

Skiny Jeans, Vestments, or Suits?

By Ric Shields – September 2018

Except for a small, country Baptist church I attended for a few months as a kid, I have attended a Pentecostal or Charismatic church since August 1954; I was born nine months later. There were some small churches in small towns, a more formal church in a large town, and large and medium-sized churches in the suburbs.

While each church **prescribed to similar doctrines, they were not taught or practiced in the same ways.** It wasn't until we started to attend our current church that I began to hear and understand more about grace. In the previous church, we learned much about God's faithfulness. One of the churches seemed to enjoy teaching about Hell. I could never figure out what one of the small-town churches embraced because its values changed with each new edition of a Christian magazine.

Some in those churches believed the emphasis and expression of Spiritual Gifts (especially those found in 1 Corinthians 12) was the fastest way to church growth. I have come to believe that before we make a strong push for the operation of the **Gifts of the Spirit**, we need to humble ourselves and make way for the **Fruit of the Spirit** to flow in our churches.

What would happen if all the Christians in your town (whether large or small) were brought together in one place? The first week might be great, **but within a short time, things would begin to change.** Rather than celebrate the knowledge of Jesus they all share, arguments about theology and governance would surface. There would be discussion on which Bible version should be used and which songs should be sung. How would communion be served? Would they use a common cup or individual, plastic cups? Would skinny jeans be allowed on the platform or should ministers wear vestments or a business suit?

Were we to throw the operation of the **Gifts of the Spirit** in the middle of the discussion, there would be disagreements about speaking in tongues, prophesying, giving Words of Knowledge, exercising Faith, and proper decorum in worship while **a large percentage of the community around us would die and go to hell before we would decide to be the disciples that Jesus called us to be.** There would be no reason for them to believe Christians are united in purpose, united in faith, united in worship, and united under the banner of the Kingdom of God. That is not the **love for one another** which Jesus, Paul, John, or a host of others have taught us.

I am one who has knelt with a teenager and prayed for them to receive the Gift of Speaking in Other Tongues. Though it seems humorous now, I literally heard one friend praying in his right ear to *"Hang on...hang on!"* while another prayed fervently in his left ear to *"Left go...let go!"* **There is little reason to wonder why it was such an ordeal for him to be filled with that supernatural expression brought by the Holy Spirit.** Regrettably, I have never prayed for a someone to be filled with **love for others.**

If we believe the most important thing in a person's spiritual life is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, then we should begin by teaching them to be filled with **love that comes from that same Spirit.** The more they fall in love with Jesus and follow Him, the closer they will draw to Him. That's when they will ask for more of Him and **will experience the gifts He has purposed for their lives, for the benefit of the church, and for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.**

My own arrogance led me to believe that one church where I served had become a power-broker among churches. The Gifts of the Spirit were flowing unlike anywhere I had ever seen. Words of Knowledge flowed, Prophecy flowed, Miracles flowed...yet I do not recall teaching or hearing someone teach that we should ask the Holy Spirit to fill people with **love for one another.**

I believe the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (not just some gifts, but all of them) should operate in the church today. **But the Gifts of the Spirit may be all noise and distraction without the Fruit of the Spirit.** I am reminded of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13...

¹ "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

John wrote...

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." 1 John 4:11

Paul wrote...

"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." Romans 12:10

Jesus said...

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

The **Fruit of the Spirit** listed in Galatians 5:21 is not listed in alphabetical order yet **love** occurs as the first. One must wonder if Paul meant to indicate the nine attributes to be accumulative with **love** being the most important and foundational of all.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12 about the Gifts of the Spirit and ended the chapter by writing, *"And yet I will show you a more excellent way."* Next, he **immediately laid out the case for love** in 1 Corinthians 13 and concluded by writing, *"Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."* The very next sentence (which we know as 1 Corinthians 14:1) Paul

continues his teaching with these words: *"Follow the way of love, but eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit..."*

I confess to have not followed this simple instruction. I have sought recognition and position and have practiced the Gifts of the Spirit without understanding love as the foundation of it all. In the end, I have grown weary of promoting distinctions without a difference and am ready to do all I know to promote a **spirit of love** wherever I go.

What does it all look like? I don't really know; neither do I know where this journey takes me, you, or others. My great hope is that it leads us to be more like the people who Jesus desires for us to be.

Jesus said the love we have for each other...**not our mutual love of Christ, but the love we have for each other**...would be a sign to the world we are his disciples. If you are looking for an effective way to point others to Jesus, begin by asking Him to fill you with the **love for others** you have rarely heard taught or preached. **Spiritual Gifts will follow when you're ready to use them properly and when His Kingdom will be gloried through them.**

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