

# The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

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## THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

So.... We continue with our series on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We have seen that these are gifts or presents from God by the Holy Spirit to his people. They are imperfect ways of knowing God, but they are given for the 'in-between times', so that we might know him better. We do not need to be afraid of the gifts, and they are given to build up the community – they are given for the common good.

In this series we are looking at one list of gifts – the one in 1 Corinthians 12 v 8-10, but these are not the only gifts we find in the bible, and the other lists we do find are not really meant to be exhaustive either. There is, in fact, a wide variety of gifts, and if you haven't been on the Network course, I encourage you to, because many more gifts are talked about there.

A question you might have been thinking is: is every Christian supposed to have all the gifts? Or perhaps, as we focus on the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 v 8-10, are all Christians supposed to have all the gifts in that list? The answer is NO!

1 Corinthians 12 v 27 -31 reads: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts."

In verses 29 and 30, Paul asks a number of rhetorical questions. All these questions begin with the Greek word "me", which signifies a question where the answer is supposed to be "no!"

- Are all apostles? No.
- Are all Prophets? No.
- Are all teachers? No.
- Do all work miracles? No.
- Do all have gifts of healing? No.
- Do all speak in tongues? No.
- Do all interpret? No.

Paul does not expect us to be omnicharismatic! The same thing happens in verses 8 -10.

1 Corinthians 12 v 8-10 reads: "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous power, to another prophecy, to

another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and still to another the interpretation of tongues.”

There are two gifts that Paul encourages us all to desire, they are prophecy and speaking in tongues.

1 Corinthians 14 v 1-5 reads: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no-one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.”

We’ll talk about both of those gifts later in the series. God graciously gives different gifts to different people and no-one will have all the gifts, but we will all have some, given as a present for the building up of the church. Are your gifts unopened?

Ok – so we turn today to the gift of the message of knowledge. As we do I am going to pray:

“Father, we ask today, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will help us, teach us and move us on in our understanding of the gracious gifts you have given us – especially understanding the gift of knowledge. Amen.”

Now the commonly held view is that a word or message of knowledge is a supernatural insight into the secrets of a person’s heart or situation. In a situation a person somehow knows something about another person that they could not possibly know. This happens. Maybe you have been in a place where this has happened to you; someone spoke something over you and told you things about yourself that they could not have known before they spoke.

As we saw last week, an example often used for understanding this gift is in John 4: The Samaritan women at the well. Jesus knows things about her; he tells her she has had 5 husbands and the man she’s now living with is not her husband! I am not in any way trying to question what Jesus did or that he knew things about this woman – it is obviously true from the text that he did! Neither am I trying to question any occasion when someone spoke a word or prayer over you when they told you things that you have no idea how they knew it.

That happens, it is real and it can be (as it was for the Samaritan woman) a life changing event. What I do want to do though, is to suggest that it is not the gift of knowledge at work in these instances. I’m going to give you two reasons:

- First, the Samaritan woman responds to Jesus by saying: “Sir, I can see you are a prophet!” She doesn’t say: “I can see you have the gift of knowledge!”
- Second, we must ask what Paul means by knowledge – and not interpret Paul by using John’s gospel!

I think that the experience of the Samaritan woman and perhaps your own experiences, are examples of the gift of prophecy rather than the gift of knowledge (we'll come to the gift of prophecy later in the series). So what does Paul mean by the gift of knowledge? We get a clue earlier in his letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 2 v 10 – 16 reads: “But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”

Here Paul describes revelation which comes from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reveals God’s mind to believers and he does this that we might understand what God has freely given us. This is then spoken – by means of the Holy Spirit. This has very strong parallels with what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 v 8: “the message (or gift) of knowledge by the same Spirit”. So by knowledge it would seem that Paul means “the things that God has freely given us”. This for Paul means God’s grace – the free gift of eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ. This again – as with the word of wisdom, means Paul has in mind the big picture of God’s grace and all that it means for us. So the gift of knowledge would be the anointed description of one of the many treasures associated with God’s gracious gift of his son, available to the church. An inspired speech concerning God’s work of grace!

Here is a wonderful example from Paul himself! He is writing to the Ephesians and he suddenly gets a word of knowledge about all that God has done for them and the things he has freely given them!

Ephesians 1 v 3 -14 reads: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a

deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.”

This is an inspired revelation into God's grace, which he then speaks in words given him by the Holy Spirit! Such knowledge only comes through the power of the Holy Spirit! The gift of knowledge would thus appear to be primarily a teaching gift, since it is the special ability to know and articulate the things which God has freely given us!

There is also a very practical side to the gift of knowledge. On the one hand it is Paul getting really excited and pouring out what God has done for, and freely given to, the Ephesians (and all of us!) On the other more practical side, it is Paul saying to the Corinthians: “I do not want you to be ignorant about the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12 v 1). Have you ever considered how Paul knew all this stuff about the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Where did he get all his knowledge about them? Is it all based on his own ideas, or on rational speculation?

Perhaps Paul himself is exercising the gifts, and particularly the gifts of wisdom and knowledge as he teaches here. So in describing what the gifts actually are – he himself is anointed with the gift of knowledge. How to use the gifts (as we saw last week) is the gift of wisdom. All the way through his teaching on gifts Paul is exercising the gift of knowledge:

- 1 Corinthians 12 v 4-6 reads: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”
- 1 Corinthians 12 v 11 reads; All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Now as we've been going through this you will have noticed a strong connection with the gift of wisdom. These two go together - as do prophecy and discernment, tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Both wisdom and knowledge are about understanding the mystery of salvation, or the riches of God's grace. Knowledge is the insights into God's grace; wisdom is how that grace is worked out. At the practical level the gift of knowledge is the “what”, and the gift of wisdom is the “how”. So the gift of knowledge is the special ability to put into words divinely revealed knowledge about God's grace.

Here is a really important question: Can anyone have this gift? The answer is most definitely yes! This has nothing to do with education or even literacy. Remember this is a gift of grace – a present! Think for a minute about Peter at Pentecost. He was a fisherman – not known for their learning or education. In fact he would have been considered uneducated. When Peter and John were before the Sadducees in Acts 4 – they are called unschooled. And yet it is Peter, who in Acts 2 gets up and says – let me explain this to you – all that has happened with Jesus! I think what he said must be a combination of wisdom and knowledge. How did he suddenly know all that? He was divinely inspired!

In 1906 a great revival broke out at 312 Azusa Street, L.A. It gave birth to the modern Pentecostal movement. What is interesting is that God used relatively uneducated men and women who were

divinely inspired, and given extraordinary insights into the working of God's grace. Actually one of the things that can, and probably does, stop us receiving the gift of knowledge, is too much reliance on our own knowledge – often gained through learning and education. Only when we give ourselves to God, our mind and our intellect can we receive from him – his knowledge. God desires always to build his church, his body, and he is looking for people who are open to his Spirit to build up the body of Christ.

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