

Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Introduction

The Holy Spirit brings conviction to the unsaved and He regenerates those who respond favorably to the message of the Gospel. And when people accept the Gospel message, and repent of their sins, and believe that Jesus died for their sins—then the Holy Spirit continues to work in their lives. The Holy Spirit works in a number of ways in the believer's life:

- a) The Holy Spirit teaches (1 Corinthians 2:13). This involves the idea of instruction.
- b) The Holy Spirit guides (Romans 8:14). This involves the idea of direction.
- c) The Holy Spirit infills (Ephesians 5:18). This involves the idea of control.
- d) The Holy Spirit empowers (Romans 8:13). This involves the idea of enablement.
- e) The Holy Spirit produces fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). This involves the idea of instilling character qualities.
- f) The Holy Spirit endows gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-31). This involves the idea of granting an ability to perform a useful service in the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to every believer in Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says so. He assigns a gift (or a number of gifts) to every person “as it pleases him” (1 Corinthians 12:18). The various gifts are listed in three portions of the New Testament—Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; and Ephesians 4:11. The gifts include apostleship, prophecy, miracles, healing, tongues, evangelism, ministry, teaching, faith, exhortation, financial giving, showing mercy, ruling, discerning spirits, etc. There is some overlapping of the gifts which are listed in the three basic passages.

1. The Nature of Spirit Gifts

The subject of spiritual gifts was important in the life of the early church. Paul wrote to Timothy and urged him to ordain elders in every city. And Timothy was to commit the Gospel to godly and gifted men. 2 Timothy 2:2 indicates that those who are ordained to the ministry are to be “faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.” They are to be godly (faithful) and gifted (able). Several times Timothy was given the exhortation, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (see 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6).

A spiritual gift is not quite the same as a **natural talent**. A natural talent is an ability which comes through heredity, or an ability which a person has developed through much study and hard work. Natural talents include such abilities as being able to sing well, or to write helpful letters, or to play a musical instrument, or to paint a beautiful picture, or to master a difficult language. A spiritual gift is not something that comes through heredity, but instead, is an endowment which is given by the Holy Spirit, and is intended to aid in performing useful service in the body of Christ.

God sometimes makes use of a natural talent to increase the usefulness of a spiritual gift. One noted evangelist says that before he was a Christian, he was aware that he had an ability in the area of salesmanship. He could approach people and sell things. He enjoyed that kind of work. Later, God used this natural ability to a spiritual advantage, when as a Christian, he was given the gift of evangelism (the ability to tactfully approach people and speak to them about their need for salvation through Christ). And so natural talents and spiritual gifts are not the same, but they are often inter-related.

A spiritual gift is not the same as a **New Testament office**. The word “office” includes the function of the teacher, the elder, the bishop, the deacon, etc. The “office” refers to the person, whereas the “gift” speaks of the endowment for service which the Holy Spirit gives to each individual. In some of the New Testament passages, the office and the gift are merged together and used almost interchangeably. For example, Ephesians 4:11 speaks of the “prophet,” whereas Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 both speak of “prophecy.”

A spiritual gift is not the same as a **church ministry**. A “ministry” is an outlet for the use of a gift. The gift of teaching, for example, may be used in presenting a Sunday School lesson, in leading a prayer-meeting discussion, in writing a Bible Correspondence Course, in conducting a small group Home Bible Study session, etc. The Sunday School lesson, the Bible Study Session, etc.—these are ministries—but the ability to teach and to edify God’s people is a spiritual gift.

A spiritual gift is not the same as **the fruit of the Spirit**. Gifts have to do with service; fruit has to do with character. Gifts tell what a person has; fruit tells what a person is. Having a particular Spirit-gift does not necessarily indicate godliness in the person’s life. The qualifications for an elder (or a deacon) in 1 Timothy 3 stress **fruit** more than **gifts**. In God’s eyes, it is better to be godly than to be gifted—but it is the Lord’s intent that we should exercise our gifts—and be godly.

Every Christian has some Spirit-gifts, but no one person has all the gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 makes that clear, and thus none of God’s children should ever say, “I’m a nobody; there’s nothing I can do.” Neither should certain talented persons try and do most everything in the church, for no one has **all** the gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 makes that clear.

The local congregation should not expect a few especially gifted persons to do most of the work. The vast majority of God’s work is done by common, ordinary people who may not be endowed with many prominent Spirit-gifts. Even the gifted Apostle Paul said, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17). Paul believed in baptism, and taught the necessity of baptism, but Paul knew what his gift was, and so he focused his efforts on itinerant preaching. There were others who could perform the ceremony of baptism.

God has bestowed various gifts to different individuals in every congregation so that the local body can grow in a balanced way. No one of us is gifted enough or wise enough or strong enough to function alone in God’s kingdom. We belong to each other; we minister to one another; we need the others in the assembly. No one should think he can do everything, but neither should anyone say, “I can’t do anything.” Believers are a part of a family and every one of us is needed.

2. The Classes of Spirit Gifts

According to 1 Corinthians 12:4, “There are diversities of gifts.” That is, God has supplied a variety of spiritual gifts for the purpose of perfecting the saints, for the work of ministry, and for building up the body of Christ.

- Seven are listed in Romans 12.
- Thirteen are named in 1 Corinthians 12.
- Five are listed in Ephesians 4.

However, because of some overlapping, usually they are condensed into approximately eighteen Spirit-gifts. For the study in this article we will try and distinguish between the various gifts by placing them into three categories:

Eight Speaking Gifts:

- Apostleship—the gift that enables one to be sent on a spiritual mission, often to a people outside one’s own immediate group.
- Prophecy—the Spirit-given ability to proclaim the Word of God with clarity, and to apply it in such a way that it will edify the church.
- Evangelism—the gift of announcing the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ so that people will respond to Christ in conversion and in a life of obedience.
- Shepherding—the gift which enables one to give direction to those who are floundering in uncertainty, seeking to lead them to a life of greater victory.
- Teaching—the Spirit-given ability to explain clearly and to apply effectively the truths of the Word of God.
- Exhortation—the Spirit-endowed ability to strengthen the weak, to reassure the wavering, and to encourage the troubled.
- Word of Knowledge—the Spirit-imparted ability to comprehend (and then verbalize) the deep truths of God’s Word.
- Word of Wisdom—the special ability to apply God’s principles to difficult situations and to complex problems.

Six Serving Gifts:

- Helps (Ministering)—the Spirit-given ability to serve the Church in such a way that it releases other workers to more effectively engage in their duties.

- Giving—the honest ability to earn money, and then to use it wisely to supply relief for those in need.
- Ruling (Governments)—the gifts of administration, the ability to moderate a meeting so that things are organized, people are not confused, and business is done decently and in order.
- Showing Mercy—the Spirit-endowed gift that enables one to bring brightness and cheerfulness into the sick room. The Greek word means “sick visitor.”
- Faith—a unique and special trust in God, believing His power to supply a specific need.
- Discernment—a special God-given ability to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Four Sign Gifts:

- Miracles—the Spirit-given power that enables a servant of God to perform an act which is contrary to natural laws, in order to prove the reality of his message.
- Healings—the ability to intervene in a supernatural way, as an instrument for the curing of illness and the restoration of health.
- Tongues—the gift which enables a person to speak in a natural language even though he never previously learned it.
- Interpretation of Tongues—the divinely given ability to translate the speech of others who speak in tongues, into a language known by the listener.

In this article, we will limit our look at each of the gifts to the brief one-sentence description just given, and then in two articles to follow, we will take a more careful look at each gift.

In 1 Peter 4:10-11 we read about the speaking gifts and the serving gifts. Peter was inspired to write: “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak (speaking gifts), let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister (serving gifts), let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, that God . . . may be glorified.” This passage contains the only use of the word “gift” outside the writings of the Apostle Paul. We are told in these verses that each believer is to exercise his gift, whether a speaking or a serving gift, in such a way that God gets the glory. Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with. They are not instruments to promote self-glory, but are abilities which should be exercised in such a way that God’s name might be magnified.

3. The Discovery of Spirit Gifts

Each genuine Christian has received a Spirit-gift at the time of his conversion to Christ. We are responsible to use our gifts and we are to be careful not to neglect them. But sometimes it is difficult for

us to know what gift (or gifts) we have. Here are some factors to consider in discovering your spiritual gifts.

a) Get busy in doing Christian service.

Every Christian (without necessarily being sure he has a particular gift) can attempt to evangelize, and show mercy, and perform various helpful duties among fellow-Christians. For example, homes for the aged are full of people who pass the lonely days, longing for someone to bring them a little sunshine. As we begin to make visits in homes, and help lift Sunday morning offerings, and participate in preparation for the communion service, and contribute words of advice in a Sunday School class—many times as we do these things—certain special abilities come to the surface. Do what you can—even if it is only a menial task. Willingness to do something that is already available, may uncover a gift you never knew you had possessed.

b) Notice if you are drawn toward a certain gift.

When seeking to discover one's spiritual gift, the question is not "What do you feel others expect of you?" Nor is it "What gift is currently in vogue among your friends?" The real issue is, What gift are you suited for? Usually your personality characteristics, your background, your training, and your present circumstances, have converged together to create in you some burning desire that will find fulfillment in the exercise of a particular gift. A person is often (perhaps unconsciously) drawn toward a certain area of service. If you find yourself watching the style of a teacher—how he introduces a lesson, ways in which he tries to make the presentation clear, how he brings the session to a conclusion—God may be using that teacher's example to awaken the gift of teaching in your life.

c) Check to see if you delight in exercising the gift.

We should enjoy ministering our Spirit-given gifts. The Greek word for "gift" is "charisma." It is related to the word for "joy" (which is "chara"). If we endure certain duties, instead of enjoying them—or if we feel a sense of frustration, instead of a sense of fulfillment—we are likely not aligned with the proper gift. There should be a kind of "inner peace" about the work we are doing.

One sister in Christ finds that to host company is a joy, but to teach a children's Sunday School class is almost impossible. Another sister, on the other hand, enjoys teaching, but finds making a meal and inviting company for dinner is a real chore. All of us need to discover the gift (or gifts) we have, and accept our limitations, and seek to do well in those areas where God has endowed us with a special spiritual capacity.

d) Observe whether others note the gift in you.

Our character and our abilities can often best be evaluated by other persons. When you put in a job application, you must submit references—names of people who have observed you down through the years—because their evaluation can be helpful in determining your abilities. And so a frank discussion with other Christians, persons in whom you have confidence, may help identify your spiritual gifts.

Have spiritually mature people told you of certain abilities that you possess? Are there certain things you are never asked to do? By combining what others see in us, along with what we already know about ourselves, it ought to be possible to narrow the field of potential spiritual gifts.

If we are sensitive to the Lord's leading in our lives, and if we are eager to do God's will, each of us will be using the gift (or gifts) which God has intended for us even if we may not be altogether sure what they are. It is helpful to recognize one's gift, but it is not immediately important that we know. The important thing to remember is that the exercise of any gift is work. Gifts are not ornaments to be hung on individuals for display; they are given for service to the body.

The child of God is utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit for his spiritual birth, and for his victory in daily living. The Holy Spirit expects us to reciprocate **by using** the abilities He gives us to be of service to others in the Christian community. The more we yield to the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence—the happier and more holy we become.

Would you experience the daily love and peace of God? Would you live on the highest spiritual plane? Would you have increasing victory over temptation? Would you have a song in your soul? Would you be a blessing to others as you go from place to place? Then we must keep yielded to the Holy Spirit and work hard at using the gifts which He gives us to benefit the body of Christ. In the next two lessons we will take a more careful look at each of the gifts which the Spirit gives for service in the Lord's work.

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