

Sermon Notes

Series: Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts

Date: July 19th, 2009

Title: “3 Difficult Questions About Spiritual Gifts”

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

1) ARE ALL THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE STILL VALID?

- a) Short answer... yes! In fact I believe all the spiritual gifts are not only valid, but operative.
 - i) I haven't always believed this, but God changed my mind through teaching on 1 Cor 13:8-13.

- b) 1 Corinthians 13:8-13
 - i) Summary of chapter 13
 - (1) Paul began in v 1 by telling the Corinthians that apart from love, the gifts have no value.
 - (2) In v 2, Paul says love is so important that he would rather the Corinthians act in love than have any of the gifts they treasure so much.
 - (3) And then in verse 8, Paul continues this argument.
 - (a) He says that love is superior to the gifts because it will last into eternity, whereas the spiritual gifts – and Paul just lists three, will pass away.
 - (4) In the remaining 5 verses, Paul expands on that contrast from verse 8.
 - ii) Considering verse 10
 - (1) If the spiritual gifts (and especially the more miraculous gifts like prophecy and tongues) are temporary, when do they stop existing?
 - (2) Verse 10 says when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.
 - (a) Most agree that the “partial” or “imperfect” in verse 10 refers back to the spiritual gifts that Paul gave examples of in verse 9.
 - (3) But what does “perfect” refer to?
 - (a) If we know when the perfect comes, we know when those gifts that are partial and temporary will pass away.
 - (4) Based on the context, “perfect” refers to the “state of affairs that Jesus brings at His return”
 - iii) 3 Reasons why “perfect” refers to Jesus’ return and all that it brings...
 - (1) First, this understanding is consistent with what Paul says when he begins his letter to the Corinthians. (cf. 1:4-7)
 - (a) Once Jesus returns, we won't need the gifts anymore.
 - (i) At that point we will have been glorified and transformed.
 - (ii) At that point we will be as much like Jesus as we ever will.
 - (b) So we need the spiritual gifts until Jesus returns, but not after.
 - (2) Second, Paul has already shown that he is thinking about eternal matters by saying love never ends in verse 8 of our text.
 - (a) Since verse 8 had a view towards eternity, it is likely that the “perfect” should be understood in the same way.
 - (3) The third reason for understanding the perfect as a reference to Christ's return is the analogy of the mirror in verse 12.
 - (a) In this analogy Paul explains that our present perception and knowledge are indirect, but eventually it will be direct and perfect.
 - (b) And the day when we will see things perfectly and directly will be the day when we no longer see in a mirror, but face to face.

- (c) The phrase “face to face” is used all throughout the O.T. to refer to seeing God personally. (Gen 32:20; Judg 6:22; Deut 5:4, 34:10; Ezekiel 20:35; Exodus 33:11, etc.)
 - (i) Cf. Rev 22:1-4 as well.
 - (d) So when will we finally see God face to face? When Jesus returns!
 - (e) When will we know fully and be fully known? When Jesus returns!
 - (f) When will all the spiritual gifts cease, including the miraculous? When Jesus returns!
- c) An important qualification about my understanding of spiritual gifts.
 - i) Even though I believe all the spiritual gifts are for today, I don’t see any biblical reason why every church is required to have every single spiritual gift.
 - (1) Consider churches in N.T (Rome, Ephesus, etc.)...no mention of tongues, healing, etc.
 - (2) If the presence or absence of a particular gift doesn’t make a believer somehow more spiritual, why would it be different in the church as a whole? (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11)
 - (3) Also, God apportions the spiritual gifts according to His sovereign grace.
 - (a) We’re not responsible as a church to have all of the gifts.
 - (b) Instead, we’re responsible as a church to use whatever gifts God has given us.
 - d) Application
 - i) Be open to the all of the spiritual gifts.
 - (1) Instead of responding to the abuse of miraculous spiritual gifts by rejecting them, we need to respond by correcting them.
 - (a) This is what Paul did in Corinth (1 Cor 14)
 - (b) Paul tells us not to despise prophecies (1Thess 5) or forbid tongues (1 Cor 14:39)
 - ii) Don’t be consumed by the spiritual gifts.
 - (1) As important as the spiritual gifts are, and as much as we should understand and implement them, we need to be careful about making them central.
 - (2) Some churches today have become like Corinth because they’ve allowed their passion for the gifts to cloud their love for others, or even worse the priority of the gospel.
 - (3) We must heed Paul’s admonitions to keep love (1 Cor. 13) and the gospel (1 Cor 15:3) greater priorities than the spiritual gifts.

2) HOW MANY SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE THERE?

- a) Considering the four New Testament “lists” on the Spiritual Gifts (cf. Ephesians 4:11-12; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30).
 - i) Most agree that each list here is probably more of a representation of the gifts then a catalogue.
 - ii) There is a possibility some of some things on these lists are different names Paul was using to describe the same spiritual gift. (e.g. service and helps)
 - iii) Additionally, there may be other areas in the Old or New Testament that could be qualified as spiritual gifts. (e.g. craftsmanship from Exodus 33)
 - iv) Because these four lists are only representative, I let a biblical definition of spiritual gifts determine the actual number of spiritual gifts.
 - v) And based on that definition (see previous sermon, “Defining the Spiritual Gifts,”) I believe there are 20 spiritual gifts in the Bible.

3) HOW SHOULD WE DEFINE EACH OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

- a) Carefully! See “Spiritual Gifts Chart” download. (NT prophecy only gift explained during sermon)