

**Subject: Gifts for God's Children**

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

One of the wonderful blessings of the Christian life is what the Bible calls spiritual gifts. Paul did not want believers to be ignorant about this area of God's work. Neither can we afford to be ignorant about spiritual gifts.

### **1. Definition of spiritual gifts**

- *Spiritual gifts are God-given desires and abilities to serve others in the body of Christ.*

Two words are used for spiritual gifts:

- *spiritual gifts (pneumatika)* – of the Spirit; refers to things given by the Spirit of God; they are spiritual, and not physical; supernatural, and not natural
- *grace gifts (charismata)* – refers to something undeserved; given freely by God as part of our salvation

Two verses describe the nature of spiritual gifts:

**1 Corinthians 15:10** *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* We are saved by grace and we serve by grace.

**Philippians 2:12-13** <sup>12</sup> *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* <sup>13</sup> *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* God gives us the desire and ability to accomplish His will through spiritual gifts.

God gives people both natural talents and spiritual gifts, but they are different. All people may have natural talents, but only Christian people have spiritual gifts. Natural talents are given at our physical birth, but spiritual gifts are given when we are born again. In some ways, spiritual gifts and natural talents are similar. They must be developed and used for the good of others and the glory of God. When a baby is first born, it has all the "equipment" he needs, but it takes a while for him to recognize it and use it.

### **2. Distribution of spiritual gifts**

The source of all gifts is God (the same Spirit...same Lord...same God). Gifts are given to each one (vs. 7) for the benefit of all or for the common good. They are for the edifying (building up) of the church (1 Cor. 14:12) and for serving one another (1 Pet. 4:11).

The Holy Spirit distributes the gifts to each one as He wills (vs. 11, 18). In the distribution of gifts every believer has at least one. In many cases a believer has more than one gift and every person is unique (like paint on an artist's palette). God determines the gifts of each person so there is no room for pride or jealousy. The NT mentions spiritual gifts in three places (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; and Eph. 4). This is the entire list found in the NT:

|                       |                            |  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--|
| <u>apostle</u>        | <u>helps &amp; service</u> | <u>administration &amp; leadership</u>       |
| <u>prophet</u>        | <u>faith</u>               | <u>wisdom</u>                                |
| <u>evangelist</u>     | <u>exhortation</u>         | <u>knowledge</u>                             |
| <u>pastor-teacher</u> | <u>discerning spirits</u>  | <u>tongues (languages)</u>                   |
| <u>miracles</u>       | <u>mercy</u>               | <u>interpretation of tongues (languages)</u> |
| <u>healing</u>        | <u>giving</u>              |  |

Each of the spiritual gifts can be put in these three categories:

- Speaking gifts – for public or private teaching
- Support gifts – mainly behind the scenes
- Sign gifts – given to certain people for a special purpose and time

Some spiritual gifts were temporary gifts and some are permanent gifts. The temporary gifts were given to confirm the ministry of the apostles and prophets right after the time of Christ. They were prominent in early formation of the church, but they were no longer in use after the NT Scriptures were complete and the church was established. Take for example the gift of healing. In the time of the early church healing was instantaneous. Healing was complete and permanent. Healing involved systemic problems such as blindness or paralysis. Healing was unconditional (it didn't depend on the faith of the person being healed). God still heals today, but He does so in answer to prayer, not through the NT gift of healing. None of the so-called faith healers today heal instantly, completely, or unconditionally. They do not heal blindness, paralysis, or similar conditions. If someone had the NT gift of healing today they would go to hospitals and heal every kind of problem.

### **3. Deployment of spiritual gifts**

We need to understand how God wants us to use our gifts. To help us understand God uses the analogy of the human body. God determines the placement of each part in the body, the purpose of each part, and the proportion of each part (vs. 18). Several principles govern the operation of our spiritual gifts in the church.

- The principle of unity – There is one body, and the body is not just an accumulation of parts. A human body is made up of parts, but it is a unit that works in harmony for the benefit of the whole body.
- The principle of diversity – We are all different, just like the different parts in a body. God created a world of infinite variety—no two snowflakes alike, no two leaves alike, no two fingerprints alike, no two DNA codes exactly alike. Even if two believers had exactly the same spiritual gifts, they have different personalities and different experiences. Since each member of the body is unique, each one can make a unique contribution.
- The principle of necessity – We need one another. Using the analogy of the human body (vs. 21), the eye cannot say to the hand, “I don't need you.” Those parts we never see are the most important parts (our heart, lungs, liver). When the parts of our body work as they should we have a healthy body, but when some parts don't function properly or at all, the body is sick. When a person has certain parts that don't work we say he or she is “disabled,” which means he is not able to do what a

healthy body should normally do. I learned some lessons about this when I had an accident a few months ago...

- The principle of *sympathy* – To sympathize is to “feel with.” Verse 26 reminds us that when one member suffers, all members suffer with it. If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. The church is a place where we multiply our joys and divide our sorrows. We rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep.
- The principle of *charity* – (vs. 31) “a more excellent way.” Chapter 13 begins where chapter 12 leaves off, emphasizing the importance of love. We may be extremely gifted, but what good is it if we don’t serve one another in love.

#### **4. Discovery of spiritual gifts**

If spiritual gifts are so important to the health of the body, we should know what our gifts are and use them. Here are some guidelines that may help you:

- What needs to be done in the church? Using your spiritual gift is practical.
- What do you enjoy doing? Using your spiritual gift is rewarding and satisfying.
- What comes easy for you? Using your spiritual gift is like second nature.
- Look for open doors and pray for opportunities
- Seek the wisdom of mature Christians – Another person may see something in you that you can’t see.

Spiritual gifts are tools to use, not toys to play with. Spiritual gifts are for the good of the church and the glory of God.

**1 Peter 4:10-11** <sup>10</sup> *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* <sup>11</sup> *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*