

The Spirit at Work

by Alan Redpath

Alan Redpath emphasizes the vital role of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers and fostering unity within the church through spiritual gifts.

Duration: 35:28

Scripture: John 15:5, Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:4-10, 1 Corinthians 12:13-21, 1 Corinthians 12:28

Topics: "God's Work"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being still and silent in our hearts to hear the will of God. He highlights the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, including the baptism of the Spirit and the various roles in the church such as apostles, prophets, and teachers. The speaker acknowledges that the charismatic movement is often associated only with speaking in tongues, but he argues that it is much broader and has made a significant impact on the evangelical church worldwide. He also cautions against envy of others' gifts, as all gifts are given by the Spirit of God.

Transcript

1 Corinthians chapter 12, a classic of the Bible on spiritual gifts. Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. You know that you were Gentiles carried away into these dumb idols even as you were led.

Therefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed. And no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit. Now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit.

And there are diversities of administrations but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit with all.

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit. By the way, notice the frequent repetition of that little phrase at the end, by the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another diverse kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

But all these worketh that one and the self, same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many are one, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

For the body is not one member but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members, every one of them, in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. Nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. How much more these members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.

And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour. And our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need, but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.

That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. Or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

This is the word of the Lord, and strange as it may seem, 1 Corinthians 12 is followed by 1 Corinthians 13, that great chapter of love. I want to share with you a little bit this morning about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is rather neglected, or misunderstood, or forgotten in so many areas these days.

And it's so sad that the one who was sent to unite the body, is these days the centre of controversy. Christian work is so planned that we don't need the Holy Spirit anymore, and Christian living is so organised that we don't have much time for it. But Jesus said in John 15 and verse 5, without me you can do nothing.

Not without my help, not without a little reinforcement, but without my life, you can do nothing. It was A. W. Tozer who says in his book, In Pursuit of God, I think, if the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we do would go on, and nobody would know any different. If the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95% of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.

Programme is substituted for Holy Spirit strategy. Do you ever have the misfortune to attend church business meetings, perhaps? You don't have that in your area, but I do, and there's a complete dichotomy in a church business meeting between the very nice opening evangelical prayer and the benediction, and

what happens in between. Have you ever been at a church business meeting when somebody has stopped it and said, just a minute, what do you think the Lord wants to do about this? I haven't.

We make our plans and ask him to bless them, without really stopping to ask what his plan may be. Yet, the Holy Spirit is the substitute on earth today for the bodily presence of Jesus, 2000 years ago. He's here to replace him.

You remember that when the Lord was here, heaven opened more than once and said, this is my beloved son, hear him. Not now, not now. Now it is, he that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

That's the way in which every letter to the seven churches in Revelation concludes. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Of course, that means giving him time and room.

Supposing an angel came and stood behind you now and said to you, how many minutes are there in a day? What would you answer? 960? Left? 960 And suppose that angel said to you, yes, and how many minutes of those 960 do you give time to talk to me? Oh Lord, seven? Seven minutes out of 960? Would we have to say that? I was interested because I read in, I think it was, I forget which magazine, so I'm trying to tell you, in the average life of 75 years, we spend 25 years asleep, 17 years at work, six years in travel, seven and a half years dressing, nine watching TV, six years eating, four years being sick, and six months in prayer and Bible study. If I believe in the Holy Spirit, I just can't afford to live like that. He needs time and room.

It's sufficient, of course, to begin with, if he that hath an ear, one person, one person has an ear to hear, and that person must have a capacity to wait on God and listen. All fruitful Christian service begins and continues in hearing what the Holy Spirit is saying. I don't think that has much to do with our outward ear.

God has many ways of getting his message through. It comes through his Word, chiefly. I would say that the Word of God without the Spirit of God is dead.

I don't care how fundamental it is, it's dead. And the Holy Spirit without the Word of God is dangerous. It isn't based on the Word of God, it's dangerous.

But where you have the Word of God linked with the Spirit of God, you've got dynamite. And that's what we need in these days. You read a chapter in Acts, like Acts 13, especially the closing part, where the disciples went everywhere preaching the Word, the Word.

That was their authority. He can speak that way. He also speaks through outward circumstances.

I haven't time to ask you to read this, but I'll just give you the chapter, Acts 16, verse 9, how the Word of God got into Europe, and how the disciples were led by closed doors as well as open doors. When anybody comes to me and says they're absolutely sure that God is leading them somewhere, every door is opened wide. It's been so wonderful.

I find that every door shuts slam in my face before God opens one of them, which is his. You may not agree with that. But in spite of all these things, everybody must have willingness to be still, to be silent in the depths of our hearts to our own plans and our own ideas, and wait for a revelation of the will of God.

Now, in revealing his will to us, the Lord has gifts of the Spirit, and we were reading this morning this amazing chapter in his Word. Look at one or two verses with me, would you? First, at verse 13, for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body. Notice that word, all.

Now look at verse 28, and God has set some in the church. Now that word some is not in the RSV or in the NAV, but it's implied. God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondary prophets, thirdly teachers, and so on.

He has baptized all in the Spirit, and he has given some apostles and prophets and teachers and so on. Now turn to verses 4 through 7. Let me just read them again to you. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

There are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. Diversities of operations, but the same God who works in all in all. The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit with all.

And just leave it there at the moment. Now what is the Lord saying? What is the Word saying to us in that? He's saying this, isn't he? He knows what is the best gift for each one of us. Verse 6, in order that we may fit into the body, the church, verse 7, and also verse 11.

All these worketh that one and the self, same Spirit, divide into every man severally as he will. That's tremendously important. I'll say a word or two more about that in a minute.

Of the gifts here, and there are 14 of them, none of them are natural talents, natural gifts. Verse 4, and there are 11 repetitions of this phrase, by the same Spirit. They're all given by the Spirit of God.

Therefore I should never envy anyone else's gift. Never. But we need all of them within the fellowship of the church.

But you can't have them all. You and I will have the gift that the Lord knows we need in order to take our part in the body of Christ, for the blessing of other people. That's the teaching of these verses, and especially as we go on in verses 14 through 21.

There are 17 references to the body here. The foot, the eyes, the hand, and the head, all make up the body. Therefore, and how important this is, each of us can say, my place in the body of Christ is not my choosing.

The Holy Spirit is sovereign. I am not where I am because I'm put there by a committee. I'm not there by the appointment of other people.

God may have used them as instruments to direct me. But I am where I am, and what I am, by the sovereignty of the Spirit of God. And that means when I'm facing a crisis, I'll be jolly slow to resign.

Remember that. You're not where you are, or you ought to be, because of somebody's decision, somebody's passing a committee. You're there because the Lord has put you there, and that will keep you there.

You'll be slow to resign. And that will keep you from being dissatisfied with the place you have in the body, and it'll keep you from being envious of the place of other people. That's, if you really get hold of that in your heart, that saves a tremendous lot of oh, criticism and bad feeling and so much that goes on.

To put all that together, let me stress again verse 11, and ask you lovingly to bear in mind one or two things. Nobody since Pentecost, until the return of the Lord, has all the gifts of the Spirit. Nobody.

Of course, and I'm thankful to say this, the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 is incomplete. There's a further list in Ephesians 4, which includes evangelists and pastors, that's fortunate. Some of us will be out.

In addition, in Romans 12, you have the gifts of service, exhorting and giving. But you just cannot have them all. But you can have all the fruit.

The gifts of the Spirit are for ministry and service. The fruit of the Spirit is the character and life. And the fruit of the Spirit, of course, Galatians 5, 22, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

You can have all that, but you can't have all the gifts. Then nobody has a right, therefore, to demand that everyone else should have their particular gift. Nobody.

But all of us should reveal the fruit. I'm not pleading for a manifestation of the gifts apart from the fruit, or for the fruit apart from the gifts. Both should be combined in an effective witness for the Lord Jesus.

The Lord is sovereign in distribution of the gifts which are related to ministry and service. The fruit is related to character, the purpose of God for all of us, Ephesians 3, 19, that we might be filled up with all the fullness of God. That's the fruit.

Therefore, it should be clear that to say that to speak in tongues is an essential evidence of baptism in the Spirit is quite unbiblical. And it's unbiblical on two grounds. First, not all Christians can have that particular gift.

If this was the one gift that mattered above all others, it would be majored upon in the New Testament, in every letter. Instead, it's only mentioned in 1 Corinthians, and then only in three chapters, and then with a view to keeping it under control. Furthermore, it's no evidence of spiritual maturity, because the Corinthian church was absolutely carnal, but it came to possess all the gifts.

Therefore, the phrase, baptism in the Spirit, needs to be defined from Scripture. 1 Corinthians 12, 13. You've all been baptized by one Spirit into the body of Christ.

Baptism always refers in the Bible to initiation, a new beginning. How do I just put this to you? Take, for instance, Acts 1-5 and Acts 2-4. You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit, referring to a new situation, a new relationship.

You never find the word baptism in the Spirit in Acts again, except in two instances. You find it in, you might like to note it, chapter 10, in the home of Cornelius, and chapter 19, at Ephesus. Both of these were Gentile situations.

Cornelius, and at Ephesus, a strange company of twelve people who never heard of the Holy Spirit before. They had been baptized in the baptism of John, and they were baptized in the Spirit. The word baptism in the Spirit is used in reference to the Lord Jesus once, in chapter 12, verse 50 of Luke, where he spoke of an overwhelming experience.

I have a baptism to be baptized with. How am I straight until it be accomplished? The baptism into a new relationship occurs once. The filling of the Spirit in growth and maturity occurs over and over again.

Have you ever heard of a great Methodist teacher, a couple of generations ago, Charles Inwood? He said something very lovely about the fullness of the Spirit. There is no such thing as a once and for all experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It's a moment by moment faith, in a moment by moment filling.

At the moment I begin to believe, at that moment I begin to receive. And as long as I go on believing, I go on receiving. That's marvelous.

That's exactly what happens. There are some people, and I would identify myself with them, who have had a very nominal experience of the Lord Jesus at the beginning. Suddenly, one day, a new revelation takes place in their lives.

It's like a fresh baptism into power. I don't want to quarrel about words, but speaking very untheologically, it's like being born again all over again. For seven years I lived a defeated Christian life.

One day, Major Ian Thomas, the founder of Caithnary Hall, spoke at a meeting in which I was present. He said, what do you think the Lord would expect of you? I sort of shriveled up, I'd like to get under my seat and thought, oh I know. He expects me to be some tremendous person, etc., you know, some terrific Christian.

I listened again. He said, nothing but failure. I pricked up my ears, because the Lord, if that's right, I'm a candidate right now, ready.

He said, God expects nothing from you but failure, but God has given to you the Holy Spirit that you need never fail. And that just absolutely lit up the whole situation to me. Not that you cannot fail, but you need not fail.

That absolutely transformed my life. That understanding that the Christian life is not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord. Like Hudson Taylor on the beach at Brighton, thinking his missionary career was over for being a complete failure, suddenly said to himself, oh Lord, it isn't what Hudson Taylor does for you that matters.

It's what the Lord does in and through Hudson Taylor, a life of complete exchange. Therefore, I must recognize something, and it's this, that every Christian is a charismatic Christian. You can't be a Christian if you're not.

The word means grace, gifts, excuse me, a moat. Charismatic grace, charismatic gifts. And if I haven't got any grace, I haven't got any gifts, I'm not even a Christian at all.

And I don't understand what all the fighting is about. It's terribly sad that in the mind of so many people, so many Christians, the charismatic movement is identified only with the glossolalia, only with speaking in tongues. It's far wider than that, worldwide.

The charismatic movement, so called, has made the greatest impact on the evangelical church of the century, all over. The trouble has been that wherever you have reality, you've got counterfeit. So Satan is pretty good at that.

And many people have been completely disillusioned by the insistence of so many people that everyone should have that particular gift. And therefore, the reaction of so many people has been, don't touch any of it, we've got it all. Got it all.

Just look at us. Look at the average church congregation, got it all. Any excitement there? Any joy? Never saw such a miserable bunch of people in my life, as I see at some churches, honestly.

Got it all. I was preaching at a church, a Methodist church in Grantham, a couple of weeks ago. Grantham, you know, the place where the 125 engines are made and so on.

And once, a great center of Methodist worship. It was the Free Church Council Annual Anniversary Meeting. That meant, I think, every free church except Anglicans.

So I was back there. And it was a Methodist church with accommodation for at least 1700 people. You know, one of these huge galleries that went right round, and a great big pulpit way up there on the level of the gallery.

And do you know how many people were at the service? Fifty-one. Fifty-one people out at the place. That seat, it's 1700.

And I thought to myself, Lord, what's the matter here? What's gone wrong? I don't know what had been wrong. I've gone wrong. But somehow I sensed that those people, at least 51, very rarely heard the Gospel.

Very rarely. We've got it all. Oh dear.

Don't touch it. Well, forget the charismatic movement. You go to a church.

I don't like naming places, but Benestroit is a great friend of mine. You probably know Jim Graham. Some of you do, in Amersham, near Amersham.

My, that church is alive. Packed full. He has seven elders in that church.

And they meet with him every day, every morning at seven o'clock before they go to business. Over an hour. They pray together, worship together, and plan the Sunday preaching together.

It's a one-man ministry. That's out. All these people share in the ministry of the Word of God.

I don't know, some of you may be not in that particular land, but I mean, if you're in the ministry, it's no good thinking that you're going to lead the thing, and everybody else is going to follow. They won't do that. The trouble in many churches is that they appoint people, especially people with money, to be treasurer.

And these people who put in, who are in business, simply carry on their business in the church. And give the fag ends of the time, to the ministry of the church. Can't work.

The men are dead tired anyway. What you need, surely, in a church is a shared ministry. And the moment you're prepared to put people into that, they go off your neck then.

Because they realize something of tension, something of the strain of preaching and of ministry, and share it with you. And you have a shared ministry that's shared at depth, in prayer, in concern, in love for other people. It's wonderful to see a church like that at Jim Graham's, absolutely packed, twice a Sunday, and having to rebuild and so on.

But all because there is an acknowledgement of the charisma of the Holy Spirit, giving him time and giving him room. Now, there's one other danger of this. It's this, that why is it, I wonder, that some people would

tell us that certain gifts of the Spirit, um, like prophecy, healing, and tongues in particular, were withdrawn after the first century.

And are not for this age. Why? I don't think we can arbitrarily dispense with three gifts because we don't understand them. And are perhaps afraid of them, but accept others' granting.

And you can do that. I believe the whole church worldwide needs all the gifts of the Spirit. And especially in these last days, when Satan is turning on his power against the church as never before.

And you can't defeat the devil with second-class weapons. The rise of Satan, worship, witchcraft, and all the allurements of the occult, etc. You can only answer that with a power of the Spirit of God, set free and let loose.

And I find that the evidence of reality in this charisma, especially in the gift of tongues, is that the people who have that gift never speak of it. I know many people who received a new touch of Holy Spirit life. If I may speak, um, of my family.

They came home from Central Africa on a photo some years ago, about 15 years ago, I suppose. I remember them saying, when they came home, they said to me, unless the Lord does something with us, we can never possibly go back. They, they were spending a holiday with us then in New Jersey.

They went across to the other side of the states and went to a church that was alive. And they received a new touch from God. And in the course of that, in the sheer joy of it, they, they spoke in tongues.

And they had a great sense of freedom and liberty. And I wouldn't have known that if I hadn't asked them. Because they didn't speak of it.

But, but I saw, I saw Jesus shining out of them. I saw the reality of Christ shining about them. They were different people.

They'd come home depressed and down and ready, ready to resign and quit. Now, weeks later, months later, they're absolutely full of joy and went back to the field. But as I asked them, have you received that gift? They both said they hadn't, but never have told me.

And that sense seemed to be so genuine. When you see Jesus shining through, oh, of course, there are many, many people who are filled up with the Spirit of God who don't speak in tongues. And there are many people who are speaking in tongues who are not filled with the Spirit.

And a great evidence of reality is somehow that Jesus comes right through. And you can't mistake that. I was speaking at a church in Redhill, near London, some little time ago.

And at the end of the service, a lady came up and spoke to me. And she said, what a pity you haven't got it. And I said, I beg your pardon, ma'am.

She said, what a pity you haven't got it. I said, what do you mean? Oh, come to our church, you'll get it. You really would.

You must come to our church and get it. So I said to her, my dear lady, I'm not looking for it. I'm looking for Him.

It's the giver I want, not the gift. If I have the giver and all of Him, He'll give me what gifts He knows I must have, that I need for my share in the ministry. I think all I would say is the Lord needs to help us to keep all this in balance, remembering that the function of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus real to us, to make His word live, and to make our witness for Him effective.

So get your priorities right. Right. And remember that between chapter 12 and chapter 14 is that great chapter of love.

And our unlikeness to Jesus is exactly in proportion to our failure to love. Like that. That's all I think I should say on that subject this morning.

Let's just have a word of prayer together. Thank you, dear Lord, that we're members of your body. And where one member suffers, we all suffer.

May that love and care and sharing be constantly with each one of us, and that people may recognize that the love of God is in our hearts, and works through us to your glory and your praise. Thank you for the brief time we've had together. And Lord, may the river of God flow this way, and may each one of us know the just overflowing of your power constantly.

That we may not grieve your spirit, but that we may be filled up to overflowing with the power of the living God. Hear our prayer. And Lord, teach us to accept whatever gifts you may give us, and that we may take our part in the body, not to criticize other people, not to judge or condemn or to be jealous, but to love and to care, and that it may be body life all the time.

Hear us, Lord, and grant us your blessing today and through these days, till Jesus comes again. And may the joy of the Lord be our strength always, and the shout of a king in the camp. We ask it in your dear name.

Amen.

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