

Spiritual Gifts.01. What is A Spiritual Gift?

Today, we begin a short series on the subject of “spiritual gifts”

As we seek to understand what the Scriptures reveal about “spiritual gifts,” there are certain practical concerns we need to be aware of:

(1) Ignorance of “Spiritual Gifts”

- The sad reality is that, since the time of the Apostles as is seen in 1 Corinthians 12:1, much of the church has not known much about the reality, manifestation and functioning of spiritual gifts
- **1 Corinthians 12:1** = *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed*
- The Greek word translated “*uninformed*” is “agnoeo,” literally “without knowledge”
- As the New Testament shows us, just as the “*members*” of our physical body are essential for the health, well-being, growth and functioning of our physical life, so “spiritual gifts” are essential for the Body of Christ, yet many are “without knowledge” resulting in a handicapping of the full and effectual functioning of the Church as God designed it to function

(2) The Influence of Our Worldview

- Our “worldview” is the “filter” within our minds and hearts through which and by which we interpret and understand the world, and especially the things of God
- Since the time of the so-called “Enlightenment” when the Western world rejected the authority and truth of the revelation of Scripture for the authority of human reason, there was an “emptying” of understanding of the spiritual realm and how the Bible reveals the way it interfaces and functions with our earthly lives and relationship with God
- Because “spiritual gifts” are the manifestation of the Holy *Spirit* in and through us, the consequence is that the revelation about “spiritual gifts” in Scripture is basically irrelevant
- However, it can be observed that this “modern” age is now transitioning to a different “age” with people seeking the “spirit realm” in witchcraft and the occult, thereby showing us that Church must have a Biblical understanding of the spirit realm and functioning of spiritual gifts

(3) Institutionalism

- Because of the tendency of fallen human nature to control and not be “led” by the Holy Spirit, churches and denominations “calcify” into functioning as an organizational “institution,” like a dead body without the spirit, rather than a living, dynamic Spirit-filled and Spirit-led organic body functioning according to the spiritual gifts of the members that God has given to them
- Instead of people identifying their spiritual gift(s) and functioning “organically” in the body according to them, a church merely conceives of, creates and identifies “jobs” with people seeking to function in them according to the “job description”
- This tragically fulfills the Scripture that churches will be “*having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*” (2 Tim. 3:5)

(4) The Continuation of Certain “Spiritual Gifts”

- Due to certain theological and Biblical principles of the interpretation of Scripture, there came about the belief in the Western church that specific “spiritual gifts” ceased, such as prophecy, tongues, and healing, with the consequence of great division in the Church over the “gifts”

- This view is not taught in the New Testament, as all the “gifts” continue throughout this age until the return of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:4-8; 13:10)

(5) The Practical Concern of How and Where “Spiritual Gifts” Can Manifest

- Like swimming, we can learn “about” it but must jump in the real water of a pool to be able to actually swim, so there must be “places” or “venues” in the life and community of the church where people can identify and learn to function in the body according to their gifts

What is a “Spiritual Gift”?

It may be surprising to know that the literal terminology “spiritual gift” is not used in the Bible

→ “Spiritual gift” is a designation or label in the English language for what the NT, as well as the OT, identifies as the manifestation of the grace of God by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit in and through a person

(1) “Spiritual”

→ The word “*spiritual*” identifies this is an effectual working of the Holy Spirit

For the most part in the New Testament, the word “*spiritual*” does not mean:

(a) Something “spiritual” in distinction to something “physical”

(b) A “higher level” of spiritual maturity

→ “Spiritual” primarily means “the working and manifestation of the Holy Spirit”

When Paul begins his lengthy teaching about “spiritual gifts” in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, the ESV translates the Greek in 1 Cor. 12:1 as “Now concerning spiritual gifts”

- The single Greek word translated “*spiritual gifts*” is “pneumatikos”

- The root, “*pneuma-*,” means “spirit,” specifically referring to the Holy Spirit

- The suffix “*-ikos*” is plural and means “the things of, the stuff of, the working of, what is characteristic of”

- Paul is literally stating “Now concerning the things of, the workings of the Holy Spirit”

- This is abundantly clear as Paul goes on to state in the following verses

- **1 Corinthians 12:7-11** = *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

⁸ *For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

It is critical to understand that a “spiritual gift” is the effectual working of the Holy Spirit

- A “spiritual gift” is not a God-given “natural” “talent” or “skill” that a person has which originates in and from their own “mind/soul” or “heart/spirit”

- While a person’s “talent” and “skill” can, and often does combine with the working of the Holy Spirit, as, for example, the “mind” combines with the “body” to effect something yet the effectual

working is not from the “body” but the “mind,” so the Holy Spirit can and often does combine with a person’s “talents” and “skills” yet the power and effectual working is from the Holy Spirit - For example, what confirms a person’s “spiritual gift” is “teaching” is not their functioning in the “job” of a Sunday School teacher with the mere speaking of words of a “lesson” but that the hearers are genuinely given insight and understanding in their hearts of what is being taught so that they are “built up” and “grow” in their life, walk with and likeness to Christ (Eph. 4:13)
 ➔ For this reason, we cannot be “without knowledge” of His working in and through us, but must be “filled with the Holy Spirit” and recognize each person’s “Holy Spirit-given gifts”

(2) “Gift”

➔ For the most part, the word translated “*gift*” means a “concrete manifestation and effectual working of the grace of God given to a person” - the key concept is grace

In the NT, there are two ways in which “the grace of God” is manifested

- Both essentially mean the unearned, unmerited, undeserved favor and kindness of God

(1) “Grace” is a manifestation of the attribute of God within God Himself

- This grace of God is His unearned love, mercy and kindness in His own divine nature granting salvation to all who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ apart from their works

- **Ephesians 2:8-9** = *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast*”

(2) “Grace” is the power of God working in and manifesting through a person

- We can see this by the Greek word translated as “*gifts*” in Rom. 12:6

- **Romans 12:6** = *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us*”

- The Greek word translated “*gifts*” is “charismata”

- The root is “charis-,” literally meaning “grace,” the word that is next translated “*the grace*”

- The suffix “-mata,” is plural and means “the stuff of, the things of”

- Thus, “charismata” literally means “the stuff of, the things of and originating from grace”

- The Bible says all Christians are to be “charismatic” - manifesting the grace of God

A potential problem with the word “gift” is that it might be thought of a “static,” “package” bestowed on us, something like a tool such a hammer or saw that we “use”

- This idea can be erroneously communicated in English in a verse such **Romans 12:6**, “*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them*” (ESV)

- The words “*let us use them*” are, literally, not in the Greek

- A “spiritual gift” is not “static” “tool” or “appliance” that we “use,” but the dynamic working and manifestation of the grace of God by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us

These two ways the grace of God is manifested are stated in 1 Cor 15:10

- **1 Corinthians 15:10** = *But by the grace of God [the grace within God Himself] I am what I am, and his grace [the grace within God Himself] toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me [the effectual working of the grace of God by the power of the Holy Spirit in and through him]*

It is important to understand these two ways of the manifestation of “the grace of God” regarding “spiritual gifts” for at least two reasons

(1) A “spiritual gift” is not given because of anything within the person who receives that “grace/gift,” but only, completely and purely because of the sovereign grace within God Himself by which He freely chooses to give and manifest that “gift” in and through that person

- It is a waste of time to either (a) ask why you might be “worthy” to receive a “gift” because you’re not, or (b) ask why God would give “such” a gift to a person you think is not “worthy”
- It is all of grace that God freely grants to a person because He wants to
- As Paul states in **I Corinthians 12:11** = *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

(2) It is not us but the grace of the power of God the Holy Spirit Who effectually works in and through us to bring about what God wills to take place through that “grace/gift”

- **Zechariah 4:6** = “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts”

These two primary concepts of a “spiritual gift” being “pneumatikos,” “things of and from the Holy Spirit,” and “charismata,” “the effectual workings and manifestations of the grace of God” are explicitly combined and stated in **Romans 1:1**

- **Romans 1:11** = *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift*
- The Greek words translated “spiritual gift” are “charisma,” meaning “a thing of grace,” and “pneumatikov,” meaning “a thing of the Spirit”
- ➔ A “spiritual gift” is a “charisma,” “a thing of grace,” that is “pneumatikov,” “a working and manifestation of the Holy Spirit” so that all glory, honor and praise goes to God

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity was anointed, empowered by and manifested the effectual working of the Holy Spirit, so now, we who are the “Body of Christ” are to manifest all the “grace/gifts” of the powerful and effectual working of the Holy Spirit

Romans 12:1-5 gives us practical principles for how this is to be applied in our lives

(1) We must know the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ and, because of this, be wholly devoted and sacrificially dedicated to do the will of God as an act of worship

- **Romans 12:1** = *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

(2) Our minds must be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we will be able to discern and know the will of God for our lives

- **Romans 12:2** = *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

(3) We must honestly, soberly and humbly discern how a spiritual gift is being manifested through us, neither with, one the one hand, pride, and the other, self-denigration

- **Romans 12:3** = *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

(4) We must know and “function” in the body according to our gift(s)

- **Romans 12:4-5** = *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.*