



January 28, 2024

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.

News:

Wednesday Evening Classes at 6:30

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God breathed upon the disciples, and they immediately came to life as His _____.

We are to “Put on the full armor of God,” and to be ready for _____ (Ephesians 6:11–17).

We fight with the _____ of the Holy Spirit.

In this fight we “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39, Luke 6:29).

Because eternal _____ is so much more important than anything else.

Our problem is one of _____. We don’t act as though Salvation is exponentially greater than every other thing combined, because we don’t really _____ it.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and particularly the Beatitudes bit of it, are _____ entirely by a lot of American Christians.

It isn’t that Jesus wants all His sheep to be slaughtered, it is that He wants all His sheep to genuinely believe that they have already been eternally _____.

Our _____ of things is what makes the Words of Jesus difficult to understand and impossible to incorporate into our lives (Matthew 5:3–12).

Can you see that such a response isn’t coming from a place of _____, but from a place of tremendous _____? It proves that you know what eternity holds.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

The context is that you, and I would, “put on the full armor of God” so “that we will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...”

What does it mean? It means no retreat. We stand our ground, and please get this, not because it’s our ground to stand...

The nature of this war is _____, and our Lord’s marching orders apply to us all.

This is not about _____ versus _____. The them are the very people...

Our enemy is evil itself, which is personified as the Devil. The Devil peddles _____.

Influence is it has no effect if you don’t _____.

Our true enemy is not the people under evil influence because we are all influenced by evil. The true enemy is Satan and his fear-spawned ideologies that pit man against man (Galatians 5:19–21).

We must recognize that those who practice such things are ____, only unforgiven.

“Renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1&2).

Many people see the power of the Holy Spirit as a _____ power and look at His Gifts as _____ given only to specially Spirit-filled Christians.

In truth, when a person is genuinely Saved and so “Born Again,” they become a child of God and are, at that moment, _____ with the Holy Spirit.

Even so, the Holy Spirit will _____ force you to be who you refuse to be.

1) The Agapê of God.

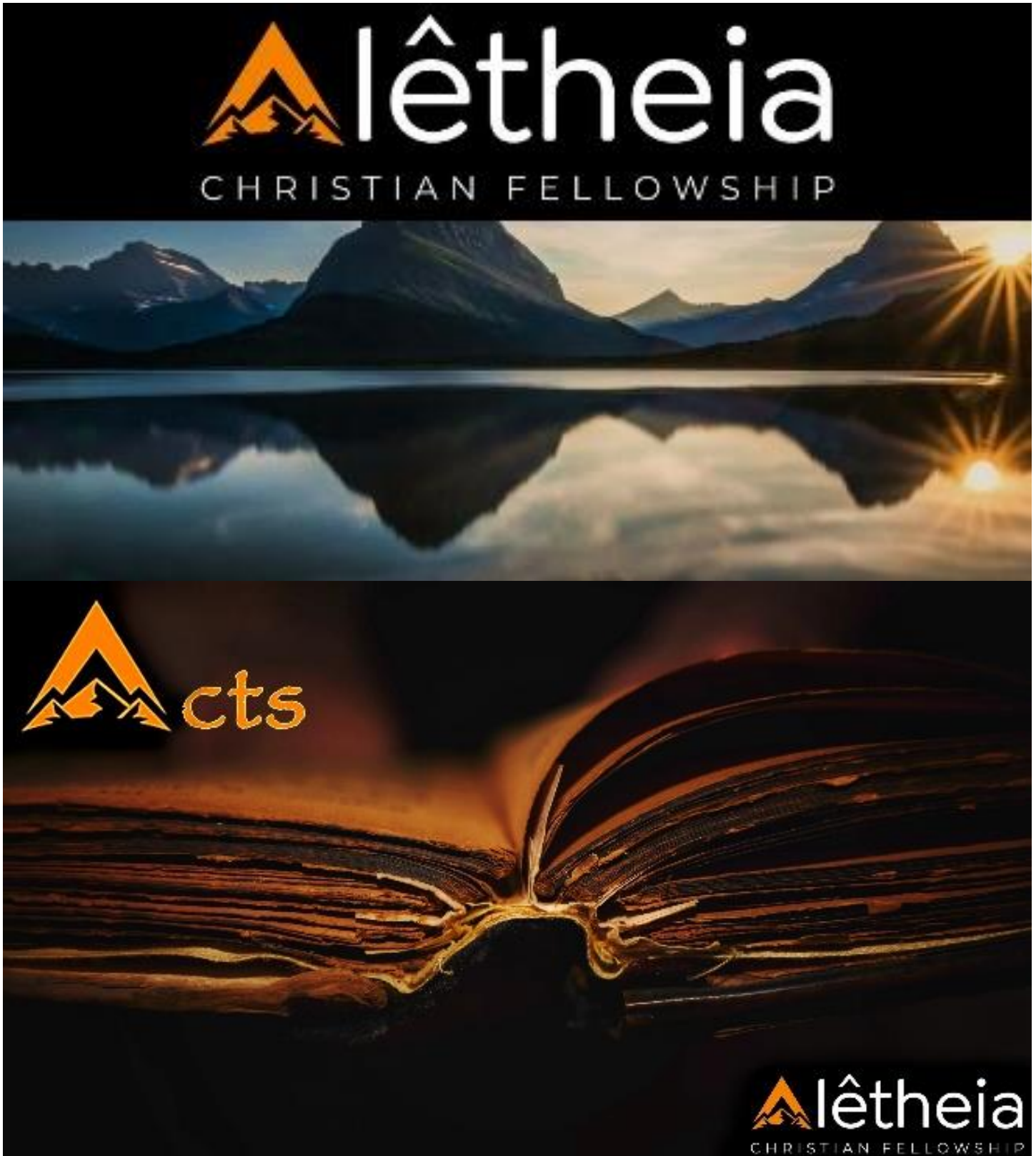
2) Spiritual growth.

3) The Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

For building the Kingdom...

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
Phone _____ Email _____



Last week we saw the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Christian church. God

reversed His action at the Tower of Babel as His people supernaturally delivered His Gospel Message in the various languages of the diverse crowd. God revealed Himself in a way that the common people there could easily understand. “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out.” The crowd was “bewildered, because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.” The Breath of God breathed His exhale, His πνοή (pnoē), upon the disciples, and they immediately came to life as His army.



An army sent to fight the battle against evil in order to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth. That's

what the church is supposed to be and that's what it's supposed to do. We are soldiers in God's Army engaged in a war!

What war? How are we to fight? What are the weapons that we are to use, and what are the weapons the enemy has arrayed against us? Who is the enemy... With whom exactly are we battling? What does victory look like? Who is giving the orders? Who am I truly obeying in my combat role?

I honestly think that the majority of Christians in America today don't have a clue about any of that, or if they do, they don't want to have a clue, and so they ignore it all. The net effect is most Christians are not in the Lord's Army. Some of them are those who simply refuse to fight – spiritual draft dodgers. The rest fight sure enough, but it's only the war that they want to fight, with the weapons they want to use, battling the enemy of their choice.

The Bible tells us to "Put on the full armor of God," and to be ready for battle (Ephesians 6:11–17). So, who do we attack? We actually attack everyone in all directions, which greatly simplifies things. We attack them with the Gifts that the Holy Spirit chooses to offer

our friends, those who are ambivalent to us, and those who are our enemies, through our willing sacrificial service to them.



Well, Scott that ain't American! You're right. It isn't even human. It is so difficult to "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39, Luke 6:29), the first few times, but when it's the thousandth time... Well, it gets old. It is so disillusioning to have yet another friend, in a long line of friends, turn against you and malign you and impugn your character, when all you've ever done was try to help them, bless them, and serve them. Anyone who has done Christian ministry correctly knows a little bit of what Jesus felt when Judas kissed Him on His cheek.... And that's the point.

Eternal Salvation is so much more important than the physical affairs of this life that we who have already been Saved are supposed to expend our remaining physical lives in the service of the Holy Spirit so that others might be Saved. If we understood the magnitude of eternity with and without God, we'd be more concerned.



Our problem is one of perspective. It's a flaw in our perception of things. We don't act as though Salvation is exponentially greater than every other thing combined, because we don't really believe it. I know, I know, we say that we believe it, but the conduct of our lives tells a different story. Doesn't it?

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and particularly the Beatitudes bit of it, are dismissed entirely by a lot of American Christians. As we saw, it's downright unamerican – it's wimpy. The greatest courage and strength of all is exhibited when someone chooses not to use their power for the greater good. Jesus was not a pacifist. The Word of Almighty God Who took on flesh was no dope-smoking hippie! He will demonstrate that fact when He returns. But we don't need to wait that long because He already demonstrated it on the Cross.

What held Jesus to the Cross? Some say nails and rope, others say that it was our sin, still others say that it was the Father's Will, but the Truth is that the only thing that held Jesus to His Cross, was His choice to stay there - to submit for the greater good. It was His love manifested because He believed in what was eternal, far more than cared about what was temporal.

So, it isn't that Jesus wants all His sheep to be slaughtered, it is that He wants all His sheep to genuinely believe that they have already been eternally saved.



He wants us to know that the reason that we continue in our physical sheep life is so that He can minister to the other sheep through us. He can love the sheep in His fold and also extend His love to the wayward sheep outside of the fold through His own Holy Spirit filled sheep. Well, sheep sometimes react poorly to love.

Jesus is far more interested in you proving that you fully trust Him with your eternity by your willingness to suffer for the sake of the fold, than He is in you being a fat and sassy sheep taking in the view.

Our perception of things is what makes the Words of Jesus difficult to understand and impossible to

incorporate into our lives. Things like, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” and “Blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth,” and “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy,” and “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God,” but especially, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.” (Matthew 5:3–12).

With that kind of perception, when someone slaps you on your right cheek while you are being used by the Holy Spirit to minister God’s grace, you can offer them your other cheek. Not because you’re a namby-pamby milquetoast coward, but because the Gospel and their eternal destination is more important than your temporary pain.

Can you see that such a response isn’t coming from a place of weakness, but from a place of tremendous strength? It proves that you know what eternity holds, both for yourself and for the person who is so full of fear that all they can do is slap those trying to help them. It proves that you trust in the Lord and in the

Message of Hope that He brings to others through you, far more than you care about anything else.



My dad used to say, “Anyone can fly on a nice day,” well, anyone can be a conduit for the Holy Spirit to minister to kind, receptive and grateful people. If our perception matched God’s reality, we would be willing to be a conduit for whomever the Holy Spirit wanted to touch. Beyond that we would be overwhelmed with a sense of urgency to be of use in building the Kingdom, especially where it doesn’t already exist.

Perhaps that’s part of the shift that must take place within the American Christian Community... Perhaps we need to realize that Jesus has us here so that He

can build something eternal, rather than for us to tear down something that is only temporal.



You see I mentioned the full armor of God and I think we misunderstand. I think we think with God's help we can all be Rambo or Superman and save the day for ourselves, for our loved ones, for "truth, justice, and the American way." My friends, the context is that you, and I would, "put on the full armor of God" so "that we will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you

will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm.” I say, my friends let us stand firm!



Great, what does it mean? It means no retreat. We stand our ground, and please get this, not because it's our ground to stand, but because our ground is God's ground. We must be careful about that. So, we hold His line, but how exactly?

The Bible tells us plainly what our weapons, tactics, and combat gear, consists of... His "Truth," "righteousness," and "the Gospel of peace ready at hand." We are to defend ourselves with "faith," which is "able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil

one.” It is our “salvation” that enables us to wield the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

The nature of this war is spiritual, and our Lord’s marching orders apply to us all. We are to allow Jesus to minister the Father’s Grace through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. This war is about saving as many souls as possible through the sharing of the Word. We defeat the enemy, Satan, when the Holy Spirit through us Saves a human soul.

We have all enlisted in the Lord’s Army, whether that was clear in the brochure or not, and He is uninterested in our excuses, our contrived battle plans, or the weapons we think will be more effective.

This is not about us versus them. The them are the very people God wants us to reach. In fact, anytime you have an us versus them attitude, you are operating from your flesh. This is about us helping them to become us. You cannot do that through condescension, anger, or self-interest. In fact, you can’t do it at all, but the Holy Spirit can. He can touch other human hearts through you, if you will allow Him that access.

This war rages all around us and our enemy is evil itself, which is personified as the Devil. The Devil peddles influence. His whole gig is to influence others, both demons and people.

The thing about influence is it has no effect if you don't listen. The thing about this particular influence is that we humans have a very difficult time not listening. The Devil gets us to listen by working our emotions, typically by creating fear, which leads to anger, which leads to no good being done for the Kingdom. The influence is pedaled along with distraction and then it's just too subtle, too interesting, too salacious, too satisfyingly stimulating to ignore. We can easily ignore the Holy Spirit's influence, but it's hard to ignore what you want to hear.

Our true enemy is not the people under evil influence because, honestly, we are all influenced by evil and so that's only a matter of degree. The true enemy is Satan and his fear-spawned ideologies that pit man against man. His influence is evident when we see people engaged in "sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, 21envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things

like these... those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19–21).

We must recognize that those who practice such things are us, only unforgiven. We must be realistic enough to recognize that we are no better than them without Christ and so we would allow the Holy Spirit to offer Christ to them, just as He once offered Christ to us, and for some, it will change their eternity. To stand firm is to never call evil good, but it's also to offer an alternative. To sincerely, humbly, and honestly let them know that the forgiveness that we enjoy, can be theirs too.

Have you ever noticed how that significant passage on the Armor of God concludes? We don't stand alone, we stand as a church, and we make our stand together through prayer.

Think Truth, speak Truth, but most importantly, humbly live Truth. The only thing that you have control of is your own response. Be noble people of integrity because of your eternal assurance in Him given to you by the Holy Spirit. That's the “Renewing of your mind.” That's the change of perspective. We present ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice by being

transformed into Christlikeness by the Holy Spirit's renewing of our perception of things. When we do that, we know the Will of God, and we live the Will of God (Romans 12:1&2).



In keeping with this point, one other thing we must address is the penchant of many people to look at the power of the Holy Spirit as a personal power within the individual Christian and so to look at the mystical Gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, as tools, or weapons, or prizes, or possessions, for special Spirit-filled Christians... In such circles Christians who have received the second blessing after Salvation called the Baptism in the Holy Spirit then receive and own a Gift or Gifts.

I truly do not want to offend anyone, but it is an absolutely untenable position Biblically speaking. The Bible is completely consistent on this point. When a person is genuinely Saved and so “Born Again,” as Jesus described it, they become a child of God and are, at that moment, indwelt with the Holy Spirit deposit (as the Apostle Paul called it).

Because it is true that the Holy Spirit is a Gentleman, and technically the Gentleman, He never forces a person in whom He dwells to do anything against their will. It is said that God’s “still small voice” (I Kings 19:12) is the easiest voice to miss when you’re distracted and to ignore when you’re covetous and to dismiss when you’re overconfident.

We’ve talked about it quite a bit over the years. The Holy Spirit will not force you to do anything. He will push, pull, prod, influence, pressure, persuade, encourage, and even punish, but He will not make you do what you refuse to do, and He will not make you be who you refuse to be.



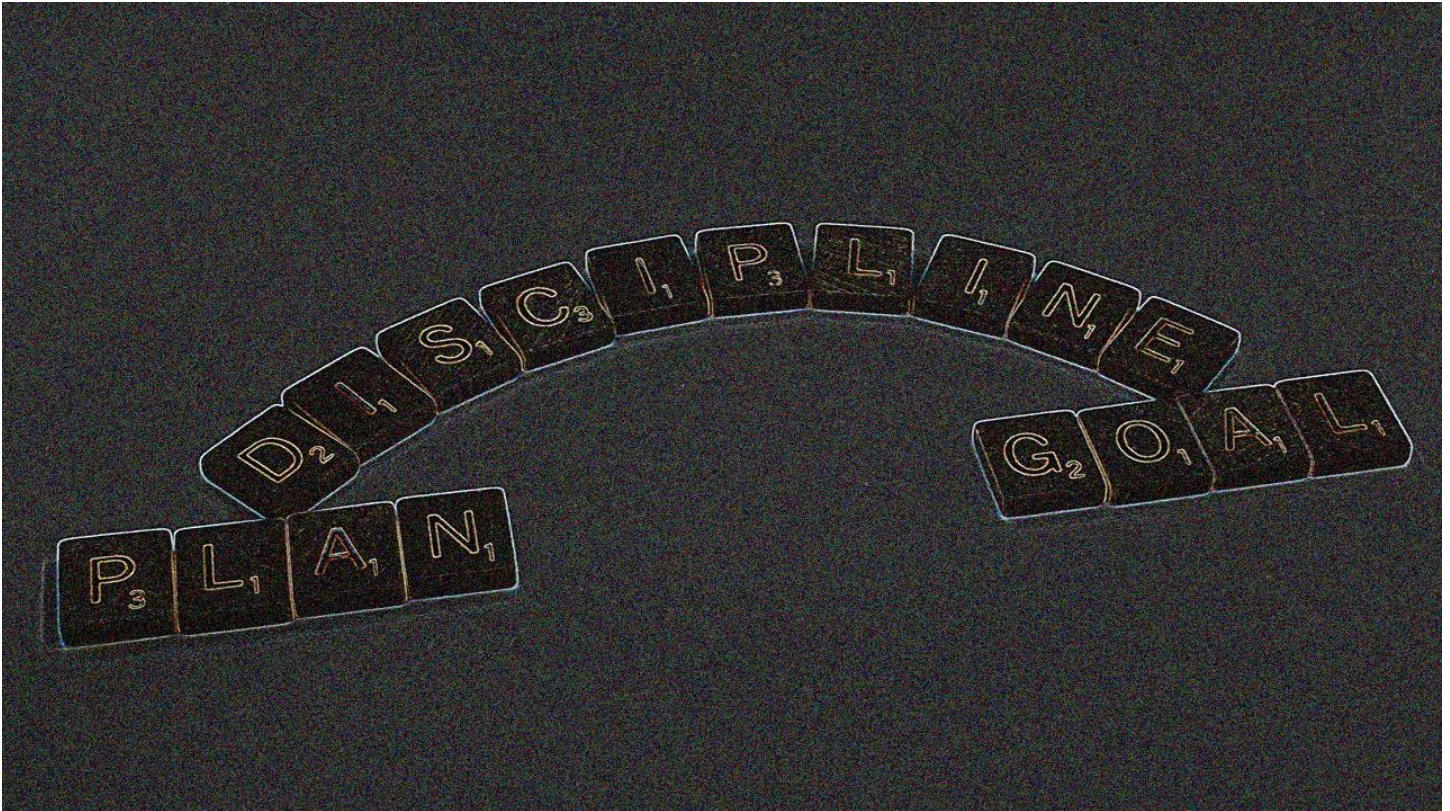
That comes in the three main areas we always talk about. 1) The first is the Agapê of God. You can only experience as much of God's Agapê love as you are willing to accept. There are barriers that we put up, oftentimes unknowingly, that prevent us from fully experiencing the Agapê that God has already given to us.

We all hinder God's Agapê for us to one degree or another. To determine to which degree that you personally block the love of Almighty God for you, all you need to do, is look at how much you Agapê others. I could quote a lot of verses for that – you know bounce

you around your Bible a bit, but you should sense the Truth of it, right down to the core of your being.

This is precisely what Jesus was getting at when He taught us to pray “Father forgive my shortcomings in the same way, and to the same degree, that I have already forgiven the shortcomings of others.” It isn’t that we must first forgive in order to be forgiven, it is that the more forgiving we are the more the forgiveness that God has granted to us personally, is actually operative within us.

The freeness with which you hold out Agapê in the form of genuine concern, compassion, forgiveness, and sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has the power to save a person’s immortal soul from eternal damnation is the same degree to which you are accepting those things from God. Too many of us show in our behavior that our personal resistance to the indwelling Holy Spirit on this matter is strong.



2) The second area is spiritual growth, the conforming of a person to Christlikeness. It is most easily encapsulated by the Fruit of the Holy Spirit starting with Agapê and ending with self-control. The Apostle Paul used the term self-control as a synonym for Christian maturity. Being disciplined is being self-controlled and is the root idea of being a disciple.

If you think about it, what is patience, if not self-control? What is goodness to others, if not self-restraint, the opposite of an immature person's self-indulgence... See, it is self-control. Clearly, too many Christians lack self-control, which is proof that they are resisting the work of the Holy Spirit within them.



3) The third area is the area highlighted here in our passage. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Namely the Gift of Tongues. According to the Bible there are unlimited Gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are multiple listings of Gifts, and the very nature of those listings shows that none of them are exhaustive. The Holy Spirit cannot be put into a manmade box, He is God! I think we sometimes forget that as we identify Him with a dove, or with a gentle breeze, or with a Casper-like friendly ghost. He, the Breath of Almighty God, determines what to give, when to give it, how to give it, to whom to give it, and through whom it will be given.

That's a really important point and it's the key to understanding the Gifts. Many Christians think in terms of God the Spirit giving a particular individual a Gift or Gifts. Nearly all Christians, even those who would disagree with that statement still talk that way. We commonly say that Mary has the Gift of Helps, Bob has the Gift of Leadership, Bill has the Gift of Healing, etc. That's fundamentally wrong.

The analogy goes like this... I want to give a gift of my own choosing, for my own reasons, to someone. You will see that someone before I am able to see them and so, I ask you to give my gift to that person for me. You kindly agree. Does that make the gift yours?

The most well-known and celebrated Gift list of all is found in I Corinthians chapter 12, but what comes immediately before the only list that contains Tongues is, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

What is the “common good”? Well, it’s the church with its mission as explained at the end of the list in Ephesians chapter 4, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.”

This is about Kingdom building, which coheres perfectly with the “one body, many parts” introduction to the list found in Romans chapter 12. The point is that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are given by Him at His discretion for the sole purpose of ministering through people to other people.



The crowd was baffled by what they saw and heard, and with good reason. It would have been quite a

spectacle for sure. People, especially female people, didn't proclaim the Gospel Message of Salvation out loud in public in multiple languages all at the same time. I'm sure that none of the people there that day had ever seen or even heard of such a thing before.

You have to imagine it and no wonder devout people were wondering what it all meant, and no doubt scoffers were quickly mocking the whole thing.



Acts 2:14, But Peter, taking his stand with the other eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, know this, and pay attention to my words.

I don't think that we stop and recognize the transformation of character that the Holy Spirit wrought in a willing Peter. A fisherman from Galilee is about to fulfill the Words of Jesus and become a fisherman of souls. The very first Christian pastor is about to deliver the very first Christian sermon. Let's imagine that we're there and listen in...

Acts 2:14–21, 14But Peter, taking his stand with the other eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, know this, and pay attention to my words.
15For these people are not drunk, as you assume, since it is only the third hour of the day; 16but this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel:
17‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour out My Spirit on all Mankind; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, And your old men will Have dreams; 18and Even on My male and female Servants I will pour out My spirit in those days, And they will prophesy. 19‘And I will display wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, fire, and vapor of smoke.
20‘The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the

Lord comes. 21‘And it shall be that Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

22“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a Man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—23this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24But God raised Him from the dead, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

25For David says of Him,

‘I saw the Lord continually before me, Because He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken.

26‘Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue was overjoyed; Moreover my flesh also will live in hope;

27For You will not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor will you Allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. 28‘You

have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.’

29“Brothers, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30So because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne,

31he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.



32It is this Jesus whom God raised up, a fact to which we are all witnesses. 33Therefore, since He has been exalted at the right hand of God, and has received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He has poured out this which you both see and hear.

34For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, 35Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” ’

36Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

37Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what are we to do?”

38Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” 40And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on urging them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”

41So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

42They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44And all the believers were together and had all things in common; 45and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had

need. 46Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

That is an amazing sermon with a remarkable outcome, and we'll talk about the elements of it a bit more next time, but for now, let's relish in the fact that the Holy Spirit so moved a group of people 2,000 years ago that we here today are part of their legacy. It's our legacy to uphold now.



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