

Chapter 52: Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1)

What are spiritual gifts? How many are there?
Have some gifts ceased? Seeking and using spiritual gifts.

A. Questions Regarding Spiritual Gifts in General

Definition: A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church

(1) Spiritual Gifts in the History of Redemption

(a) Old Testament

- In general, less powerful activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of most believers
- The Old Testament looks forward to a time when there would be a greater empowering of the Holy Spirit that would reach to all God's people

(b) New Testament

- John the Baptist heightens people's expectations of Joel's prophecy (Mt 3:11)
- Jesus brings the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit in his person, teaching with great power, healing, and casting out demons from those who are oppressed. (Lk 4:14,15-22, 31-41)
- He gives this power to the twelve and the seventy. (Mt 10:7-8; Lk 10:1-12)
- The Spirit is poured out at Pentecost. (Acts 1:8; Acts 2:32-33)

(2) The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament Age

- (a) Spiritual gifts are given to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns (1 Cor 1:7 13:10; 14:12)
- (b) Spiritual gifts give a foretaste of the age to come (1 Cor 13:9-10,12; Eph 1:13-14)

(3) How Many Gifts Are There? (1 Co 12:8-10; 12:28; Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Co 7:7; 1 Pet 4:11)

- Paul was not attempting to construct exhaustive lists
- There is some degree of overlap among the gifts (prophecy, prophet)
- Some of the gifts will have many different expressions as they are found in different people (serving, helps, etc.)
- Different ways to classify gifts
- The point of diversity of gifts is so that we will depend on one another (1 Cor. 12:12-26)

(4) Gifts May Vary in Strength (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 14:18; 2 Ti 1:6; 1 Co 12:11)

- Paul reminds us that not all have every gift or any one gift (1 Co 12:29-30)
- Though all do not have the "gift" of teaching or evangelism, all can teach or share the gospel to some degree.
- Other gifts not only vary in strength, but also find a counterpart in some general abilities found in the life of every Christian (are there examples even regarding healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues?)
- Spiritual gifts are not as mysterious and "other worldly" as people sometimes make them out to be.
- A certain person's gift may not be strong enough to function for the benefit of the entire church in a large church, but that same person may find that in a younger, smaller church, his or her gifts are very much in demand and able to benefit the entire congregation.

(5) Do Christians Possess Gifts Temporarily or Permanently? (1 Cor 13:2; Rom 12:6; 1 Ti 4:14; 1 Cor 12:12-26)

- In most cases, NT seems to picture a permanent possession of spiritual gifts.
- Some people have titles that describe a continuing function—prophets, teachers, and evangelists
- Some gifts are non-permanent by nature, such as marriage and celibacy, healing, and prophecy, and some gifts may be given for a unique need or event, like Stephen's revelation of heaven. (Acts 7:55)
- In any case, the Holy Spirit is sovereign in distributing gifts as he wills, which includes his authority to withdraw a gift for a time. (1 Co 12:11)
- In a sense, no gift is permanent. (1 Co 13:8-13)

(6) Are Gifts Miraculous or Nonmiraculous?

A miracle is a less common activity of God in which he arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to himself. (Chap. 17)

- By this definition, prophecy, healing, casting out demons, or speaking in a foreign language could be described as "miraculous" while teaching, mercy, encouraging, and contributing could be described as "non-miraculous"
- We should be cautious against making a supernatural/natural distinction in our minds. The Bible makes no such distinction, and the danger of this is that we may tend to think that "supernatural" gifts are more important or more dearly from the Lord, and we may devalue the "natural" gifts.
- A supernatural/natural distinction could also cause us to be suspicious about those which we think to be "supernatural," or could lead us to think they are unlikely to happen in our own experience.
- In contrast to this perspective (1 Co 12:4-6)
- Should we seek one type of gift over the other? (1 Co 14:12)

(7) Discovering and Seeking Spiritual Gifts

(a) What if many members in a church do not know what spiritual gift(s) God has given them?

- Church leaders need to ask whether they are providing sufficient opportunities for gifts to be used
- Individuals can begin by asking what the needs and opportunities for ministry are in their church, evaluating their own desires and abilities, and praying for God's wisdom (James 1:5-6).

- After this, he or she should try ministering in various areas and see where God brings blessing.
- The goal is that the body of Christ in each location grow up in maturity.
- (b) Seeking additional gifts (1 Co 12:31; 14:1; 14:5)
 - Ask God for them. (1 Co 14:13)
 - Have right motives. (1 Co 14:1)
 - Seek opportunities to try the gift
 - Continue to use the gifts you now have and be content with those gifts (See Lk 19:16-23)
- (8) Gifts Are Tools for Ministry, and Not Necessarily Related to Christian Maturity (1 Cor 3:1; Matt 7:22-23)
- B. Have Some Gifts Ceased? The Cessationist Debate
- (1) Does 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Tell Us When Miraculous Gifts Will Cease?
 - a. The Purpose of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13
 - Paul intends to put the entire discussion of gifts in proper perspective. It is not enough simply to “seek the greater gifts (12:31a), one must also “seek after love” (14:1).
 - Paul argues that love lasts forever, whereas the gifts are temporary (13:8), since something perfect will come to replace them. Prophecy, for instance, fills a certain need now, but will one day be made obsolete or useless.
 - b. 1 Corinthians 13:10: The Cessation of Prophecy When Christ Returns
 - Several factors argue that the Lord's return is what Paul had in mind regarding “when the perfect comes.”
 - c. Objections
 - 1. This Passage Does Not Specify When the Gifts Will Cease
 - 2. “When the Perfect Comes” Refers to a Time Earlier Than the Time of the Lord's Return
- (2) Would the Continuation of Prophecy Today Challenge the Sufficiency of Scripture?
 - a. The Authority of the Gift of Prophecy
 - If New Testament congregational prophecy was like Old Testament prophecy and New Testament apostolic words in its authority, the sufficiency of scripture would be challenged by prophecy. However, this is not the case (see next chapter).
 - Ordinary congregational prophecy in NT churches did not have the authority of Scripture.
 - b. The Question of Guidance
 - Some object that even if prophecy is not believed to be on par with Scripture, it functions in some believers' lives to compete or replace Scripture in giving guidance concerning God's will.
 - Many in the charismatic movement are cautious about using prophecy to give specific guidance.
 - Among very Reformed cessationists there is a willingness to admit some kind of continuing “illumination” by the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. In this respect there does not seem to be a great difference in what they are saying and what many in the charismatic movement are doing.
- (4) Did Miraculous Gifts Only Accompany the Giving of New Scripture?
 - Miracles had several other purposes:
 - 1. They authenticate the gospel message throughout the church age
 - 2. They give help to those in need, and thereby demonstrate God's mercy and love
 - 3. They equip people for ministry
 - 4. They glorify God
- (5) Is It a Historical Fact That Miraculous Gifts Ceased Early in the History of the Church?
 - This is doubtful on historical grounds, since we have evidence that miraculous gifts were occurring throughout the history of the church in greater or lesser degree.
 - When Paul said, “When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away” (1 Cor 13:10), he was not saying anything about the relative frequency of miraculous gifts in the history of the church.
- (6) Are Miraculous Gifts Today the Same As the Miraculous Gifts in Scripture?
 - We must ask whether it really matters whether the miracles today are exactly as powerful as those that occurred at the time of the New Testament. If today only three hundred are converted at an evangelistic meeting instead of three thousand at Pentecost, does the speaker lack the gift of evangelism?
 - The fact that gifts are imperfect and can vary in strength does not mean we should stop using them altogether.
- (7) Is It Dangerous for a Church to Allow for the Possibility of Miraculous Gifts Today?
 - To say that the use of miraculous gifts is “dangerous” is not by itself an adequate criticism, because some things that are right are dangerous in some sense.
 - A better approach is to ask is, “Are spiritual gifts being used in accordance with Scripture?” and “Are adequate steps being taken to guard against the dangers of abuse?”
- (8) Cessationists and Charismatics Need Each Other

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