



WOW: Word Of the Week

Shouldistic

March 8, 2023

I am working on a series of studies about the **Holy Spirit**. From time to time in coming weeks or months, our WOW may reflect great truths from that study. (The series will be posted on my website.)

I begin with a quote from Jerry Lynch:

“It took me quite a while to realize that the “spiritual gifts” (patience, kindness, and so forth) were simply that, gifts, and not to be employed as behavior modification mandates, or how a Christian should act. It is this shouldistic attitude toward life in the spirit that Christ took exception to with the Pharisees and what I see as presently contributing to the sad state of the Church.”

Isn't it amazing that with our **lens of legalism** we have even figured out how to misunderstand God's gifts. The gifts (fruits) of Galatians 5 are ours because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The fruits list is not a “to do” list. It is not a “should” list. As Lynch observes, it is not a behavior modification list. No wonder we have trouble understanding grace. Our “shouldistic” attitude is apparent in moralistic sermons. (I was fond of assigning students in my class on preaching the task of preaching without moralistic imperatives: avoiding words like “should, have to, must, ought to.” Listen to the sermon Sunday and see how often moralizing creeps in!) Our speech reflects a misunderstanding of what God is trying to do in our lives and how he wants to do it.

God's work in our life through the Spirit is less forced and more automatic. Spirit-filled people put to death deeds of the flesh, give evidence of the Spirit's presence in attitudes and actions. Spirit-filled people wield the sword of the Spirit well. Spirit-filled people are people of prayer. Spirit-filled people talk about Jesus.

God's gifts come into our lives little by little through our continuing surrender to the Father's will, confidently knowing that he will care for us and provide our every need. As we receive and develop more fully God's gifts in our lives, our part is to relate to others honestly and openly about our shortcomings. Ours is to admit our inability to develop and demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit by our own power. Ours is to be open to God's gifting. Depending on our own power only leads to closing ourselves off from God's power, God's presence, God's gifts, and God's results.

The gifts of the Spirit are gifts. They are not our own doing – they are God's doing. Ours is to be open and receptive to the teachings of the Master, becoming more and more like him. That is what discipleship is all about.