

**Harvest Christian Fellowship
Theology @ 9
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SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Holy Spirit Equips the Church

In Dr. J. I. Packer's book *Concise Theology*, he begins his consideration of spiritual gifts, by considering God's gift to the church of servants who lead, teach and shepherd His people.

Ephesians 4:7-13

7 *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says:*

"When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

9 *(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Paul explains the phrase he...gave gifts to men as referring to the ascended Christ giving his church persons called to and equipped for the ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher.

The New Testament depicts local churches in which some Christians hold formal and official ministerial offices (elder-overseers and deacons, Phil. 1:1), while all fulfill informal serving roles. Every-member ministry in the body of Christ is the New Testament ideal. It is clear that officers who oversee should not restrict the informal ministries but rather should facilitate them, just as it is clear that those who minister informally should not be defiant or disruptive but should allow the overseers to direct their ministries in ways that are orderly and edifying.

Hebrews 13:17

17 *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be*

a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Also, through the enabling ministry of these servants, Christ is bestowing a ministry role of one sort or another on every Christian. Elsewhere Paul calls these divinely given powers to serve gifts, which are specific manifestations of grace and the energy of the Holy Spirit.

The body of Christ grows to maturity in faith and love “as each part does its work” and fulfills its grace-given form of service.

Ephesians 4:16

16 *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Amid many obscurities and debated questions regarding New Testament spiritual gifts, three certainties stand out.

First, a spiritual gift is an ability in some way to express, celebrate, display, and so communicate Christ. We are told that gifts, rightly used, build up Christians and churches. But only knowledge of God in Christ builds up, so each gift must be an ability from Christ to show and share Christ in an upbuilding way.

1 Corinthians 14:12

12 *So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.*

Second, gifts are of two types.

There are gifts of speech. There are gifts of practical helpfulness.

In Romans 12:6-8, Paul’s list of gifts alternates between these categories. The gifts of speech are prophecy, teaching, and exhorting. The gifts of helpfulness are serving, giving, leading and showing mercy. The alternation implies that no thought of superiority of one gift over another may enter in. However much gifts differ as forms of human activity, all are of equal dignity, and the only question is whether one properly uses the gift one has.

1 Peter 4:10-11

10 *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. **11** If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

Third, no Christian is without a gift and it is everyone's responsibility to find, develop, and fully use whatever capacities for service God has given.

1 Corinthians 12:7

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Wayne Grudem defines spiritual gifts of this kind as *any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.*

The sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the grand finale of Jesus' work. Jesus was sent to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8) and that has been done by way of His incarnation, sinless life, death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven and the sending of the Spirit. God is making all things new.

Grudem says, "Jesus has come in the greater new covenant power of the Holy Spirit, and he has come to conquer Satan's kingdom." Part of that conquering is the building up of His church by giving its members first of all, the Holy Spirit himself. That He lives in believers will be evidenced by their changed lives and through the spiritual gifts He bestows upon them. These gifts are given to build up the body and as a result, defeat Satan as more gifts are given and the Kingdom of God advances.

While the Spirit plays a vital role, the entire Trinity is involved in the bestowing of our spiritual gifts:

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord (Jesus). 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God (the Father) works all of them in all men.

Spiritual gifts are not necessarily a sign of spiritual maturity. We must not evaluate spiritual maturity on the basis of spiritual gifting. Maturity comes through a close walk with Jesus, and results in obedience to his commands in everyday life.

Let's look at the charts from H. Wayne House's *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*. As we do, Grudem offers some helpful advice:

What is obvious is that these lists are all different. No one list has all these gifts, and no gift except prophecy is mentioned on all the lists. These facts indicate that Paul was not attempting to construct exhaustive lists of gifts when he specified the ones he did. Although there is sometimes an indication of some order, it seems that in general Paul was almost randomly listing a series of different examples of gifts as they came to mind.

Mark Driscoll & Gerry Breshears in their book *Doctrine* record the following:

Since many in the church at Corinth were poorly informed about spiritual gifts, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 to speak at length about the source and function of them. We can learn at least seven things about stewarding our talents from his teaching.

- 1) God determines which gift(s) we do and do not receive; we do not. Therefore, rather than lamenting what we are not gifted to do, we should rejoice in what God, in his wise love, has gifted us to do without trying to be someone we are not or do things we cannot do well.
- 2) Different people are given different portions of their natural abilities and spiritual gifts. Subsequently, some people, for example, with the gift of teaching excel in one-on-one discipling while others function better in a class or group, and still others are most effective teaching large crowds.
- 3) Ability and maturity are two different things. Paul opens his letter to the Corinthians by noting how gifted they were, but then spends the remainder of the book rebuking them for being immature, selfish, and worldly. It is a great mistake to correlate ability and maturity, because it allows gifted but immature people to occupy leadership positions, or, conversely, encourages mature but not competent people to lead. Ministry leaders must have both ability and maturity equal to the task.
- 4) We are to steward our talents so that the entire church benefits. This means that we are to humbly serve and not be devoted only to our cause, ministry area, faction of the church, or even our own desires and longings, but primarily to the good of the whole church.
- 5) In addition to our talents, God also gives us passions to help motivate and compel us toward ministry service. This means, for example, that someone with the gift of encouragement may also have a passion for junior high students, single mothers, young men, or people dying of cancer, and that specific spiritual gift combined with that specific passion work together for a ministry to flourish.
- 6) Every talent must be cultivated if it is to be effectively stewarded. Paul urged Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God in him (2 Tim 1:6). Just like athletes must practice to improve their skill, so too servants must steward their abilities in order to serve God and people as effectively as possible.
- 7) We must be willing to serve outside our area of talent if there is a pressing need. This kind of humble service is to be undertaken as a fill-in measure until someone gifted and passionate is found to fill the need.

*Most of the foregoing material was taken from *Concise Theology* by J. I. Packer, *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem, and *Doctrine* by Mark Driscoll & Gerry Breshears