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# Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual Gifts are of God enabling the Christian to take part in His service.

Dorea

doma Eph. 4:8; Acts 11:17

Pneumatikos

charisma

The term charisma ("spiritual gift"), except for 1 Pet. 4:10, is used only by Paul. Charisma signifies redemption or salvation as the gift of God's grace (Rom. 5:15; 6:23) and a gift enabling the Christian to perform his service in the church (1 Cor. 7:7), as well as defining a special gift enabling a Christian to perform a particular ministry in the church.

Paul offers instruction on spiritual gifts in Rom. 12:6 - 8; 1 Cor. 12:4 - 11, 28 - 30; Eph. 4:7 - 12. Spiritual gifts were unusual manifestations of God's grace (charis) under normal and abnormal forms. Not every spiritual gift affected the moral life of the one who exercised it, but its purpose was always the edification of believers. The exercise of a spiritual gift implied service in the church. This practical approach is never lost sight of in the NT, these spiritual gifts often being divided into miraculous and nonmiraculous; but since some are synonymous with specific duties, they should be classified according to their significance for preaching the word, on the one hand, and exercising practical ministries, on the other.

**The Gifts of the Spirit  
There are five gifts of the Spirit**

**Working of Miracles (1 Cor. 12:10, 28 - 29)**

"Miracles" is the rendering of dynameis (powers). In Acts dynameis refers to the casting out of evil spirits and the healing of bodily ailments (8:6 - 7, 13; 19:11 - 12). This may explain "working of powers," but this gift is not synonymous with "gifts of healing." Probably the former was much more spectacular than the latter, and may have signified raising the dead (Acts 9:36ff.; 20:9ff.). Paul himself exercised this gift of working of powers, and it was for him proof of his apostleship (2 Cor. 12:12), and authenticated both the good news he preached and his right to proclaim it (Rom. 15:18ff.).

**Gifts of Healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30)**

As already suggested, gifts of healing resembled "working of miracles" (powers). Witness the ministry of our Lord (Matt. 4:23 - 24), of the Twelve (Matt. 10:1), and of the Seventy (Luke 10:8 - 9). Gifts of healing were also prominent in the church after Pentecost (Acts 5:15 - 16; cf. also James 5:14 - 15). "Gifts" (plural) indicates the great variety of both the sicknesses healed and the means used in the healings. The person who exercised the gift, and the patient who was healed, had one essential in common, faith in God.

The writings of the church fathers prove that "the gifts of healings" were exercised in the church centuries after the apostolic period. Since then, this gift has appeared intermittently in the church. Gifts of healing have been in abundance, but Unfortunately the manner in which some act who claim to have received the gift has brought it into disrepute. The kind of ailments that were healed in the NT period, the nature and place of faith, the significance of suffering in God's economy, the importance of the subconscious and the nature of its influence upon the body, the relations between gifts of healings and medical science (a doctor was numbered among Paul's traveling companions!), these have not received the attention they require today. Gifts of healings are a permanent gift of the Spirit to the church but are properly exercised only by men of the Spirit, and of humility and faith.

**The Gift of Helpers (1 Cor. 12:28)**

What spiritual gift was signified by "helper" may be gathered from Acts 20:35, where Paul exhorts the Ephesians elders to labor "to help the weak" and constantly to remember the Lord's own words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul supports this exhortation from his own example. The early church seems to have had a special concern for the needy among her members, and those who helped the indigent were considered to have been endowed by the Spirit for this ministry. It is not impossible that the office of elder originated in the gift of government or rule. By the same token, the office or duty of deacon may have originated in this gift of helpers. The deacon was one who ministered to the needy (Acts 6:1 - 6).

**The Gift of Governments or Administration (1 Cor.12:28; Rom.12:8)**

The gift of ruling or governing the local assembly of believers. This gift would take the form of sound advice and wise judgment in directing church affairs.

They would become recognized officials in the church, fulfilling well defined duties in the administration of the Christian community. At the beginning, however, it was acknowledged that some Christians had received the gift of ruling and had liberty to exercise it. In addition to administration, practical matters in the conduct of public worship would require wisdom and foresight, and here again those who had recognizably received the gift of ruling would be expected to legislate.

**The Gift of Faith (1 Cor. 12:9)**

The gift of faith should probably be included among the gifts closely related to the practical life and development of the church. These spiritual gifts would naturally strengthen the believers in their faith, and convince the unbelievers of the authenticity of the church's message. The Spirit's gift of faith could effect mighty things (Matt. 17:19 - 20), and keep believers steadfast in persecution. These five spiritual gifts, then, had special reference to the practical aspects of the church's life, the physical well being of believers, and orderliness of their worship and conduct.

The remainder of the gifts of the Spirit concern the ministry of the word of God. To that extent, they were more important than the foregoing; but the latter were, nevertheless, spiritual gifts. In origin and nature they were the result of special endowments of the Spirit.

**Apostleship**

Concerning the gifts especially meaningful for the preaching of the word, Paul gives pride of place to the grace of apostleship: "God hath set some in the church, first apostles" (1 Cor. 12:28). The designation "apostle" began to be applied to NT personalities other than the Twelve, especially to Paul. So highly did he value the gift of apostleship which the Holy Spirit had conferred upon him that on occasion he was at pains to prove its validity (cf. I Cor. 9:1ff.; Gal. 1:12). The apostles conceived that they had received this spiritual gift to enable them to fulfill the ministry of the word of God; nothing, therefore, should be allowed to prevent their fulfilling that all important function (Acts 6:2).

We also gather from Paul that the gift of apostleship was to be exercised principally among unbelievers (1 Cor. 1:17), while other spiritual gifts were more closely related to the needs of believers. Paul's apostleship was to be fulfilled among Gentiles; Peter's ministry of the word was to be exercised among Jews (Gal. 2:7 - 8). Obviously the Spirit's gift of apostleship was not confined to a strictly limited group of men whose gift of apostleship made them ipso facto special units of a divine grace or authority.

Their function was doubtless conceived to be the most important so far as the ministry of the word was concerned, but we shall see presently that theirs was only one of a number of such spiritual gifts. The church was built upon prophets as well as apostles (Eph. 2:20), the first ministering in the word to the church, the latter preaching the word to non Christians. Since, then, the gift of apostleship was spiritual, so also was the authority of the apostles. It remained the prerogative of the Holy Spirit and never became official in the sense that one could communicate it to others of his own volition. The authority exercised by the apostles was exercised democratically, not autocratically (Acts 15:6, 22). They were careful to include the elders and brethren when substantiating the validity of the directives they were issuing to the church. Even when Paul was asked to legislate for the churches he had founded, his authority was not his apostleship but a word from the Lord (1 Cor. 7:10).

**Prophets**

Prophets stand next in importance to apostles in Paul's enumeration of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:2ff.). The gift of prophecy has already been differentiated from the grace of apostleship on the ground of the sphere in which each was exercised. In a sense Moses' desire (Num. 11:29) had been realized in the experience of the church as a whole (Acts 2:17 - 18; 19:6; 1 Cor. 11:4 - 5), but some individuals seem to have been specially endowed with this grace (Acts 11:28; 15:32; 21:9 - 10). These prophets in the NT church seem often to have been itinerant preachers. Moving from church to church, they built up believers in the faith by teaching the word. Their ministry would probably be characterized by spontaneity and power, since it seems to have included speaking by revelation (1 Cor. 14:6, 26, 30 - 31). In these passages, however, the prophet's utterances were clearly understood compared with the utterances in tongues.

On occasion God would make his will known through the prophet (Acts 13:1ff.), or a future event would be foretold (Acts 11:28; 21:10 - 11); but the prophet's special gift was the edification, exhortation, consolation, and instruction of the local churches (1 Cor. 14). In the subapostolic period the prophet could still take precedence over the local minister, but the day was not far off when this gift of prophecy passed to the local ministers who preached the word to edify the members of the Christian fellowship.

The nature of this gift of prophecy was such that the danger of false prophets must always have been present. The Spirit, therefore, communicated a gift that enabled some among those who listened to the prophets to recognize the truth or falsity of their utterances. This was not natural insight or shrewd judgment but a supernatural gift. Paul describes this spiritual gift as a "discerning of the spirits." The fact that the prophet spoke by revelation made the appearance of false prophets almost inevitable; while, therefore, Paul urged his converts not to despise prophesyings, they were, nevertheless, to prove all things (1 Thess. 5:20 - 21).

**The Gift of Discernment of Spirits**

Believers had to be able to discriminate between the false and the true spirits, when an itinerant prophet claimed to be inspired to speak by revelation (1 Cor. 14:29).

**The Gift of Teaching**

Clearly related to, but carefully distinguished from, the gift of prophecy is the gift of teaching (1 Cor. 12:28 - 29; Rom. 12:7). The prophet was a preacher of the word; the teacher explained what the prophet proclaimed, reduced it to statements of doctrine, and applied it to the situation in which the church lived and witnessed. The teacher would offer systematic instruction (2 Tim. 2:2) to the local churches. In Eph. 4:11 Paul adds the idea of pastor to that of teacher, because no one is able to communicate effectively (teach) without loving those who are being instructed (pastor). Likewise, to be an effective pastor, one must also be a teacher.

**The Gift of Exhortation (Rom. 12:8)**

The possessor of the gift of exhortation would fulfill a ministry closely allied with that of the Christian prophet and teacher. The difference between them would be found in the more personal approach of the former. If his exhortations were to succeed, they would have to be given in the persuasive power of love, understanding, and sympathy. His aim would be to win Christians to a higher way of life and to a deeper self dedication to Christ. The Spirit, therefore, who bestowed the gift of exhortation would with the gift communicate spiritual persuasiveness and winsomeness.

**The Gift of Speaking the Word of Wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8)**

An important part of the Spirit's endowment so far as the Christian community was concerned was wisdom. This gift would communicate ability to receive and explain "the deep things of God." In God's dealings with men much is mysterious, and the ordinary Christian is often in need of a word that will throw light upon his situation; and the person fitted by the Spirit to fulfill this ministry is through the Spirit given the word of wisdom. Because of the strong sense of revelation or insight implied in the phrase, perhaps this gift was akin to a revelational utterance by the Christian prophet.

**The Gift of Speaking the Word of Knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8)**

Speaking the word of knowledge suggests a word spoken only after long and careful consideration. This would be a word that the Christian teacher would ordinarily speak. Of course, this mental activity would not be entirely unaided; a point being reached when the Spirit would give knowledge, understanding, insight, that might be described as intuition. But since Paul points out that both the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge are given through or according to the Spirit, the emphasis is on the reception of the word, not on its interpretation.

**The Gift of Tongues**

Yet another spiritual gift is mentioned by Paul. The Spirit gives "kinds of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:10, 28). The nature of this gift is explained in 1 Cor. 14. (1) The tongue in which the person spoke was unintelligible, and therefore unedifying to the Christian assembly (vss. 2 - 4); (2) the tongue (glossa) was not a foreign language (vss.10 - 12); (3) The tongue speaker addressed himself to God to whom he probably offered prayer and praise (vss. 14 - 17); (4) The tongue edified the speaker (vs. 4); (5) The tongue speaker lost the control of intellectual faculties (vss. 14 - 15), the tongue being probably a disjointed, highly pitched, ecstatic series of ejaculations, similar to the tongues spoken in times of spiritual awakening experienced intermittently by the church.

**The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10, 30)**

A necessary corollary to speaking in tongues was the interpretation of tongues. The tongue speaker might also exercise the gift of interpreting, but usually others exercised it (vss. 26 - 28; 12:10); though Paul's advice in 1 Cor. 14:13 is interesting. This would imply giving meaning to unmeaningful ecstatic ejaculations as an art critic interprets a play, a symphony, or a canvas to the uninitiated; though the tongue interpreter did not depend on natural knowledge.

**The Evangelist**

Another gift to the church is the evangelist. Timothy is called an evangelist in 2 Tim. 4:5, as is Philip, one of the seven, in Acts 21:8. The task of preaching the gospel, although theoretically everyone's responsibility, is entrusted specifically to certain individuals by the Holy Spirit. They are to exercise their ministry in the full realization that the power comes from God, making faddish and manipulative techniques not only unnecessary but wrong. When such are present, it is a clear indication that the Spirit is absent. Converts from the evangelist's ministry are to be funneled into the church where they are to be built up by those exercising the other gifts.

**Service (Gr., diakonia)**

Service is called a gift in Rom. 12:7. This term is used in a number of ways in the NT, from a generalized idea of ministry (2 Cor. 5:18, where Paul's preaching is called a ministry of reconciliation) to a specific office or task (1 Tim. 1:12). It is difficult to know exactly how Paul means it here. It is perhaps a generalized gift of power to anyone exercising a specific function in the church.

**Contributing**

Paul speaks of contributing as a gift (Rom. 12:8). All are to give to the needs of the church, its ministry, and the poor, but a special gift enables some to make joyous sacrifice in this area. Paul adds that this gift should be exercised "without grudging" or "in liberality."

**Acts of Mercy (Rom. 12:8)**

Merciful acts are to be performed with cheerfulness under the guidance of the Spirit. It might be wondered why such a noble act would require charismatic endowment, but the circumstances of the time explain it. To render aid was dangerous. Such identification with other Christians in need branded one as a Christian as well, opening up the possibility of persecution for oneself.

**Giving Aid (Rom. 12:8)**

Giving aid, also mentioned as a gift, is to be exercised with zeal. It is possible that this gift is another form of administrative gift. If so, this is not new. If not, it more closely parallels acts of mercy.

**Conclusion**

In instructing Christians on the exercise of these gifts, Paul is concerned to stress their practical nature. The Spirit bestows his charismata for the edification of the church, the formation of Christian character, and the service of the community. The reception of a spiritual gift, therefore, brought serious responsibility, since it was essentially an opportunity for selfgiving in sacrificial service for others.

The more spectacular gifts (tongues, healings, miracles) necessitated some degree of order that would prevent their indiscriminate use (1 Cor. 14:40). The spirits of the prophets must be subjected to the prophets (vs. 32). Paul clearly insists that spectacular gifts were inferior to those that instructed believers in faith and morals and evangelized non Christians. Tongue speaking was not forbidden (vs. 39), but intelligent exposition of the word, instruction in faith and morals, and preaching the gospel were infinitely superior. The criteria used to judge the relative values of spiritual gifts were doctrinal (1 Cor. 12:3), moral (1 Cor. 13), and practical (1 Cor. 14).

The problem was where to strike the balance. The greatest peril lay in overemphasizing the gifts, which tended to exalt the offices that grew out of them. That led inevitably to institutional ecclesiasticism and the inevitable corresponding loss of the church's awareness of the Spirit's presence and experience of the Spirit's power.

**Spiritual Gifts**

**Advanced Information**

Spiritual Gifts (Gr. charismata), are gifts supernaturally bestowed on the early Christians, each having his own proper gift or gifts for the edification of the body of Christ. These were the result of the extraordinary operation of the Spirit, as on the day of Pentecost. They were the gifts of speaking with tongues, casting out devils, healing, (Mark 16:17, 18), usually communicated by the medium of the laying on of the hands of the apostles (Acts 8:17; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14). These charismata were enjoyed only for a time. They could not continue always in the Church. They were suited to its infancy and to the necessities of those times.