

Desire the Greatest Gift of God's Spirit

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Most of you know there are many gifts of God's spirit. Which one would you like most to have? Have you ever thought about that – that if given a choice, which would you want most? Which gift is the greatest gift? And why does it matter? Apostle Paul identifies the greatest gifts. We'll discuss all this today.

As you know, we're now past the Feast of Pentecost, the day of Firstfruits of the wheat harvest. It was the day God sent His holy spirit in Acts 2.

With the Holy Spirit eventually come GIFTS of the Holy Spirit – and also, a different matter, **the FRUIT of the Spirit**. Two different things.

FRUIT: There are NINE listed fruit, but described in the singular, together, “the Fruit (not Fruits) of the Spirit IS...” (NOT “the fruits of the Spirit are”).

That makes for an interesting discussion, which I've done before.

Galatians 5:22-23

“But **the FRUIT of the Spirit IS** love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

GIFTS: God's spirit also gives us GIFTS of the Spirit. Gifts are not fruit. There are many listed especially in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. The point of this teaching is this: *if you could decide which one or two gifts you could have, which one or two would you choose, if that's all you could have? And why does it matter?*

We can read some of the gifts starting in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. I'm quoting from NKJV first.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

“**There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.** 5 There are *differences of ministries, but the same Lord.* 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

Verse 8: for to one is given the **word of wisdom** through the Spirit, to another the **word of knowledge** through the same Spirit, 9 to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another **gifts of healings** by the same Spirit, 10 to another the **working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to

another **discerning of spirits**, to another **different kinds of tongues**, to another the **interpretation of tongues**.

11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”

Wow, that’s a long list of wonderful gifts. All of them are wonderful. And there are more! Of all possible gifts, which would be the greatest, the most desirable, if we could have but one or two?

Romans 12 also lists some different gifts, slightly different from 1 Corinthians 12. *So there are many gifts of God’s spirit.*

Remember a GIFT of the *Spirit* is NOT necessarily something you were already born with. Sometimes God may *add* to a natural talent you already had – like teaching or leading. But clearly these gifts of God’s Spirit can be seen as something that come additionally, from God; maybe a gift you may not have had so clearly before. So here are more from Romans 12. Perhaps we seldom think of some of these as “gifts”.

Romans 12:6-8 NIV

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is **prophesying**, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is **servng**, let him serve; if it is **teaching**, let him teach; 8 if it is **encouraging**, let him encourage; if it is **contributing** to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is **leadership**, let him govern diligently; if it is **showing mercy**, let him do it cheerfully.”

So if you could choose your own gift from God’s spirit, which would you choose? Which is the BEST or greatest gift of all? Some have a GIFT of serving or prophesying or teaching. Even encouraging can be a gift. Even being a giver can be a gift.

Which one would be your favorite, if you could choose? *I would be very, very surprised if most of you pray for God to let you have much more of the gift that scriptures calls the best gift, the greatest gift.*

I believe for many ministers, their favorite gifts might be to have the gift of prophecy, or the gift of healing, or of teaching, or the gift of working miracles. We sure could use more healings and miracles.

Among Pentecostal congregations especially, **the gift of tongues** is highly cherished. But whether or not you agree with the way “tongues” are used in Pentecostal churches, keep in mind that scripture clearly shows us that not everyone gets the same gifts.

Not everyone can heal or work miracles or teach or prophesy. *And not everyone can speak in tongues.* And interestingly enough to me, speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues are always listed last among the gifts. I'm not putting them down. Paul says not to forbid speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39).

Just remember, that we're told "to ONE is given this gift, and to another something else" – 1 Cor. 12:8 – but it's the same spirit.

Let's go on:

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 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.

29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

31 But eagerly desire the GREATER GIFTS. *And now I will show you the most excellent way."*

So he will next start talking about greater GIFTS.

But before we see what Paul says: Keep in mind that even Yeshua/Jesus warned that it's very possible that some people could do such great preaching and miracle-working, and yet still could end up hearing Jesus say to them, "I never knew you". Now that would be scary to hear.

Matthew 7:22-23

"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

So beware of just following someone who can perform awe-inspiring healings and miracles, or who can prophesy or preach real well or cast out demons. Remember **even the great false prophet** to come as Anti-Christ will be able to call down fire from heaven and work such great miracles that many will be deceived. *We're told Satan himself will give him those powers.* They won't be magical acts or slight-of-hand – but true miracles.

Revelation 13:11-15

“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. 12 And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. **13 He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. 14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. “**

Jesus also warned us of coming false prophets and false messiahs.

Matthew 24:24-25

" For false christs [false messiahs] and false prophets will rise and show GREAT signs and WONDERS to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand.”

2 Thessalonians 2:9

“The coming of the lawless one **is according to the working of Satan, with ALL power, signs, and lying wonders,**”

But now Paul will teach us about some greater gifts of the God’s spirit. **Are you praying for more of these greater gifts?** Without this special gift, those who can speak in tongues or can prophesy, are just making noise. *Paul says without this special gift of the Holy Spirit, even the ability to have so much faith as to move entire mountains, means nothing!* But many of us would be absolutely impressed by someone with that much faith to visibly move mountains! But Paul says – that could be missing the more important gift.

Remember that 1 Cor. 12:31 ended with Paul still talking about gifts of the spirit. Let’s read the last verse again:

1 Cor. 12:31 “But eagerly desire the GREATER GIFTS. And now I will show you the most excellent way.”

So he says it’s wonderful to eagerly desire the best gifts of the spirit. But it’s not one of the ones he’s mentioned before.

The GREATEST GIFT of the Spirit – have you been praying for more of it?

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

“Though I speak with the **tongues of men and of angels**, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. **2 And though I have the gift of prophecy**, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have **all FAITH, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am *nothing*.**”

1 Corinthians 13:8

“**Love *never* fails.** But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.”

And then here it is, the greatest of all the gifts of God’s Spirit that we should be earnestly desiring and praying for more of:

1 Corinthians 13:13

“**And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the GREATEST of these is LOVE.**”

So there it is: the greatest GIFT you can ask for more of, is more of God’s LOVE. Love is also the first listed FRUIT of God’s *Spirit, of his genuine presence in your life. God’s love is not the fruit of our striving to be more loving. The kind of love we must have is GOD’S love and it comes only from God – as one of his gifts to us.*

God’s love is something GOD GIVES us through His Spirit. All the translations say this kind of love comes to us from God. Ask for it! It appears we’re all given some of it, but we should desire much more of God’s love.

Romans 5:5

“Now hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us.**”

The KJV says the love of God has “been shed abroad in our hearts”. Be sure you understand that wording as most translations simply say: God has poured out into our hearts HIS very own love, the love of God. This is the greatest gift from God. God’s own love.

WHY HAVING GOD’S LOVE IS SO VITAL

Keep several huge points in mind as to why this is so important to understand:

**** In the end time, Jesus warned us that the love of many “will wax cold”** as KJV says. People as a rule will become ever increasingly more unloving and will be attacking us viciously. So it will be hard to love them – though we’re told to love your enemies. This is part of Jesus’ famous Olivet prophecy of the last days.

Matthew 24:9-14 NIV

"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. *10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,* 11 and many false prophets will appear and **deceive many people.** 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, ***the love of most will grow cold,*** 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved”.

We must not let that be describing us - -letting God’s love in us grow cold. WE – God’s children – must keep our love red hot – yes even when we’re being attacked or having our loved ones killed! We don’t cool down to “lukewarm” like Laodiceans. That makes Jesus SICK to his stomach and makes him want to vomit us out, according to HIS own words in Revelation 3:14-15.

**** God’s TWO greatest commands**, according to the Son of God, **is ABOUT LOVE – love for God with all our being, and love for fellow mankind as ourselves** (Matthew 22:34-40). *That* should be our answer if someone were to ask you what main things does your church believe? How would you answer that?

The MAIN thing we believe is frankly NOT the 7th day sabbath, and it’s certainly not about not eating pork or lobster – but **our main belief is: *how GOD IS ALL ABOUT LOVE for us***; How he loved us all so much that He gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). And Yeshua did not come to condemn us (v. 17).

God embodies love! That one word – love - is what he IS. Sure, he’s also Creator, God most High, Everlasting Father and all of that – but all of that is about his LOVE. And we stress that our belief is that we must live with a deep LOVE back to GOD and for one another! That’s what Jesus said, remember! The two greatest commandments. And we explain that we love HIM because He first loved us, and died for us in his Love for us, even while we were still sinners.

**** So this love for one another should be so strong that when people meet us, or our church group, that they're BLOWN AWAY by the loving concern,** attentiveness, caring that they sense in all the people there. They're experiencing Jesus in each person. This is one of the biggest signs that we're God's people: that we have this PROFOUND LOVE for one another, as Christ does for us (John 13:34-35). We love, forgive, reconcile with even with those who hurt us, or who did bad things once they repent.

If we don't love, neither will we be able to forgive and reconcile. But if that happens, frankly, neither will WE be forgiven, by God, according to Jesus' on words after the sample Lord's prayer.

Matthew 6:14-15

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 *But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*"

And if our heavenly Father won't forgive us... we're still in our sin and headed for the lake of fire. It's that simple. Or we can accept God's love, and forgive others who hurt us, and we're forgiven too. It's one aspect of love.

We need to PROVE we have this GOD-LEVEL kind of love by demonstrating God's love to everyone, even our very enemies. We need to *prove* it by reconciling with those we have offended – or who have offended us, once they repent. *We need to forgive even if or even when the same person comes to us seven times in one day asking for forgiveness for yet another offense (Luke 17:3-4).* And Matthew 18:21-22 says even 70 x 7 times, meaning forever.

Romans 8:39 says to us in the new covenant, nothing can separate us now from the love of Christ – and that is the way WE must become: that our love for others will not be broken, no matter what. That's not human love. That's God's love. We love all others, no matter what.

WHY is love listed *first* in the fruit of the spirit? Why is love called the greatest GIFT of God's spirit? Because love is what it's all about. Love is what God is. Love is what God's way, God's kingdom, and God Himself are all about. Love is what *we're* supposed to also be all about. When we preach the gospel – ultimately it's all about God's love for mankind in restoring God's kingdom and saving all humanity. That is why the apostle John focused on love in the epistle of 1 John.

Let's read some of John's inspired writings about God's love that we should all have in us:

1 John 4:7-13

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has seen God at any time. IF we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”

1 John 4:16

“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God IS love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”

1 John 4:19-21

“We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God MUST love his brother also.”

“MUST love his brother also”. Wow. MUST. All the signs of love are in full action. Study 1 Corinthians 13 again.

So are you praying for more love? It's by demonstrating the love of God that men will know we are his disciples (**John 13:34-35**), as they see us forgiving, reconciling with former enemies, and loving even our foes.

If any of you have a hard time forgiving and reconciling, let's be clear: you need much, much more of God's love. You don't have enough yet of THIS GODLY LOVE if you can't enjoy one another, reconcile with all, even those who have hurt you badly in the past.

When people come visit in your congregation, besides all the other gifts, *the greatest gift they should sense is in abundance, is an incredible, indescribable LOVE we all have for one another.* THIS gift is more important than other gifts like healing, preaching, miracles or anything else. When visitors go back home, hopefully they're still talking about all the amazing love they experienced in your congregation -- and with you.

Remember how at the end of 1 Cor 12, Paul said he wanted to show us the best gifts that we should earnestly be desiring? Well, here it is again:

1 Corinthians 13:13

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the GREATEST of these is LOVE.”

Of course love is the greatest of all. Love is what God is. Love is what he wants us to be as well. God’s love is what life is all about.