

## “The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit”

Isaiah 11:1-3

Rev. Bill Pinches

Mason First Presbyterian Church

Mason, Michigan

May 27, 2018

Every now and then I come upon a piece of Christian teaching that is totally new to me, something I have never heard of before. Something that feels like *gold*. I find myself wondering, “How come I’ve never heard this before?” That happened to me as I was working on last week’s sermon. I was digging around, trying to find ways to capture what the Holy Spirit *does*, and lo and behold, I discovered that there’s this thing called “the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.” I made a quick mention of it last week. But I also had this sense that I needed to come back and take a second look.

This is traditionally a *Catholic* teaching. It’s a pretty big deal in the Catholic Church. It’s not a big deal in the Protestant world. I can’t tell that it’s *ever* taught in the Protestant church. Maybe the Reformers jettisoned it. But it looks to me like it stands on solid ground, and it has a very long history. I find myself thinking we need to bring it back. It’s a gem – a gem that we Protestants need to claim.

It comes from that familiar passage in the book of Isaiah: *A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots. The Lord’s Spirit will rest on him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of planning and strength, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord. He will delight in fearing the Lord.* (Isaiah 11:1-3) We Christians understand this “shoot” from Jesse’s stem to be a reference to Jesus Christ. “The Lord’s Spirit will rest on him” is a reference to Jesus’ baptism. These verse tell us what *kind* of a Spirit this is. There are seven characteristics that are named, right? *Wisdom, understanding, planning, strength, knowledge, fear of the Lord* – wait, that’s six. Where’s the seventh?

There’s an answer to that question, but I had to dig a little to find it. It has to do with the way this verse was translated into Greek and Latin. In the original Hebrew, *six* characteristics are named:

1.	חִכְמָה	hokmah	wisdom
2.	בִּינָה	biynah	understanding
3.	עֵצָה	’atzah	counsel
4.	גְּבוּרָה	geburah	might
5.	דַּעַת	da’at	knowledge
6.	יְרֵאת יְהוָה	yirat Adonai	fear of the Lord

The last one, *yirat Adonai*, is repeated in verse 3: “he will delight in *yirat Adonai*,” the fear of the Lord.

7.	יִרְאַת יְהוָה	yirat Adonai	fear of the Lord
----	----------------	--------------	------------------

When Isaiah was translated into Greek, a slight change was made. Rather than repeating “the fear of the Lord”, the translator substituted a different word in verse 2 – *eusebeia*, meaning “piety”.

1.	חֵכְמָה	hokmah	sophia	wisdom
2.	בִּינָה	biynah	sunesis	understanding
3.	עֲצָה	'atzah	boule	counsel
4.	גְּבוּרָה	geburah	ischus	might
5.	דַּעַת	da'at	gnosis	knowledge
6.	יִרְאַת יְהוָה	yirat Adonai	eusebeia	fear of the Lord (Hebrew); piety (Greek)
7.	יִרְאַת יְהוָה	yirat Adonai	phobou Theou	fear of the Lord

So *voila*, now there were seven characteristics of the Spirit, not just six. Similarly, in Latin:

1.	חֵכְמָה	hokmah	sophia	sapientia	wisdom
2.	בִּינָה	Biynah	sunesis	intellectus	understanding
3.	עֲצָה	'atzah	boule	consilium	counsel
4.	גְּבוּרָה	geburah	ischus	fortitudo	might
5.	דַּעַת	da'at	gnosis	scientia	knowledge
6.	יִרְאַת יְהוָה	yirat Adonai	eusebeia	pietas	fear of the Lord (Hebrew); piety (Greek and Latin)
7.	יִרְאַת יְהוָה	yirat Adonai	phobos Theou	timor Domini	fear of the Lord

Seven gifts in Latin, and in Greek. Six in Hebrew. How it got changed, doesn't really matter.

These six – or seven – characteristics were given to Jesus at the moment of his baptism, right? “The Lord’s Spirit will rest on him.” That’s what it did, it *rested* on him. These gifts were given *to Jesus*.

But what about *us*? Are these gifts also given to *us*?

According to the Catholic Church, *yes*, they are. The official Catechism of the Catholic Church, published by authority of the Vatican in 1992, says: “The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1830-1831) The Catechism refers to

two other scripture passages to support those teachings: “Let your good spirit lead me on a level path” (Psalm 143:10); and “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God . . . If children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:14, 17). The idea is that, when we become joined to Christ through our baptism, we become *fellow heirs with Christ* of the gifts he received – which means, *we get those gifts too, and they lead us on level paths*. This is not just a recent teaching; it has depth and history – Thomas Aquinas talked about these gifts in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and Saint Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup>. This teaching has been around for at least 16 centuries – and I just learned about it last week!

So what *are* these gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us, through our union with Christ?

1. *Wisdom*. Wisdom is a gift that allows us see things from *God’s* point of view. Wisdom allows us to recognize what is really *true*.
2. *Understanding*. This is the gift that enables us to *grasp the meaning* of divine truths. Wisdom helps us *know* the truths; understanding helps us to *grasp* them, at least in a limited way. There are some truths – like the mystery of the Trinity – that we may never fully understand.
3. *Counsel, or, right judgment*. This gift is a special kind of intuition that helps us to know the right course of action, quickly, especially in difficult circumstances.
4. *Fortitude, or courage*. Aquinas used the word *endurance*. This is the gift that enables us to withstand adversity or hardship, and to stand up for goodness and truth in the face of evil.
5. *Knowledge*. This gift allows us to perceive the meaning and purpose of our lives, and to live into that meaning. It enables us to move beyond *wanting* to do God’s will, to actually *doing* it.
6. *Piety*. This is the gift of truly *desiring* to worship and serve God. It enables us to move beyond living out our faith through a sense of *duty*, to living it out through a genuine *love for God*.
7. *Fear of the Lord*. This is the gift of *wonder* and *awe* at the grandeur and majesty of God. It is not being *afraid of God* so much as it is a profound sense of *reverence*.

These, my friends, are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. *I think we Protestants have been missing something important here*. I think we have failed to recognize that God really wants us to *have* these gifts, and has given us a way to receive them. I feel like I know a lot of Christians who would say that they don’t *have* these gifts, at least not *all* of them. Maybe some of *you* feel that way. Well, guess what, friends – *these gifts are for us, too!* Every single one of them. That Isaiah passage, that Romans passage – those verses are in our Bibles too. There’s no reason why this has to be just a *Catholic* thing.

There are two critical things we need to do. The first one – and this is really important – is to *recognize* that *God genuinely wants to give you each one of these gifts*. Don’t sell yourself short. Don’t think, “I could never have *that* gift.” Just because you may feel like you don’t have one of these gifts right now doesn’t mean that you won’t *ever* have it. One of the worst things we can do is refuse a gift that God is trying to give us. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that these gifts aren’t for *you*.

And the second thing we need to do is pray. I mean, really *pray*. Like you really *mean* it. Like you really believe that God wants to *give* you these gifts. Let’s go to God, and ask to receive these gifts.

© 2018 Rev. Bill Pinches