

# SPIRITUAL GIFTS<sup>1</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The subject of spiritual gifts is a controversial & often polarizing topic today. It's almost all that some Christians talk about and emphasize. Other believers avoid the topic completely, feeling it creates division. However, Scripture makes it clear that God does not want us to be ignorant on the subject of spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:1). With that in mind, the following notes have been prepared in order to assist in an understanding of this subject.

## **THREE MAIN VIEWPOINTS ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS:**

A. All the gifts are still available today. This is the position of most of those in the modern-day Charismatic/Pentecostal movement.

B. All the gifts have ceased to operate and none are available today. This is the position of a number of conservative Bible-believers.

C. Some of the gifts are still available today, while others have ceased. Other Bible-believers, myself included, hold this position.

## **WHY AN UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IS IMPORTANT:**

A. Understanding your spiritual gift will help produce harmony in the home—especially if a husband and wife have different gifts.

B. Understanding spiritual gifts will produce harmony and appreciation in the church. A pastor and his leadership will probably have different gifts, and their views on what constitutes a good ministry will be colored by which gift(s) they possess. A knowledge of this subject will thus help you understand why various people think the way they do.

C. Obviously it would be wise to assume responsibilities in line with your spiritual gift. (e.g. If a person has the gift of "helps" it would probably not be wise to put them in a supervisory ["*administration, ruling*"] type of position).

D. God will cause His church to advance more effectively when members understand and use their gifts.

E. An understanding of spiritual gifts helps every person to realize that they are important to their local church! When a believer realizes they've been especially gifted to help their church, it changes their whole perspective and will help eliminate the "*spectator*" mentality, as members realize that they are important and needed in the body of Christ.

## **HOW THE GIFTS ARE GIVEN:**

A. They are given through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ founded the church (Mt. 16:18) and from His mediatorial work and the sending of the Holy Spirit, He sends the gifts.

B. They are distributed by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:11). Believers do *not* get to choose their spiritual gift (I Cor. 12:11, 18). This is a false idea often propagated today by preachers & televangelists who exhort followers to come forward & claim this or that gift. Exhortations in Scripture to "*covet earnestly the best gifts*" (I Cor. 12:31; 14:2) are not addressed to individual believers, but rather to the local church as a whole. Furthermore speaking in tongues, which is the gift usually being promoted by such individuals, is the least important gift according to Scripture (I Cor. 12:28-31; 14:2-ff) so doesn't qualify anyway! Actually the teaching of I Corinthians 12-14 is that churches should forget about the flashy gifts such as tongues and instead desire that God will bless their fellowship with some solid preachers (i.e. prophecy)! Note the prioritized list immediately prior to that statement [I Cor. 12:28-30 cf. I Cor. 14, esp. vv. 1-4, 15-19, 23-25]. An important related truth: everyone does *not* receive the same gift anyway (I Cor. 12:4-6, 11-26).

<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of the material contained in these notes was taken nearly verbatim from three sources: a) A series of Bible studies on *Spiritual Gifts* by Rev. Bill Tipton, who at the time (c. 1980's-1990's) was pastor of Grace Church, Pontiac, Michigan, b) An address and series on *Spiritual Gifts* by Dr. Howard Bixby, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania & c) Notes on *Spiritual Gifts* from the *Institute in Basic Life Principles*, Oak Brook, Illinois. A few additional thoughts and comments have been added by me. -Rev. Mike Edwards, Baptist Chaplain, Univ. of PNG-Goroka Campus, Papua New Guinea, 1995. (revised St. Vincent, West Indies, 2010 & Madison, Ohio, 2016)

## **WHO RECEIVES A SPIRITUAL GIFT?**

A. Only someone who has been "born again" is a recipient of a spiritual gift (i.e. one who has repented and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation). No one has a spiritual gift until first of all they are "saved" and are in union with Christ (i.e. those who love Him as "Lord"-I Cor. 12:3). An unsaved person cannot be a possessor of a spiritual gift! If someone isn't born again then obviously they don't have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), so just as obviously they can't have a spiritual gift that only the Holy Spirit gives! After all, it's hard to have a spiritual gift when you don't have the Spirit!

Interestingly, there have been many instances over the years of individuals in church services or multi-day rallies and special meetings who have claimed to be manifesting spiritual gifts such as "tongues" only to have those same people repent and receive Christ at the END of—or even after—such meetings! Obviously if such individuals did not get saved until the end of the meetings, whatever they were doing earlier was obviously *not* a spiritual gift from God, since they weren't even a child of God yet! That means that such occurrences were either a) counterfeits, b) emotionally or psychologically induced, or, c) on occasions when members of false cults (e.g. Buddhist priests, Mormons, village sorcerers, etc.) speak in tongues, etc., their doing so is quite possibly demonically inspired.

B. Every true believer has at least one gift? - I Pet. 4:10-11; I Cor. 12:6-7, 11. (Note the phrases "*to each one*," & "*to every man*") cf. Rom. 12:3-8. (Some believe that a Christian can have more than one spiritual gift. However there is no agreement on this point).

C. A believer can exercise their spiritual gift without even knowing about the gifts, or which one they possess! But because they are walking with God in obedience to His Word they often will naturally gravitate into ministries where they can use them. However, once one recognizes what their gift is they can then exercise it more effectively.

## **WHAT SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE:**

The believer is given special abilities that he/she would never otherwise possess. It is the Holy Spirit's work (I Cor. 12:7, 11). It is a taste of the "*powers of the age to come*" (Heb. 6:5) i.e. part of the powers of the age to come are these gifts. The NT church is lacking in power today, and part of that reason is possibly a lack of understanding of spiritual gifts.

A. Spiritual gifts are God given-*you get no choice* - I Cor. 12:7, 11, 18. Just as we get no choice in the color of our hair, skin, eyes, parentage, place of physical birth, etc., we get none in regard to what spiritual gift we are given.

B. A spiritual gift looks at spiritual fruit in the lives of others.

C. Thus other persons should evaluate my gift not by what I say or do, but by what occurs in the lives of others-*since spiritual gifts are given to profit and help the Body of Christ.*

D. In reality, probably only the individual himself/herself can tell for sure which spiritual gift they have, since only they know what actually *motivates* them on the inside (cf. I Cor. 12:6-word for effects="*energema*" i.e. "the unique '*energizings*' of the Holy Spirit within a believer which give (a) believer the desire and the power to concentrate on a particular aspect of spiritual concern."

E. Spiritual gifts are limited to those found listed in Scripture! By contrast, I once attended a Christian fellowship meeting on the campus of a university in New York where the leader passed out a handout that listed as examples of spiritual gifts such things as, "*Singing... Typing... Friendliness... Baking... Like to buy groceries* (sic) *...setting up chairs* (and) *...Like to get groups of people together*" (!) Such ideas are utterly absurd and completely foreign to Scripture! All of the spiritual gifts available are listed in the Bible, and the Bible alone!

## **WHAT SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE NOT:**

A. Spiritual gifts are *NOT* natural talents or abilities! For example, even unsaved musicians have good voices and have recorded such songs as "*Amazing Grace*" using their natural talents and abilities. But they do not possess & are not exercising a spiritual gift. A great mind is a natural gift from God and there is nothing wrong with having one & using it, since that too is from a sovereign God. But that is not a spiritual gift. Likewise, such things as mental ability, singing ability, athletic ability, artistic ability, etc., are not the same thing as a spiritual gift. Much work goes on by natural strength, but God doesn't work by fleshly, but rather by spiritual means.

B. A spiritual gift is not a "place." For example, going to Thailand as a missionary doesn't mean that such a person has the "*gift of Thailand*." A statement like, "*He's a gifted person, he ought to go to Thailand*" is a total misunderstanding.

C. A spiritual gift is not a "position of ministry" or age group ministry. Many can testify of a Sunday school teacher who held that position but obviously didn't have the gift of teaching. And while a person may label someone "*a gifted youth worker*", there is no such thing as the spiritual gift of "*youth worker*." Titus 2 also indicates that spiritual gifts cut across all ages.

D. A spiritual gift is also not a technique or methodology. For instance using good vocal technique which causes people to say, "*Wow, what a great singer*" is *not* the exercising a spiritual gift. With a spiritual gift you are moved by God, not by technique, methodology, technology, etc.

### **WHEN DO BELIEVERS RECEIVE THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFT?**

Spiritual gifts are given at the moment of salvation i.e. the "*New Birth*." Since they are God given, it naturally makes sense that they would be given when you are born into God's family (II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10). Scripture teaches that a person receives the Holy Spirit, the baptism with the Spirit, the sealing of the Spirit, etc., at the moment of salvation (Rom. 8:9; I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). So it's only natural that our spiritual gift would be given to us then too.

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS?**

A. They are given to glorify God - I Pet. 4:10-11.

B. They are given to edify (build up) the Body of Christ (i.e. other believers). -- I Cor. 12:7; 14:4, 12, 26; Eph. 4:12-13; I Pet. 4:10. Many sincere but misguided believers claim to use such "spiritual gifts" as a "*prayer tongue*" for their own spiritual benefit during their personal devotional times. But spiritual gifts were NEVER intended to be used in that way i.e. for *our own* benefit! Spiritual gifts are given to us for the benefit of others, not ourselves! To use them for personal edification is a total abuse and misuse of spiritual gifts!

### **MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS REGARDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS:**

A. Spiritual gifts differ in value and in order - I Cor. 12:22-24, 27-31.

B. Some spiritual gifts had time limits on them i.e. they were temporary. I believe speaking in tongues was one of those gifts (cf. Heb. 2:1-4; I Cor. 13:8-13; II Cor. 12:12). Note in I Corinthians thirteen that there are two different words used in reference to the cessation of *wisdom, knowledge* and *tongues*—one word in reference to the first two, but another word in reference to tongues. While the context seems to indicate that wisdom and knowledge will continue until the eternal state, the different wording & tense in regard to tongues seems to indicate that tongues would cease at a point in time prior to the other two (the Greek word translated "*cease*" carries the meaning that tongues would stop by themselves) and that when they did they would never resume.

Historically speaking, the gift of tongues *did* stop by the end of the first century (an historical fact that can be verified by reading the writings of the early Church Fathers). My personal view is that the alleged revival of tongues speaking that we see occurring today is *not* true biblical tongues. One reason I say that is because having attended a number of such meetings, in virtually every instance such tongues speakers have violated virtually all of the rules set down in Scripture by the Holy Spirit for the use of that gift (cf. I Cor. 12 & 14)! That would seem to clearly demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is not the one giving those manifestations, since He would not contradict Himself or go against His own instructions! It is also important to point out that many non-Christian groups and individuals speak in tongues as well (e.g. Mormons, Buddhist priests, Eskimos, Zulu priests, village sorcerers, etc.), thus proving that the ability to speak in some sort of gibberish or "language" does not necessarily mean that God is inspiring it!

Furthermore, the book of Ephesians talks about the growth of the Church. Prophets and apostles are depicted as *foundational* gifts. *How many foundations do you lay for a building?* One! You don't put another foundation in a building on the third floor! Some of the gifts were foundational at the time of the beginning of the Church. Thus we should not be surprised to see them subsequently pass away.

### C. Various ways of categorizing the gifts:

- 1) Bixby divides them into "**Speaking**" & "**Serving**" gifts, based on I Peter 4:10-11.
- 2) Gothard divides spiritual gifts into three categories, based on I Cor. 12:5-10:
  - a) "**Ministry**" gifts – I Cor. 12:5. "*Ministry gifts*" are used in "...recognized Christian service in & through the church. These gifts are confirmed by church leaders (via ordination, etc.). They include pastors, teachers, church workers, assistants and administrators" (I Cor. 12:5, 28; I Tim. 4:14; Eph. 4:11-12; II Tim. 1:6).
  - b) "**Motivational**" gifts - I Cor. 12:6. These would be tantamount to a person's individual spiritual gift. "Motivation gifts are the unique '*energizings*' of the Holy Spirit within a believer which give that believer the desire and the power to concentrate on a particular aspect of spiritual concern. They are given by the Holy Spirit in order to carry out the ministry." Gothard believes these motivational gifts are listed in Romans 12:6-8:

"Every Christian (sic) has one of the seven motivation gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8. Every Christian then views other Christians and circumstances through his or her motivation gift. Christians with the gift of *ruling* look at things through the eyes of an *administrator*. Christians with the gift of *teaching* look at things through the eyes of a *teacher*. The same is true for those with the gift of *prophecy* (preaching), *servicing*, *exhortation*, *giving* and *mercy*."

- c) "**Manifestation**" gifts - I Cor. 12:8-10. Gothard puts the gifts listed in I Cor. 12:8-10 in a third category, believing that they are the *fruit* that results in the lives of other believers when a person exercises his/her motivational gift.

Others, such as Bixby believe that the gifts in I Cor. 12:8-10 operated in N.T. times but have now ceased. MacArthur, et al., believe that those gifts are still in operation, but define them differently than Bixby. Much hinges on how you understand and define the gifts listed there, as well as in Rom. 12:6-8.

### SUGGESTED READING

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