

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In **Romans 12:1-2**, the Apostle Paul writes that believers are to present themselves to God both body and mind so that every believer may “prove what the perfect will of God is.” In other words, Paul wanted every believer to discover the perfect will of God for his or her life. Then, in **verse 3**, he uses a conjunction “for” which introduces us to an explanation of the perfect will of God for each of our lives. That will of God is that we do not think more highly of ourselves than we ought, but we should come to realize our own spiritual gift and use it for the glory of God. **The Holy Spirit is a gift to every NT believer (Acts 2:38; I Cor. 12:13).** So every believer has the potential of knowing, developing and using his/her gift. In order to discover this, we must know something about spiritual gifts and therefore, the need for this doctrinal study.

QUESTION #1 – What is the authority for proper knowledge of spiritual gifts?

The concept of spiritual gifts is a New Testament concept. The proper authority for the subject of spiritual gifts is the inspired Scriptures written by the Apostles in the New Testament. As we will see, spiritual gifts are gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit was not given to every believer until the New Testament Church Age began.

We learn in **Acts 2:42** that early NT believers were carefully devoted to apostolic teaching and doctrine. We learn from **Ephesians 2:20** that the church is built upon the foundational teachings of the Apostles.

So our authority concerning spiritual gifts is not someone’s supposed experience or subjective opinion, it is the written inspired Scriptures. **Experience should not ever be used to interpret the Bible; the Bible should always be used to interpret the experience.**

Two Apostles who specifically address this subject are the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul. Paul gives us the greatest amount of information in the subject, which we would expect.

QUESTION #2 – Where in the New Testament do we find the data concerning spiritual gifts?

There are four main passages that specifically address the subject of spiritual gifts in the N.T..

- 1) **Romans 12:1-8** which is inspired Scripture written by the Apostle Paul.
- 2) **I Corinthians 12-14** which is inspired Scripture written by the Apostle Paul.
- 3) **Ephesians 4:7-16** which is inspired Scripture written by the Apostle Paul.
- 4) **I Peter 4:7-11** which is inspired Scripture written by the Apostle Peter.

QUESTION #3 – What isn’t a spiritual gift?

Before we define spiritual gift, it is wise to understand what a spiritual gift is not.

- 1) A spiritual gift is not a spiritual office.
i.e. Pastor/teacher is a gift; Elders/Deacons/Deaconess is an office.
- 2) A spiritual gift is not a natural talent. Natural talent is given by God through a parent.
- 3) A Spiritual gift is not a spiritual ministry. Not gift of working with youth or elderly
- 4) A Spiritual gift is not a spiritual opportunity. Opportunity to give is not proof gift of giving.

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QUESTION #4 – What are key words connected to subject of spiritual gifts?

There are some key biblical words that are clearly connected to the subject of spiritual gifts. Several of these words show up in I Peter 4:10-11:

- 1) The word “gift” refers to a free gift or endowment given by God.
- 2) The word “servings” (form of word deacon) refers to a minister who serves others.
- 3) The word “stewards” refers to one responsible for managing as an administrator.
- 4) The word “grace” refers to a free grant from God which is not deserved nor earned.
- 5) The word “strength” refers to a unique power and ability that comes from God.

QUESTION #5 – What is a definition of a spiritual gift?

There have been many who have given many good definitions of a spiritual gift:

- 1) Dr. Walter Elwell defines it, “Gifts of God enabling the Christian to perform his (sometimes specialized) service” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 1042).
- 2) Dr. Paul Enns defines it, “The ‘grace gifts’ that are sovereignly given to believers by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation as a special ability for service to God and to others, particularly believers” (*Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 636).
- 3) Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer defines it, “...a gift is a divine enablement wrought in and through the believer by the Spirit who indwells him. It is the Spirit working thereby to accomplish certain divine purposes and using the one whom He indwells to that end.”
- 4) Dr. Charles Ryrie defines it, “...a spiritual gift is a God-given ability for service” (*Basic Theology*, p. 367).
- 5) Dr. Norman Geisler defines it, “In order for visible churches to accomplish their internal and external missions, they must be gifted for the task. This they are, through gifts God gives each member to edify the whole...” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4, p. 188).
- 6) Dr. John Walvoord defines it, “Spiritual gifts are divinely given capacities to perform useful functions for God, especially in the area of spiritual service” (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, April June 1986, p. 109).

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6) Our definition of spiritual gift is this: **A spiritual gift is a gracious and divine grant from God in which, through the Holy Spirit, He entrusts to a believer a specific and special ministry stewardship called a gift and supernaturally develops, empowers and enables that believer to use that gift to accomplish many things in ministry to and for others.**

In any true spiritual gift the emphasis will always be on the grace and strength which comes from God and not on the natural ability of one's self.

QUESTION #6 – Who gets a spiritual gift?

The Biblical record is very clear that every believer receives some spiritual gift.

Romans 12:3 says that spiritual gifts are given to “every man”; “to each.”

I Corinthians 12:11 says that spiritual gifts are distributed to “each one individually.”

I Peter 4:10 says that “each one has received a special gift.”

Every believer has a spiritual gift. Not every believer will discover what his or her gift is. Not every believer will know what his or her spiritual gift is. Not every believer will actually use his or her spiritual gift. But every believer does have a spiritual gift.

QUESTION #7 – Did the early church believe in spiritual gifts?

Although they did not have the full development of doctrine we have today, it is clear that the early church did have a perspective of spiritual gifts.

1) Tertullian (AD 155-225) “The apostles most assuredly foretold that there were to be spiritual gifts in the church...”

2) Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215) “But each has his own proper gift of God one in one way and another in another.”

3) Irenaeus (AD 125-202) “What shall I more say? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church, throughout the whole world, has received from God in the name of Jesus Christ...”

4) Augustine (AD 354-430) “...He has also given to each gifts suitable for the building up of His church...”

(Taken from Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4, pp. 209-213)

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5) Spurgeon (AD 1834-1892) “Whatever spiritual gifts we have, they are not our own to use as we please; they are only entrusted to us that we may employ them to help our fellow-Christians.”

Clearly from these statements the Church has believed in the subject of Spiritual gifts.

QUESTION #8 – When does God give each believer his/her spiritual gift?

This is a difficult question, but it seems that **God actually gives a person his or her spiritual gift at the moment of salvation, even though he does not discover it at that moment. No believer can get any more of the Holy Spirit than at salvation, but the Holy Spirit can get more of the believer after salvation.**

Dr. John Walvoord said, “One of the important ministries of the Holy Spirit to believers today is His bestowal of spiritual gifts on Christians at the time of their conversion” (*Ibid.*, p. 109).

We base this conclusion on the following:

- 1) Paul wanted every believer to discover his spiritual gift and considered it to be “the good acceptable and perfect” will of God (Rom. 12:2). His assumption is that every believer has the potential of discovering his or her spiritual gift.
- 2) Paul assumed every Corinthian believer had a spiritual gift and they were carnal believers I Cor. 12:7. Even though they hadn’t discovered it yet, the potential was there.
- 3) Paul stated that no unsaved person is capable of anything pertaining to God’s Spirit, which certainly means no unsaved person has a spiritual gift given by God’s Spirit (I Cor. 2:14).
- 4) Paul connects the subject of spiritual gifts to the theme of salvation by grace (Eph. 4:4-7). This would certainly lends itself to the conclusion that at the moment of saving Grace, one has a spiritual gift and the potential to discover it and use it.

Based on these observations, we assume that one receives a spiritual gift the moment he/she receives the Holy Spirit, which is the moment of salvation. However, this does not mean one will actually ever discover and use that gift because for that to happen, certain prerequisites must be met.

QUESTION #9- Why does God give different spiritual gifts to His people?

There are at least six Biblical reasons as to why God gives spiritual gifts to His people: