SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND CHURCH GROWTH

A Paper
Presented to
Roy Fish, Th.D.
Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Missions
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for EVANG 7654

by
Mark W. Christy
December 3, 2009
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining Spiritual Gifts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Permanence of Gifts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Spiritual Gifts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization of the Laity</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Gifts and Lay Ministry</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Organization of the Church Based on Spiritual Gifts</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Gift Inventories</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of Gifts</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arguments against the Use of Inventories</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Discovery</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible and Gift Discovery</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems Related to Gift Discovery</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Seeking of Particular Spiritual Gifts</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Spiritual Gift of Evangelism</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism as a Task for Every Christian</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Projection</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation of the Gift of Evangelism</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Sources</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Secondary Sources...........................................................................................................32
Commentaries ..................................................................................................................32
Encyclopedias and Dictionaries......................................................................................33
Books ..............................................................................................................................33
Articles ............................................................................................................................35
Internet Documentation..................................................................................................35
SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND CHURCH GROWTH

In 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul implies that all Christians receive at least one spiritual gift at the time of conversion to empower believers for works of service.¹ Assuming that every Christian receives at least one gift from God’s Spirit, then one’s gifting may need to be matched with the ministry assignment that one performs regularly. This view, which is typical of many Church Growth scholars, is becoming increasingly incorporated into the philosophy of ministry of those called to the pastorate. One pastor, Wayne Cordeiro, believes that God’s purposes for Christians are uniquely tied to the spiritual gifts that they possess.² In the 21st century, it is essential that scholars consider the views of the Church Growth Movement concerning spiritual gifts so that pastors like Wayne Cordeiro may be better equipped to develop philosophies of ministry that incorporate spiritual gifts in a biblically appropriate way.

The purpose of this present study is to interact with various Church Growth scholars by discussing their views concerning spiritual gifts. To begin this interaction,

¹C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 284; Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 621; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, 1987), 589; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 453, 456. Barrett and Godet argue that Paul is saying that each believer receives a spiritual gift. Fee, on the other hand, states that Paul’s intention is not to say that every person has a gift, but he also says that the verse can have this meaning. Collins points to the presence of ökáστῳ in v.7 and v.11 as proof that God’s Spirit gives a gift to “each member of the [believing] community.”

This paper will define spiritual gifts, discuss their permanence, and articulate their purpose. Then, some discussion of the views of Church Growth advocates on the function of spiritual gifts in relation to mobilizing the laity will be offered. Afterwards, spiritual gift inventories will be examined before addressing the discovering of gifts in general. Before concluding this work, the views of Church Growth scholars concerning the gift of evangelism will be addressed. The overall examination of the views of Church Growth scholars reveals that spiritual gifts play an important role in the functioning of the Body of Christ.

Defining Spiritual Gifts

According to James F. Stitzinger, χαρισμα is the term most often associated with spiritual gifts. About fifty percent of the time, according to G. D. Fee, χαρισμα "designates a variety of way God’s grace has been evidenced among his people. It includes such diverse ‘gifts’ as eternal life (Rom 6:23, cf. 5:15, 16), the special privileges granted to Israel (Rom 11:29, referring to Rom 9:4-5), celibacy and marriage (1 Cor 7:7), and deliverance from a deadly peril (2 Cor 1:11)." The term is clearly used to refer to gracious gifts from God in 1 Corinthians 12:4, Romans 12:6, 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, and 1 Peter 4:10.

A second term, which is sometimes understood to mean spiritual gifts, is πνευματικὸν. In 1 Corinthians 12:1, the genitive form of this term either refers to spiritual

---


gift or “those who possess spiritual gifts” depending on whether it is neuter or masculine. While this term is often translated to mean spiritual gifts because of “similar usage in [1 Corinthians] 14:1,” Ken Hemphill and F. F. Bruce argue in favor of the masculine translation by translating it to mean “spiritual persons.” Hemphill believes spiritual people and spiritual gifts “are so closely linked” that Paul was addressing spiritual people who, by default, possessed spiritual gifts.

Other terms used in the New Testament to refer to spiritual gifts include δόμα, δωρεά, and μερισμός. According to Stitzinger, δόμα “stresses concrete character,” δωρεά denotes “gracious giving while adding the aspect of formal endowment,” and μερισμός connotes “the aspect of distribution of the Spirit.” These three words taken together with χάρισμα and πνευματικόν help develop a more correct understanding of spiritual gifts.

The Permanence of Gifts

Scholars debate over whether or not spiritual gifts are permanent or temporary. Gregory J. Lockwood argues that the presence of διδόται suggests that the gifts are temporary since Paul uses the present tense form instead of the perfect tense (1 Cor 12:7). John F. Walvoord believes that some gifts are permanently given to the Church.

---


7Hemphill, Spiritual Gifts, 53.

8Gregory J. Lockwood, 1 Corinthians, Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2000), 417.
while others were only temporary. Augustine limits the gift of tongues to the Apostolic era. Hilary of Poiters and Ambrose, on the other hand, believe that all gifts of the Holy Spirit, even the visible gifts, are a part of the Holy Spirit’s ongoing ministry through the Church. One should note that the Holy Spirit is only constrained by God’s Word and not human interpretations of God’s Word.

Another issue concerning the permanence of spiritual gifts includes the debate on whether or not individual Christians keep their spiritual gifts permanently. Wagner offers an argument supporting the permanence of spiritual gifts for individual Christians by appealing to Paul’s discussion on “the smooth operation of the body of Christ” in Romans 12:4. While Paul clearly teaches in this verse that all Christians need to do their part by ministering according to their spiritual gifts so that the Body of Christ will function correctly, this fact does not automatically lead to the conclusion that some Christians may lose or gain other gifts as the needs of the Body of Christ change.

---


12 C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow: How to Find Your Gift and Use It* (Glendale, CA: Regal, 1979), 106.
Gibbs takes the position that God can take back spiritual gifts because “[t]hey are gifts from God and not personal acquisitions. He gives when and how [H]e will, and is free to withdraw a gift again at any time.”

In Romans 11:29, Paul declares that “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.” While Grudem argues that the context of this verse “is the status of the Jewish people, including . . . the gifts and blessings bestowed on them as a result of that status,” Dunn points out that the verse might be “a wider reference” to “all the enactments and manifestations of divine grace” such as those mentioned in Romans 12:6-8. Even if God allows a Christian to retain their gifts throughout this life, Paul, according to Wayne Grudem, teaches “that these ‘imperfect’ gifts . . . will be in operation until Christ returns, when they will be superseded by something far greater” (1 Cor 13:8-10).

Along with discussions on the permanence of spiritual gifts for individual Christians, some Church Growth scholars converse about the dormancy of spiritual gifts. Wagner believes that some people who have multiple gifts may from time to time allow some of their gifts to be used less if at all do to the present ministerial demands. Whether or not it is possible for a Christian to refrain from using one of their spiritual gifts in keeping with the will of God is certainly debatable. A more pressing issue,

---


14All biblical references in the English language in this paper are from the *New International Version*.


however, is whether or not a Christian can opt to neglect their spiritual gift against the will of God. Willem C. Van Unnik provides some strong biblical evidence supporting the conclusion that a spiritual gift “can be used or neglected.”\textsuperscript{18} In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul expressly warns Timothy not to neglect his gift. In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul again tells Timothy to be active in ministering according to his gift.

**Purpose of Spiritual Gifts**

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul lists five equipping gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) before defining the purpose of these gifts: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until [Christians] 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” (cf. 1 Cor 14:12). Gary L. McIntosh believes that this purpose given by Paul in Ephesians demonstrates that the purpose of the clergy is to help the laity engage in ministry as opposed to simply doing all the ministry themselves and allowing to the laity to be reduced to the ministry recipients.\textsuperscript{19} By equipping Christians to serve, the church leadership will be helping Christians fulfill the biblical purpose of serving others according to their gifts (1 Peter 4:10). While affirming that spiritual gifts have been given to Christians for the purpose of serving other Christians at least in part, Donald

\textsuperscript{18}Willem C. Van Unnik, “The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 12:31,” *Novum Testamentum* 35 (1993): 157. Van Unnik observes that Paul tells the Corinthians that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (1 Cor 14:32). He notes that the use of tongues can be controlled by the person having such a gift (1 Cor 14:27-28).

McGavran and Winfield C. Arn agree that the ultimate purpose of spiritual gifts is evangelism.\textsuperscript{20}

To gain more understanding of the purpose of spiritual gifts, one may observe that Paul frequently mentions spiritual gifts in the context of his discussion on the Body of Christ. Church Growth scholars frequently discuss spiritual gifts in connection with the Body of Christ. In Romans 12:5, Paul proclaims that Christians “form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” He then informs his readers that Christians have different gifts, each of which allows the individual Christian to serve in different ways (Rom 12:6-8; cf. 1 Cor 12:7-11).

Through the distribution of spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit to each member of the Body of Christ, each believer is empowered so that they can contribute to the task of ministry to the church and evangelism to those outside the church in a special way.\textsuperscript{21} Lewis A. Drummond notes, “These gifts are supernatural endowments of the Spirit of God that enable God’s people to serve Him effectively and efficiently.”\textsuperscript{22} Christian A. Schwarz observes that Christians who serve according to their gifts (and not according to their own strength) find God’s empowering grace to render exemplary service while at the same time finding much contentment so long as they minister according to their gifts.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{21} Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12-14; Eph 4:4-16.
\end{thebibliography}
Many writers in the field of Church Growth point to Paul’s association of spiritual gifts with the Body of Christ motif to argue that spiritual gifts are “the key to understanding the organization of the church.” In 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul declares that these “manifestation[s] of the Spirit [are] given for the common good.” This suggests that all spiritual gifts are given for mutual edification. In 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, Paul relates the spiritual gifts possessed by each Christian to their function in the Body of Christ. Therefore, it would seem that Christians are given gifts to aid them in performing the ministry and mission of Christ.

Mobilization of the Laity

Charles Van Engen, in his discussion on “Church Growth theory,” lists a “well-mobilized laity which has discovered, developed, and is using all the spiritual gifts for growth” as a major component. This focus on mobilizing the laity may be due in part to the rapid changes in Western culture where the disintegration of society and the erosion of relationships limit the ability of professional clergy to actively engage potential new converts. While much biblical support exists to prove that all Christians have an active role in ministry, the cultural factors in the 21st century seem to make the

---


26 Other cultural factors that may contribute to the urgent push toward mobilization of the laity include the constant movement of peoples, the erosion of families, the push toward pluralism which devalues Christianity in the minds of some potential converts, and the improvement in modern transportation which have caused people to have fewer ties with those in their neighborhoods.
obedience of all Christians to the biblical call to service a desperately needed companion to the work done by professional ministers.

**Spiritual Gifts and Lay Ministry**

Many Church Growth scholars see spiritual gifts as a biblical means of organizing the laity to actively serve within the ministries of the church. George C. Hunter III observes that many advocates of lay ministry perceive a lay ministry actively serving according to their gifts as the fulfillment of Luther’s doctrine on the priesthood of all believers.  

According to Thom S. Rainer, “[t]he Church Growth Movement has focused extensively on the gifts of the Holy Spirit because of their relationship to unleashing all the laity for ministry.”

Wagner argues that Christians engage in ministry according to their spiritual gifts: “It is with their spiritual gifts that Christian people minister. Therefore, if a pastor is leading a church to growth one of the essential goals of that leadership is to make sure every member of the church discovers, develops, and is using his or her spiritual gift or gifts.” Some Church Growth scholars believe that “[s]piritual gifts are the primary channels through which [Christians] minister.” If Wagner is correct, one may ask whether or not it is the responsibility of the church leadership to help people learn how to

---


serve according to their gifts? Based on Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 4:11-12 which instructs Christian leaders “to prepare God's people for works of service,” Paul R. Orjala argues that church leaders must “help [the membership] discover their spiritual gifts, train them, and give them opportunity to employ them in the edification of the whole Body.”

Paul certainly would have wanted ministers to teach the people about spiritual gifts, and he would have expected ministers to encourage people engage in ministry.

The Organization of the Church Based on Spiritual Gifts

Logan takes this argument a step forward by saying that the spiritual gifting of the laity must play some role in how the church is organized. His intention is to organize the church in such a way that all ministries, in which the church partakes, are performed by people who have the appropriate spiritual gifts. To involve the membership in this approach to “gifts-based ministry,” Logan states that “there must be [sixty] well-defined roles or tasks for every [one hundred] adults attending worship.” In support of developing a mobilized laity according to their spiritual gifts, Wagner notes, “Pastors of growing churches . . . know how to motivate their laypeople, how to create structures which permit them to be active and productive and how to guide them into meaningful avenues of Christian service.” But Orjala and Logan seem to go a little beyond Paul’s


32Robert E. Logan, Beyond Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1989), 163.

33Ibid., 164. These tasks or roles can include those involved in greeting, hospital visitation, children’s ministry, etc.

34C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (Glendale, CA: Regal, 1976), 69.
teaching at least in Ephesians 4:11-12 when they state that ministers should provide opportunities for service for the membership.

While all Christian leaders should help their members find meaningful opportunities to serve others, the process of developing an organization that can constantly keep ministry volunteers actively engaged may be cumbersome to the pastor. This process becomes even more difficult when a church seeks to identify the gifts of the membership so as to place them in ministry according to these gifts. James McKinnell desires to have potential leaders identified according to their gifts and lead them to assist in the ministry of the church may be of use to the pastor who wishes to organize the laity for ministry according to their gifts.35 Such a decision, according to some Church Growth writers, contradicts the traditional approach to the mobilization of the laity. Traditional churches, according to Hunter, develop their job descriptions and then find people “to fill [them], whether they ‘fit’ or not.”36

While some churches may be successfully undertaking this task of organizing almost every ministry in the church while at the same time pairing such ministries with those who have the appropriate spiritual gift, such a task can be overwhelming and difficult to maintain over time for several reasons. First, some people may have little understanding of their spiritual gifts and may have difficulty settling down in a particular ministry obligation. This situation alone can lead to an organizational nightmare in a larger church. Second, larger churches will face the overwhelming task of developing and


36Hunter III, Church for the Unchurched, 130.
overseeing enough ministry tasks to keep sixty out of every one hundred people in the worship service busy. Third, the task of keeping the laity mobilized is often complicated by the tendency of volunteers to grow less committed to their duties over time.

Robert E. Logan goes a step further by arguing that churches must first have gifted leaders in place before they begin new ministries.\(^\text{37}\) If Logan’s advice for only performing church ministry when a gifted leader is strictly followed, churches, especially those with a small membership base, may not be able to provide sufficient ministries to their people until an appropriately gifted leader comes forward. Even so, church leaders must actively seek out those who are gifted as leaders and equip them to serve others accordingly (Eph 4:11-12). Developing lay leaders, according to Russell and Russell, is essential less the membership be reduced to no more than spectators, which causes the membership to feel like they have no part in the ministry and the growth of the church to be stifled when people no longer are compelled to engage in ministry.\(^\text{38}\)

Even with the difficulties that exist in organizing the laity to engage in ministry according to their spiritual gifts, many churches are being led in this direction. Darrell W. Robinson directs churches to form a “nominating committee or group” which is tasked with the responsibility of “finding a job for every member.”\(^\text{39}\) Eddie Gibbs comments on the organizational challenge that pastor’s face when they try to mobilize the laity: “The problem of how to motivate and sustain lay participation concerns many, if not the

\(^{37}\)Logan, *Beyond Church Growth*, 162.


majority, of church leaders. Someone has indelicately commented that the trouble with the Church as a body is that it is all mouth and bottom!”\textsuperscript{40} To solve this problem, Gibbs encourages ministers to teach the membership a “theology of the laity” which teaches Christians about spiritual gifts and the responsibility of all Christians in regard to ministry and mission.\textsuperscript{41}

One must consider whether or not Paul’s intention in Ephesians 4:11-12 was to have the ministry of the individual Christians become organized to any great extent. Paul’s lack of direction on this matter suggests that Paul’s goal was for Christians to engage in ministry and mission in their daily life. While some Church Growth advocates may wish to have the ministry of Christians (based on their spiritual gifts) incorporated into an organization, they must also remember the importance of teaching Christians the need to be prepared to render Christian service in their daily life.

Rick Warren offers a different view about the role of spiritual gifts in involving the laity in ministry. He writes, “Spiritual gifts reveal a part of God’s will for [one’s] ministry, but not all of it.”\textsuperscript{42} If Warren is correct, some Church Growth advocates, including Wagner, must reconsider their position on mobilizing the laity according to their spiritual gifts. This approach may be a little too simplistic given the complexity of people, not to mention the complexity of the Spirit which bestows God’s gifts and power upon them. Furthermore, if some Church Growth scholars are correct in their assertion that the Bible fails to mention a complete list of all available gifts, then it is conceivable

\textsuperscript{40}Gibbs, \textit{I Believe in Church Growth}, 313.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 313-14.
that any organization of the laity according to their gifts will falter because some gifts
remain unidentified.

**Spiritual Gift Inventories**

**Identification of Gifts**

To help people discover their gifts, many writers have developed spiritual gift
inventories. Even the Southern Baptists have developed a spiritual gift inventory. These
inventories are based various lists of spiritual gifts derived from each author’s study of
Scripture. In contradiction to those who compile these inventories based on a specific list
of spiritual gifts, Hemphill sees “no value in combining the various lists [in Scripture]
and identifying twelve or sixteen gifts” because these lists are “representative, not
exhaustive.”

Ken Hemphill, like many Church Growth scholars, believes that God is
not limited just to the gifts listed in Scripture as he may desire to give some other
spiritual gift to a Christian. John Stott makes the following observation about the various
lists of spiritual gifts in Paul’s writings: “The arrangement seems almost haphazard, as if
to draw attention to the fact that each is a limited selection from a much larger total.”

A cursory study of spiritual gift inventories reveals that each one offers a list of
gifts with some notable differences. Most of these inventories, according to Rainer,

---

42 Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message &

Internet.

44 Ken Hemphill, *The Official Rule Book for the New Church Game* (Nashville: Broadman,
1990), 154.

Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 88.
usually include nineteen gifts mentioned in Romans 12:7-8, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4:11. In Romans 12:7-8, Paul discusses the gifts of service, exhortation, giving, and mercy. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul lists wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between the spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostleship, teaching, helps, and administration. Paul adds evangelism and shepherding to this list in Ephesians 4:11.

Wagner affirms the gifts listed by Rainer but adds celibacy, voluntary poverty, martyrdom, and missionary. Paul does seem to list celibacy as a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 7:7. His intention, however, is not to promote celibacy because the context suggests that Paul considered marriage to be a spiritual gift as well. For the gifts of voluntary poverty and martyrdom, Wagner lists 1 Corinthians 13:3 as proof along with the personal examples of various Christians. In this verse, however, Paul seems only to be using hyperbole to make his point that the absence of love in one’s heart render one’s actions to be worthless.

The missionary gift, listed by Wagner, is derived from his interpretation of Ephesians 3:7-9 where, according to Wagner, Paul says that his gift of “cross-cultural communication” came from God. Wagner’s hermeneutic on this verse does not appear

---

47 Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts*, 59-60, 62-63. Wagner also includes the gifts of leadership and hospitality.
48 Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 328.
50 Collins *First Corinthians*, 476-77.
51 Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts*, 211.
to be correct, however, because Paul is more than likely referring to God’s grace as a
divine enablement for ministry. Harold W. Hoehner notes that the genitive του θεου
which modifies δωρεὰν (gift) in Ephesians 3:7 “is a possessive genitive or genitive of
source demonstrating that it is God’s gift of grace, or more specifically, God’s gift which
is [H]is enabling power.”

*Network*, a spiritual inventory training manual developed by Willow Creek
Community Church, adds a few more gifts to the list compiled by Rainer. These additions
(for which they provide biblical references) include craftsmanship, creative
communication, hospitality, intercession, and leadership. While it may be undeniable
that some Christians and even non-Christians have amazing talent in various forms of
creative communication, the scriptural supports (Ps 150:3-5; 2 Sam 6:14-15; Mark 4:2,
33), provided by Bugbee, Cousins, and Hybels, only demonstrate that people are to
praise God with music and Jesus used stories (parables) as teaching instruments in
communicating the gospel.

For the gift of hospitality, the authors of *Network* offer scriptural evidence
from 1 Peter 4:9-10, Romans 12:13, and Hebrews 13:1-2. A study of these passages
reveals that Christians are expected to be hospitable; however, these Scriptures do not
offer any clear teaching on the existence of hospitality as a spiritual gift. While many

52 Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker
Academic, 2002), 450.

53 Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels, *Network: The Right People... In the Right
Places... For the Right Reasons: Participant’s Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 77-78, 87. For
craftsmanship, the authors list scriptural evidence from Exodus 31:3, 35:31-35, Acts 9:36-39, and 2 Kings
22:5-6. While some may debate the existence of this gift in the modern era, God clearly gave such a gift to
those who built the temple. Concerning the gift of leadership, Paul seems to offer some proof for the
existence of such a gift in Romans 12:8.
spiritual gift inventories that list hospitality as a spiritual gift frequently cite 1 Peter 4:9-10. Thomas R. Schreiner comments that Peter’s intention was to say that “[h]ospitality was one of the marks of Christian community.” Commenting on Peter’s discussion on spiritual gifts in 1 Peter 4:10, J. Ramsey Michaels writes, “Peter is content to leave the particulars to each congregation.”

In discussing the gift of intercession, the authors of *Network* use the same hermeneutic that they used to support the existence of hospitality. The Scriptures that they offer as proof (Rom 8:26-27; John 17:9-26; 1 Tim 2:1-2; Col 1:9-12, 4:12-13) only offer teaching and encouragement for Christians to engage in intercessory prayer. Concerning Romans 8:26-27 (a passage which is often cited to support the existence of intercession as a spiritual gift), James D. G. Dunn, declares, “That Paul is thinking of glossolalia as such is unlikely, especially since the glossolalia which he heard at every meeting for worship in Corinth (1 Cor 14) seems to have been regarded by some Corinthian believers as a mark of spirituality, something to be proud of (cf. 1 Cor 14:12).”

Another gift listed in some spiritual gift inventories and teaching guides is exorcism. Kent R. Hunter lists exorcism in his list of spiritual gifts and provides Matthew 10:1 as evidence. In this verse, Jesus gives the disciples the ability to cast out demons.

---


While this certainly demonstrates that exorcism is an ability that God can give to Christians, it does not prove conclusively that God still gives such a gift to modern-day Christians.

**Arguments against the Use of Inventories**

Many Church Growth writers seem to support gift inventories as helpful teaching tools, Warren, however, presents a different view:

In the first place, inventories and tests require standardization, which denies the unique way God works in every life. Those who have the gift of evangelism in our church may express it much differently than Billy Graham expresses his gift of evangelism. Second, there are no definitions of most of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament, so today’s definitions are arbitrary, highly speculative, and usually represent a denominational bias.

A third problem is that the more mature a believer becomes, the more he or she is likely to manifest the characteristics of a number of gifts. He may demonstrate a servant’s heart, or she may demonstrate liberal giving, out of maturity rather than giftedness.  

Warren’s concerns with gift inventories must be considered by those who wish to use these teaching tools within their church. The standardization of the inventories and even the definitions, descriptions, and questions regarding spiritual gifts (which are largely based on the author’s experience) might be overcome by careful instruction of those who use these inventories so that the participants are aware of these flaws and are informed to use any results derived from these inventories along with other means to make a final assessment concerning their spiritual gifts.

The assertion, made by Warren, that mature Christian might evidence many Christ-like qualities while not having gifts associated with those qualities must be studied

---

further. While Warren may be correct, a mature Christian is far more likely to have already gained some understanding of the exact nature of their gifts and may be less likely to be confused by taking a gift inventory. Less mature Christians, on the other hand, must be taught not to allow these teaching tools to become an excuse for not reaching maturity in all the qualities associated with Christ.

Despite Warren’s concerns for spiritual gift inventories, Warren supports a similar approach. While most gift inventories provide a basic list of questions which ultimately guide the person to discover their possible gift or gifts. Warren, who writes the forward for *S.H.A.P.E.: Finding & Fulfilling Your Unique Purpose for Life* and provides a direct link to this work on his website, endorses a method that provides various descriptions of particular gifts based on subjective experiences and then asks the person taking the test to determine whether or not they have or might have that particular gift.59 This approach is standardized and uses definitions and descriptions of spiritual gifts which are not defined clearly in Scripture.

Grudem offers another reason why spiritual gifts inventories may be faulty in his discussion on the various spiritual gifts lists in the Bible. He notes that “there is some overlap among the gifts,” and points to “administration” (1 Cor 12:8), “leadership” (Rom 12:8), and “pastor-teacher” (Eph 4:11) as examples.60 Because of the overall lack of solid biblical instruction concerning precise definitions of spiritual gifts and Paul’s apparently haphazard approach, spiritual gift inventories must certainly be viewed with some degree

of suspicion. For those church leaders who decide in favor of using them, careful biblical instruction and appropriate warnings about the experiential content within gift inventories must be given to those being instructed on spiritual gifts.

**Gift Discovery**

While some Church Growth writers advocate the use of spiritual gift inventories as a means of spiritual gift discovery, they also argue that determining one’s gifts can be aided by involvement in various ministries as well as the affirmation of fellow Christians. When one is involved in multiple ministries, one has the opportunity to test the information that they received from a spiritual gift inventory (or some other source) about their spiritual gifts. Ministers may do well to constantly encourage their people to keep actively engaging in various ministry opportunities until they find the opportunity which best suits them.

**The Bible and Gift Discovery**

Daniel R. Sanchez, Ebbie C. Smith, and Curtis E. Watke agree that people can learn their spiritual gifts through ministry involvement because it enables them “to find confirmation from God and from spiritual people around them.” While these authors give some value to some spiritual gift inventories, they suggest that Christians should

---

60 Grudem. *Systematic Theology*, 1020.

61 Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 74.

study the Bible directly in their search for knowledge about their spiritual gifts. Perhaps this focus on the studying of Scripture for purpose of gift discovery may be a subject in need of more consideration by those within the Church Growth Movement who lean on spiritual gift inventories. Even though these inventories are often based, at least in part, on the Scriptures, a short study of their contents reveals that most if not all also include a large amount of experiential information which is completely subjective. This subjective information may often come from a mature Christian who has studied both the Scriptures as well as the working of the Spirit in other Christians, but ultimately the Christian who chooses to use these inventories must be aware that these teaching materials can be fallible.

While spiritual gift inventories may not have direct biblical support, one must ask whether or not the Bible instructs Christians to discover their spiritual gifts. Paul declares that he does not want the Corinthian Christians to be ignorant about their spiritual gifts and proceeds to instruct them on the subject in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. After considering Paul’s instruction, the Corinthians should have been more aware of the presence of spiritual gifts within their corporate fellowship and better able to discern the presence of such gifts in certain members.

Even though Paul gives some instruction on spiritual gifts, he never issues a specific directive for Christians to actively engage in discovering their particular gifts. Gene Getz, therefore, argues that the Bible contains “no exhortation for individual Christians to ‘look for’ or to ‘try to discover’ his or her spiritual gift or gifts.”

---

63Ibid.

acknowledging that many believers throughout the centuries have served Christ faithfully with little understanding of their spiritual gift(s), Wagner contends that God’s desire is for all Christians to know their gifts. For proof, Wagner argues that “a clear logical relationship” exists between the possession of gifts by Christians (Rom 12:6), the admonition for Christians to think about themselves with sober judgment (Rom 12:3), and living according to God’s will (Rom 12:2). According to Grant R. Osborne, Paul, in Romans 12:3, is admonishing Christians “to consider themselves with respect to others in the church” and avoid thinking of themselves too highly. James D. G. Dunn agrees with Fee but also, like Wagner, concludes that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:3, was “preparing for the description of the Christian community’s functioning charismatically as a corporate unity” in the following verses.

Getz disagrees with Wagner and states that a pastor should simply lead his people toward spiritual maturity as opposed to the discovery of their spiritual gifts. Despite Getz’s position, it certainly seems odd that Paul would have addressed this issue if he did not desire to make Christians aware that God has bestowed spiritual gifts upon all members of His Church. If one considers Paul’s directive to Timothy to minister

________________________
teaching on spiritual gifts and the Body of Christ in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4.

65 Wagner, Your Spiritual Gifts, 47.

66 Ibid.


68 Dunn, Romans 9-16, 732.

69 Getz, Building Up One Another, 18.
according to his gift, one may conclude that Timothy must have discovered his gift by this time so that he could follow Paul’s instruction (1 Tim 4:14).

In 1 Peter 4:10, Peter offers a similar directive to all Christians when he admonishes them to serve others according to their gifts. One may conclude that Christians must discover their gifts if they are to engage in serving others according to their gifts. This discovery, however, may occur as Christians serves others allowing them to gain a better sense of their particular gifts as well as affirmations from other Christians who observe them rendering service.

**Problems Related to Gift Discovery**

While Getz’s position against any attempt to discover one’s gifts may be rather extreme, one should certainly be aware of the practical reasons that led Getz to such a position. He notes that some Christians who were led to discover their gifts at the time of their conversion wound up confused and unable to discern what gifts they possessed.\(^7^0\) Wagner acknowledges this problem but argues that confusion over one’s spiritual gifts can be overcome with biblical instruction on spiritual gifts.\(^7^1\) Additionally, the pastor may also alleviate such confusion by encouraging church members to affirm each other’s spiritual gifts so that all members will have a better understanding of the gifts they possess.

Getz also observes that another problem occurs when some Christians, who think they have discovered their gift, begin to use their newfound knowledge “as a

\(^7^0\)Ibid., 14.

\(^7^1\)Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts*, 48.
rationalization for not fulfilling other biblical responsibilities.”

Such rationalization is a “cop-out” according to Wagner. Any such rationalization which leads toward disobedience in regard to biblical directives must be addresses by careful biblical instruction and perhaps even some measure of church discipline when necessary. Finally, Getz laments that some people, who believe they have discovered their gift, have actually made an incorrect conclusion about themselves. Wagner observes that this problem can also be alleviated when “members share their perceptions of each others’ gifts with openness and love.”

To add further to the debate over the discovery of gifts, Elmer Towns and Warren Bird suggest that every church, as a corporate fellowship, should discover its “dominant gift” which will influence the worship experience. While some spiritual gifts such as evangelism and teaching may play a bigger role in the worship service since the pastor typically has one or both of these gifts, it does not follow that the worship experience will somehow negatively impact certain members who have any particular gifts. Unfortunately, Towns and Bird do not give any argumentation to explain their position.

---

72 Getz, Building Up One Another, 15.
73 Wagner, Your Spiritual Gifts, 48.
74 Getz, Building Up One Another, 15-16.
75 Wagner, Your Spiritual Gifts, 48.
76 Elmer Towns and Warren Bird, Into the Future: Turning Today’s Church Trends into Tomorrow’s Opportunities (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2000), 140.
The Seeking of Particular Spiritual Gifts

While many of those in the Church Growth Movement believe that all Christians should attempt to discover their spiritual gift(s), some debate exists as to whether or not a Christians should seek the bestowal of more spiritual gifts from God. Paul, it seems, clearly admonishes the Corinthian Christians to “eagerly desire” the greater gifts and even acknowledges that some are doing just that (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1, 12). Gordon D. Fee confirms that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:31 and 14:12, was teaching the Christians to “eagerly desire” the greater gifts (χαρίσματα); however, he concludes that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14:1, only meant to direct the Christians to earnestly seek “the activity of the Spirit in the community of worship.” Getz, on the other hand, understands Paul to be telling the Corinthian Christians as a corporate body to desire the manifestation of the greater gifts within their fellowship without actively seeking out the bestowal of such gifts from God.

While Paul may be addressing the Corinthian Church as a whole, ultimately the manifestation of the more desirable gifts will only happen as God bestows such gifts on individual members. Even if Getz’s argument that Paul was addressing a corporate fellowship is correct, the desire of the corporate fellowship for the greater gifts can only be met by the One who gives gifts. In apparent contrast to Getz’s conclusion that Paul would not have individual Christians seek the bestowal of spiritual gifts upon themselves or others within the Church, Hemphill observes, “The sovereignty of the Giver does not

---

77The greater spiritual gifts in the context of 1 Corinthians 12:31 are apostleship, prophecy, and teaching.

78Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 655, 666.
negate human responsibility in the asking. Paul’s emphasis on zealously desiring the greater gifts . . . was based on the conviction that God desires to grant gifts for the edification of the body.”

**Spiritual Gifts and the Professional Minister**

A frequent concern of some writers is the role of spiritual gifts in connection with the clergy. Should a minister’s spiritual gifts be evaluated before determining his or her place in the ministry of the church? Bob Russell and Rusty Russell argue that a church will certainly have “leadership problems” when it is led by those who do not have the gift of leadership mentioned in Romans 12:8 even though these same leaders are honest and spiritually mature. But one must ask whether or not every church leader, especially those in paid ministry, must have the leadership gift. While Paul lists the gift of leadership, does he intend to say that all leaders within the church must have this gift? Perhaps this dilemma can be solved by placing those who have the gift of leadership in appropriate leadership position (when they are spiritually ready for such roles) while at the same time surrounding them with other leaders whose gifts collectively compliment one another leading to the potential for more effective ministry.

---


82 While it is beyond the scope of this paper, this argument could be further expanded into a discussion about the tendency of Southern Baptist churches to have a leadership model where the pastor is the sole elder. Such a model may limit the church by the small range of gifts given to the one elder. This problem may be alleviated when a church adds staff members whose gifts compliment those of the sole elder; however, problems may arise should that sole elder decide to exert complete control over the ministries of the church without any appreciation for the gifts of the other leaders.
Russell and Russell list two more issues that need to be considered before deciding whether or not to hire ministers based on their spiritual gifts. They suggest that those who minister in keeping with their gifts will be more successful, and they will derive more joy from their work thus reducing the likelihood of burnout.\textsuperscript{83} Given these concerns, churches may wish to consider the gifts of a prospective leader based on the particular ministry position they seek to fill.

The Spiritual Gift of Evangelism

Evangelism as a Task for Every Christian

Because the Great Commission was given to all Christians, all Christians have a responsibility to engage in evangelism even though they may not have the spiritual gift of evangelism. While Wagner agrees with this position, he argues that Christians who do not have the gift of evangelism will contribute to the growth of the church by ministering according to their spiritual gifts and faithfully witnessing when the occasion arises, but they will not “go around looking for opportunities to share their faith.”\textsuperscript{84} Arthur F. Glasser takes Wagner’s position one step further when he states, “[O]ne cannot establish biblically the thesis that evangelism should be the priority of all Christians although all are under obligation to bear witness to Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{85} Wagner expresses his views on the call for every member to engage in evangelism in the following way:

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{\textsuperscript{83}Russell and Russell, \textit{When God Builds a Church}, 180.}

\textbf{\textsuperscript{84}Wagner, \textit{Your Spiritual Gifts}, 178.}

It is a misunderstanding of biblical teaching . . . to try to convince every Christian that he or she has to be sharing the faith constantly as a part of their duty to the Master. [Pastors] do not tell them that they have to teach all the time or pastor others all the time or be an apostle or a prophet or an administrator or a leader or a missionary if they haven’t been given the spiritual equipment to do the job well. To make people feel guilty if they ever get gas and don’t share Christ with the filling station attendant or if they don’t leave tracts for the mailman or if they don’t witness to the waitress in the restaurant may actually harm the Body of Christ more than help it.  

Wagner and Glasser’s teaching concerning the priority of personal evangelism will certainly cause alarm for some. Just because some evangelicals, including many in the Southern Baptist Convention, advocate the priority of personal evangelism even to the extent of encouraging their members to engage in it frequently, it does not follow that such teaching is unbiblical. In Luke 9:60, Jesus Himself told a common person to “go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” This directive, along with the examples of Christ and His Apostles and the Great Commission, provide sufficient evidence that every Christian is called to actively share their faith.

**Gift Projection**

While Wagner affirms personal evangelism, his comments may cause some to think otherwise. A careful analysis of his arguments, however, reveals that Wagner’s concern about the teaching of personal evangelism is related to what he calls “gift projection.” Wagner observes that those who are gifted in evangelism, for example, are more effective and more intrinsically motivated to engage in evangelism as opposed to those who do not have the gift of evangelism. His argument may be plausible if one

---

86 Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts*, 178-79.

87 Ibid., 184.

88 Ibid., 181-84.
considers that someone who has been given a special grace by God in the area of evangelism would certainly be more effective than someone who has not had such particular grace given to them. If one agrees with Wagner, then one must consider how to teach Christians to engage in personal evangelism while avoiding extremes caused by “gift projection.”

This tendency toward gift projection may be why some evangelism approaches tend to cause people to associate the commission to “make disciples” solely with sharing one’s faith (Matt 28:19). ⁸⁹ W. Charles Arn argues that a Christian’s obedience to the call to make disciples involves the use of their various spiritual gifts “in the overall process of bringing others into the family of God.” ⁹⁰ While Arn is not suggesting that Christians should not attempt to render a verbal witness, one could easily use Arn’s teaching as an excuse to avoid sharing their faith.

Given that all people are called by God to engage in personal evangelism, it should not follow that the gift of evangelism should be elevated above other spiritual gifts. Paul’s teaching on the importance of each member in the Body of Christ in Romans 12:4-8 should provide sufficient instruction against this problem of gift elevation. Unfortunately, Mark Mittelberg and Bill Hybels encourage gift elevation when they teach that those who have the gift of evangelism are “really blessed, because it’s the most exciting one.” ⁹¹ While they may rationalize their teaching by arguing that those with

---


⁹⁰Ibid., 62.

⁹¹Mark Mittelberg and Bill Hybels, Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 200.
other gifts think the same about themselves, such instruction may cause Christians to claim the gift of evangelism even when they do not have it; furthermore, this instruction expresses little appreciation for those with other gifts who collectively engage in the Great Commission.92

**Activation of the Gift of Evangelism**

Besides the potential problems of “gift projection” and gift elevation, Wagner points out another potential issue for churches in regard to the gift of evangelism in particular. He argues that the reason why many churches are not growing today is because those who have the gift of evangelism are not actively engaged in evangelism.93 This view may be supported by Barna’s research which reveals that, from 1995 to 2009, “the proportion of born again adults claiming the gift of evangelism dropped from 4% to 1%.”94 Wagner’s argument may seem unfair to those who have the gift of evangelism because there are a myriad of potential reasons why a church’s growth is inhibited, but then he expands his contention to include all church members who are not ministering according their gifts, a situation which will ultimately have a negative impact on evangelism.95 To combat such a problem, the leadership of every church should certainly

---

92 Ibid.

93 Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 78.


95 Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 79.
consider whether or not the members are actively doing their part in the Great Commission by using their spiritual gifts accordingly.

**Conclusion**

Spiritual gifts certainly play an important role in the functioning of the Body of Christ, but should pastors organize their laity according to their spiritual gifts? While many Church Growth writers are advocating this view, the various concerns listed in this paper must be addressed by each church as they pursue such a course of action. If these churches decide to use spiritual gift inventories, they must do so with great caution and careful biblical instruction. Whether churches employ the use of gift inventories or not, it does seem biblically appropriate to help the laity discover their gifts though pastors even while taking steps to ensure that Christians do not become confused about their gifts or use their gifts as an excuse to avoid their responsibility to engage in evangelism. On the hand, the leadership and those gifted in evangelism must develop an appreciation for the gifts of other Christians and how those gifts collectively aid the church in the Great Commission.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources

Commentaries


**Encyclopedias and Dictionaries**


**Books**


**Articles**


**Internet Documentation**
