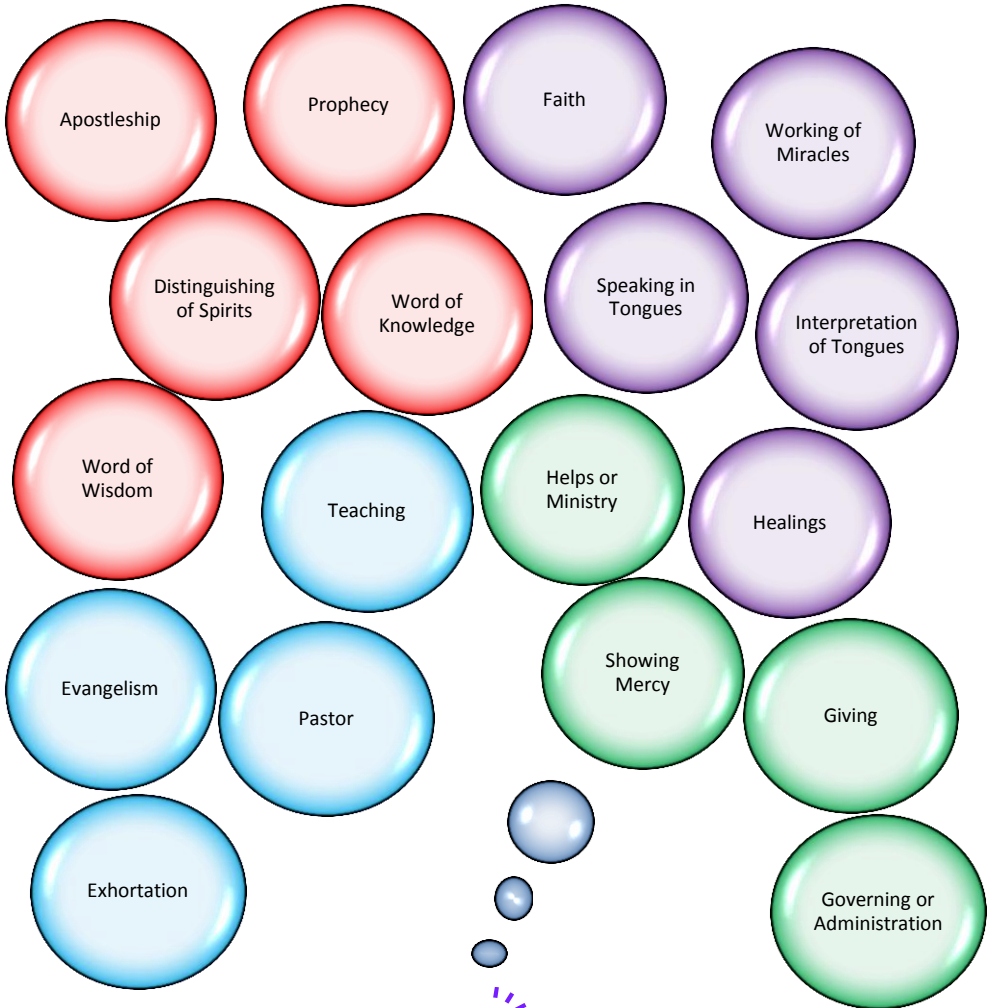


Thinking About Spiritual Gifts



Rom 12:1-8; 1 Cor 12-14; Eph 4:7-16

May 29, 2013



Red = Revelatory Gifts

Purple = Confirmatory Gifts

Blue = Speaking Gifts

Green = Serving Gifts



Introduction

The topic of spiritual gifts has been a source of great debate in modern times. On the one hand, spiritual gifts were given by God to help the church multiply, grow, and mature. On the other hand, these gifts have been misunderstood and abused by many. This has led to confusion, discord, and even schism in some local assemblies. The purpose of this study is to identify and categorize the spiritual gifts so we can have a better understanding of their purpose and use in the local church.

There are 18 distinct spiritual gifts identified in Scripture which can be grouped into four categories: revelatory, confirmatory, speaking, and serving (see illustration). The first two of these groups were only operative in the infancy stage of the church. The remaining two groups are operative throughout the life of the church, from Pentecost until the rapture.

Revelatory Gifts

The first five gifts which helped start the church were revelatory gifts that revealed new truth which was previously undisclosed. Four of the gifts involve the reception and giving of new revelation — **apostleship**, **prophecy**, **wisdom**, and **knowledge**. Wisdom and knowledge (1 Cor 12:8–10) are replaced by apostleship and prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:28–30. The former gifts likely refer to the inner revelation of new truth to those so gifted, whereas the latter gifts involve the outward utterances of those revelations. A fifth gift — **distinguishing of spirits** — was also necessary to discern which utterances were genuine revelations of the Holy Spirit and which were false prophecies.

Apostleship

Having the gift of apostleship — a gift that was also an office in the early church — required several natural qualifications. 1) Apostles had to have personal contact with Jesus during His life on earth. Acts 1:8, 21–23 point out the necessity of one having been a witness of Jesus' earthly ministry if he were to be a candidate for the apostolic vacancy left by Judas Iscariot. 2) Apostles also had to be an eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection from the dead (Acts 1:21–22; Luke 24:48; 1 Cor 9:1–2). But these two qualifications were not enough to make someone an apostle. 3) Apostles also had to have a direct appointment by the Lord Himself (Luke 6:13–16). Only some of Jesus' disciples received such an appointment. Some have argued that the term "apostle" is just another

name for a missionary, and therefore the gift is available today. But this definition does not rest on biblical evidence. “Apostle” was usually a narrow technical term in the New Testament. The dominant use refers to a group of Christian leaders who met the requirements described above. In light of the first two criteria, the gift was available to the body of Christ only as long as eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life and resurrection were alive. Paul came by the gift under somewhat unusual circumstances. He was the last person to be appointed an apostle (1 Cor 15:8–9). The last apostle to die was John around A.D. 100. With his death, the gift ceased to function within the body of Christ. Apostles were Christ’s immediate representatives and possessed the highest authority in the first century church. Their influence extended to the church as a whole, not just a particular local church. By virtue of their gift and associated revelatory gifts, the apostles were recipients of divine revelation which they were responsible to transmit to other Christians. Their credentials consisted in various supernatural feats accomplished through the confirmatory gifts of the Spirit which they also possessed (2 Cor 12:12). Acts 8:14–17 illustrates the authority of the apostolic office. Without the presence of an apostle, God chose to refrain from imparting the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans. The apostles were not infallible. Paul had to confront Peter because of his mistaken judgment in withdrawing from the Gentiles (Gal 2:11–14). But when the apostles functioned as channels of divine revelation, the possibility of erring disappeared. For this reason, the New Testament books composed by them were without error.

Prophecy

Those having the gift of prophecy shared with the apostles the privilege and responsibility of being channels of direct divine revelation. They had insight into the “mysteries” of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:2; Eph 2:20; 3:3, 5) as did the apostles. It appears that all apostles had the gift of prophecy, but not all prophets met the qualifications for being an apostle. Some of the New Testament books were written by individuals who possessed this gift (Mark, Luke, James, Jude). To the degree that a prophecy was valid, based on divine revelation (cf. 1 Cor 14:29), a prophet spoke inspired authoritative words. But the authority of the apostles was of a more general and ultimate nature than that of the prophets (cf. 1 Cor 14:27). Another difference between apostles and prophets relates to the sphere of their ministries. Apostles ministered to several churches, whereas prophets usually served in more settled situations, being assigned to a single local church (cf. Acts 13:1; 15:32). The

prophet's function was to provide edification to the body of Christ by exhorting and comforting the saints through revelations given to them. Another aspect of their ministry was to predict future happenings. In this sense, their function closely resembled that of Old Testament prophets. The ability to predict the future was also confirmatory in nature which is why this gift appears with the other confirmatory gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:10. There were female prophetesses, as shown by the four virgin daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). With the completion of the book of Revelation, the gift of prophecy became obsolete. Revelation 22:18 pronounces a severe penalty on any who attempt to add to the prophecies of the Apocalypse.

Word of Wisdom

Apostleship and prophecy replace the gifts of wisdom and knowledge in later lists (1 Cor 12:8; cf. vv. 28–29). The association of prophecy and the understanding of mysteries confirms this (1 Cor 13:2; cf. 1 Cor 13:8, 9, 12). “Mysteries” is a technical term in the New Testament for the disclosure of divine secrets not previously divulged. So the gift of wisdom relates to the gift of prophecy. The difference between wisdom and prophecy is that wisdom focuses more on the reception of the revelation from God where prophecy focuses more on communicating to others what has been received. 1 Corinthians 2:6–13 has a great deal to say about this relationship. The prophets converted the wisdom/mysteries from God into a form which they could articulate and communicate to God's people through speaking or writing. Peter noted as much when he spoke of the wisdom given to him in writing his epistles (2 Pet 3:15).

Word of Knowledge

The gift of knowledge is also revelatory in nature. It stands in the same categories with apostleship and prophecy (1 Cor 12:8; cf. vv. 28–29), and later appears with prophecy and tongues (1 Cor 13:8, 9, 12). Second Peter 3:2–3 illustrates what results from the word of knowledge. Peter tells his readers to “be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior.” This refers to revelation that had come earlier through the word of wisdom. Then in verse 3, he goes on to apply those earlier revelations to a new situation that had arisen at the time of writing 2 Peter. This application represents a divinely inspired extension of previously revealed “mysteries.” The same thing occurs in 1 Corinthians 7:10–12 and Jude 17–18. The difference

between these applications of principles and the application of principles by Christians in everyday life is a matter of inspiration. We should note a few distinctions. The word of knowledge does not pertain to knowledge obtained through reason and instruction on a natural level. It operates on a supernatural plain. This gift is also distinct from the illuminating work of the Spirit available to all Christians. Such enlightenment comes through the study of the Scriptures and is indeed “supernatural,” but is separate from the special revelatory ability to apply previous divine revelation in an inspired way. Since this gift is also revelatory in nature and related to the gifts of apostleship and prophecy, it had no further usefulness once the New Testament Scriptures were completed. This gift is not operative today.

Distinguishing of Spirits

The gift of discerning or distinguishing spirits follows immediately after the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and is a companion gift. Persons with this gift also possessed the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 14:29) and could pass immediate judgment on prophetic utterances given in the Christian assembly. Someone other than the prophetic speaker needed to render an opinion about the validity of the source of the message once the message was complete. That someone had the gift of distinguishing spirits. “Spirits” in the name of this gift refers to *spirit manifestations* or *spiritual gifts* — a meaning that the same word has in 1 Corinthians 14:12. The discerner was responsible to determine if an utterance came from the Holy Spirit or some other spirit. There is no New Testament illustration of this gift being exercised in a church meeting, but Paul’s encounter with the young woman in Philippi illustrates how the gift must have worked (Acts 16:16–18). Even though the words she spoke were true, Paul recognized that the source of her words was “a spirit of divination,” so he proceeded to cast out the evil spirit from her. Paul describes the proper functioning of this gift in 1 Corinthians 14:29. Prophecies were to be subject to “others” who recommended their acceptance. These “others” were other prophets in the congregation who were listening. This was God’s provision for guarding the church from being led astray while waiting for the New Testament to be completed.

Confirmatory Gifts

God also used certain spiritual gifts to confirm His messages during the first century. These gifts include **faith**, the **working of miracles**, **gifts of healings**, **speaking in tongues**, and the **interpretation of tongues**. One of

the secondary functions of fulfilled prophecy was also to confirm God's message, but the revelatory nature puts this gift in the revelatory group. Similarly, although the primary purpose of tongues was confirmatory, a secondary purpose was to reveal new truth. But since the primary function was as a sign, this belongs with the confirmatory group. As a group, these gifts supported the revelatory group. Without them, there was no visible way to tell if a speaker was a legitimate messenger of God or not. These miraculous signs were the credentials of the apostles and prophets just as they were for Christ (Acts 2:22).

Faith

In 1 Corinthians 12:9–10, the gift of faith is the first in a category of gifts that includes healing, miracles, prophecy, and the distinguishing of spirits. These gifts provided various means for confirming revelations from God to the first-century church through the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, apostleship, and prophecy. Faith is the broadest of the gifts in this category and, in a way, provided the common thread for the rest of the confirmatory gifts. They all operated on the basis of a special faith exhibited by a gifted one. Paul speaks of this spiritual gift of faith as that which can “move mountains” (1 Cor 13:2). It's likely he is referencing Jesus' previous statement that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains (Matt 17:20–21). Faith was the means Jesus used to overcome obstacles in His ministry. Similarly, the gift of faith was the means certain members of the early church used to overcome certain obstacles to their ministries. This gift involved a special ability to believe God to the point that He would remove hindrances in the spread of the good news. Whether that involved an explicit miracle or healing; or sometimes a divinely inspired conviction that circumstances would turn out precisely according to God's promises (Acts 27:22–25; cf. v. 34) — this gift aided in confirming revealed truth and allowing an open door for the spread of the gospel.

At the same time, faith is what saves an individual and makes a person a child of God. But faith in Christ for salvation is not the spiritual gift of faith in the above sense. This gift operated in the early church when direct revelation to apostles and prophets resulted in inspired revelation that needed some type of overt spiritual confirmation. This gift passed from the scene with the other confirmatory gifts, but faith for salvation and Christian life is an ongoing condition for people to have a right relationship with God.

Healings

The gift(s) of healing(s) are some of the gifts highlighted by the gift of faith because exercising the gift rested on a confidence in God to heal in an unusual way. This gift did not eliminate the need for medical and surgical treatments of illness. The plural “gifts” and “healings” implies that there may have been certain people possessing the gift who only had the ability to heal particular kinds of illnesses. For example, one might have the gift of healing leprosy, another, the gift of healing the lame, etc. Healing was also one of the gifts that a person could not exercise indiscriminately. It had to be done in harmony with the will of God. For example, it was God’s will that the man at the door of the temple be healed by Peter (Acts 3:6ff), but it was not God’s will that Paul be healed of his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:8–9). In cases where healings did occur, they did so publicly in spectacular fashion, drawing much amazement and attention. This gained an audience for the healer and provided credibility with the listeners. This was also true in the life of Jesus. He was accredited by the miracles, signs, and wonders God did through Him. Many people today have erroneously assumed that the purpose of the gift of healing was to give people good health. If that were true, then this gift was a massive failure because a very small percentage of the people were actually healed, and those who were eventually died. Good health was only incidental. The primary purpose of the gift was to draw attention, center the focus on the agent of the healing, identify God’s spokesman, and attest God’s approval of the message he brought. Such authentication was necessary to identify to identify the true message of God in the midst of many counterfeits. This gift should not be confused with the promise of healing in response to the prayers of God’s people in James 5:15. The bible speaks of three types of healing: 1) natural healing (e.g. 1 Tim 5:23), 2) supernatural healing in response to prayer (e.g. Phil 2:27), and 3) charismatic healing (e.g. 1 Cor 12:9). The second category represents the privilege and responsibility of every believer to pray for healing. It glorifies God but authenticates no messenger or message the way the gift does. Whatever is touted in the present day as the gift of healing has several possible explanations: psychosomatic cures, hoaxes, Satanic deceptions, or healings in answer to prayer. None of these qualifies as the gift of healing as exercised during the early days of the church.

Working of Miracles

The gift of working miracles is another of the confirmatory gifts (1 Cor 12:10). It includes miracles other than those accomplished by the

gift of healing. This was another way the gift of faith manifested itself. Some examples of this would include bringing a person back to life (Acts 9:40) and the blinding of Elymas (Acts 13:8–11). These “miracles, signs, and wonders” provided verification of the inspired messages that came through the revelatory gifts such as apostleship and prophecy. The purpose of the gift was to provide authentication for God’s spokesmen and their message. The termination of the gift in the modern church does not rule out God’s providential working of miracles since that time. Miracles have continued to happen since the completion of the New Testament. However, God has not been pleased to use miracle workers the way He did while He was revealing New Testament truth. The age of miracles continues, but the age of miracle workers has ceased.

Speaking in Tongues

The gift of tongues consisted of the ability to speak a foreign language that had not been through the natural, ordinary method. The tongues we encounter in Acts 2:4, 11 were identified on that occasion as being languages. Verses 6 and 8 use the Greek term *διαλέκτω* (*dialektō*) meaning “dialect.” It can mean nothing other than human language. The miracle on that occasion was not one of hearing, but of speaking. The gift was not given so people had the ability to listen; it was given so that the speakers could communicate the message to people with whom they might not otherwise be able to communicate. Some have suggested that the tongues we encounter in 1 Corinthians had changed and were somehow different than those in Acts. But this is not possible because the book of Acts was written seven years after 1 Corinthians. Since Luke had been to Corinth, surely he would have distinguished the two had he been aware of a difference. The purpose of tongues is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 14:22: “Tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers.” The word “sign” in that verse is used throughout the New Testament of a miraculous happening with deeper symbolic significance. As with the previous miraculous gifts, tongues authenticated and accredited the speaker and demonstrated the divine origin of the message when they spoke. Tongues was the miraculous authenticating miracle that occurred at the home of Cornelius (Acts 10: 44–46) to show Peter that God had granted to the Gentiles the same Holy Spirit that He had granted to the Jews in Acts 2:14ff. The common language throughout the first-century Mediterranean world was Greek. But despite this, there were still many who did not speak Greek — particularly as you moved beyond the

bounds of the Roman Empire. The gift of tongues aided in bringing the gospel to new language groups. When Paul and others who had this gift arrived in a new city and immediately began to speak fluently in the language of the local populace, this gave them an immediate hearing for the gospel. Tongues also had a secondary purpose of speaking mysteries — i.e. new and fresh revelation that had not previously been disclosed by God. But these mysteries could only be understood by those who spoke the foreign language. This is why interpretation had to accompany tongues in a church meeting, so all could benefit from it (1 Cor 14:5b, 13). Tongues with interpretation had the same net effect as the gift of prophecy. But clearly prophecy was much more efficient because the message came directly in the common language of the people addressed. As the church matured and more inspired New Testament writings became available, the necessity of this gift to confirm new revelation became less and less. Paul envisioned a time when the gift of tongues would no longer be necessary (1 Cor 13:8). This coincided with the time when the church would reach maturity (“perfect” — 1 Cor 13:10). This time can be correlated with the completion of “laying the foundation” (Eph 2:20). The idea is that once the foundation of New Testament revelation has been given, the church would be mature — building upon that foundation. But one other possibility loomed in Paul’s mind. Christ could return prior to the completion of the New Testament canon. If that were the case, then the gradual growth of the church would instantly reach the stage of maturity (1 Cor 13:12). The confirmatory and revelatory gifts will not last as long as faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:8–13) because those three virtues will definitely continue until the coming of Christ. But love will continue beyond that point when faith and hope are no longer necessary because of the coming of the Lord. Therefore, the duration of the gift of tongues extended to only about A.D. 100, and then disappeared from the scene along with the revelatory gifts it supported.

Interpretation of Tongues

The gift of interpreting tongues was an ability to translate into one’s own language from a foreign language that had never been learned by natural means. It was a companion to the gift of tongues. This gift enabled an unintelligible message in a foreign language to become intelligible to the immediate listeners and therefore be spiritually profitable. There is no New Testament example of the use of this gift, but Paul speaks about it quite extensively in 1 Corinthians 14. He takes seven verses to show how unprofitable tongues *without* interpretation

was for the Christian assembly (vv. 6–12) and seven verses to show how profitable tongues *with* interpretation was for the same group (vv. 13–19). In fact, tongues with interpretation had the same net effect as the gift of prophecy: edification (1 Cor 14:2). The use of this gift and that alone legitimized the use of tongues in a Christian gathering. Otherwise, tongues were completely out of place when the church was assembled together.

Cessation of Certain Gifts

As the church moved beyond its infancy stage, the revelatory and confirmatory gifts became no longer necessary. The above gifts were critical at a time when inspired Scriptures (i.e. the New Testament) were unavailable to guide the teaching and conduct of the church. But with the completed New Testament canon, their function was no longer necessary since everything was now recorded. Paul anticipated that these revelatory and confirmatory gifts would outlive their use and come to an end with the completion of the New Testament (1 Cor 13:8–10). Additionally, he noted that the apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the church (Eph 2:20). This was not only done through their ministries, but also through the inspired writings we now call the New Testament. We should notice that once that foundation is laid, we do not continue to lay the foundation until Christ returns. To use the biblical analogy, we are now constructing the superstructure on top of the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets. Once the New Testament was complete, the church had everything it needed for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). For this reason, we believe that the so-called “miraculous gifts” (i.e. revelatory & confirmatory gifts) have ceased.

Speaking Gifts

The speaking gifts supported the church both in its infancy and growth stages. These will continue all the way until the return of Christ at the rapture. These gifts usually involve vocal communication, but they can also involve written communication. They are: [evangelism](#), [teaching](#), [pastoring](#), and [exhortation](#). All four presuppose a direct revelation from God. Since the first century, that revelation has been handed down in the form of the completed New Testament canon. These gifts contribute to the body of Christ by adding members, instructing them in doctrine, shepherding them through life, and persuading members to live in conformity to God’s word. These gifts lead the way in the edification of the body.

Evangelism

Paul mentions “evangelists” as the third position in his list of gifted persons (Eph 4:11). This indicates that there is a spiritual gift of evangelism. The New Testament specifically calls out Philip as a man who had this particular gift (Acts 21:8). He had a great deal of evangelistic success in winning converts for the Lord (Acts 8). Those who have this gift will also have a high degree of success in seeing the lost converted. This does not mean they will have a perfect track record, but they will have a much higher “batting average” than one who does not have the gift. But this gift involves more than just persuading the mind to believe. There is also an aspect of teaching involved in communicating the gospel. In the first century, evangelists would often follow on the heels of apostles and help grow churches in new areas. The best modern equivalent for someone filling the position of an evangelist would be a missionary. Oftentimes people might expect this gift to be bestowed on someone with an outgoing personality. But that is not always the case. Sometimes introverts can be very effective evangelists. Of course, this does not release the rest of the body of Christ from also doing evangelism. Each of us is told to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5).

Teaching

When compared to evangelism, teaching appeals more to the intellect than to the will. Teaching is a vital function for the growth of every believer. The gift of teaching enables certain believers to grasp, arrange, and present revealed truth in an organized fashion so that the recipients have an enhanced understanding of the Scripture under consideration. A teacher must be able to understand a biblical text appropriately and communicate that to others in a meaningful way. The net result of good teaching is having a group walk away from a lesson having a better understanding of the Scriptures. This gift is not the same thing as with those who have a natural/secular ability to teach. Teaching is the mainstay of the Christian faith because without doctrine, Christianity would be non-existent. For this reason, the New Testament puts many safeguards around the activity of teaching and warns those who do teach to do so carefully, knowing that they will incur a stricter judgment (Jas 3:1). That being said, we should note three things: 1) Everyone does not have the gift of teaching, but there are occasions when every Christian must do the work of a teacher. The scenarios are endless — substituting for an absent teacher, witnessing, parenting, etc. 2) Every believer has the ability to grasp Christian

doctrine, even if he/she does not have the teaching gift. 3) Even though teaching focuses mainly on the intellect, a believer's decision-making and emotions are bound to be touched by solid, biblical teaching.

Pastor

Those called to be pastors are actually a subset of the larger group of teachers (Eph 4:11). But an additional element of giftedness is added for this group — shepherdly concern. This involves pastoral care for the sheep of God, but also feeding of the sheep. Shepherding and feeding are two ongoing responsibilities for those charged with the care of a flock. The New Testament uses three descriptive terms for those who occupy this office — elder, bishop/overseer, and pastor/shepherd (1 Pet 5:1–3; Acts 20:28; cf. v. 17). These terms roughly correspond with teaching, administrating/governing, and guiding/guarding a local assembly of believers. Those who are gifted as pastors will have a particular concern for the spiritual care and well-being of the church. One thing to note here is that those called to the *office* of pastor/elder must also meet the qualifications (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9). But others can also be gifted with shepherdly concern, e.g. a Sunday School teacher who carefully shepherds his/her students.

Exhortation

The last of the speaking gifts is that of exhortation (Rom 12:8). This gift particularly involves the aspect of persuasion. It is geared toward the will of the believer, just as the gift of evangelism is geared toward the will of an unbeliever. Exhortation can be of two kinds: 1) It may seek to induce a correct moral choice. This can include persuading a believer to stop sinning and act in conformity with God's word. 2) It may persuade a grieving person to find reassurance in the Lord. E.g. this can happen by helping a person to view a trial properly. Paul and Timothy are good examples of New Testament believers who exercised this gift (1 Thess 2:12; 3:2). Barnabus also exhorted the Christians at Antioch to remain true to the Lord (Acts 11:23). This gift is critical for the growth of the body, but it must be used in conjunction with sound biblical teaching. We should also note that preaching which is all exhortation but devoid of instruction wears thin very quickly.

Serving Gifts

Serving gifts contribute to the temporal and material needs of the body of Christ. These gifts are in no way less important than any of the others. Those with speaking gifts cannot say to those with serving gifts,

“I don’t need you.” Without serving gifts, the body would be crippled and unable to function as God has intended. Furthermore, the speaking gifts would be rendered of little value. The serving gifts include **helps/ministry, showing mercy, giving, and governing/administration.**

Helps or Ministry

Those with serving gifts help those with speaking gifts by making them more effective. The gift of helps (1 Cor 12:28) or ministry/service (Rom 12:7) has the broadest scope of all the serving gifts. It operates wherever there are physical or temporal needs that arise in connection with the church’s ministry. There is a general sense in which ministry or service can apply to all the spiritual gifts. But this gift performs that service in particular ways to meet needs that arise. One example of this in the New Testament was in Acts 6:1–6 where the church appointed seven men, presumably with the gift of helps, to serve tables at mealtimes. Accordingly, this gift is an obvious prerequisite for any who would desire to serve in the office of deacon. Two things should be noted about the gift of helps: 1) Those who have this gift must act from a motivation of pure love. They will not enjoy having their deeds publicly appreciated by others. 2) This gift involves an unusual ability to know how to perceive and meet people’s temporal needs. Not every Christian has this ability. This does not excuse other believers from offering help. That is one of the general responsibilities of all Christians (Gal 5:13). But a person with this gift can meet the need more efficiently and effectively.

Showing Mercy

Showing mercy is a sub-category within the gift of helps. Those so gifted have a particular eye for helping those who are sick, distressed, in pain, and so forth. This gift involves a special skill in relieving that distress, misery, etc. Kind words and a compassionate shoulder to lean on can help a great many people in the time of crisis. These are the times when the gift of showing mercy shines brightest. Those who have this gift are particularly instructed to exercise it with cheerfulness (Rom 12:8). Dorcas is a great New Testament example of someone who exhibited this particular gift (Acts 9:36). Epaphroditus was also chosen by the church to minister to Paul’s need because of a similar gifting (Phil 2:25,30). But as with the gift of helps, the act of showing mercy should not only be done by those with the gift. This is incumbent upon all believers (Jude 22–23; Matt 9:36; Jas 2:13; 3:17).

Giving

The gift of giving involves a specialized ability to invest material substance in spiritual undertakings so as to reap the maximum spiritual dividends. We often will associate this gift with those who have large material resources, and that can oftentimes be the case. But those who have limited resources can also possess this skill as they wisely use what God has given to them. Those who have this gift are instructed to give with liberality (Rom 12:8). But this kind of giving should spring from pure motives, unlike those of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1–11). A good New Testament example of this gift is that of Barnabus (Acts 4:34–37). Those who give generously not only help the work of the ministry in the local community, but also throughout the whole world. Paul referred to the Philippians' financial gift as "an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18). Giving enables those with speaking gifts to keep preaching the gospel without taking time out to support themselves through side jobs. But again, giving is not just for those who have the gift. It is the responsibility of all Christians. Paul writes "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7). Those who do not have this gift should act wisely and cheerfully in supporting the Lord's work.

Governing or Administration

The last of the serving gifts has been called administrations/governments (1 Cor 12:28) and leading/ruling (Rom 12:8). Those who have this gift are urged to exercise it with diligence. This is a quality of leadership and also is a prerequisite for the office of elder (1 Tim 3:4–5). But those who have this gift can include more than just elders (pastors). This gift allows a believer to effectively steer others into areas of service. This can be particularly helpful if you have a group of spiritually gifted people who are all doing their own thing. An administrator can channel those efforts in a certain direction so that the group can be united in accomplishing tasks or goals. Several New Testament passages are directed toward leaders (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Pet 5:2, 3). These furnish proper guidelines for authority over the flock and care for leaders. At the same time, leaders will give an account for those under their charge (Heb 13:17). Often, leaders are called upon to sacrifice for the sake of the flock. Every believer needs to follow wise leaders. This does not mean that leaders need to be tyrannical dictators. But God has placed pastors (overseers) in authority over the congregation to help it function smoothly. With the gift of

governing in place, believers can achieve a goal much sooner and with greater satisfaction.

How to Discern Your Spiritual Gift(s)¹

It is one thing to learn about spiritual gifts. It is another to actually discover and use the gift(s) that God has given you. One of the challenges many new believers face is figuring out how God has gifted them. Below are some practical steps you can take to discover your gift(s).

- 1) Have a settled assurance that every believer has at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7, 11; Rom 12:3; Eph 4:7; 1 Pet 4:10).
- 2) Be aware of the possibilities and purposes of the gifts.
- 3) Pray for enlightenment regarding your particular gift(s) (1 Cor 14:12).
- 4) Consider your own natural abilities, circumstances, and resources.
- 5) Try your hand at each of the available gifts for an extended period of time (cf. 1 Cor 14:1, 12).
- 6) Perform a self-evaluation, noting which areas feel most worthwhile to you.
- 7) Seek out the input of other mature Christians.
- 8) Allow for the possibility of having more than one gift.
- 9) Recognize that there are degrees of giftedness.

How to Use Your Spiritual Gift(s)

Once you have discovered your spiritual gifts, you need to put them into practice. But this should not be done in a cavalier manner. Wisdom, orderliness, and a proper attitude are necessary in the exercise of any gift. Below are some practical suggestions for employing your spiritual gift(s).

- 1) Seek to develop your spiritual gift(s) (1 Tim 4:13–14).
- 2) Make sure your gifts are used in harmony with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; 1 Cor 13).
- 3) Recognize that your gift should be regulated in light of stronger Christian duties (1 Cor 14:30, 33).

¹ Guides for discerning and using your spiritual gift(s) are taken from Robert L. Thomas's book *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1 Corinthians 12–14*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), pp. 205–14.

- 4) Avoid pride (1 Cor 4:18; cf. 1 Cor 13:4; 12:21).
- 5) Remember that each member of the body of Christ is needed (1 Cor 12:15–17).

Conclusion

Every believer today has been given as a gift to the body of Christ. Whether we have been gifted in speaking and/or serving, we should be using those gifts as good stewards of the grace God has given to us. The apostle Peter sums up this thought well:

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” ~1 Peter 4:10–11

~AWB