

HOOK | A Mountain Store Encounter

Traveling to a Christian retreat in the mountains, a Christian mentor and his new believing protegee stopped in on a quintessential country store. Christian music was playing. Christian books and art were prominently displayed throughout the store. The Christian mentor says to the owner “I like your music and art, are you a Christian believer? The owner confidently replied, “I am!” And by way of clarification, the owner continued “I am a born-again and spirit filled follower of Jesus Christ. How about you? Are you born again?” The Christian mentor’s response to the owner left an indelible impression on his young disciple. He said, “I am a born-again Christian and know that I am filled with the Holy Spirit because I have spiritual gift of teaching and encouragement.

Questions:

- What do you think the “indelible impression” was for the young believer?
 - What might the young believer conclude about how to discern his assurance of salvation?
 - What would the young Christian conclude about being spirit-filled and how might this impact his pursuit of being “spirit-filled?”
- What in this scenario might become the “function” of spiritual gifts in the life of a believer?
 - If special “abilities of the spirit”—are they infallible, are they necessarily a person’s gifts in every situation? Would the person be unfaithful if in a situation that doesn’t call for his spiritual gift(s), is the person now absent a spiritual calling in that setting? Etc.
- What in this scenario is the ‘nature’ of spiritual gifts? How, if at all, are they related to natural aptitudes, providential training and skill development through such previous means like work experience or education?

The above true story reflects what Kenneth Berding describes as the conventional view of spiritual gifts in need of rethinking. By conventional, Berding refers to the view held by a majority of *modern* (individualistic oriented) evangelical and charismatic orientations.

Today, we want to carefully discern the biblical argument for spiritual gifts as a spiritually enlightened and empowered service in/with/through the body of Christ:

BOOK |

That spiritual gifts are the manifestations of *the grace of God given* Christian believers (spiritually enlightened and empowered) for the sake of ministry and service in/with/through the local body of Christ as providentially needed in accord with the local 3 Biblical Observations:

1. The Greek Word “Charismata” and Paul’s careful explanation in 1 Cor 12:4-6

*Now there are distributions of gifts (charismata), but the same Spirit. And there are distributions of areas of **service** [diakoniai], but the same Lord. And there are distributions of **workings** [energemata], but the same God who works all things in all persons.' (1 Cor. 12:4-6)*

Observations:

- Single Grk word “Charismata” translated by two words in many English translations as “spiritual gift—very misleading. NOTICE:
 - “Charismata” (plural of “Charisma” is derived from the Greek word “pneuma” translated in English as ‘Spirit,’—in its grammatical form, it means simply “pertaining to” or “being derived from” — ‘e.g. it doesn’t settle the “what” regarding “pertaining to” or “derived from” wherein the “what” exactly is of the spirit must get settled in its immediate context. (Note: Elsewhere in scripture “charismata” is used spiritual truths (1 Cor 2:13, ,spiritual benefits/blessings (Eph 1:3, Rom 1:11), and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19), spiritual judgements 1 C/or 2:14, etc. All using the same word charismata...
 - In 1 Cor 12:4-6 notice the almost exact repetition of the phrase using “Charismata” in the next two subsequent phrases—what 2 word are used in subsequent two repetitions to replace “charismata”? (e.g. diakonos-service/ministry, *energemata*)? What does this tell us about the intended meaning of “charismata” – *Is it special spirit given ability given to me by the Holy Spirit, or is it a spiritually empowered/enlightened service/work given to the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit?*

2) Notice that the word “function” is synonymous with “gift” and related to “grace given” in Rom 12:

*4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same **function**, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having **gifts** that differ according to **the grace given**...*

Observations:

- Grk word translated “function” according to the highly esteemed Lexicon (Louw & Nida) interpret the Greek word as “a sustained activity, task or responsibility” — ‘all these parts have different work to do.’—e.g. A ministry in the life of the church
- Grk word translated “gift”- *in v. 6 is the Greek word, ‘charismata’, which has a wide semantic range that could refer to either special gift given to individual (abilities) or gift given to the church by the services of the individual (ministries) as more consistent with the word translated “function.”*

3) Elsewhere in scripture, what is notable for this current study is that in every case that Paul uses the "grace" + "given" combination he discusses particular ministry assignments in the immediate context, either his own assignment or those of others. For instance see if you can discern what is “given to Paul” and how this further illustrates the above:

- Romans 15:15: "because of the grace that was given to me by God."
- 1 Corinthians 1:4: "because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus."
- 1 Corinthians 3:10: "according to the grace of God that was given to me."
- 2 Corinthians 8:1: "the grace of God that has been given in the churches of Macedonia."
- Galatians 2:9: "and recognizing the grace that was given to me."
- Ephesians 3:2: "the stewardship of the grace of God that was given to me."
- Ephesians 3:7: "according to the gift of the grace of God that was given to me."
- Ephesians 3:8: "To me, the least of all the saints, this grace was given."
- 2 Timothy 1:9: "according to his own purpose and grace that was given to us in Christ Jesus."⁵

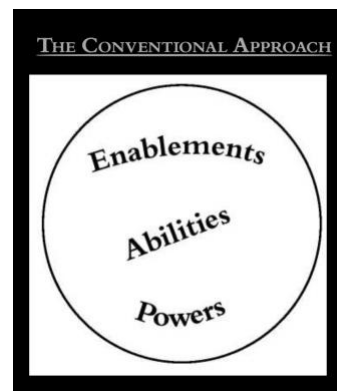
Summary:

As noted by Berding, "It may even be wise to do away with the term spiritual gift altogether. Here's the reason: if what we've always called a spiritual gift-like prophecy, teaching, and so forth-is fundamentally an ability, then the term gift will always adversely affect the conversation. Those who translate the Bible into English use the word gift simply to mean 'something that is freely given.' But in English the word gift has another meaning not found in the Greek language of the New Testament, that of 'special ability.' Think of the following statements: He has such a gift for the piano. She is an intellectually gifted child. In the English language there are only two meanings of the word gift. In a discussion of 'spiritual gifts,' many people automatically interpret gift as special ability rather than to mean 'something that is given.']"

LOOK |

The so-called spiritual gifts are not special abilities; they're Spirit-given ministries. According to the contextual evidence in the letters of Paul, the so-called spiritual gifts should not be viewed as special abilities to do ministry; rather, they should be viewed as the ministries themselves. Every believer has been assigned by the Holy Spirit to specific positions and activities of service, small and large, short-term and long-term. These ministry assignments have been given by the Holy Spirit to individual believers and, in turn, these individuals in their ministries have been given as gifts to the church. God deeply desires that his glory be declared to the world through the community he has brought together by his grace, a community that Paul often refers to as the body of Christ.'

**Quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from Kenneth Berding, *What are Spiritual Gifts: Rethinking the Conventional View*



Expressed in Historical Confessions of Faith:

Notice how the “Biblical” view is reflected in the historic Christian consensus as expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (note carefully how it is written and what it doesn’t and does say in description of our relation individually to the body of Christ in service/ministry—e.g. an expression not of personal “gifts” but “services” in communion with Christ and one another.

WCF Chapter 20

2. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

TOOK | So What?

Returning to the Mountain Store Encounter (see above),

1. How might the “conventional” view impact our assurance of Salvation?
 My so-called spiritual gift easily becomes my basis for assurance, what proves that I am indeed a Christian—a form of works-righteousness.
 VERSUS: The objective work of Christ is the basis for my assurance received by grace through faith alone

2. How might the conventional view impact what it meant to be “spirit filled?”
 Being “Spirit-filled” becomes defined as having certain special abilities apart from my abilities that are gifts of God by birth and providence.
 VERSUS: The biblical definition of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5) in service to Christ, becoming conformed more into the image of Christ wherein our aptitudes and abilities are redirected to the Glory of God and service for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. Now might the conventional view impact what services we do in the life of the church?
 e.g. It will be limited to what I perceive my special gifts to be vs. what in any given church could be something I could do in service to the greater mission of that particular church.

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The Biblical View Summarized:

“Every believer has been assigned by the Holy Spirit to specific positions and activities of service, small and large, short-term and long-term. These ministry assignments have been given by the Holy Spirit to individual believers and, in turn, these individuals in their ministries have been given as gifts to the church. God deeply desires that his glory be declared to the world through the community he has brought together by his grace, a community that Paul often refers to as the body of Christ.”

- Key Words: Roles, Ministries, Assignments, Functions
- Key Question: “God, where do you want me to offer myself (my particular knowledge, aptitudes, trainings, experience, etc) in service as one one member of the body of Christ that I am a member toward helping to meet the greatest need and having the greatest impact relative to the particular providence of my local church in service to the gospel of Jesus Christ?”

4. How then do we “measure” the use affectiveness of spiritual gifts in the biblical view:
Notice: In Rom 12, the stated purpose of the grace given is related to “the common good” which is again more consistent with the more corporate focused “spiritual ministries.” And for what purpose? E.g. common good is measured in relation to its usefulness within the particular body of Christ vs. something inherently given to the individual Christian.

“Every believer has been assigned by the Holy Spirit to specific positions and activities of service, small and large, short-term and long-term. These ministry assignments have been given by the Holy Spirit to individual believers and, in turn, these individuals in their ministries have been given as gifts to the church. God deeply desires that his glory be declared to the world through the community he has brought together by his grace, a community that Paul often refers to as the body of Christ.”

E.g. “There’s no ‘I’ in Church” - Paul's central concern in Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12-14; and Ephesians 4 is that every believer fulfills his or her role in building up the community of faith.

Further Discussion