

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

What are spiritual gifts?

Having been a Christian for over twenty years and having sat under the teaching of as many as ten different men with the gift of pastor-teacher, I have heard several definitions of what spiritual gifts are and the importance of knowing and using my gifts. As a general definition, I like and could support from Scripture, the statement from Willmington:

“The definition of a spiritual gift. It is a supernatural ability given by Christ through the Holy Spirit to the believer at the moment of his salvation.”¹

I find this definition inadequate to inform more than superficially, but it is factually correct. It is also helpful when used to weed out what are not spiritual gifts. However, there maybe some cross over between the two in some cases.

“I am not sure that we can always draw a sharp line between spiritual gifts and natural abilities – both of which remember, come ultimately from God. Nor do I believe it is always necessary to make a sharp distinction. On most occasions, however, in the context we are discussing, the gifts I have in mind are supernatural ones the Spirit gives a person for the good of the Church.”²

The salient point is that spiritual gifts are supernatural in origin. It is possible that God may supernaturally enhance a natural ability for use in the body, but natural or previously developed abilities are likely to be rejected by God for use in the church because we are apt to use them in our own strength. When we use our spiritual gifts the body is built up and God gets all of the credit and glory.

¹ H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1984), p. 429.

² Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, (Waco: Word Books, 1978), p.198.

What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” (Revelation 4:11)

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:11-16)

I have a hard time adding to that clear message from God. He wants to make His children into one body, a perfect bride for His Son. This supernatural work requires that each member of the body have supernatural gifts and that they exercise them. No natural talents in man can ever hope to unite such a group of individuals into a single body, even if a million years were available to accomplish the task.

What are the differences between natural talents and spiritual gifts?

Every person has natural talents and every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. Although talents may or may not be used within the church, we are held accountable for using gifts given us by Christ in the work of the ministry. In the parable of the talents, the servant who did not use what the master gave him for the master's benefit experienced great loss.

“Every believer has some gifts, and believer's may have more than one. The spiritual gifts, while sometimes related to natural abilities, are not to be confused with them. For instance, while a person may have the gift of teaching, naturally, only God can give the gift of teaching spiritual things. Spiritual gifts are not secured by seeking, but rather by the Holy Spirit apportioning gifts 'to every man severally as he will' (I Cor. 12:11)”³

Spiritual gifts are given by God to enable us to fit rightly and fulfill our roles in the body of Christ. Musical talent or artistic talents or mechanical talents maybe very helpful in the physical church building and ministries, Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, build up and unify the believers who are the true church, the bride of Christ.

³ L.S. Chafer, Major Bible Themes, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p. 277

How can you discern and develop your spiritual gifts?

Speaking first from my stored experience and knowledge, spiritual gifts differ from talents again in the way they are discovered. It is not aptitude tests or classroom training that most often reveal and confirm our spiritual gifts. Most Christians seem to discover their gifts by using them in the work of the church. There are many excellent ways of discovering what your gifts maybe, including prayer, reflection, studying Scripture on the subject and advice from more mature Christians. However, none of these is foolproof and confirmation will only come as we use what God has given us and find that it fits well in the body and is a blessing to the ministry.

Certainly the best guide we can have to discovering what gift we have received is the Giver Himself, Billy Graham makes a great point about this:

"... I believe the discovery of our spiritual gifts should be a matter of careful and thoughtful prayer on our part. We should pray that God will guide us to know our spiritual gifts. Also, we should be sure we are willing to make use of our spiritual gifts in a way that is honoring to God. For example, if God showed you that you had the gift of teaching others, would you be willing to put that gift to use in a Sunday school class?"⁴

Praying and seeking are excellent tools to help us to discover our gifts, but a willing heart and a mind to do the work of the ministry are likely more important.

In my own case, I thought I had the gift of ruling/administration, but in attempting to use that talent in the church there was always opposition and resistance. Instead, every time I have had the opportunity to teach I have been able to bless the body, even though I have little training or prior experience outside of the church and had none before my salvation.

⁴ Ibid. p. 201

What spiritual gifts are listed in Scripture?

Better men than I will ever be have made lists of the spiritual gifts found in Scripture and differ widely. Bill Bright has a great comment on this:

“Dr. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, respected scholar and theologian, in his book, The Holy Spirit, lists 14 spiritual gifts. Dr. Peter Wagner, also a respected scholar and theologian, lists 27 gifts in his book. And most other writers number the gifts somewhere in between.”⁵

For the purpose of this paper, I will stick to what the Apostle Paul enumerated in Romans 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:4-10, 28; Eph. 4: 7-8, 11-12

Temporary Gifts

Apostleship – (Eph. 4:11 and I Cor. 12:28)	Miracles - (I Cor. 12:28)
Prophecy – (Rom 12:6 and Eph. 4:11)	Healing – (I Cor. 12:9 & 28)
Knowledge – (I Cor. 12:8)	Tongues – (I Cor. 12:10)
Interpretation – (I Cor. 12:10)	

Permanent Gifts

Wisdom – (I Cor. 12:8), the correct application of knowledge
Discernment – (I Cor. 12:10), insight into the nature of spirits (motives)
Giving – (Rom. 12:8), accumulating and giving money joyfully
Exhortation – (Rom. 12:8), challenging believers to action
Ministering/Helps - (Rom. 12:7, I Cor 12:28, Eph. 4:12) practical spiritual & physical help
Mercy – (Rom. 12:8) ministering to sick, infirm and downhearted
Ruling/Administration – (Rom. 12:8 & I Cor. 12:28) organizing, administering, directing
Faith – (I Cor. 12:9) believing and expecting God’s blessings
Teaching – (Rom. 12:7, I Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11) imparting the Word of God
Evangelism – (Eph. 4:11) pointing sinners to Christ & rallying others to also
Pastor/Teacher – (Eph. 4:11) preaching and teaching to lead a flock

⁵ Bill Bright, *The Holy Spirit: The Key to Supernatural Living*, (San Bernadino: Here’s Life, 1980), p. 218

What were the sign gifts and according to Scripture why should they be considered non-existent in the church today?

In the previous section I enumerated the temporary gifts, which are also considered the sign gifts. There exists some argument among good men as to whether some of these, such as prophecy, might exist today in different forms. If you define prophecy as forth telling rather than foretelling you could make points all day, but I hope to refrain from doing that as much as I possibly can!

The sign gifts were absolutely necessary in the beginning stage of the church for two major reasons: 1) to prove the authority of the apostles and the very first Christians, both to the Jews to whom these gifts were judgment signs and to Gentiles who knew not the Scriptures; and 2) to give new revelation before the New Testament was completed.

In support of point one let's use the letter to the Hebrews:

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb. 2:3, 4)

I'd like to make three points from this passage: first it speaks about the past; second, it has a judgmental tone, "how shall we escape"; and third, it calls the signs and gifts God's witness, or proof. None of these points are conclusive, but the three found here together are quite supportive of my assertion that they were for a limited purpose.

In support of point two, I offer two passages: 2 Peter 1:16-21 where Peter tells us that the written Word is better than even an eyewitness account; and I Cor. 13: 8-10 we hear that prophecies and tongues and knowledge will vanish away, because they are partial, incomplete. In contrast, we know that God's Word is perfect and complete and is given to perfect us as well (2 Tim. 3:17).

Bibliography

H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1984)

Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, (Waco: Word Books, 1978)

Bill Bright, *The Holy Spirit: The Key to Supernatural Living*, (San Bernadino: Here's Life, 1980)

L.S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974)