

The Blessing of Spiritual Gifts
Steven R. Cook, D.Min., M.Div.

At the moment of salvation, God gives every believer at least one spiritual gift for the purpose of serving and strengthening the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; Eph. 4:11-12). The Christian life advances through the consistent acquisition and application of God's word under the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:2). As the believer grows spiritually and walks by faith in dependence upon the Spirit, his God-given spiritual gift will naturally materialize in the normal course of Christian living and service. Scripture therefore directs believers to focus primarily on spiritual growth, maturity, and faithful service rather than becoming preoccupied or anxious about identifying their particular gift. According to Fruchtnbaum, "A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to be used by the believer in serving others; it is a supernatural ability possessed by an individual...Believers are placed by God into the church for the purpose of ministering to the body using their spiritual gifts."¹ These gifts are not merely natural talents, though God may use natural abilities alongside them. Spiritual gifts are supernatural enablements designed by God to accomplish His purposes through His people. No believer is left without a place or function in the body of Christ, for "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7).

Scripture compares the Church to a human body in which every member has a unique and necessary role (1 Cor. 12:12-27). Just as the human body depends upon many parts working together properly, so believers depend upon one another for encouragement, instruction, service, stability, and spiritual growth. Scripture identifies a variety of spiritual gifts. The gift of apostleship involved those personally commissioned by Christ to lay the foundational ministry of the early Church through revelation and authority (Eph. 2:20). Prophecy involved proclaiming divine revelation before the completion of the New Testament canon (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Evangelism is the Spirit-enabled ability to communicate the gospel clearly and effectively so unbelievers come to faith in Christ (Eph. 4:11). Pastor-teachers shepherd, teach, protect, and spiritually nourish believers through the ministry of God's word (Eph. 4:11-12). Walvoord notes, "While it is not necessary for a teacher to have all the qualities of a pastor, it is vital to the work of a true pastor that he teach his flock."² Exhortation encourages, comforts, motivates,

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ruach HaKodesh: God the Holy Spirit* (Ariel Ministries, 2019), 5.

² John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Galaxie Software, 2008), 170.

and strengthens believers in their spiritual walk (Rom. 12:8). It is the ability to influence people to apply God's word as needed. Teaching involves the clear explanation and application of biblical truth so believers grow in spiritual understanding (Rom. 12:7; 1 Pet. 2:2). According to Walvoord:

The gift of teaching is mentioned specifically a number of times in the New Testament (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11), and it must be considered as one of the major gifts...The teaching gift consisted in a supernatural ability to explain and apply the truths which had been already received by the church. As such it is related to, but not identical with, illumination, which is a divinely wrought understanding of the truth.³

The gift of serving, or helps, provides practical support and assistance to others within the body of Christ (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28). Giving enables believers to contribute materially with generosity and wisdom for the needs of others and advancement of ministry (Rom. 12:8). Fruchtenbaum states, "Those who have this gift should do it with liberality. While everyone is responsible to give, those with this gift will be able to give to a far greater degree. Some people who have this gift have given away as much as 90 percent of their income to the work of the ministry."⁴ Leadership, or administration, involves organizing, guiding, and directing ministries effectively and wisely (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28). Mercy enables believers to minister compassion, comfort, and care to those who are suffering or distressed (Rom. 12:8). The gift of faith involved unusual confidence in God's power and promises for specific situations of ministry (1 Cor. 12:9). According to Fruchtenbaum, "While all believers have saving faith, not all believers have the gift of faith. The gift of faith is the God-given ability to trust God in any and all circumstances without a shadow of a doubt."⁵ The gifts of wisdom and knowledge involved Spirit-given insight and understanding particularly useful during the foundational era of the Church (1 Cor. 12:8). Distinguishing of spirits enabled certain believers to discern truth from false spiritual influences and deceptive teaching (1 Cor. 12:10).

Some gifts were temporary sign gifts given primarily during the apostolic age to authenticate God's new revelation and the ministry of the apostles (Heb. 2:3-4). These included miracles, healings, tongues, and interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10). Miracles involved supernatural displays of divine power beyond ordinary

³ Ibid., 168.

⁴ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ruach HaKodesh*, 5.

⁵ Ibid., 5.

providence. Healings involved supernatural restoration from sickness. Tongues involved the miraculous ability to speak in previously unlearned human languages, particularly as a sign to unbelieving Israel (Acts 2:4-11; 1 Cor. 14:21-22). Interpretation of tongues enabled the translation of those languages so the Church could be edified (1 Cor. 14:27-28). With the completion of the New Testament Scriptures and the passing of the apostolic era, these revelatory sign gifts to have fulfilled their foundational purpose (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 2:20). Walvoord states:

With the completion of the New Testament, and its almost universal acceptance by those true to God, the need for further unusual display of miraculous works ceased. The preacher of today does not need the outward evidence of ability to heal or speak with tongues to substantiate the validity of his gospel. Rather, the written Word speaks for itself, and is attended by the convicting power of the Spirit.”⁶

Spiritual gifts are given for the edification of others rather than self-exaltation. Paul repeatedly emphasized that ministry within the Church should strengthen, encourage, and build up fellow believers (1 Cor. 14:12, 26; Eph. 4:16). Peter wrote, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10). Believers therefore function as stewards rather than owners of their gifts. Radmacher notes, “Stewards are managers or trustees who will be held accountable for using their gift in the best interest of the One who gave it to them.”⁷ God entrusts these abilities to His people so they may serve faithfully, glorify Him, and benefit others. Spiritual gifts should always operate in love, humility, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit, for giftedness without love becomes empty and destructive (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

The believer bears responsibility to discover, develop, and faithfully exercise his spiritual gift through spiritual growth, study of God’s word, prayer, service, and active involvement with other believers. As the believer consistently acquires and applies Scripture to life under the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit, his spiritual gift will naturally manifest itself in ways that edify others and glorify God. Gifts often become clearer through consistent service and the affirmation of other mature Christians. Fear, passivity, carnality, pride, or neglect may hinder effective use of one’s gift, whereas walking by the Spirit promotes fruitful ministry (Gal. 5:16). Scripture encourages believers not to neglect the ministries God has entrusted to

⁶ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 174.

⁷ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 1687.

them (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Though spiritual gifts differ widely, every faithful act of Spirit-led service contributes to the unity, maturity, stability, and spiritual growth of the Church and brings glory to Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the body (Eph. 4:15-16).