

Spiritual Gifts

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"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." (I Corinthians 12:1)

I Corinthians 12:1-6 in the Amplified New Testament reads, *"Now about the spiritual gifts (the special endowments of supernatural energy), brethren, I do not want you to be misinformed. You know that [when] you were heathen, you were led off after idols that could not speak--habitually--as impulse directed and whenever the occasion might arise. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking under the power and influence of the (Holy) Spirit of God [ever] can say, Jesus be cursed! And no one can [really] say, Jesus is [my] Lord, except by and under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Now there are distinctive varieties and distributions of endowments [extra-ordinary powers distinguishing certain Christians, due to the power of divine grace operating in their souls by the Holy Spirit] and they vary, but the (Holy) Spirit remains the same. And there are distinctive varieties of service and ministration, but it is the same Lord [Who is served]. And there are distinctive varieties of operation of working to accomplish things--but it is the same God Who inspires and energizes them all in all."*

God has given supernatural gifts by the Spirit so the church might move as a many-membered body to do a supernatural work by supernatural means. God has made provision for the full manifestation of His power and life through His people. Every believer is a partaker of the divine nature and thus has the freedom to exercise the divine powers that belong to the family of God. The sons of God should manifest a supernatural nature in life, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and through faith in the name of Jesus Christ and His atonement. God has provided His Spirit and the manifestations of the Spirit for the outworking of His purpose in a spiritual manner in and through believers.

I Corinthians 12:8-10

"For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom..."

The gift of the word of wisdom is the supernatural revelation by the Spirit, of God's divine purpose--in other words, declaring the mind and will of God, unfolding to His people His plans and His purposes concerning people, places, and things. The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge are two very closely related gifts. The gift of knowledge is the revelation of past happenings, or things which exist or have taken place in the past or in the present. The gift of the word of wisdom is a revelation of the purpose of God pertaining to people, things, or events in the future. Let us not confuse the word of wisdom with spiritual insight or some unusual understanding of God's Word. The word of wisdom is a supernatural declaration used through a person to reveal the mind and will of God. The gift of the word of wisdom can be manifested when God reveals to a person something that is going to happen in the future, and as He reveals it, it will tend to warn or show what will come to pass. Many times it is used to warn individuals, or a group, of approaching danger, to deliver them from the effects of this danger. It can also be used to reveal blessings as well as judgment that will come upon individuals or a group of people.

This gift is also used to reveal God's plan to those He is going to use. They do not know it by intuition or knowledge, but by God revealing what should be done. He did this in the Old Testament on many

occasions, such as the word of wisdom to Moses revealing how to carry forth His plans that the people of Israel might be set free. When Joseph was sent into the land of Egypt, he was able to feed his brethren when the famine came upon the land. God had revealed His purpose, showed forth the dream, and given him wisdom to approach the circumstances. This gift can also reveal the will of God in all of His commandments and ordinances. Every place in the scriptures that we see "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not" is an unfolding of God's eternal purpose, and the word of wisdom given to us by God unveils His divine purposes.

"...To another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit..."

This gift is a supernatural revelation by the Holy Spirit of certain facts. It is from the mind of God. The one operating this gift gives nothing, but is merely one who receives that which is in God's mind. It has no natural aspects to it. It is a revelation from God, as all gifts are the manifestations of the Spirit beyond the sphere of the natural. The gift of the word of knowledge depends upon our fellowship with God. These spiritual gifts are beyond the endowment necessary for ministers or for the one bringing the message of the Gospel. They are designed for an additional purpose. They are intended for the miraculous signs accompanying and confirming the preaching and teaching of God's Word. The Lord has said, "These signs shall follow them that believe..." This gift is used in many cases to reveal the cause of sickness or even demon possession, and to know men's thoughts (Jesus used this gift many times, as did Peter and the other disciples). This gift is also used to reveal corruption and evil in the midst of the body of Christ, the church. It can be a great aid in effectual prayer for God's servants in distress, and for those who need spiritual help.

"...To another faith by the same Spirit..."

The gift of faith is a gift of the Spirit to the saint so that he might work miracles or receive miracles. The gift of faith is for power. When this gift is in operation in the believer, he believes God in such a way that his word is honored by God and brought to pass. The gift of faith is distinct from the working of miracles even though it produces miracles. Faith's power receives and enjoys things by the Spirit. The gift of faith is a supernatural endowment quite distinct from what we generally term faith, and equally distinct from the other eight supernatural endowments of the Spirit. All nine gifts operate by faith, even the great gift of faith, but it differs from saving faith or from the faith which is a fruit of salvation, as we abide in the vine.

The gift of faith could be termed "miracle faith." It is for the heavenly miracles manifested on this earth by God's children. (This gift of faith is the same faith that sealed the mouths of lions.) It is also used for receiving the wonderful promises of God, which are beyond our natural understanding. The gift of faith in operation is less spectacular than that of the other gifts. Many times it is manifested without being known, but this makes it no less miraculous or supernatural. The gift of faith is used in casting out demons and in the divine commission to raise the dead.

"...To another the gift of healing, by the same Spirit..."

The gift of healing is the supernatural healing of diseases or infirmities without the means of any natural ability or help. This gift is to be used to fulfill the divine commission to heal the sick. It is not dependent upon natural man or his ability, drugs or surgery, but is a divine gift bringing forth supernatural healing of diseases or infirmities. This gift is used in the working of the ministry to destroy sickness and the works of the devil in the bodies of human beings. It is also used to draw people to the sound of the gospel, and to convince unbelievers of the truth of God's Word. As Christ said, *"Believe me for my words or else believe me for the very work's sake."* (John 14:11) This gift also inspires faith and hope in God's people. God has not left us in the world to survive in a natural way or by our own wits, but God has left in our midst the gifts of healing, the supernatural means of destroying diseases and infirmities for a supernatural people.

These manifestations of healing are gifts that are received by the one being healed. A person does not receive a "gift" to be able to heal others. This manifestation, along with all the rest in this list of spiritual gifts, is worked by the Spirit through believers that are exercising faith. This keeps us in the place where we can do nothing separate from Him. This is a very important area to understand.

"...To another the working of miracles..."

The gift of the working of miracles is a sovereign act of the Spirit of God. A miracle has no explanation other than the sovereign power of the Lord. God is not bound by His own laws. God acts as He will, either within or outside of what we understand to be His laws--either His natural laws or His supernatural. This gift is used to confirm the preaching of God's Word, to display His power and magnificence even to the raising of the dead and to the restoring of members (parts of a person's body) that have been lost or withered.

"...To another prophecy..."

The gift of prophecy is a divinely inspired and anointed utterance. It is entirely supernatural, as are the other utterance gifts that we will discuss. Prophecy is a supernatural utterance in a known tongue. It is the manifestation of the Spirit of God and not of the human mind. It is a divine act straight from heaven. We will see that the human will and faith are active in the working of the gift of prophecy, but not the human intelligence. Its pronouncements come with the same authority and power regardless of whether they are spoken by a peasant or by one who is very learned. Whether peasant or learned, both are only mouthpieces for the expression of God's divine words. We must not confuse the gift of prophecy with the office of a prophet. The office of a prophet is inseparable from a person, but the gift of prophecy is only an instrument. This instrument, the prophetic gift of the Spirit, does not qualify a man for the prophetic office. Greater gifts than the gift of prophecy are needed to make a man a prophet.

There is a great mistake made by many who reason in the natural, saying that the gift of prophecy is prediction of future events. When we examine the gift we will find that it does not in itself convey the power to predict the future. The fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians in no way leads us to believe that it is used to foretell or predict the future. The gift of prophecy, as we have stated, is simply a divinely inspired anointed utterance. The word "prophecy" does not mean to foretell but simply to speak for another.

Prophecy is confused many times with preaching, and if we allow this gift to be defined as preaching, we allow it to be robbed of its supernatural character. We can see a distinction, for in true preaching the

natural mind, with its expression in words, is operated by the Spirit. In prophesying the mind of the Spirit is speaking through natural speech organs by divine inspiration. Heavenly preaching is a word, divinely inspired, but not supernatural. Prophesying is entirely supernatural. Let us say right here that a good deal of what passes for preaching today is neither prophecy nor preaching in any scriptural sense.

Prophecy is for speaking unto persons supernaturally. In tongues men speak to God supernaturally, and in prophecy God speaks to men supernaturally, through the speech organs of men. The gift of prophecy is to edify the church. The prophetic word is intended for and should be confined to the church, which is a body of believers. It is used to exhort the church. As one writer put it, it is "a calling near, to comfort the church and to give consolation and solace in time of trials or distress."

In I Corinthians 14:24-25,31 we see that prophecy is used in the church that believers may learn, and to convict the unbeliever and make manifest the secrets of his heart. The possessor of the gift of prophecy is responsible for its use. We see in Romans 12:6 that as in the rest of the gifts, faith must be exercised in prophesying, and we should prophesy according to the measure of faith that we have.

"...And to another the discerning of spirits..."

The gift of the discerning of spirits is a supernatural insight into the secret realm of spirits. It reveals the kind of spirit that is activating the person who is manifesting supernatural knowledge or power, at the time the miracle is actually taking place. By the operation of this gift one can know the true source and nature of any supernatural manifestation, whether divine or satanic. The character of such spiritual manifestations can only be determined by the use of this gift. It is not discerning the body, but the discernment of spirits. This gift is used in delivering the afflicted, oppressed, and tormented, and in discovering or unveiling a servant of the devil. It can be used to reveal the plan of Satan and as an aid in checking him, to reveal seducing spirits and lying spirits, to unveil doctrines of devils and damnable heresies, and to unmask demon miracle workers. Not only should we be desirous of this gift that we might know the working of Satan and reveal his hand, but we should go forth to set the oppressed free, knowing by this gift what is of God and what is of Satan.

"...And to another divers kinds of tongues..."

This gift of tongues is a supernatural utterance by the Holy Spirit in a language never learned by the speaker. It is not understood by the mind of the speaker, and usually not understood by the hearers. It is a manifestation of the mind of the Spirit of God, employing human speech organs. When a man is speaking with tongues his mind, intellect, and understanding are not in operation. It is the faculties of God that are active. Man's will certainly is active, as well as his spirit and his speech organs, but the mind that is operating is the mind of God through the Holy Spirit. The gift of tongues has two uses. Both are brought out in the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians.

The first use is the operation of the gift of tongues in the church or body of believers. When this gift is manifested in the church it must be accompanied by the related gift of interpretation of tongues. The gift of tongues, with the gift of interpretation, is for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of the body.

Let us not try to make something out of these gifts that God's Word does not, but let us keep them in the proper order, as God has intended, and they will do the job that God has placed them in the midst of His church to do. This gift should be exercised according to the order set forth in I Corinthians 14:27, *"If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret."* Many have taken this to mean that they can only have three messages in tongues

at the most. But we feel this means no more than two in succession, and at the most three, and after three messages in tongues one should interpret. The passage goes on to say that if there be no interpreter, the man should keep silent in the church, and "*speak to himself, and to God.*" Those who speak in tongues should pray that they might interpret (I Corinthians 14:13).

This is a gift that is freely given and needs much knowledge in its operation, that the church might be edified. Paul said, "*I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying*" (I Corinthians 14:5). We feel this gift of tongues should be exercised with clarity and with authority when spoken in the church, as the Spirit of God moves upon the ones speaking, and that reverence be given to the voice of God as it is recognized speaking to us through this gift. The gift of tongues must be exercised with much love. When dealt with wrongly, or when out of order, it tends to kill the life which dwells in the body of believers who would manifest these gifts. As these gifts are encouraged and manifested, they must be kept in order with love and sincerity of heart, that the body might receive edification and that others in our midst will covet and allow God to use them to manifest these supernatural gifts of the Spirit. We can usually test the proper usage of these gifts by the edification given to the body of believers.

We must also recognize the gift of tongues used in the believer's own private life, as set forth in the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians. This gift is used that men may speak supernaturally to God and that the believer might be personally edified. If this gift is used properly in the church and in believers' lives, we will see both edified. Tongues, along with the other gifts, is one of the means by which we become a supernatural moving body of believers. We cannot do away with any of God's wonderful gifts. We must yield to the life of God in the Spirit so that the fullness of God's grace might be revealed and so that the body of believers can have all God has given for its operation in this hour.

This gift of tongues is used for our worship, as described in I Corinthians 14:2: "*For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.*" How can we take away from the wonderful supernatural manifestations of the gifts of tongues that God has given to His people, enabling us to speak to Him not only in our own understanding, but in the limitless vocabulary of the Holy Spirit? We pray in the Spirit, and we magnify and praise the Lord in the Spirit.

"...To another the interpretation of tongues..."

Interpretation of tongues is a supernatural showing forth, by the Spirit, of the meaning of an utterance in other tongues. This interpretation is not an operation of the mind of the one interpreting, but of the mind of the Spirit of God. The interpreter, or the one who is exercising the gift of interpretation, never understands the tongue he is interpreting. The interpretation is just as much a miracle as the original utterance of tongues. Both utterances are equally direct from the mind of the Spirit of God. We see very plainly by reading the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians that the gift of interpretation of tongues is dependent entirely upon the operation of the gift of tongues.

Unless the gift of tongues is in operation there can be no interpretation of tongues. With the gift of prophecy this is not so, and we see in the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians that tongues with interpretation is considered equal with the gift of prophecy. Both gifts are for use in the assembly of believers. The gift of interpretation is not the translation of tongues, but an interpretation or declaration of the tongues--declaring the meaning of the message brought forth in tongues. The Greek word in the original means to explain thoroughly; it does not mean to translate.

There is one important fact pertaining to the three utterance gifts used in the assembly of believers, and this should be held utmost in the mind of the believers when the gifts are in operation. When the gift of tongues is brought, the believers should reverence the supernatural utterance of the Spirit. They should listen for the interpretation of that tongue in order to understand what God is saying to them, and that they might be edified, exhorted, and comforted. For too long we have not given the voice of God its proper reverence or place in our worship service, so let us reverence the gifts of God that we might be edified, and go forth when we have been built up in Him, to accomplish his purpose in our lives.

We do not feel that scripture has put any limits on the amount or number of manifestations of these gifts, but the believer should be wise and all things done for edification. If gifts are used in excess continually, they could lose their effectiveness in fulfilling the purpose of God. In many gatherings the gifts themselves are glorified rather than being used to build up the church in Christ. The scriptures reveal that the spirit of the prophet is subject unto the prophets, so let us be wise in all things, that the Lord might be glorified as the Head of His body.

In closing this discussion of gifts of the Spirit, let us say this: God has put gifts in the midst of the church that He might use all members; therefore let no one monopolize the gifts of the Spirit, but let us wait on the Lord, that He might use all the members who will yield to the Spirit.

"But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." (I Corinthians 12:11,12)

A Closer Look at Prophecy As God Designed

As we put the proper value on the gifts of the Spirit, and understand their purpose, we might look more closely at the gift of prophecy. The purpose of this particular gift is not to be the last word in directing us, nor do we wait for prophecy to tell us what to do or when to do it. God's Word says the Spirit will lead us. As we have spiritual understanding in what the gift of prophecy is and what responsibility goes with its use, this gift will begin to fulfill its purpose in our gathering. But we do not depend on prophecy to govern or direct our lives.

The genuine gift of prophecy never contradicts the written Word of God, nor does it go further than the Scriptures. Let us first consider Scripture and its purpose, so as not to confuse it with the purpose of prophecy or any other gift. God has given Scripture by inspiration and it is *"profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* (II Timothy 3:16,17) The Scriptures are infallible, but prophecy (the gift) can fail, because of the vessels that are used. This gift operates by faith through a human vessel. For this reason there is always the possibility of a mistake--not that God is ever wrong, but man can be wrong because of different reasons, which we will discuss as we go on to see the proper usage and value of the gift of prophecy.

This gift of prophecy meets a certain need in the body of Christ. Prophecy (the gift) is for our building up, to stir us up and to comfort us (the church). If we make prophecy more than God makes it or use it for a purpose other than what God designed it for, we distort the image of Christ that is being revealed in any particular locality and we move into our own works and knowledge, thus moving out of the will of God. Man's misuse of this gift gives us no excuse or reason not to allow the gift of prophecy to fulfill the function God designed it for. We must allow God to show us, by His Word, its proper use and its responsibility in the church, rather than put our own values on it. Our own values put on anything brings death. This gift must be just what God has designed. Let God place His values on its

use. Then it will give life in all areas of His expression through us.

Prophecy is for edification, exhortation, and comfort. Prophecy is not used for judgment. When we see it used for this purpose, we find the expression outside of the love of Christ rather than within His divine order set forth in His Word.

Many give prophecy more value and weight than the word brought for reproof and correction, but this is not according to the Scriptures. When a word is brought forth in God's timing and by His anointing it has value and places responsibility on those who hear it. If we think the gift of prophecy can take the place of or supersede other ministries, or that it has greater value than God's truth brought in some other manner, we have not allowed the life in the Spirit to show us God's values and purposes. We may find ourselves being a judge of God's anointing rather than a partaker of His life. We can never fail to realize that everything the Spirit is doing, in manner or manifestation, is important to the full expression of Himself. Let the Spirit reveal and teach us in this important area of His ministry through and in us.

We must be faithful in moving and declaring God's ways and His word at the time and with the ability that He gives. If we move in ourselves outside of faith in His word, the words brought forth have no life or value in God's purpose.

We cannot say we don't need the gift of prophecy any more than we can say our lives are to be governed by this gift of prophecy. But in receiving the ministry of prophecy to the body, we find there is a need met in the life of the believer. Life is ministered by the Spirit and works in us a part of the divine work that God is doing.

The Focus: Christ

As we consider this realm of spiritual gifts, we must look to God to do all things in His power, not to some certain gift or person, even though the Spirit may use a gift or a person. The real working of the life of God is in the Spirit. When this truth is realized and understood in the Spirit, we will look to God, by His grace and ability, to always minister in His ability and put our faith in Him and Him alone. God's design is perfect for what He is doing; the Spirit is well able to bring forth the life of God in each of our lives if we will allow Him expression by setting our wills to do His will in faith.

All ministry of the Spirit brings life. All God's ways are for His highest good. This is His plan. He has not asked us how we think it should be done, any more than the potter would ask his clay how he should mold it and what it would like to be. God made man for a purpose; He is now working out that eternal purpose. We cannot change God's plan, nor should we want to. We have become part of what He is doing. We have become the expression of His image through the work of Christ on the cross. Remember, God's ways must be revealed to us by the Spirit, and this will only happen when we draw close enough to God to hear the deep things of His heart being revealed to us by His Spirit.

Paul tells us to desire earnestly, to "covet" the best gifts, but we can never seek the gift for the gift's sake. Paul goes on to instruct us and show us a more perfect way, a "*more excellent way*" (I Corinthians 12:31). There are many gifts and ministries, but God is the One who has given them all. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. All gifts and ministries are because of Him and for Him as He works His perfect work. We possess nothing in ourselves for ourselves. All things that God has given to us are to bring us to Himself in a fullness of understanding, a fullness of life. If we have been partakers of this in the power of the Spirit, we will allow God to do His perfect work and will keep our eyes only on Him, and then it will be His life being expressed. Christ must be our desire. Anything

short of this will only manifest self.

Paul tells us that all things should be done to edify. As he wrote in I Corinthians 14:6, "*...What shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?*" Paul was looking for results of eternal value to be produced in those who heard him. He didn't seek the gift for the gift's sake. He allowed the gift to bring an eternal weight of glory to his hearers. Paul put the value in Christ, not in prophecy. Prophecy is something that will pass away, but while we are here we must allow the gift of prophecy to do the work God has purposed and designed it to do in His eternal plan. Spiritual gifts only have value when they do what God designed them to do, and when they are brought forth in God's timing.

Misuse and Counterfeit

Many today have started to be used in the manifestations of the Spirit, then try to use the gift to do what they think should be done. They try to work the works of God in their own strength and understanding. When spiritual brethren in the local gathering allow this to happen, misuse, strife, and division begin to distort the image of Christ. This is why God has given discerning of spirits as one of the gifts of the Spirit--so that we can know what spirit is manifesting when any supernatural utterance or manifestation is taking place. These utterance gifts--prophecy, tongues and interpretation of tongues--can be misused. They should be the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but they can be counterfeited by our spirit or even evil spirits.

The love of God never continues to allow false manifestations of the Spirit. Correction and judgments are the only means to bring back the real manifestation, to the glory of God. Purging always assures more fruit--good fruit. We must all desire that misunderstanding and misuse be removed from our minds and hearts, and allow the Spirit to build in us and bring from us a pure flow of His life.

Diversities of Gifts - Given by God for His Purpose

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (I Corinthians 12:4-7).

Everyone does not have the same gift(s). Spiritual gifts are not just anybody and everybody speaking what they feel is good for the hearers. A spiritual gift is someone being used by the Spirit to bring forth His words and the expression that God designs, in His timing, to accomplish God's own purpose. God gives "severally as He will." We do not work God when we will. He works all things to His end purpose as we move in His faith, by His Spirit, and in the life of God, which is love. We must come together in love and allow God to work.

We must encourage each other but never try to work the works of God in our own ability. Having our hearts right will not of itself work the purpose of God, but our hearts must be right to allow God to work His perfect work through us. Our desire must always be to please Him, never focused on how much we can do for Him. We could be busy in the service of the Lord and still not be doing one thing in His eternal plan. Let us move in His purpose and enter in at the strait gate.

In our life in the Spirit there must never be self-realization, but only realizing God in every step of faith we take. In Christ, God has given us the ability to be sons. That ability is in the hand of God and the outworking of His Spirit. We are being built together as a habitation for God by the Spirit.

Groups that have no place in their midst for God to manifest Himself or to use different men in the gifts of the Spirit must first have a desire for life in God as He has designed, not a desire for man's ways.

God is looking for hearts that are looking to Him and have pleasure only in Him. If there is not yet a true experiencing of fellowship with the Father and Son, and the essential life of God working in and through the believers, this must become a reality before there can be a manifestation of that life to work the works of God. Gifts are the abilities of God to do His work through individual believers. The evidence of life is not the gifts but the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit is produced because we are abiding. Gifts are manifested through us, as we move in God's ability by faith. Paul told the brethren to desire spiritual gifts, that which would build up the church and bring us to God's end purpose, Christ filling all in all, which is fullness.

Let us seek God and prove Him, in His Word and by the witness of His Spirit, and all things will be done to His glory.