

A Brief Discussion of Spiritual Gifts

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First, let's list some Scripture passages that mention something about gifts:

Acts 2:38 (NASB)

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 11:17 (NASB)

17 "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

Romans 3:24 (NASB)

24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Romans 6:23 (NASB)

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 12:3-13 (NASB)

3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,

5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;

8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,

13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

1 Corinthians 7:7-9 (NASB)

7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. 8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.

9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

(i.e., celibacy is a spiritual gift! Don't believe it? Then read the passage again!

Paul says "I am celibate." Then he speaks of each man having "his own gift."

Clearly, he is saying that he is gifted by being able to remain celibate!)

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (NASB)

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.

2 You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.

3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.

6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;

9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 (NASB)

27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?

30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 (NASB)

8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 14:1-19 (NASB)

1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.

3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?

7 Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp?

8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?

9 So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning.

11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.

12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

13 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

15 What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

16 Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?

17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;

19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

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1 Corinthians 14:39-40 (NASB)

39 Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.

40 But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

Ephesians 2:8 (NASB)

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Ephesians 4:7-14 (NASB)

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE

GIFTS TO MEN."

9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

Hebrews 2:4 (NASB)

4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

1 Timothy 4:13-14 (NASB)

13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

James 1:17 (NASB)

17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

1 Peter 4:10 (NASB)

10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Hebrews 13:1-2 (NASB)

1 Let love of the brethren continue.

2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

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Genesis 30:19-20 (NASB)

19 Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob.

20 Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.

Exodus 31:1-7 (NASB)

1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.

3 "I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship,

4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze,

5 and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship.

6 "And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you:

7 the tent of meeting, and the ark of testimony, and the mercy seat upon it, and all the furniture of the tent,

Numbers 8:19 (NASB)

19 "I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the sons of Israel, to perform the service of the sons of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement on behalf of the sons of Israel, so that there will be no plague among the sons of Israel by their coming near to the sanctuary."

Numbers 18:6 (NASB)

6 "Behold, I Myself have taken your fellow Levites from among the sons of Israel; they are a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD, to perform the service for the tent of meeting.

Psalms 127:3 (NASB)

3 Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.

Proverbs 18:12-16 (NASB)

- 12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, But humility goes before honor.
13 He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him.
14 The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, But as for a broken spirit who can bear it?
15 The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.
16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-14 (NASB)

- 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime;
13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.
14 I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

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1 Samuel 16:18-19 (NASB)

- 18 Then one of the young men said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful **musician**, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him."
19 So Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David who is with the flock."

1 Chronicles 25:1 (NASB)

- 1 Moreover, David and the commanders of the army set apart for the service some of the sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, who were to prophesy with lyres, harps and cymbals;

Joel 2:28 (NASB)

- 28 "It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions.

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From the OT verses pertaining to gifts or skills that God gave through His Spirit to various individuals, we see several things:

1. When God wants something done, He gives individuals the knowledge and skills needed for the task.
2. The specific knowledge and skills given depend upon the nature of the task. God seems to decide what is needed.
3. God inspires others to provide whatever support in terms of money or supplies that may be needed. This inspiration is also a gift from God. (In the NT, Paul specifically recognizes the gift of Giving.)

From the NT verses pertaining to spiritual gifts we make note of the following:

1. Only a few specific gifts, approximately 13 to 18, depending upon one's definition, are mentioned. (See ref. 2)
2. In no single passage are all the gifts listed. In 1 Cor 12, for example. Paul gives two separate list of gifts that are not the same.
3. No passage, even all of them combined, would lead one to conclude that Paul gives a closed listing of spiritual gifts. In fact, in 1 Cor 12:4-6, Paul uses, gifts, ministries, and effects to indicate ways in which people are gifted.
4. The very fact that Paul did not provide to the Romans, the Corinthians, nor the Ephesians the same list of gifts makes it clear that it was NOT Paul's intention to focus entirely on specific gifts. Rather, he was only using specific gifts to make two primary points: (1) How the gifts are used is critical - love is the key - and (2) the purpose of these gifts is the unity and proper functioning of the Church, the Body of Christ.
5. A careful examination of 1 Cor. 12-14 demonstrates that Paul's teaching on gifts was intended to correct an improper emphasis on glossolalia.
6. The primary reason Paul tended to rank the gifts was to show that others were more important than tongues – glossa. "Paul emphasizes the first place of prophecy, wisdom and knowledge, for those gifts were conspicuously absent at Corinth." (Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary)
7. When Peter speaks of gifts, his list is short and different from Paul's. He also says that love is the key essential.

In consideration of these facts, one may conclude the following:

1. Too much focus on specific gifts can lead to the very thing that Paul was trying to correct - too much emphasis on specific gifts and an attitude of superiority based upon one's abilities. "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think."

The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary puts it this way: *Paul emphasizes (a) their variety, (b) their single source but with various manifestations, and (c) their common purpose – the good of the community. Perhaps he stresses variety to teach the Corinthians the error of looking for leadership to a few persons whose inspiration is manifested in a spectacular manner. Inspiration within the church cannot be so narrowly defined. The common good is served by the contributions of*

many different types of persons inspired by the Spirit, each possessing a special gift that is essential to the life of the church.

2. Because Paul was trying to deal with a specific issue of his day, he did not attempt to treat the subject of spiritual gifts in a more general and complete manner. In fact, the various gifts Paul mentioned should probably be seen as categories, not necessarily as specific gifts. Therefore, it is highly probable, considering also the OT examples cited, that God would provide other manifestations of spiritual gifts today that would not have even been dreamed of in Paul's day. In fact, in order to provide for the unity and proper functioning of the church today, it is probable that additional gifts or manifestations would be needed that might not fall into the categories that Paul mentions.

3. Perhaps the best way to demonstrate that Paul was not seeking to give a complete list of gifts is to note that he did not list all the parts of the body. Just because he listed a few body parts, we don't conclude that there are no others, do we? No, because we know that there are other body parts. We don't as easily conclude that there are other gifts because this concept is more abstract, requiring more thought to grasp the entire concept.

4. In dealing with spiritual gifts, most writers on the topic try to draw a line between spiritual gifts and natural talents or learned skills. This line is always an arbitrary one. (see Ref. 1 - Clinton p. 97) Moreover, it is not necessarily the skill itself that is the gift but the manner in which it is used.

5. Some writers also attempt to classify individuals and their gifts into certain psychological categories. These categories, the traits that define them, and the degree to which individuals can be said to have the traits are all very arbitrary. There is no Biblical basis for such classifications. (See Clinton p. 97)

Consider the gift of music, for example. This is not mentioned as a gift specifically in either the OT or the NT. However, music has always been an important part of worship. In the OT, music is referred to as a form of prophecy, and if prophecy is a gift, then music must be a gift. Moreover, in the OT God appointed specific persons to be musicians to serve as worship leaders, obviously to make the OT "church" a properly functioning entity and to promote its unity. We don't read in the NT much about music in the early church. We do know that Christ and the Eleven "sang a hymn" after the Last Supper, before departing the Upper Room. So music must have continued in some manner in the early church, and it has come down to us today as an essential part of worship. To suggest that God would not gift certain musicians with the capacity to serve His church in this manner seems highly improbable. What gift would you say that Bill Gaither might have?

Consider the passage in Joel 2:28: "I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy..."

This passage is quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17, where Peter is explaining that the events on Pentecost, which included speaking in "unknown tongues," were a fulfillment of this prophecy! This demonstrates that we are not able to determine or limit what the prophet meant when he said "your sons and daughters will prophesy..." In other words, when we see young people leading a praise and worship service through the use of music, we could be witnessing a demonstration of a spiritual gift.

The gift of craftsmanship is mentioned specifically in the OT but not at all in the NT. Moreover, this gift is clearly a category, so it encompasses a large variety of specific gifts or manifestations. Just think about all the possible manifestations this gift might take today that could not have been imagined in OT times but are essential in churches today. (Various applications of "technology" are perhaps examples.)

Consider also the gift of service. How many forms might this gift take? 1 Peter 4:10 suggests that all spiritual gifts are given for service. Clinton p. 45 apparently refers to this as ministering (diakonia), which is the KJV term, and lumps it into what he calls governments [another KJV term], which is a mistake. The gifts of service and administration are not the same. The Gk word *kubernêsis*, (a ship's helmsman, or pilot) translated as governments or administration, is found only in 1 Cor. 12:28, not in any other list of gifts, but the Gk word *diakonia*, translated "service" in Rom. 12:7 and 1 Peter 4:10, is found over 30 times and is most often translated as ministry or service.

Some writers consider hospitality to be a spiritual gift. This trait is either mentioned or demonstrated as an important characteristic in both the OT and the NT. E. g. 1 Peter 4:9 (NASB) - Be hospitable to one another without complaint. An outstanding example is given in Gen. 18, where Abraham entertained three men. This is mentioned in Hebrews 13:1-2 (NASB) - 1 Let love of the brethren continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Look at 1 Corinthians 7:7-9. What gift is Paul talking about here? The statement "each man has his own gift from God" is used by many writers to mean that each person has at least one spiritual gift. But what gift is Paul speaking of in the context? It is the gift of celibacy! Think of all the terrible things that have happened because of men who tried to serve as priests but did not have the gift of celibacy.

Part of the difficulty we are dealing with here has to do with the difference between what we call the Eastern mindset versus the Western. The Eastern is highly symbolic; the Western is highly literal. The Bible was generally written by individuals of the Eastern mindset. When it is interpreted by a Westerner, some of the symbolic understanding is easily lost. So when Paul uses the Eastern mindset to speak about spiritual gifts, he uses terms that are more like categories and are symbolic or abstract terms, not specific offices. But Westerners see these terms as more specific than the writer intended. This easily leads to a distortion of what the writer actually has said. Paul was a brilliant, God-inspired Easterner -- be careful about interpreting him too literally. As the minister to the Gentiles, he was making attempts to interpret Eastern concepts for Westerners, but he could not remove himself completely from his Eastern moorings. Nor should he, because the Western mindset is often severely limited when it comes to dealing with spiritual concepts.

The bottom line? Only by setting up arbitrary definitions of spiritual gifts is it possible to limit what these gifts might be. The Bible never explicitly defines these gifts nor sets these limits. Thus, it is prudent to exercise considerable care in dealing with the topic of spiritual gifts. As Paul says, "Be careful about focusing on specific gifts. Rather, pursue love." Then, as opportunities arise, use your gifts to serve, enrich, and build up His body, the Church. (See ref. 3)

1. Spiritual Gifts: A Self-Study or Group-Study Manual, by J. Robert Clinton
2. Discover Your Spiritual Gifts!, By Gene Wilkes (http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/files/lwcF_wmn_SpiritualGifts_List.pdf)
3. You Are Gifted: Your Spiritual Gifts and the Kingdom of God, by Ken Hemphill