

***“The Holy Spirit Gives Gifts to the Church”*** (Series #4)

By Pastor Rand Lankheet for New Horizon URC. Second service, March 12, 2017

Based on the Catechism (教理问答) . Read Q. 55; Bible illustration: 1 Corinthians 12:1-31a.

**Before reading:** Many of the points I’ll be making in this sermon are taken from a workbook written by

Rev. Alvin Vander Griend. That workbook is entitled “*Discover Your Gifts.*” Rev. Vander Griend was my pastor during some of my years in seminary (神学院) , in Grand Rapids, Mich. I served on a church staff with him.

-Our topic is “the gifts恩赐 of the Holy Spirit.” We’re going to cover this topic in 2 sermons. / Part of series on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. [Read

**Introduction:** Compare a battle ship to a cruise ship. On a battle ship (战舰) , a military ship, everyone on that ship has a task. Each sailor has a certain duty. But, on a cruise ship, only the staff have duties. 90% are passengers, without any duties. They are usually on vacation, not doing much. Just enjoying the cruise. /

So what would you say: is the church more like a cruise ship, a passenger ship, or is the church more like a battle ship? Well, the Bible emphasizes that in the church every member has a function. Everyone has some task to do.

So, in that regard, the church is like a battle ship. Not a cruise ship.

***The topic of spiritual gifts emphasizes our functions and tasks in the church today.***

None of us should be sitting back, just enjoying the ride. No. We should all be doing something.

HC Q. 55 says that in the church “each member should consider it a duty to use ... [their] gifts readily and cheerfully.”

**1. So let’s start with the question, WHAT? What are spiritual gifts, in general?**

Here’s a good definition: “Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by Christ through the Holy Spirit to empower believers for the ministries (事工) of the congregation.” [Repeat.

Let’s break that down: Spiritual gifts are “special abilities.” So these are not merely things we are good at, by nature. Say, like playing a sport, or being artistic. No. The spiritual gifts are special abilities given by the ascended (已升天的) Lord Jesus Christ, to his church, to the members of Chr. congregations. /

And, notice, these gifts are given particularly by the special work of the Holy Spirit.

[Read vs. 11. We call these “*spiritual*” gifts...because they flow to us by the *Spirit*. /

**2. Now, historically, Reformed theologians (神学家) have distinguished two categories of spiritual gifts:** A distinction between the so-called “extraordinary” (不同一般的, 特别的) gifts, and the “ordinary” gifts.

I wish Br. VandeGriend had kept that distinction in his otherwise excellent study guide.

He doesn’t. But we’re keeping that historical distinction.

**2.A.** We believe that ***the extraordinary gifts*** are those given only to the first and second generations of Christians. Just after Jesus ascended to heaven, and poured out His Spirit. That was before the New Testament books were written.

For example, in Acts 2, we read that the apostles (使徒) were given the ability to speak in various languages they had never studied. We call it the “gift of tongues.” (说方言的恩赐) They started to speak in human languages which were never learned or studied.

Now, ***why*** was that gift of tongue-speaking given? Well, it was given so that the good news of Jesus would advance rapidly in the world. Jewish people from dozens of countries were gathered

for the Jewish festival of Pentecost (五旬节) . Among the tens of thousands of people gathered on that day, three thousand Jews heard the gospel (福音) in their own language!

We talk today about “kick-starting a project”...that is, launching (发起) a project in a big way. So Jesus “kick-started” His church on earth, just 10 days after He ascended to heaven.

He powerfully launched His church by giving to His church the gift of tongues.

-On that day of Pentecost, people had come to Jerusalem from more than a dozen different countries. How long would it have taken missionaries (宣教士) , to go to these lands? To learn those languages, and to see that many converts? Easily, it would have taken twenty or thirty or more years! So with the gift of languages, Jesus “kick-started” the spread of the early church.

Today, we count around one billion Christians in the world. Billion, with a B. Oh, not all of them are genuine believers. But about 1 in 7 of the world’s people claim to be Christian today.

So today there are tens of thousands of pastors and missionaries who are trained in churches and seminaries....and are being sent out to plant new churches.

We have the radio and the internet, likewise. So, the gift of miraculous languages might be nice, but it is not a necessity today. It was something necessary in the first century A.D. But it is not necessary today.

-We also put the **gift of healing** in the category of “extraordinary gifts.” That gift is no longer for today. Let me explain. Indeed, God does sometimes miraculously heal people today. But there are not specific Christians who have the special, spiritual gift of healing.

If you carefully study the New Testament, you find that gradually the gift of healing disappears.

Evidently some in the church in Corinth had that gift—it is mentioned in chapter 12, vs. 9.

But some years later, Paul advises Timothy to “take a little wine” for his stomach problem.

Paul doesn’t tell Timothy to find someone in the church with the gift to heal his stomach.

But, just like the special gift of tongues, so the extraordinary gift of healing miracles. Those miracles helped to “kick start” the growth of Jesus’ church on earth with the first and second generation.

The technical word for those who believe the extraordinary gifts have ceased, are called,

“*cessasionists*.”“持 (特别属灵恩赐) 已终止意见者” I am a cessasionist. Pastor Mitchell is a cessasionist. A cessasionist believes that the extraordinary gifts have ceased. Those gifts do not continue today. //

**2.B.** But many spiritual gifts *have continued*. We call them the “*ordinary*” *spiritual gifts*.

In 1 Corinthians, vss. 8-9 you see some of those gifts listed. [Read vss. 8-9.

In addition to 1 Cor 12, there are two other places in the NT, which list the gifts.

Those places are Romans 12:6-8, and Ephesians 4:8-12. [Repeat. //

Depending on how you categorize them, there are between 12-16 continuing spiritual gifts for Christians today. The NT doesn’t number them clearly, and some overlap....

so the actual number is somewhat a matter of interpretation (释经) . See them listed on the

outline... let me read them, in alphabetical order (字母表顺序) : administration, creative ability, discernment (属灵辨别) , encouragement, // evangelism, faith, giving monetary (金钱的) gifts, hospitality (热情好客) ,

Also—intercession (代求) , knowledge, leadership, mercy, //service, shepherding (牧养) , teaching, and wisdom.

That’s one list of 16 continuing gifts for members of the church today.

[Lists on the side table...with descriptions of each of these 16 spiritual gifts.

**3. Let me give some examples. *Let’s look at three of these gifts.***

**3.A. Administration.** [See 1 Cor 12:28.

In its root meaning, the Greek word translated as “administration” referred to those who worked

to navigate (导航) or pilot (领航) a ship. A good navigator has the ability to keep the ship on course. The word was also used to describe someone who manages a household.

So “administration” is the Spirit-given ability to guide the church, or members in the church, to accomplish certain plans, to meet certain goals. A church member who has this gift has extra organizational and management skills. This is not a matter of moving paper about, or sending emails...though, today, it may include that.

Rather, this gift refers *to the spiritual management of fellow Christians in the church to accomplish a certain goal*. That includes motivating and organizing fellow believers according to their own spiritual gifts. Inspiring them when challenges arise. Keeping them focused on the assigned goal or plan. / Might you have this spiritual gift, today? Think about it...

-You can also see by this example that a spiritual gift doesn't have to be, well, “super-spiritual.” The Spirit led administrator is spiritual in the sense of having genuine trust in Jesus, and actively involved in the church. But, the gift of admin. is also very practical, hands-on.

Now, anyone who manages people in ordinary life, or in work, will be quick to say that management requires a lot of skill, and a lot of patience. If we think of church members as sheep, sheep in a flock (羊群), how easily sheep get distracted. How quickly they turn to the right or to the left. So the believer with the spiritual gift of administration especially needs the Spirit-filled skill in motivating people, and gently directing believers in good ways. /

**3.B.** Another spiritual gift, **teaching**. [Read 1 Cor 12:28.

This spiritual gift seems to rank high, up there with gifts of being an apostle (not for today), or the gift of prophecy (also not exactly for today). Eph 4:11-12 associates the gift of biblical teaching, with the gift of being a pastor. Quote, “he [Jesus] gave some to be pastors and teachers”—or as it could be translated, “pastor-hyphen-teachers.”

Teaching must be a gift for every pastor, every preacher of the gospel.

To teach requires high dedication (奉献精神) to God's Word, a burning desire to transmit the truths of His Word to His people. It also requires a Spirit-given skill to communicate those truths.

In an engaging (吸引人的) way.

This gift isn't only for pastors, preachers. Elders, ideally, should have that gift, also.

And other members of the church may have that spiritual gift, also.

-Be careful not to think of our “western style” of teaching, or our more modern style of instruction. Today teaching happens with textbooks, and power-point presentations. In our setting today, a teacher usually is standing up in front of a large class.

Teaching in Bible days was quite different. Back then, teaching was often one-on-one teaching, ...more like a guided conversation. We might call it today “discipling”—a new believer. Explaining about Jesus and about our life in Jesus to a new convert. Or, bringing more advanced biblical knowledge to a longer time Christian, who simply might be confused.

The gift of teaching today requires reading skills and communication skills.

If you are not so much interested in reading or communicating, you probably don't have the gift of teaching. / But there are many other gifts you might have....

**3.C.** So, *let's take another spiritual gift*, in a completely different area.

[Turn to Romans 12:8. Read. *Giving monetary gifts*.

Quite obvious...being generous, with financial resources (经济资源). Giving freely. Giving joyfully. //

**4. Finally: What are THE REASONS Jesus gives these gifts, through His Holy Spirit,**

to members of His church? Several reasons...but let's consider just *TWO main reasons*:

**4.A.** [Look at 1 Cor 12:7 “*for the common good*.” In 1 Peter 4:10, Peter says we ought to use our gifts to [quote] “serve others.” The Holy Spirit supplies us these gifts to minister to one another in the church, the congregation. [Read HC, Q 55.

**Illustration:** So, take the *gift of giving money*. Believers with that special gift, are giving even more generously than other Christians. Perhaps they are blessed with extra income; they might own a profitable (盈利性的) business. Or, maybe they have an ordinary income, but the Lord has given them a spiritual willingness to be satisfied with a more simple life. Not to spend so much money on themselves, but to give to those who have financial needs.

Why are they giving? Well, with their gifts, they are financially supporting pastors and missionaries and church planters. Or, as they learn of Christians in poverty, they give extra, to help supply their basic needs. This gift, obviously, is for the “common good.” For the good of the needy in the local congregation. And for the good of Jesus’ church around the world.

**4.B. Another reason** for spiritual gifts is found in Ephesians chapter 4. [Read Eph 4:12-13. Essentially, using our spiritual gifts is *to build up the body, the congregation, bringing us together into full maturity in Jesus Christ*. Gifts of the Spirit, put to use, help make us more mature. More mature in our understanding, in our faith, in our living for J. We don’t have time to go further... but just to emphasize, again, that your spiritual gift is not for you, for your benefit, first of all. It is for the benefit of the whole body. Maturing them in their faith and life.

**Conclusion: What’s the difference between a cruise ship with passengers, and a battle ship in**

the Navy? As we said—a cruise ship is mostly for people to enjoy the ride. To sit and relax.

But, in a battleship, everyone has a task. Each sailor has a duty.

So the church is more like a battleship. Jesus gives us unique spiritual abilities, through His Holy Spirit. So that we may do our duty. How is it for you, in this church?

Are you sitting back, just enjoying the ride? Or do you know your gifts?

Next Sunday, Lord willing, some practical ways to discover your spiritual gifts.

-Are you using your gifts? [Re-read HC, Q. 55.

May God encourage you to put your spiritual gifts to work. *The gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

For the good of the other members here.

For the good of other churches nearby..and around the world.

As you use your gift, and I use mine, each of us in the church will be built up in Jesus.

Together, as church, we will become more mature in Him.

Ultimately, all to the praise of the King of the Church, even Jesus our Lord. **LET US PRAY.**