

# *Sermon Text for December 21, 2014*

*by*

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Psalm 51:10-17, I Corinthians 12:4-11

“Are you gifted?”

This week we look at just 6 words in the Apostles’ Creed and once again we begin with the words: I believe. I believe in the Holy Ghost. Again if when we say I believe we don’t just mean intellectually but rather our beliefs have a very real impact on our lives, then this concept of the Holy Ghost is probably the most difficult part of the trinity to explain and to understand, but we will say that it ties into what we are gifted to do, what God gives us to do here on the face of the earth.

If someone were to ask you: what do you mean when you say that you believe in the Holy Ghost? How would you explain? Would you talk about Casper, or some kind of phantom, or would you direct your comments to the well known Ghost busters? First of all Ghost is again a term that was used as a synonym for Spirit. There is absolutely no difference between saying Holy Ghost and Holy Spirit.

When we say Spirit we mean wind, breath, air. In both the Old Testament, Ruach, and New Testament Pneuma, Spirit means breath. Holy means of God. So here is a brief description of Holy Spirit that you can use in your arsenal. It is God’s presence in the world today. Our Scripture in Psalm 51 and I Corinthians 12 speaks about the type of breath, or air, or demeanor we ought to have, a broken one, and this humble spirit allows God to work through us. God works through us most effectively through his Holy spirit which is best seen in our gifts.

What we will see today is that we should have no difficulty in explaining the Holy Spirit as God who is working through us for the good of the community. God’s spirit give us gifts which we need to identify and use so that this community will closely reflect God’s kingdom here on this earth.

## **READ**

Harper’s Bible Dictionary defines the Holy Spirit as the mysterious power or presence of God in nature or with individuals or communities, inspiring or empowering them with qualities they otherwise would not possess. Do you see how that ties into the

gifts which we have? That is not a bad definition. We see God's power in nature in Genesis as the Spirit of God moves in creation over the waters, it moves in humanity as God breathes breath into us, it continues to move as God's Spirit creates and recreates time after time.

Psalm 51 gives us an understanding of what type of spirit we are to have as individuals. In verse 10 we hear: Put a new and right spirit within me, then don't take your holy spirit away from me. But finally in verse 17 do you see what is acceptable to God? A broken, contrite spirit that recognizes that we cannot do all things by ourselves, but only with God working through us can everything be accomplished. So often we find within ourselves a spirit that only recognizes our ability and our skills and tries to claim the credit for that. That is a wrong spirit, an old spirit. People, whatever we have, sure we worked hard to get and maybe we even used our gifts and skills to get it, but God has given us gifts that only God can use for the purposes that it should be used for.

Paul in I Corinthians takes us from the Holy Spirit in creation, and the Spirit of humanity that must be broken and subjected to God's Spirit which we find in the psalm, to the Holy Spirit which works as Paul states, and this is crucial to understanding how the Holy Spirit ultimately is supposed to work, for the common good. Look at I Corinthians 12:7. There is no more crucial verse to understanding how the Holy Spirit works. It has nothing to do with us individually. It is for the common good. What is the common good? He doesn't mean Rome, he doesn't mean for the Jews, he means very specifically for the church. The purpose of the Holy Spirit working within us, Paul states, is for the common good which means the church. We are not just a gathering of people who happen to live in Strasburg or in this community, we are how God works out His purposes here on this earth.

Just as an aside, Paul gives us a very Trinitarian understanding of the Holy Spirit working in the community by stating in verses 4-7 that there are many gifts, but one Spirit, many services, but one Lord, many activities, but one God. People will question you on the Trinity and these verses give a great reference to the God that we worship who is manifested as Spirit, Son, and Father, sustainer, redeemer, and creator. This is what Paul gives us to begin these verses. Don't be afraid of the Holy Spirit, because as vs. 7 states, this is the key verse here, every single person is given the manifestation of the

Spirit, which means that every single person is given gift, a talent, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This is not to be used for our own individual gain but rather for the good of the community.

What is an example of a gift or a manifestation of the Holy Spirit that each of us is given at least one of? Some are given wisdom and others knowledge. It is often said that these two attributes come with age and that may be true to a certain extent. I think it was Socrates who said that you shouldn't listen to anyone until they turn 35 because they haven't lived enough to be wise. But Solomon was a young wise king when he was given the wisdom and knowledge of God. Our Lord and Savior never reached 35 and he taught us a few things. And not all mature adults are rocket scientists or wise in the least bit. There are people in this community that I often search out for advice and wisdom when things come up. I have recognized and seen exhibited the gift of wisdom and knowledge, and boy do I lean on them for that.

Some are given faith as a gift of the Spirit. But Bob, don't we all have faith? Good question. Yes we do, by the grace of God we have a faith in Jesus Christ that is the foundation of our life. But the faith that is talked about here is the type that can move mountains as Paul states in 13:2. Let's face it, there are some serious faith champions in this church that pray for every single issue and event, and have the confidence in God working all things out for the good.

Others have the gifts of healing and miracles, prophecy, discerning spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues. It is so tempting to skip right over these gifts. For some churches this part of Paul's letter can seem like somebody else's mail. WE don't seem to focus on healings and miracles and prophecy and spirits and tongues. Some feel that God's presence in the world today has nothing to do with these mysterious, powerful manifestations of God. I disagree, healings still take place because God uses our prayer and the Holy Spirit acts on that prayer. Miracles are still seen, we are given visions by God as to how we are to act and move. This is prophecy as I understand it. A direction that is given to us on how His bride should proceed.

The speaking in tongues is another issue that we must deal with today very briefly. When we say that we believe in the Holy Spirit, and Paul tells us that speaking in tongues is a gift of the Spirit then what are we to say? I speak 2 tongues fluently and two

enough to get myself into trouble but not out. I can read 6 tongues in all. This may be a gift but this is not what Paul states and it is not what we think of when we hear speaking in tongues.

Some call speaking in tongues the language of the angels where a person is so open to God's Spirit that they utter whatever comes to them. Some churches consider speaking in tongues a litmus test as to whether one has God's Spirit in them or not. As mainstream Protestants what do we believe? As Presbyterians we categorically disagree that a person has to speak in tongues in order to be a believer. We believe that the Holy Spirit descends upon you in baptism as an infant or adult and that it remains with you for the rest of your life. The example we use is when the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ in the form of a dove at his baptism.

But, you will be hard pressed to find a mainstream Protestant Church, or a Presbyterian Church where tongues are spoken as a matter of course. Scripture tell us, and Paul here hints at it, that speaking in tongues has absolutely no value to the community if there is not someone there to interpret. When the speaking is in the midst of the congregation with no interpreter and cacophony ensues and nobody except that individual is edified then it is not of God. But, and if we are going to use Scripture as a weapon to keep some people out, then we need to recognize that speaking of tongues is a gift of God for the good of the body.

All of the gifts, Paul tells us, are given by the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. Each person, every person here has at least one gift of the spirit whose purpose it is to build up the community or the church. If you don't find a gift that you think you might have in this list, don't worry, there are other lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament. Romans and Ephesians gives us lists that include: ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, being compassionate. I would also add, being a helper, a hostess, a peacemaker, a problem solver, all those things that help the church to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ but isn't always front and center. This is how every single person here should be involved in this church by identifying and putting to use their gift for the upbuilding of the church.

We have just seen that the church is a whole community in which the power of the Holy Spirit is palpably present, operating through the complementary gifts of its

various members. Paul was critical of the Corinthian church because they were proud of their spiritual condition. What we do in the church is not to our merit but rather is a result of God's grace. All that is done must be done for the good of the church.

Paul ends his section on the Spirit by stating that all of what we do has been given to us through the Spirit, and that Spirit, as we said earlier is in harmony with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is a fallacious thought these days that whatever is spiritual must be good. Beware, because if something feels spiritual it does not mean that it is Christian, that it is of God.

Warm fuzzy feelings do not indicate God's presence. Paul warns the Corinthians about confusing any warm feeling in a religious setting with an authentic experience of God's Holy Spirit. There is a test that you can do to discern if what you are experiencing is God, or other. The question you need to ask is: Is it for the common good? The Holy Spirit should lead us to a religious experience which makes us better followers of Christ. Not all spiritual feelings are Christian feelings. Not all inspirational experiences are an experience of God's Holy Spirit. It must be compatible with the life of Christ.

So go out and discern your spiritual gift. Find out what it is that God wants you to do for his body so that more and more people will come to know Jesus Christ, and then together, as a body we will work to make sure that God's kingdom is well represented through us. Amen.