

## 7. The Gifts and Power of the Holy Spirit

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Sarah Hinlicky Wilson | Livsväg 2019 - Livet med Helige Ande

### Sammanfattning

St. Paul invented the Greek word for what we call “spiritual gifts”, *charisma* (plural *charismata*), out of another Greek word, *charis*, which means “grace.” *Charismata* are “graced-things,” not an independent category of God’s work. They are always linked to the gift of salvation and blessings on those in need. But Paul’s congregation at Corinth was eager to separate spiritual gifts from the gospel and so they used their own term, *pneumatika*, “spiritual-things”—divorced from grace. *Charismata* are for everyone, because God’s grace is for everyone—so says Paul. *Pneumatika* are only for a special class of people good at spirituality—so say the Corinthians. The whole book of I Corinthians is Paul’s argument with them!

Paul agrees that the Corinthians “are not lacking in any gift” or graced-thing: *charismata*. But then he launches into a long discussion of all the ways the Corinthians have failed at being a church. They have accepted the good news about Jesus’s death and resurrection but haven’t grasped the consequences of the news for their life together. So the first principle Paul lays down is that “no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” The purpose of spiritual gifts is to draw people closer to Jesus Christ.

Next point: there is only *one* Spirit, but there are *many* gifts. Every believer gets a gift from the Spirit, but not every believer gets every gift. Furthermore, the unity of Spirit-gifted Christians is rooted in the fact that “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” The ultimate goal is that “there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

Now Paul introduces a new topic, his famous chapter 13 on divine love or *agapē*. Our life together and our spiritual powers are for the purpose of *participating in divine love*. Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will pass away, but love will endure forever. Here’s an interesting fact: love is *never* called a *charisma*. Love is not a gift for certain people only but for every single person in the church. So Paul concludes, “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.”

The issue, for Paul, is what to do with the Corinthians’ enthusiasm for the *charismata*. Spiritual gifts should not be only or primarily beneficial on a personal level, but good for the whole community. *Reception of a spiritual gift does not automatically make you into a spiritual person*. You can receive the gift and still live in the “flesh,” still be controlled by sin. God does not give a *charisma* in order to say, “This person is better than everyone else.” Rather, God gives *charismata* in order for people to learn to use them rightly for the good of the whole church.

It helps to remember that God’s gift of *charismata* is a mirror of God’s gift of salvation. The Father sent His Son to us, while we were still His enemies and dead in our sins, as a free gift for us and for our salvation. Just because God offers us salvation does not mean that we will accept it. But the offering of salvation never depended on our response anyway. God always gives first,

before there is any change or response on your part. God gives *in order to* change you, not because you have *already* changed. God doesn't even give the gift because God *knows* you will change and therefore deserve it later on. The gift is never deserved, and there are no conditions on it. It's not cheap—it's absolutely free.

It's the same with the *charismata*. You can't do anything to earn them. You can't bargain for or exchange them. The *charismata* are free gifts, graced-things. The possibility remains that you might abuse the gifts given to you. Yet, knowing the potential for abuse, God gives them to you anyway. There is a potential for both pride and envy here. One member of the body might think that her gift is the best, and that other gifts are less valuable. Another person might suffer from terrible jealousy that someone else was given a gift that he wanted for himself but was denied. Or we might corrupt another person's gift by acting like it's so much more exciting and wonderful compared to others'. But every gift, of every kind, is truly a divine gift.

Even more importantly, the Holy Spirit is given to every believer. Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: "*I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts...*" God does not impose or force *charismata* on His people. But it matters a lot *why* we desire them and *how* we ask for them. A church community of love is the right place to pray for the *charismata*.

Finally, no *charisma* is given without one other gift: the gift of the cross. The cross is surely not a gift that anyone asks for! But whenever the Scripture tells us about the ultimate gift of God, His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, the cross is always part of that gift. Grace is freely given, but it is also costly—the ultimate cost of grace is God's death on the cross. He shares this costly death freely with us.

### Reflektion- & Samtalsfrågor

- After hearing Sarah's teaching, is there anything specific that stands out for you?
- Is there something new about the gifts and power of the spirit that you didn't know or have thought of before? Is there anything that surprises you?
- What have you got to monitor, and what image do you have of the gifts of the Spirit before?
- Have you received any spiritual gift that you would like to share, or share? Please describe how the gift works for you, and in what way it can be helpful to you or others. Do you have any experience of sharing it with you?
- Have you prayed for *charismata*? Alone, with a few others, in the context of the church?
- How do the *charismata* lead you to bear the cross of Christ?
- How might you encourage your church to seek *charismata* for the upbuilding of the whole community?
- Have you seen abuses of *charismata*, and if so, how might you address them?

### Bibelställen

- 1 Corinthians 3:16
- 1 Corinthians 12-14

- Romans 6:23 ("free gift" = *charisma*)
- 2 Corinthians 1:11 ("blessing" = *charisma*)