

SPIRITUAL GIFTS©

By Pastor Greg Hooker

Have you ever wondered why God did not immediately take you to Heaven when you were saved? The Lord made you one of His children instantly upon receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior; so why did He leave us in a world that is polluted with wickedness and evil? Wouldn't it be far better to take us directly to a place of beauty; one of joy, peace and contentment?

On the surface it seems odd that our loving Father would want His redeemed children to remain in such conditions; but there are good, eternal reasons for Him do so. It's because He wants us to use our spiritual gifts to advance and further His plans for mankind. We are His voice in the midst of ciaos; His Light in the corridors of darkness; His salt preserving God's Word; and His witness to a lost and dying world. So what are spiritual gifts and how do we receive them?

A spiritual gift can be defined as, 'A distinct spiritual attribute assigned to every believer by the Sovereignty and Grace of God to be implemented in advancing the Lord's plans and purposes for mankind.' It is something we do not receive at our 'natural' birth, but from our 'spiritual' birth. Unlike a talent such as a painter, sculpture, writer, musician, etc.; a spiritual gift is only given to the born-again believer during their new birth experience. Like the first breath of fresh air outside of the womb, a new born baby birthed into God's family, inhales the breath of eternal life into their soul and the Lord bestows upon them spiritual gifts.

There are several passages of Scripture that list the spiritual gifts - Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; and 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; and I Peter 4:9-11. It is from these references we comprise the following gifts of the Spirit. Many of these them are closely related to each other and overlap. Furthermore, a Christian may possess more than one, but usually has a particular gift that is dominant. We will look at them from a two-fold perspective: I. Spiritual Gifts Still In Effect Today; and II. Spiritual Gifts Not In Effect Today.

I. SPIRITUAL GIFTS STILL IN EFFECT TODAY

From the dawning of the Church Age, the following gifts have existed till now. They will continue to do so until the Lord calls us home to be with Him.

1) Leadership – Romans 12:8.

A person with the gift of leadership is like a small rudder guiding a massive ship on the seas of uncertainty. Though they are comparatively small and insignificant, like a helm they can move a massive ship and stay the Church on a true course. They have the uncanny ability to rule and guide the people of God in the right direction to advance the Lord's kingdom. A person with this gift leads by example – not as they say, but as they do. Wisdom and grace are ornaments about their necks and they lead with humility and love.

2) Teaching – I Corinthians 12:28; Romans 12:7; Ephesians 4:11

The gift of teaching is given to communicate and instruct others in the Biblical truths and doctrines of the Scriptures. In doing so, the body of Christ is built up in the unity and maturing of the Word of God. Just as a teacher of math, science, or literature would instruct their students and prepare them for the world, so the teacher of the Scriptures prepares the Biblical student to walk the spiritual life.

3) Knowledge – I Corinthians 12:28

The gift of knowledge goes hand in hand with teaching. While teaching is the ability to ‘communicate’ truth to the hearers; the gift of knowledge is the ability to ‘assimilate’ that truth in such a way as to adhere to context, syntax, language and cultures existing at the time of the writings. Many misinterpretations occur when Scripture is not studied in light of the methods, times and native customs of Biblical people and lands. The person with the gift of knowledge is like a dry sponge soaking up the ‘water’ of God’s Word. They never seem to get enough of the golden nuggets often buried in the vastness of the Bible. A true person possessing the gift of Knowledge will not only absorb the Word, but share it in a loving, compassionate and non-argumentative way. Moreover, they do so out of love and humility, yet with a distinct flavor of boldness.

4) Wisdom – I Corinthians 12:28

You might say the gift of wisdom goes hand in hand with the gift of knowledge. It is the God-given ability to process ones accumulated knowledge presenting it in such a systematic approach to others that it is clearly understood, and at the same time, in such a fashion that it is applicable to everyday living. It's one thing to ‘know’ the Word of God and entirely something different to have the wisdom to ‘apply’ its truths to our lives. Knowledge of God’s Word carries with it the duty and responsibility to apply that knowledge to sanctify and build ourselves up in holiness and righteous living.

5) Prophesy – I Corinthians 12:10; Romans 12:6

The Greek word translated “prophesying” or “prophecy” means to “speak forth” or declare the divine will, to interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God which is designed to influence people. A person with this gift is able to speak the Word of God in boldness through teaching and preaching, bringing conviction of sin and repentance that leads to a changed life.

IMPORTANT WARNING: Prophesying doesn’t mean predicting the future as exemplified in Acts 16:16 – 18), *“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying [or prophesying the future]: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”*

The Apostle Paul made it clear that we should avoid like the plague ‘sooth sayers’ or those that claim to foretell the future. This includes, but not limited too; fortune tellers, palm readers, tarot cards, dream interpretations, witch craft, etc. God has given His complete and final instructions for our generation in the perfect, inspired Word – the Bible. We do not need, nor receive anymore ‘Thus saith the Lord’s’ – what is written aforetime is written for our admonishing and exhortation that we, as a body of Christ, can grow and mature in unity and holiness of God. The key word is ‘unity’! How can the Church dwell together in unity if people are receiving their own ‘divine revelations’ from the Lord?

6) Discernment – I Corinthians 12:10

The gift of discernment is the ability of some Christians to determine the source and motives of others. They can tell whether something is a true message from God, or a counterfeit of Satan. This special gift is important to help guard the church from the lies and deceptions of the enemy. We have an example of this in Matthew 24:4 – 5, *“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”* The gift of discernment allows the recipient to sort out the wolves in sheep’s clothing from the true flock.

7) Exhortation – Romans 12:8

Have you ever seen someone within your church that has the ability to let their lives bubble over to others? They probably have the gift of exhortation. God has given them the spirit to take a dark and gloomy atmosphere and transform it into an excited, on-fire-for-God group! They build others up in the

Lord, encourage them to “*run the race with patience*”, and stimulate others to service for God. The person with this gift is contagious! Everyone wants to be around them.

8) Shepherding – Ephesians 4:11

The gift of shepherding is the ability to watch out for the spiritual welfare of others. Although it is given to Pastors and other administrators of the church, it is not limited to just them. As a natural shepherd tends to the needs of his flock; the spiritual shepherd watches for wolves and other predators that may slip into the sheep fold and harm the sheep. Moreover, they feed the flock through teaching and preaching, tending to the wounds often occurred and generally providing their daily needs. A shepherd never ‘drives’ his sheep, but ‘leads’ them where he wants them to go. Thus a person with the gift of leadership will ‘lead’ others, rather than rule as a dictator.

9) Faith – I Corinthians 12:9

While every child of God is given a certain measure of faith, the person with the ‘gift’ of faith has an overwhelming, unshakable, and steadfast trust and confidence in God and His Word. Nothing seems to deter them and they readily share this faith with others.

10) Evangelism – Ephesians 4:11

Even though everyone should seek to win the lost to Christ, the person with the ‘gift’ of evangelism has a bold, clear and undeniable capacity to share the Gospel in such a way as to cause the unbeliever to be convicted with a call to repentance, followed by leading them to a positive acceptance of Christ. Many times this is coupled with the calling of a missionary.

11) Apostleship – I Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11

The gift of apostleship refers to those gifted to carry the Gospel and plant churches abroad – in other words, a missionary. They are unique individuals burdened and focus outside the local church to places hungry for the good news of Jesus and His love. Most always they are called to extreme hardship and necessities, but are not deterred in their love of seeing people converted by the Gospel. They feel that suffering is a small price to pay for the glory reserved for them in Heaven.

12) Service/Helps – I Corinthians 12:28; Romans 12:7

The individual with this gift is always scrambling about the church looking for ways to assist others. They don't mind taking a 'backseat' to recognition and operate behind the scenes. Simply out of a love to 'wash the feet of the Lord', the person with the gift of helps will joyfully and gracefully do anything that needs to be done.

13) Mercy – Romans 12:8

In times of sorrow and suffering you will find the person with the gift of mercy. They are like a soothing ointment spread upon the wounds of another's broken heart. Compassion and caring are their trademarks for which they wear about their necks. The gift of mercy is closely linked with that of encouragement.

14) Giving – Romans 12:8

The person with the gift of giving contributes freely, joyfully and abundantly of themselves – it may be money, goods, talents, or time. They are always concerned with the welfare of others and seek to find ways to distribute their abundance to build up the body of Christ. When it comes to recognition and praise, they want no part of it. Their left hand doesn't know what the right is doing.

15) Hospitality – I Peter 4:9

These are people who gladly open their homes to strangers in need. They are gifted with entertaining guest and making them feel at home, away from home. When a traveling evangelist comes to their church, they are the first to respond to their hospitality needs.

II. SPIRITUAL GIFTS NOT IN EFFECT TODAY

As we have noted above, God is still imparting wonderful spiritual gifts to His children to build up and advance His program among mankind. However, there were specific gifts given during the early church age that do not exist today, at least not in the sense they were used during the Apostolic Age. These gifts were given as a 'sign' to affirm to the Church that the Apostle's message was from God, thus they are often called the 'sign gifts'.

1) Healing

While there is no question that God is still in the healing business and does so every day, the Apostolic form of healing in which individuals received miraculous healings and people were raised from the dead, are no longer in effect today. Individuals do not have the power, or ability to heal the sick and impart new life to a corpse. If they did, all the hospitals and morgues around the world would be emptied.

2) Miraculous Powers – Acts 2:22; Acts 19:11, 12; Acts 3:6; Acts 6:8; Acts 8:6, 7

Similar to the gift of healing, the miraculous powers gift was temporary and went out with the dispensation of the Apostles.

3) Speaking And Interpreting Tongues

Perhaps the most misunderstood and abused gift is that of speaking or interpreting tongues. This gift was given and used during the early Church age to preach the Gospel to all the nations and various tongues (languages), as exemplified during Pentecost. During this great event, there were people from across the land gathered together who communicated in various languages. Therefore, as the Apostles preached in Greek for example, the people heard it in their own native language – a miracle of the Lord to propagate the Gospel to all peoples, regardless of their language. No matter where they were from, they heard the Word of God with clarity just as if the Apostles were speaking directly to them.

CONCLUSION

I hope this simple message has whetted your appetite for additional study on the gifts of the Spirit. More importantly, I hope it has encouraged you to discover your gift(s) and begin focusing on what God wants you to do within the body of Christ. When one makes that awesome discovery, the riches of God's ministry through you will blossom as a rose in the garden of the Lord.