

Participating in the life of the Spirit

After exploring the first two of the St James purposes namely, “Encountering God” and “Growing as followers of Jesus,” we take time to look at the work of the Holy Spirit and what it means to “Participate in the life of the Spirit.” We will be looking at two key chapters in the New Testament – Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 12.

Many consider Romans 8 as the greatest passage within the greatest book in Scripture. It has been described as:

The inner sanctuary within the cathedral of faith; the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden; the highest peak in a range of mountains.

While the varied riches of God’s Word make any such comparisons precarious, Romans 8 deserves to be put in the front rank for its rich and comprehensive portrayal of what it means to be a Christian. Prominent in this description is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Read: Romans 8. 1-11

- How many times do you read “Spirit” in this passage?

The word *pneuma* (“Spirit”) occurs 21 times in Romans 8 and all but two refer to the Holy Spirit. But the passage is not *about* the Spirit, but on what the Spirit *does*. It is the blessings and privileges conferred on believers by the Spirit that are the theme of this chapter.

- Name the blessings and privileges the Holy Spirit bestows on the believer.

The Spirit of God brings us to Jesus, the Spirit of God liberates Christians from the penalty (justification) and power (sanctification) of sin, the Spirit of God will raise our mortal body to life, the Spirit of God is the “Spirit of adoption” giving us the status of loved children and heirs of the promises to come, the Spirit of God enables us to live His purposes and will bring God’s final triumph to completion.

- Take a moment to thank God for the work of his Holy Spirit. (You might want to read again verse 1 “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” and also 8.28; 31-34)

The other reading concentrates on the work of God as the one who gives gifts to his church.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12.1 – 14

In verses 4 – 6 Paul uses three different words when talking of the Giver: 'Spirit', 'Lord' and 'God'. These three words, especially in their Greek forms, are strongly suggestive of the three persons of the Trinity. Think about this. God is three (diversity) working in perfect harmony (Unity). Unity within diversity is an expression of God’s work within the local church.

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The other important truth is that it is God who distributes (v4). He decides who gets what and when. While the list is not exhaustive (there are other passages in the Bible speaking of gifts, ministries and services) they cover the following areas:

1. Gifts of instruction (Wisdom and Knowledge)
2. Gifts of supernatural power (Faith, Healing and Miracles)
3. Gifts of inspired utterance (Prophecy, Discernment, Speaking Tongues and Interpreting Tongues)

What distinguishes this listing is the concretely visible nature of these items, especially the last seven. They are not only “gifts,” they are above all *manifestations* of the Spirit’s presence in the midst of the congregation (group of believers).

The remarkable feature of this list is the attribution to “each one” of a whole range of supernatural activities – in the same matter-of-fact way that contemporary churchmen would list positions on an organisational chart!

The theologian J. B. Phillips wrote in his book “The Young Church in Action” (translation of the book of Acts)

Yet we cannot help feeling disturbed as well as moved, for this surely is the Church as it was meant to be . . . if they were uncomplicated and naïve by modern standards, we have ruefully to admit that they were open on the God-ward side in a way that is almost unknown today

- Share what you have learned today about God's gifts.
- What are you going to do in response as a group?

Prayer

We pray that your kingdom will come. We pray that what you want will be done in our lives, in our group, in our church and in our community.

Thank you that I stand forgiven, free and loved because of what Jesus has done on my behalf. Holy Spirit, thank you for your life, direction and works in me. In your church and in your world there might be things I do in my own strength and to fill my own needs. I find it hard to let go because they define me, give me status and power. I surrender and ask your Holy Spirit to redirect my heart. Teach me to be receptive to the Spirit manifestations and in step with you in my Christian service.