

Basics About "Spiritual Gifts" (Grace Gifts)

Introduction

"About spiritual gifts ... I do not want you to be ignorant," were Paul's words to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:1). God's Word is clear that recognizing your spiritual gift is extremely important for our spiritual growth and ministry. Here are three reasons:

- 1) Your spiritual gift(s) is part of your identity as a Christian, i. e., the grace of God that saved you also equips you (Eph. 4:7; Rom. 6:23);
- 2) Your spiritual gift is given so you, both individually and in harmony with the rest of the church can fulfill the ministry of Christ both in the church and in the world (1 Cor. 12:7; Rom. 12:48; 1 Pet. 5:10f.; Eph. 4:16); and;
- 3) To neglect this special grace which God gives for ministry stunts our spiritual growth and paves the way for more serious spiritual disease (1 Thess. 5:19-20; Eph. 4:14; 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6-8; Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 12:14-26).

I want to define for you what a spiritual gift is, answer some basic questions often asked about spiritual gifts, and perhaps most importantly, share some steps you need to take to recognize your spiritual gift(s).

Definition of a Spiritual Gift

There are several principal passages which deal with gifts: Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:7-16 and 1 Peter 4:7-11. The Bible's favorite word for a spiritual gift is not "spiritual gift" (*pneumatikos*) but "**grace gift**" (*charisma*). Unfortunately, most Bible translations do not make this distinction. **Further**, a spiritual gift, besides being an expression of God's grace, is a **manifestation of the Spirit** (1 Cor. 12:7, 11). In other words, a spiritual gift is the result of the Spirit's activity in your life, and even more the Spirit determines which gifts) you will receive. A **third** element of the makeup of a spiritual gift is that it is a **concrete expression of ministry**. This is to say, a gift is always real, not abstract: it is not the potential of what might be, but what really is; it is something we can take a picture of, touch, hear, feel, or see. It is a divinely inspired act of ministry. Two things support this. First, the construction of the Greek word used for gift, and secondly, the illustrations of all the gifts mentioned in the New Testament. The fourth element of a spiritual gift is that by it we **testify to Christ's Lordship** as we minister, i.e., the act of ministry performed is done in His name, whether stated or unstated, and as an act of worship to Him (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Pet. 4:11; Mk. 9:41). The fifth and sixth elements go together. **Fifth**

is that spiritual gifts are to be utilized **in harmony and coordination** with the other spiritual gifts of the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-30; Eph. 4:11-16; Rom. 12:4-8). The Body is ill when its members are not properly functioning and working. **Sixth**, the legitimate expression of God's grace for ministry, a spiritual gift, must be **characterized by love** (1 Cor. 12:31-13:13; Eph. 4:14-16). Otherwise God's grace becomes warped into something, fleshly (Rom. 8:8). Putting all this together we come out with the following definition:

A spiritual gift is a particular act of ministry. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit and enabled by God's grace. It demonstrates Christ's Lordship, works in harmony with the other gifts given to the Body of Christ, and is characterized by love.

Common Questions

Because of limited space it is difficult to touch on all the many questions so often asked about gifts, but here are a few. **Is a spiritual gift a natural talent?** It is not by definition. Yet, a spiritual gift may be manifested through a natural talent, but this is not always the case. A person may be a teacher professionally (a natural talent), and yet his or her gift for ministry may not be teaching but, for example, faith. A natural talent becomes a gift only when the Spirit ordains it for God's purpose (1 Pet. 4:11) and as it becomes an act of ministry in His name and for His glory. **Is a spiritual gift a fruit of the Spirit?** No. The Spirit's fruit (Gal. 5:22-23) are the result of the Spirit's work to conform us to the character of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18), while a spiritual gift is the Spirit's enablement for ministry (1 Cor. 12:11). **Are all spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament?** No. Each list is different from the others, and each list was directed to a different situation, which suggests that the needs of the church determined the grace given. Our definition of what a spiritual gift is would further support this. **Are all spiritual gifts supernatural and charismatic?** Yes. They are given by God through the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7), therefore they are supernatural. They are "charismatic" (an English transliteration of the Greek word meaning "empowered by God's grace") because all gifts are various forms of God's grace (1 Pet. 4:10). Some gifts are extraordinary (healing, miracles, etc.), while others are very ordinary (helps, administration, etc.); but both are equal expressions of God's grace; so therefore they are charismatic. **Did some spiritual gifts pass away when the apostles died (apostolic period)?** No. There are legitimate expressions of all the gifts listed in the New Testament, but it must be immediately noted: there are many counterfeit gifts evidenced today (cf. Mt. 7:22-23; 2 Thess. 2:9). There are several Biblical tests for counterfeit gifts. Later, we will make mention of some of these. Gifts will pass away at the second coming of Christ (1 Cor. 13:8-12). **Are spiritual gifts endowed permanently or temporarily?** Both. On a given occasion God's grace may enable you to perform a certain ministry, but that does not mean that gift will be a permanent manifestation of the Spirit in your life. For example, Paul

wrote to the Corinthians urging them to prophesy (1 Cor. 14:5), but they—single prophecy did not become prophets (cf. Eph. 4:11). A prophecy was a single act; the prophet was the regular manifestation of the grace. So it can be with all gifts.

Safeguards against Counterfeit Gifts

As I mentioned above there are counterfeit gifts from basically two sources: 1) Satanic (2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Cor. 12:3) and 2) fleshly (1 Cor. 13:1-3; 14:26-33; Rom. 12:3). There are several safeguards given in Scripture to detect and protect the church against such counterfeits. **First**, does the gift make a confession of demonstration of Christ's Lordship (1 Cor. 12:3). **Second**, does it manifest love (1 Cor. 13:1-3). **Third**, the Spirit provides gifts to counter-balance other gifts, e.g., prophecy and distinguishing of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues. Therefore, we must ask the question is the counter-gift in agreement with the gift manifested? **Fourth**, does the gift edify the Church, so they can affirm the act with their "Amen" (1 Cor. 14:16)? **Fifth**, is the gift in agreement with apostolic message (1 Cor. 14:37)? **Sixth**, has the gift been exercised beyond the measure of faith given (Rom. 12:3, 6; 1 Cor. 14:30)?

Steps For Recognizing Your Gift

Finally, we come to the five general steps in recognizing a spiritual gift(s). I use the term "recognize" because ultimately only the process of doing "recognize" the grace God has given us. There are certain will preparatory steps, but the bottom line is that you will recognize your gift only as you attempt to minister in the name of Jesus. Here are the five steps:

1. PROSPECT (1 Cor. 14:12)

Spiritual gifts have been given to edify the church and in so doing to reach the world for Christ. So a basic questions needs to be asked, "Where does the church need to be built up?" God often reveals needs to an individual as a first step for him/her to recognize his/her grace for ministry.

2. PRAY (1 Cor. 14:13)

Once you have seen a need, ask God to equip you with the grace to meet that need.

3. PRESENT (Rom. 12:1)

You must now make yourself available. Take a step of faith and begin to minister. To present yourself in ministry is true worship. It is to say "here I am, use me!"

4. PROBE (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 14:16)

Now comes the twofold evaluation: first, you must evaluate yourself (Rom. 12:3). Was I used to build up the church, to meet a need to help? Was there fruit? We are not talking about perfection here, but some approximation of edification. Second, some brothers and sisters in Christ should evaluate you (1 Cor. 14:16).

Others should be able to recognize that God is using you, as well as, you should be able to recognize it yourself. If you realize after you have "probed" that what you thought was your gift you is not don't give up! It does not spell, failure, but rather it is a discovery of what is not your gift, therefore return to the first step and start over again. God has given you a gift, and you have no choice but to continue until you and others recognize it!

5. PURSUE (1 Tim. 4:14; 1 Thess. 5:19-21; Rom. 12:6; 1 Pet. 4:10)

Often disappointment, fear, complacency, misplaced priorities, low self-esteem (to name a few) can cause the neglect of a spiritual gift(s) and put out the fire of godly desire which the Spirit has inspired. Once your gift has been confirmed, don't quit! Continue! Gifts must be developed, matured, and used! Remember "pursue" — press on (Phil. 3:13-14)!

Obstacles

Many Christians remain immature in their faith. They never grow up in Christ. In reality they are spiritually ill, weak, and are unaware of their condition. Often this can be traced back to an unwillingness to recognize their spiritual gift(s). This unwillingness often stems from one or more of six reasons: **one, fear of the Holy Spirit.** They have this fear because they are not Biblically informed as to the ministry of the Spirit, so they are afraid of what might happen if they seek their gifts. **Second, ignorant or ill-informed about spiritual gifts** is a common reason a gift is not recognized. The issues of tongues, baptism in the Spirit, healings, etc. often cause confusion and avoidance of spiritual gifts in general. **Third, a low sense of self-esteem** which issues in the attitude, "I can't do anything," or "I'm not good enough," can create personal barriers to the recognition of one's gift(s). **Fourth, looking for the wrong thing** is a major reason why many never recognize their gift. Many when seeking his or her spiritual gift is seeking some kind of experience or emotional high rather than a divinely inspired and enabled act of ministry. Ministry by its very nature and the example we have in Christ is costly. It is becoming a servant. **Fifth, the unwillingness to make a commitment** is another all too often reason people do not recognize their spiritual gifts. This means we must be willing to reprioritize our lives, throw away our excuses, and sign on the dotted line to take up our crosses and follow Him. **Sixth, unconfessed sin or unconquered sin habits** inhibit both the recognition and the effective functioning of one's spiritual gift. Repentance and confession are necessary steps to dealing with sin in our lives.

God's will for our lives is that we recognize our spiritual gifts. To not do so, for any reason once we have been informed concerning spiritual gifts, is to violate God's will for our lives; but, perhaps more importantly, is to miss the tremendous blessing of being used by God, to accomplish His great purpose in history is a tragic loss of opportunity and calling.

Lone Hill Church has some specialized classes for helping you and giving you individualized assistance in recognizing your gift(s). In addition, three very helpful books for your further study are C. Peter Wagner's Your Spiritual Gifts, Regal Books (Ventura: 1979); Michael Griffiths' Grace-Gifts, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Grand Rapids: 1979); and Michael Green's I Believe In The Holy Spirit, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Grand Rapids: 1975).