



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **GIFTS AND GRACES**

The Holy Spirit is the life-giver (see 2 Cor 3:6). But he does not just give us life; he also works in us and through us. In the last chapter we considered the way in which the Holy Spirit dwells in us and works inside of us to give us life and the fruit that comes from that life. We are now going to consider the way he works through us so that we can act more effectively to advance the kingdom of God.

This is not a chapter on the spiritual gifts, the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and referred to in other scriptural texts. It will mention them but not go into what they are and how they function. It presupposes some understanding of those gifts, which are commonly taught about in writings on charismatic renewal. Nor is the focus on “stirring up” particular spiritual gifts. Rather, the chapter focuses on acting confidently as servants of the Lord who have been gifted by him.

Many who have read treatments of the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been given one of two orientations. One is what some have called the “apostle’s-eye view” of such gifts. This one is easy to fall into inadvertently, because the greatest single source of scriptural discussion on gifts and graces is the apostle Paul, and he often spoke about them when he was talking about his own experience. The second orientation is the “conference and prayer meeting orientation,” which comes from the

fact that the presentations given are intended to help people participate well (and “charismatically”) in conferences and prayer meetings.

Both orientations have their uses, but they are too limited to provide an overall view of the gifts and graces of the Spirit that equip us to act and serve as Christians. This chapter will instead give what could be called a “daily life orientation,” because the focus will be on how the Holy Spirit works in us for all of our lives.

### The “Breath” of God

We tend to think of the Spirit as being immaterial (a true statement) and therefore weaker, less substantial (a false one). Psalm 33:6-9 makes it clear that something spiritual is something powerful, something “charged with” the Spirit, who is the power of God:

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.  
He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;  
he put the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the LORD,  
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!  
For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded, and it stood forth.

The word *Spirit* is a translation of a Hebrew (and Greek) word that sometimes is translated “breath,” as in the above psalm, and at other times, “wind.” The Holy Spirit, then, is “the breath of his [God’s] mouth.”

There is an image behind the use of *word* and *spirit* as synonyms in this psalm. We can only speak a word when we breathe out. To speak, we breathe and form our breath into a sound of a certain sort. A word then comes into existence. The

breath (spirit) gives the force or energy for the word to be spoken and heard. If you project your voice or shout, you realize this more quickly, because doing so takes more breath.

The word of God creates heaven and earth. Speaking of “the heavens ... and all their host ...” as well as “the earth ... and all the inhabitants of the world,” the psalm says, “He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.” In other words, by speaking a command, God created everything. His command contained the understanding of what he wanted to happen, which came from his wisdom or reason. His breath or spirit contained the force or power that brought it into existence. The Spirit with which he breathes his word is creative power itself.

Although seemingly insubstantial, wind can be very powerful. We can see something of this by considering a hurricane or tornado, both very strong winds. I was once staying with my mother when she lived close to Miami on Biscayne Boulevard. One evening a tornado decided to go north on Biscayne Boulevard. It touched down at three points and then headed out to sea. The next morning I went to one of the spots where it had landed and was impressed with how little it left of what once was a substantial building. The Scripture tells us that this is the kind of power that the “breath of God” has.

On the other hand, wind can have constructive effects. It can blow on a windmill and produce electricity or power a water pump. It can fill sails and move a boat across a great ocean. To get such results, we need the ability to receive the wind and apply its power to something useful.

Sometimes we use the phrase “charged with the Spirit.” Behind this is the image of an electrical wire. We can plug a cord into an appliance and nothing will happen. When, however, the other end of the cord is plugged into a socket, the cord is charged with electricity and brings electrical power into the appliance to enable it to function. Something charged

with the Spirit is spiritually powerful and capable of getting spiritual results.



Spirit, then, is something forceful or powerful. The Holy Spirit, the holy breath of God or wind from God, brings with him God's power. He enables what he enters into to operate with spiritual or divine power. That is why Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you," and why Peter said in Acts 10:38, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."

The Holy Spirit, however, is not naked power or brute force. He brings power accompanied by and formed by wisdom, because he is the power of God. As a consequence, he not only seeks to make our action more powerful, he also seeks to direct our action so that we know better what to do and how to do it. When the apostles wanted to choose what are sometimes described as the first deacons (servants), Peter said to the community, "Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom [or full of the Spirit of wisdom, the wisdom-bringing Spirit], whom we may appoint to this duty" (Acts 6:3). They were to look for men to whom the Holy Spirit had given wisdom, spiritually wise men. It is the combination of wisdom and power that forms human action and makes it effective and not chaotic or destructive, like that of an enraged man out of control. When we receive the Holy Spirit, then, he enters into us with wisdom and power, to equip us and work through us so that we can serve the kingdom of God in a more effective way.

## Gifts and Graces We Can Expect

Scripture speaks about gifts and graces that come from God, to use the traditional English translations. The two words seem to be rough synonyms, although some teachers distinguish between them. They are used to speak about what God does inside of us when he takes us into relationship with himself and fills us with his Spirit. They are called gifts or graces (favors), because they are not something we can earn or acquire by our own efforts, like the skill attested by a medical degree, but are the result of the Holy Spirit working in us “as he wills.”

On the other hand, gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit are not like modern birthday gifts but are more like birthday gifts used to be. I remember that when I was a child, I received toys or something similar from most people, but I could always count on my aunt, who was a somewhat old-fashioned person, to provide me with some clothing or something else “useful.” My parents seemed happier with her gift than I was.

God’s gifts, at least for the most part, are not given to us to enjoy or use for whatever we want. I once visited a park that had belonged to a duke in England. They showed us where “the lion” had been kept, a place surrounded by a strong fence. Some tribal chief in Africa had apparently sent the duke a lion as a gift. The gift, however, had a mind of its own, so there were only a very limited number of things the duke could do with him. God’s gifts are more like having a lion than having a gift certificate—they have “a mind of their own,” so to speak. We can only make use of them if we cooperate with the way they function.

The word *gifts* can also be misleading in another way. When we think of a gift, we think of something we can take and carry off and still make use of when the giver is gone. But the gifts of the Spirit, especially the charismatic gifts or spiritual gifts, do not function apart from the giver himself. They are

ways to receive the action of the Spirit working in and through us to accomplish some purpose that we can only serve.

On the other hand, a gift of the Spirit is not exactly the same thing as a particular action of the Spirit or a working of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul discussed “spiritual things” (a phrase the RSV translates as “spiritual gifts”) like the gifts of tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles, which he described as “manifestations of the Spirit” (verse 7). He discussed them in order to put them into a context that would allow the Corinthians to understand how to respond to them well.

In verses 4-6 he began to speak directly of these gifts: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.” Paul here uses three terms: *gifts*, *services*, and *workings*. The last word is difficult to translate but is sometimes rendered “operation” or “inspiration.” It is used to describe the fact that God at times works through us (operates through us) to get something to happen.

These three words all refer to the same set of things, but they have three somewhat different meanings. When people are “healers,” God works through them to heal, and so the healing that occurs is a work of God. At the same time, by praying for people, healers are performing a service. But also they have been given a gift that enables them to receive the workings of God that allow them to perform their service.

Having a “gift” can be distinguished from experiencing or cooperating with a “working,” as being a prophet or having the gift to be a prophet can be distinguished from giving a prophecy. The working is God’s action, God’s doing something through us. The gift is God’s having enabled us to receive his working on a regular basis. God seems willing to work through a great variety of people to heal at different times. But if we

speak of someone as having the gift of healing, we mean more than that. We mean that that person can somehow tap into the working of God in a regular way and so can get more regular results than someone who just prays over another person and sees a healing.

We can, then, see the gifts and graces of the Spirit as equipping us or “programming” us, making us “spiritual receptors.” To use an analogy, the internet can send music. But if we do not have an application or program on our computer that is capable of receiving what is sent, we will never hear that music. When the Holy Spirit gives us gifts, he does something like program us—that is, change us spiritually inside—so that we can receive what he does, his “workings,” in an ongoing way.

The remainder of this chapter will provide an overview of the three main kinds of gifts the Holy Spirit gives, concentrating on the charismatic or ministry gifts.

### **The Gift of the Spirit Himself**

The first kind of gift that we receive is one that we have already discussed, the gift of the Spirit himself. This is the chief gift we are given. When we have received the gift of the Spirit, we have God himself abiding in us, giving us life and working in and through us.

As we have seen, the gift of the Spirit brings us new life, and as a result of that life, the fruits of the Spirit should grow. To be sure, life needs feeding and this fruit comes through exercise or practice. Some people who have received the Spirit or been baptized in the Spirit do not seem to have received much spiritual life or to have become very spiritualized. Nonetheless, spiritual life and the fruit of the Spirit become possible, in principle, through the gift of the Spirit.

The life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit in us makes it

possible for us to be effective. If we were not alive, we could not do anything. Therefore, without the spiritual life the Holy Spirit gives, we cannot do anything or have any effect as Christians. However, considering the gift of new life in the Spirit and the way he works to enable us to develop greater likeness to God in our character does not cover all his gifts. He also gives us gifts that equip us to be effective in serving him or in acting to advance his kingdom, and those are the focus of this chapter. Here we do not need to do any more than call to mind the basic gift of the Spirit so that we can see the overview.

### **Gifts and Graces for All**

Some gifts of the Spirit seem to be for everyone, the kind of spiritual equipment that comes with being a Christian. The prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-5 has been traditionally understood to be a description of such gifts:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD  
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist,  
and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.

This is a prophecy about the coming Messiah, delivered toward the end of the eighth century B.C. The royal house of Judah, the house of David, here referred to by mentioning Jesse, the father of David, is like a large tree that has been cut down. Only the stump remains. But a new shoot or branch will grow out of it. That shoot will be the Messiah, that is, an anointed king. In other words, at a time when it will look as if there are no kings left, a new king will arise.

According to the prophecy, this promised Messiah will have the Holy Spirit rest on him—that is, come into him in an abiding way in order to equip him to be an effective king. The same thing, in other words, will happen to this descendant of David that was described in 1 Samuel 16:13 as happening to David himself: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.”

In other words, David was anointed by Samuel to be the king, and then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in a powerful way to equip him to be king. The Spirit needed to remain with him and work through him in an ongoing way, because he was to be king for over forty years, all day long and all year long. David did not receive a particular working (inspiration) or help when he was anointed but a spiritual equipping that lasted “from that day forward.”

According to the prophecy, the Holy Spirit would provide different kinds of spiritual equipment for this king and, as we shall see, for us. There are some different interpretations of the set of words that describe this equipment, but the following is a helpful one:

**Wisdom and understanding:** These correspond to what we might call mental formation, the mental formation that allows us to know basic truths like the nature of God, the creation of

the world, and basic morality—that is, what is right and wrong. A king who has these gifts should be able to understand what he is about in the light of an overall grasp of the world and its relationship to God, of human life and how it can arrive at what God created it to be. The Spirit of God works in us to teach us, to so form our minds that we can understand foundational truths in a spiritualized way.

***Counsel and might:*** These are equipment for action. *Counsel* is good judgment about what to do as different situations present themselves to us. *Might* is the strength to do what we need to do, especially the ability to handle difficulties or obstacles that might turn us away from doing what we judge is the right thing to do. The Spirit of God works in us to make us effective servants (agents) of his.

***Knowledge and fear of the Lord:*** These concern our relationship with God. *Knowledge* in this context probably refers to the personal experiential knowledge of God and what he wants of us. It is “knowing him and not just knowing about him.” *Fear of the Lord* is obedience to him. The Spirit of God works in us so that we can be in a good relationship with God.

***His delight is the fear of the Lord*** seems to be a concluding summary statement. A godly king should be someone who delights to do what God wants, whose inner orientation is to do what God wants in everything. David was described as a “man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sm 13:14), not meaning that God had affection for him but that David wanted what God wanted. The Spirit of God works in us so that we can be a people after God’s own heart.