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE TOO MUCH OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

The emphasis on spiritual gifts can get out of proportion. Other important aspects of the Christian doctrine and life may be overlooked. This happened in the Corinthian church, where concern about certain spiritual gifts outweighed the more vital matter of brotherly love.

But it is also possible to give too little attention to spiritual gifts. To be indifferent to spiritual gifts is to neglect an important aspect of the Christian life. A church which neglects spiritual gifts is likely to leave ministry to the office bearers—the pastor, elders, and deacons—settling for an institutional church rather than the dynamic "body of life" so prominent in the New Testament.

24. ARE BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS RELATED?

As the Spirit fills us he imparts his spiritual gifts to us. A Christian who is not filled by the Holy Spirit will be a non-ministering Christian. The two go hand in hand.

To use our gifts properly, we need to be filled with the Spirit. To be Spirit-filled means to be controlled by the Spirit. We cannot exercise our gifts apart from his control. We need him to enlighten and direct us in our ministries. We need his presence and his power continuously. As we yield to him, he will qualify us for our tasks and work through us.