

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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What does the Bible teach about: The difference between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit?

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

I'm going to immediately answer the question posed by our title by reading two scriptures from the ESV. The first is in 1 Corinthians 12:

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ...I want you to understand that...no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. 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 activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (vv.1, 3-7).

The second is Galatians 5:22-23:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

The Bible's teaching about the difference between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit is: whereas gifts are supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit for the functioning of the Church, the fruit of the Spirit is His activity within the life of every believer, which manifests godliness in their lives. Just as an apple tree produces apples, so the Holy Spirit produces His fruit in every believer's life in a perfectly balanced nine-fold way:

- towards God, love, joy, peace.
- towards mankind, patience, kindness, goodness.
- regarding self, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

This fruit was seen in all its fullness and completeness in Jesus Christ, the perfect Man.

The gift of the Holy Spirit

But before I talk about gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit in any detail, I would like to take a step back and consider the gift (singular) of the Holy Spirit himself. Historically, the promised Holy Spirit came down upon, and individually indwelt, the apostles and all other believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). He filled the house where they were sitting. In v.38, Peter clearly states this was when they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. A few years later, the Gentiles in Cornelius' house similarly received the Holy Spirit, when they believed the Gospel Peter preached to them:

“[Those Jewish believers] who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles” (10:45).

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he reported:

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’ (11:15-16).

After listing in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 the variety of spiritual gifts evident in the Christian Church, Paul comments about these events in Acts:

"For just as the [human] body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with [the] Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (vv.12-14).

So the baptism of, or in, the Spirit was the means by which all of those initial believers were formed into the Church, here called the Body of Christ. By the sovereign action of the Spirit of God, they became a living entity - just like the human body where:

"God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose. ... There are many parts, yet one body" (vv.18 & 20).

Since the early Church was established, anyone who has believed the Gospel has received the Holy Spirit at his/her conversion. Paul teaches this in Ephesians 1:13:

"In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit."

and again in Galatians 3:14:

"We [received] the promised Spirit through faith."

In these two verses the 'sealing of the Spirit' and the 'receiving of the Spirit' are equivalent to the expression 'being made to drink of the Spirit' in 1 Corinthians 12:13. This verse also means that all believers are equal – each has individually drunk of, or imbibed, that one Spirit for themselves.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 12 is the major passage of Scripture where there's teaching about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are either called 'gifts' (v.4) or 'manifestations' of the Spirit (v.7). (More accurately, it's the singular, 'manifestation' for v.7 is relating the overall action of the Spirit "in church", where He uses believers to whom He has given different gifts.) Three times over in ch.12, Paul identifies what/who these gifts are, and I will discuss each so that we can understand the richness of the Holy Spirit's provision to the Church. There's some commonality in the three lists, so I'll only comment once on any one gift. The first gifts-list is in verses 8 to 10, where nine are named:

- wisdom and knowledge (v.8).
- faith and healing (v.9).
- miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (v.10).

Wisdom, or more properly, "the utterance of wisdom", is when a speaker sets out the mind of God by the Spirit over a particular issue to be dealt with or course of activity the church is thinking about embarking on. God-given wisdom gauges the true nature and value of things, and their relationship to each other by imparting spiritual insight and understanding of the Truth.

Knowledge, or more accurately, “the utterance of knowledge” is when the speaker is enabled by the Holy Spirit to intelligently grasp facts and principles relating to the Truth and apply/interpret them to everyday life.

Faith. According to Ephesians 2:8, every believer receives faith as a gift from God. The gift of faith from the Holy Spirit is different and in addition to ‘normal faith’. It’s especially given to some to enable them to function and serve “in church.” Such believers demonstrate unique confidence that God will work in, and through, them; and they impart much encouragement to others in their church fellowship.

Healing. This gift from the Holy Spirit is self-evident. It’s His power to intervene in all illnesses and diseases to instantly cure and heal people. When the Lord commissioned His apostles in Mark 16:15-18, the miracle of sick people recovering from their illnesses was one of the signs He said would convince people to believe the Gospel. I’ll come back to sign-gifts later in my talk.

Miracles are God directly acting through His servants to achieve that which is neither naturally, nor humanly, possible. Acts 2:22 describes the miracles that God did through the Lord Jesus as, “mighty works and wonders and signs.”¹ Miracles signpost ‘God at work’ and their effect is to cause people to be in awe of Him through what has happened.

Prophecy. Initially, prophecy was that unique gift given to some in the early Church to teach the truths of Christianity before these truths were committed to writing and the New Testament was completed. It was also the means of communicating God’s word to believers about then current and/or future events. For example, in Acts 11:28 Agabus foretold by the Spirit the great famine over all the world, which happened during the reign of Claudius; and in Acts 13:1-3, prophets identified Saul and Barnabas to undertake their first missionary campaign. But in 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, Paul extends the prophets’ role to local church meetings:

“The prophet speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.”

Discerning of spirits. This gift is the ability to decide if the prophet is actually led by the Holy Spirit and therefore is speaking a message from God. Those so gifted are able to distinguish between true and false professing Christians; and/or true or false doctrine. This is a necessary activity because often everything seems to be genuine on the surface. Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light. So it’s not surprising if his servants, who are also deceitful workers, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. And the apostle John admonishes:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Tongues is the ability to speak the language of the listeners, which is neither the speaker’s native language, nor has he learnt it.

The interpretation of tongues is the necessary accompanying-gift - the supernatural ability to understand the foreign language spoken and to translate it into the native language of the local church. Again, when it’s neither the interpreter’s native language, nor has he learnt it. The second list of gifts of the Spirit is given v.28, where Paul says God has deliberately appointed them: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, administrators and tongues. They’re listed according to their rank and importance for His work; and for the benefit of the Church. I’ll now consider those gifts in v.28 which weren’t listed in vv.8-10.

Apostles in the New testament were those who were commissioned by the Lord to preach the Gospel and to establish Christian churches. They occur first in v.28 because they laid the foundations of the Church (Ephesians 2:20). Generally, the New Testament references are to the Twelve, who accompanied the Lord and saw Him in resurrection.² But Paul ranks himself of equal status to them:

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you [by me] with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Corinthians 12:12).

The revelations of truths peculiar to the Christian faith were made known to them:

“What...God has prepared for those who love him...God has revealed to us [apostles] through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ...We have received...the Spirit...that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10 & 12-13).

But there were other disciples sent by the risen Lord on special Gospel-missions, etc. and they, too, are named “apostles.” For example, Barnabas in Acts 14. This brings me back to the subject of sign-gifts for these were used by the apostles, in the initial days of Christianity, to demonstrate that the Gospel was authentic:

“[The] great salvation...was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Acts 19:11 states that God did “extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul.” As far as I can discern, these sign-gifts were for the purpose the writer to the Hebrews states, that is, to convince people of that time, especially the Jews, that the new message was from God. But that isn't to infer that God cannot use them for the same reason again. For example, in areas of the world where the Gospel is being preached for the first time.

Prophets. We considered prophecy in v.10. Here in v.28 (and in Ephesians 4:11) they're ranked second to the apostles because of their important role alongside them in establishing the early Church, which was:

“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20).

Teachers gradually replaced prophets, in the sense that they became responsible for the continuation of sound doctrine. Their role is to teach the truths of Scripture, which were revealed to the apostles and the prophets. Nowadays, there are no longer any prophets of the status of the original role. However, teachers (or preachers) do continue to give prophetic ministry in a more limited sense. They apply the unchanging truths of the Faith to contemporary situations both in today's church and in today's world.

Helps are those who are gifted to assist in mission and/or in church meetings and activities, etc. As their name suggests, this assistance is of a more practical nature.

Administrators are those to whom the Spirit gives administrative and governing abilities. Note well that they use their Spirit-given talents to steer and guide the people of God. These are not management techniques learnt from the world. But they do include the ability to oversee and direct

others. They're identified in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 as those who labour among, exercise oversight in, and admonish the flock of, the local church; and who are to be esteemed very highly in love because of their work.

The third list of the gifts of the Spirit is in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, which consists of a series of rhetorical questions about some gifts already mentioned in the earlier two lists:

“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?”

The emphatic answer to each question is “No!” With v.31, Paul concludes his instructions on the Church as the Body of Christ by directing the Corinthian church to earnestly desire the better gifts. The drift of ch.12 leads to the primacy of prophecy. His exhortation in 14:26 is that every gift exercised in church should be for the edification of all (cp. 12:7).

There are two other Scriptures which major on the functioning of the Church:

1. Romans 12:3-21, where God gives the gifts according to the measure of faith that He has granted to each member (v.3).
2. Ephesians 4:1-16, where Christ, the Head, gives grace to individuals according to the measure of His gift (v.7).

However, all three sections stress there's a diversity of gifts but a complete unity of this diversity.

The Fruit of the Spirit

Whereas there many gifts of the Holy Spirit, there's only one fruit of the Spirit, with nine characteristics: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23). Every Christian believer obtains his/her spiritual life from the indwelling Holy Spirit. “We live in the Spirit” as v.25 puts it. Therefore, the nine elements of Christian character are a unity. Essentially, they're the features of our Saviour, which were seen in all their fullness and completeness in His earthly life. As I did with respect to the gifts of the Spirit, I'll now discuss each fruit in turn.

Love is that 'agape' love, which is the very nature of God:

“We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16).

He has poured His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5). God's love focusses on the benefit of it to its recipient. In order for us to know what this means in practice, Paul describes its value, its qualities and its permanence in 1 Corinthians 13. As the primary fruit of the Spirit, it's that necessary precursor to the manifestation of any of the gifts of the Spirit. Paul reasons in 13:1-3, that if love be absent from the use of any of the gifts, then the user is nothing and nothing at all is gained. That's why he ends ch.12, even after his exhortation to covet earnestly the best gifts, with the words:

“I will show you a still more excellent way [of love]” (v.31).

Then in 14:1, he urges: “Pursue love” before he describes how to properly conduct church meetings.

Joy arises out of our knowledge of the love of God. It's that abiding joy of the Holy Spirit we first experienced when we believed the Gospel and realised that God had chosen us because of His eternal love for us (see 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6).

Peace is that tranquilly of mind that arises from our conscious realisation of the intimate relationship we have with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. For life-upon-earth after He had returned to heaven, the Lord Jesus promised His disciples both joy and peace:

“The Helper, the Holy Spirit...will...bring to your remembrance...that I...said...
‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid’” (John 14:26-27).
“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

Patience is longsuffering, that ability to forbear and endure wrong, especially during the extremes of persecution or ill-treatment for being a Christian. It's that steadfastness of mind and soul to continue without any feeling of anger or thought of revenge. The Spirit enables us to regard others in the same way as God's longsuffering to us - not willing that any should perish.

Kindness is gentleness, that characteristic of the love of God our Saviour (see Ephesians 2:7 & Titus 3:4). We are exhorted therefore to be kind, tender-hearted and show forgiveness in the same manner as God in Christ forgave us (see Ephesians 4:32).

Goodness is that quality in a believer which is of moral worth. Ephesians 5:9 explains that the fruit of light is seen in all that is good and right and true. In 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (RV), Paul prayed a prayer we should pray for ourselves:

“That our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfil [your] every desire of goodness and every work of faith, with power.”

Faithfulness is that in us which reflects the character of God, who is totally trustworthy (see 1 Corinthians 1:9) and whose faithfulness is renewed each morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). Gaius is an example of a believer who is faithful (3 John 3-5).

Gentleness is mildness or meekness found supremely in the Lord Jesus:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29).

In Colossians 3:12, we're required to be clothed with it.

Self-control is the power, by the Spirit, to have complete mastery over oneself. Proverbs 25:28 likens a person without self-control to a city without any defenses. Thankfully grace teaches us this fruit (see Titus 2:11-13). It's needed in increasing measure according to 2 Peter 1:5-9 to be effective and fruitful by all believers – old as well as young (see Titus 2:1-7).

Practical Implications

In Galatians 5:25, Paul follows his list of the fruit of the Spirit with this exhortation:

“[Since] we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

Earlier, in, Paul admonishes the Galatians:

“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (v.16).

Then in v.17, he explains that there’s an ongoing battle between our sinful nature, that is, the flesh, and the Holy Spirit. The flesh always seeks to manifest its ugly works (listed in vv.19-21), which we know dominate the world of unbelievers. Each and every day, we must put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit within us, realising it’s a mind-set: either to follow the promptings of the flesh, or to desire the things of the Spirit (see Romans 8:5 & 13). By yielding to the Spirit, His fruit will be seen in our lives; and He’ll be able to use us in the service of God, for which He has liberally endued us with His gifts. Only by such sanctified living will we inherit the kingdom of God (v.21).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we’ve seen from Scripture that every Christian believer has the same Holy Spirit. In fact:

“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Romans 8:9).

“All were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Both the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit are important. The gifts of the Spirit enable believers to serve God and other members in the Body of Christ. Different gifts are bestowed upon different Christians. But there’s only one fruit of the Spirit, which enable us to overcome the flesh and to exhibit the lovely features of Christ in our individual lives.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on ‘What does the Bible teach about: the difference between Gifts and the Fruit of the Spirit?’ talk T1164.

Footnotes

1. Miracles appeal to our intellect/minds. Wonders appeal to our emotions. Signs address our spirits/consciences.
2. Acts 1:15-26 with 1 Corinthians 15:5-11.

Please Note:

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