

Spiritual Gifts – Bible Study

Introduction

Along with a believer's baptism and the priority doctrines of the Christian faith, one of the early "stones" to be laid in a Christian's life upon the foundation of a personal, saving relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ is an understanding of the doctrine of personal spiritual gifts. It is largely through the use of our inborn talents and the gifts given by God at the moment of salvation to each believer that we serve the Lord. If we are desirous of being edified in the Lord ourselves and of discipling others, we must both understand the doctrine of spiritual gifts and exercise the use of those gifts in our daily lives.

I. The five main New Testament passages that deal with spiritual gifts are Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1–31; 1 Corinthians 14:1–40; Ephesians 4:7–12; and 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

A. All believers receive a spiritual gift or gifts at the moment of salvation (1 Cor. 12:13). Each believer is equipped to serve God with a gift, and each believer is responsible to God for his use of that gift.

B. Second, personal spiritual gifts are given sovereignly by God, as it pleases Him to distribute them for His own glory (1 Cor. 12:18). We are not to seek or beg spiritual gifts inasmuch as they are given simultaneously with salvation.

C. Third, the purpose of these spiritual gifts is twofold. We are to edify the saints through the proper use of the gifts (Eph. 4:12), and we are to glorify God in their use (1 Pet. 4:10, 11).

D. The primary and summary purpose that the Holy Spirit should indwell each believer in the Church Age at all is to glorify the Son (John 16:14). It is to be remembered, of course, that the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ in a number of ways, only one of which is the distribution of gifts to believers.

II. The New Testament appears to divide spiritual gifts into three categories: sign, speaking and ministering gifts.

A. Sign Gifts (Temporary) - those apostolic gifts of tongues and healing (and their attendant gifts; cp. the 1 Corinthians references) that were used only to authenticate the gospel message to the unbelieving Jews to whom the apostles themselves preached (cp. Isa. 28:11; 1 Cor. 1:22; Acts 2). The sign gifts are no longer; they ceased when the apostolic witness itself was finished (cp. Acts 1:21–26).

B. Speaking Gifts (Permanent) - Prophecy (forthtelling the Word, or preaching), teaching, evangelism and exhortation are, properly, speaking gifts.

C. Ministering Gifts (Permanent) - Ministry, giving, ruling and mercy are property serving, as opposed to speaking, in their primary focus. First Peter 4:10 and 11 divide personal gifts that belong to the Church today into these two categories of speaking and ministering.

III. Four Criteria on the Use of the Gifts

A. The Christian will have a desire to serve in the local church in a specific capacity. For example, he may wish to teach or to usher. Such a desire in the heart of a Christian who is living for the Lord and who is desirous of serving Him is of the Lord (Ps. 37:4).

B. The Christian will receive great joy from serving the Lord through the exercise of the spiritual gift. A "ruler" would enjoy the smooth operation to the glory of God of the various departments and teachers of the Sunday school he superintends; again, a "giver" would enjoy assisting a pastor or missionary with a special gift.

C. Other Christians will notice positive spiritual results from the proper exercise of our spiritual gifts. God's people, particularly those who are more mature in their spiritual lives than ourselves, can be important indicators to us of God's will.

D. God will bless our use of the gifts He has given us in ways that only He can do. Spiritual edification of the Body of Christ will begin to be apparent to us as we serve Him through the gifts He has given us.

*It should be noted that the final three criteria mentioned here require the active exercise of service to the Lord in order to be realized in our lives. God expects each one of us to serve Him in the local church; we best serve Him in those areas in which He has especially enabled us to serve by virtue of our personal spiritual gifts.

The chart connects the gifts with familiar Bible characters and their relation to the local church

SPIRITUAL GIFTS: EXPANDED <i>Romans 12:1-10; Ephesians 4:11*</i>			
	GIFT	USE IN LOCAL CHURCH	BIBLICAL EXAMPLES
Speaking Gifts	Prophecy <i>(preaching forth)</i>	Pastorate; all other uses of this gift are based on pastoral preaching: missions, conference speaking, Bible teaching, chaplaincy and the like	Paul, Peter, Stephen, Timothy
	Teaching <i>(explaining Biblical truths)</i>	Pastorate, Sunday school teacher, youth leader, missions, church women's groups, day school teacher, college and seminary professor, chaplaincy	Paul, Peter, Stephen, Timothy
	Exhortation <i>(encouragement)</i>	Hospital chaplaincy, military chaplaincy, Sunday school, women's church groups, missions, day school principal, deacon, children's clubs	Paul, Barnabas, Judas Barsabas, Silas, Peter, Philemon
	Evangelism*	Evangelist, missionary, conference speaker, children's clubs, visitation	Phillip, Paul, Timothy, Barnabas, Peter, Stephen
Serving Gifts	Ministry <i>(serving personal needs)</i>	Deacon, secretary, special education classes, VBS, shut-in ministry	Deacons of Acts 6, Tychicus, Lydia, Onesimus, Luke
	Giving	Use in daily and special needs of the church, particularly in relation to (a) pastoral staff and (b) special programs, missions, school support, etc.	Philippian saints, Philemon
	Ruling <i>(administration)</i>	Pastorate, Sunday school superintendent, deacon, trustee, school administrator, youth leaders, GARBC council, mission board officers, school board, committee chairman	Titus
	Mercy <i>(acts of kindness to needy)</i>	Hospital and shut-in visitation, deacon, women's societies, missionaries such as medical	Luke

The Leadership Gifts (Public Ministry of the Word)

Pastors-Teachers (Prophecy... not Isaiah-style)

- Identity - Mentioned only in Ephesians 4:11 it is only used (in its noun form, poimen) here, and that only as it is associated with teaching. The verb poimaino, "to shepherd," or "to pastor," is used in Acts 20:28 ("feed") in connection with the terms "elders" (verse 17) and "bishops" (verse 28). The same is found in I Peter 5:1-5. Pastor = bishop & elder.
- Qualifications - not by virtue of gifts alone - the are qualifications listed in 1 Tim 3 & Titus 1.
- Responsibilities - The responsibilities of the pastor-teacher fall generally under two headings: leading and feeding. Terms such as "oversee," "rule," "feed," and "teach" are used repeatedly in reference to pastors or elders. This gifted man is to "perfect the saints to the work of the ministry." This simply means that it is his job to train everyone else to minister. How different is his job description today?
- Honor - Above all other permanent gifts, this one carries with it a special honor. Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24, and I Thessalonians 5:12-13 are two passages which make this clear. Of particular significance is I Timothy 5:17 where the pastor-teachers are "especially worthy of double honor" Those who serve the church by leading and teaching are particularly worthy of love and esteem.

Teachers

- The gift of teaching appears more often in the catalogues of spiritual gifts than any other, only prophecy excepted. A teacher, as the name suggests, is one with the ability to explain clearly the things of God. He is not a prophet, announcing new truth, but one who is able to expound the truth already given. This gift, like few others, requires preliminary work for its exercise. One who wishes to teach must train and prepare to teach effectively. It is probably safe to assume that one with the gift of teaching has also been given a desire to study and learn. A teacher must especially "stir up" his gift (I Timothy 1:6) to increase his effectiveness. And again, the gift of teaching carries with it a special honor. The sowing of the things of God are especially important and helpful (I Corinthians 9:11). Where would any of us be today were it not for gifted teachers who have instructed us in our most holy faith!

Exhortation

- Exhortation is another gift defined only by its name. The Greek word parakaleo includes three ideas: 1) encouragement (consolation, comfort), 2) challenge, and 3) rebuke (admonition). "Counseling" all the ideas. The exhorter picks up where the teacher leaves off. Someone has said that if the teacher lays out the truth, the exhorter lays it on. The exhorter is one who has the insight to take the broad principles of Scripture and apply them to a specific situation. He is able to say, "Because the Scripture teaches this, you must...."
- By the nature of this gift, the exhorter risks being unpopular with many. Many simply do not want to hear someone else tell them what to do! Encouragement is good, challenge is okay, but rebuke?! But still, this gift is essential to the church. Mutual exhortation is a responsibility of all Christians, not just those so gifted. But if all are responsible for it, this person is particularly successful in it. His counsel must not be taken lightly.

Evangelists

- In the early church, the evangelists were considered the successors of the apostles. They were not the same as the apostles but merely continued the apostles' ministry.
- The term in the Greek is related to the word "gospel." The euangelion is the "gospel," or the "good news." Euangelizo (the verb form) means to announce the gospel, "to evangelize." The euangelistes is "the one who evangelizes," or the "evangelist."
- The term "evangelist" occurs only three times in the New Testament, none of which actually define what an evangelist is. Acts 21:8 simply tells us that Philip was an evangelist; Ephesians 4:11 teaches that evangelists are gifts to the church; and II Timothy 4:5 commands Timothy to do the work of an evangelist.
- An evangelist is one who is especially effective in presenting the message of the gospel to the lost and instructing believers in the faith. He is not one who announces new truth - that is a prophet
- It seems that the New Testament evangelist more closely resembles our present day missionary. He brings the good news to an unevangelized community, disciples, establishes a church, and moves on.

Ruling & Governing

- Apart from leadership, any organization will collapse. These gifts are to fill that need. "Ruling" (Romans 12:8), often called "administration," is not the ability to shuffle papers all day. The term means to rule, or to lead. It is used in I Timothy 3:4-5 of the elder (bishop) ruling his house and the church. The gift of "governments" (I Corinthians 12:28) emphasizes authority in leading. This gift would be a requirement of an elder (I Timothy 3:4-5) and would include the responsibility of ruling and leading in affairs of the church such as discipline. The independent spirit of our society instinctively rebels at the idea of someone in authority over such personal matters, but this is God's means of leading His church. Sometimes service must be in the form of authority and leadership.

Service Gifts

Ministry

- Romans 12:7 mentions this gift of ministry (see also I Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:12). As already noted, the word in the New Testament translated "ministry" does not mean teaching or pastoring as your pastor "ministers" the Word each Sunday. It is not "ministry" in the modern professional sense of the term. The word simply means "service." It is a form of our word "deacon," which means "servant." This gift is the God-given ability to serve others. Sound exciting? These people are the unsung heroes of the church! These are the people who are willing to work behind the scenes at those necessary but unglamorous tasks. Whether it is serving individuals in their needs or tasks or serving the church corporately in its needs or tasks, the gift is the same and equally necessary. Apart from these servants the church would be crippled. For a church's ministry to be vibrant there must be those who are willing and eager to take care of the needs of others.

Helps

- The gift of helps is very similar. The root word in the Greek means "to take instead of," that is, taking another's work yourself. This is love in action. The early church was marked by so much of this, and the more we know of it, the more we will be blessed as were they.

Showing Mercy

- Likewise the gift of mercy focuses on the needs of others, perhaps with the added dimension of special concern and care and sympathy in meeting those needs. Emotional support may well be a part of it. Of these people there can never be too many.

Giving

- This gift of giving is not the ability to put money in the church offering plate (although that may well be a part of it!). It is the ability to provide for the financial and material needs of the church and its people. It differs from the gifts of service and helps in that its focus is giving more than helping. The gifts of service and helps deal more with giving self, or serving; the gift of giving deals with giving material things, or financial giving. It is significant that Romans 12:8 commands that this gift be exercised in a certain attitude. The giving is to be done "with simplicity," or generously, liberally, with singleness of purpose - to provide for a need, with no strings attached, joyfully, and without regret. It is supporting people individually or the church corporately as a special ministry. This person does not give expecting praise for it. He asks nothing in return. He gives for the sheer pleasure of ministering in this way.

Faith

- Just as all Christians are required to help, serve, show mercy, and give, so also all Christians are responsible to have faith - for salvation and for all of life. This gift of faith, however, is a special ability to believe God in unusual ways. We all are given a "measure of faith" (Romans 12:3); this person has a greater measure. He is able to believe God to supply specific needs as a ministry to others. His faith accomplishes results beyond the ordinary. This is how every great Christian enterprise succeeds - people behind it with great faith.
- This gift is a special ministry exercised for others. If you have this gift, spend more time on your knees!