

Discover and Serve

Spiritual Gifts

What are spiritual gifts?

Spiritual gifts are special gifts given to individual Christians by God. They do not come as a result of training or experience, although we can learn how better to exercise the gifts we have received. They are not a sign of maturity, even though we are to learn to handle them with maturity. They are not a reward for godly living, but are freely given and undeserved. With the exception of the gift of tongues in one's devotional life, the spiritual gifts have to do with enabling for service and ministry, not embellishments for the individual or the church. **No credit is attached to the bearer of the gift** — only discredit if the gift is not 'delivered'!

The principal passages concerning spiritual gifts are: Romans 12:; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11. The parable of the talents is also significant (Matthew 25:14-30).

A number of different words in the original Greek version of the New Testament are used for 'spiritual gifts'. Some of these are:

- *pneumatikos* (1 Corinthians 12:1): literally 'spirituals', meaning things belonging to/manifesting the Spirit (that is, not from ourselves, but from the Holy Spirit)
- *charismata* (1 Corinthians 12:4): free/grace gifts of God (undeserved)
- *Diakoniai* (1 Corinthians 12:5): acts of service
- *energemata* (1 Corinthians 12:6): operations or workings/releases of divine energy and power
- *phanerosis* (1 Corinthians 12:7): manifestations/expressions of the Spirit

"There are different gifts (*charismata*) ... different kinds of service (*diakonias*) different kinds of workings (*energemata*) but the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Distinguishing Spiritual Gifts from:

- **Natural talents.** Everyone, Christian or not, is gifted with some natural talent(s), however buried or hidden.
- **Fruit of the Spirit:** love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). These are matters of character and are evidence of spiritual growth and maturity. **All** these different fruit are required of us **all**.
- **Normal Christian life:** what we are **all** required to do, or be. Some may have the gift of mercy, but we are all required to be merciful — “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). Some have the gift of faith, but we are all required to have faith and trust God, for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). Some have the gift of discernment, but we must all test the spirits (1 John 4:1).

Every Christian has at least one Spiritual Gift

“Now to **each one** the manifestation of the Spirit (*phanerosis*) is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4).

Each individual Christian with his or her special gift is a unique and essential part of the Body of Christ and is not to disqualify him/herself or to be disqualified by others because he/she is not like someone else. The ear should not say, “because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body”. Neither should the eye say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” (1 Corinthians 12:16,21)

We should neither boast that our gift is ‘better’ than another’s, nor expect others to be or to function like us. Neither should we belittle ourselves, nor exhibit a false humility because our gifts are not like others.

That each person is significant and has a significant part to play should be very releasing for everyone. We are free and encouraged to exercise the gifts that God has given us — and to recognise and appreciate the different gifts that God has given to others. However, we must watch that we don’t abuse this ‘release’ and use it as an escape from living godly lives and doing what is expected of us all. For example, not all have the gift of hospitality. Nevertheless, we are all exhorted to practise hospitality.

Some hold what is known as the ‘situational’ view regarding spiritual gifts — that any Christian may exercise any gift on any occasion that a particular need arises — when the Holy Spirit sovereignly works to manifest His glory and power. So although we may not normally manifest the gifts of healings, we may be called upon to pray for someone and be used by God to heal. This view can be supported from 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, that each one is given one or more of the gifts referred to, for use in building up the church at that moment, for that situation, as God decides.

It seems to us that both views may be held together!

Responsible for the Gifts we have

Spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of edifying the body. Therefore each individual has the responsibility of using **continually** those gifts which are particularly given to him or her: "And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them accordingly" (Romans 12:6). "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10).

There is no specific indication in scripture that neglect or quenching of a spiritual gift results in its permanent loss, but Paul does prompt Timothy to "kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6 NASB). Clearly, if we are not to allow our gifts to wither or be unproductive through neglect, we must take heed of the warning that Jesus gives in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:15-30). We are entrusted with the Master's property. **The number of gifts or talents is not important. Their use or non-use is critical.** We are accountable to Him for what we are given.

How are the gifts given?

- **Sovereignly by God as He wishes** — 1 Corinthians 12:4-6,11; Acts 2:1-4
- **In response to prayer** — we are exhorted to "eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (1 Corinthians 14:1). Another translation says, "Seek earnestly" (RSV). The passage suggests that this earnest seeking and desiring should be through prayer "For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says" (1 Corinthians 14:13).
- **Through impartation by others** — "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong" (Romans 1:11). For example:
 - by the laying on of hands — "I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6)
 - through relationship/discipling/association (Elijah and Elisha — 1 Kings 19:19-2 Kings 2:15). "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit" (Elisha to Elijah in 2 Kings 2:9).

The context for the Spiritual Gifts

In the passages in which spiritual gifts are mentioned, the emphasis is not so much on the gifts themselves, as on the significance of each individual believer as part of the whole body of Christ, and the importance of using the spiritual gifts given to serve **in love!**

- **The Body** — Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 3 & 4.

There is an interdependence rather than an independence — the natural body does not function as a series of detached parts.

- unity: "there is one body" (Ephesians 4:4) "all form one body" (1 Corinthians 12:12) "many form one body" (Romans 12:5)
- diversity: "made up of many parts" (1 Corinthians 12:12) "members do not all have the same function" (Romans 12:4)

- all belong: "each member belongs" (Romans 12:5) "as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16) Not forgetting that "Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour" (Ephesians 5:23)
- **Love** — Love is essential.
"If ... I have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2); "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Romans 12:10); In other words, without love, **forget it!** (1 Corinthians 13)
- **Service** — "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1) "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10)

Purpose of Gifts

It is exciting to realise that not only does each of us have access and a ministry to God (priesthood of all believers) but also, as members of the body of Christ, a ministry to each other.

"for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7); "that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12); "whole body ... grows and builds itself up" (Ephesians 4:16); "for the strengthening of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:26); "Build up the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12)

The fruit of the ministry of all believers should be unity, maturity, quality, effectiveness and beauty. With all parts functioning correctly, the natural body is healthy and balanced, with no deficiency or distortion. The same is true of the spiritual body.

Categories of Gifts

In his list of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul makes no distinction between those gifts which are obviously amazing and supernatural, extraordinary and miraculous (e.g. gifts of healings and workings of miracles) and those which we might otherwise think of as being natural gifts or talents (e.g. administration); that is: **the more spectacular gifts are not more 'spiritual'!**

The Bible does not categorise groups of gifts, although different groups do appear (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10). Nevertheless, some categories can be helpful and we have chosen here to categorise the under the following headings:

- Ministry gifts: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher.
- Manifestation gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues.
- Service gifts: helps, administration, craftsmanship, serving, giving.
- People-intensive gifts: encouragement, hospitality, mercy, teaching, pastoring, leadership, evangelism.