

Dr. Jack L. Arnold

THE HOLY SPIRIT

SPIRITUAL GIFTS – DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTRY

Lesson 6

DEFINITION OF A SPIRITUAL GIFT

A spiritual gift is a supernatural gift or ability given by God in special grace to Christians for the purpose of service to build the church.

A spiritual gift must be distinguished from a natural talent. A natural talent is an ability given by God in common grace to all men to better the human race. Natural talents would include abilities like art, music, and athletic talent.

This raises the question as to whether music is a talent or spiritual gift. It is a natural talent but it is usually accompanied with the gift of encouragement. Unsaved men can sing, but only saved people can sing in such a way that it honors and glorifies God.

THE PURPOSE OF GIFTS

There are four clear purposes for spiritual gifts: 1) to promote the unity of the body of Christ. ***“That there be no division in the body” (1 Cor. 12:15)***; 2) to promote the growth of the Body (Eph. 4:13-16); 3) to promote the evangelization of the lost (Eph. 4:11-12), and 4) to bring glory to God (1 Pet. 4:11). There may be a fifth purpose and that is to encourage other members of the body. Those who have the gift of faith, evangelism, giving, etc. become an encouragement to others to do the same on a lesser level.

DEFINING THE GIFTS

Some try to divide the twenty or so gifts mentioned in Scripture into the supernatural and natural gifts, but that is inaccurate since all gifts are supernatural. It is best to categorize the gifts as ordinary and extra-ordinary.

Spiritual gifts are given for the common good of the church to motivate God’s people and to stir them to action. All Christians are to have faith, but there are some that have the gift of faith. All Christians are to help but there are some with the gift of helps. All Christians are to give money but there is a gift of giving for some. All Christians are to teach, help, serve and show mercy to each other but there are also special gifts in these areas. All Christians are to pray for healing, but some Christians have the special gift of healing. God gives all these gifts to spur us on to higher things for Him.

Ordinary Gifts

Evangelist. ***“It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).*** An evangelist is one who has a special gift of reaching the lost and bringing them into the church. He can communicate the gospel in relevant terms to the unsaved. The evangelist also has the responsibility to equip and train the saints to do the work of evangelism.

Pastor-Teacher. ***“. . . and some to be pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).*** The pastor-teacher (one gift according to the Greek) is one who instructs and cares for Christians. The evangelist deals with the initiation of a person into the Christian life, while the pastor-teacher is involved with the development and growth of that life. Evangelists are obstetricians and pastor-teachers are pediatricians. Some are paid full time to be pastor-teachers. Others are laymen pastor-teachers without pay. Christians with this gift would be involved in teaching, shepherding, counseling and discipling. Both men and women could have the gift of pastor-teacher.

Service. ***“If it is serving, let him serve” (Rom. 12:7).*** This comes from the same root from which we get the word “deacon” which means “one who serves.” This would be service to help others, which would include hospitality and the ability to meet in a practical way the physical and spiritual needs of others. This person also displays a willingness to do the menial tasks without receiving any human glory.

Encouragement. ***“If it is encouraging, let him encourage” (Rom. 12:8).*** This is the ability to encourage and comfort, move the will, warm the heart and impel to action.

Giving. ***“If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously” (Rom. 12:8).*** This is a special ability to contribute money. These folks are able to give liberally whether rich or poor. This gift may also involve the ability to make money and give it for the furtherance of the gospel of Christ. Those who have this gift give with great delight and joy.

Leading. ***“If it is leadership, let him govern diligently” (Rom. 12:8).*** This is the special ability of leadership. Literally, this means, “one who stands in front.” This would be those who emcee meetings, conduct panels, chair committees, organize people, and motivate the masses of people.

Showing Mercy. ***“If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Rom. 12: 8).*** This is a special ability to deal with the sick and the afflicted. This person is able to identify with and comfort those who are in distress. He or she has a real sensitivity to the emotional needs of others.

Helps. ***“Those able to help others” (I Cor. 12:28).*** This is the ability to lend a hand whenever a need appears, but do it in such a way that it encourages and strengthens others. In the church, it often appears in those who do behind the scene ministries such as ushering, serving dinners, running the sound booth, preparing communion, working in the nursery, arranging flowers, etc. Hospitality would be included in helps. Those with the gift of helps make it

possible for those with the up front gifts to function more effectively. Everyone is indebted to those who have the gift of helps.

Teacher. ***“Third teachers” (I Cor. 12:28).*** This person has the special ability to explain and to apply the truth of the Word of God. He or she also has the ability to communicate truth to others so they can learn and understand the content.

Administration. ***“Those with the gifts of administration” (I Cor. 12:18).*** Literally, this says “one who pilots.” It is a special ability to lead and administrate in the local church. Those with this gift can coordinate and administrate. They have the ability to see the overall picture and to clarify long-range goals. With this gift comes the ability to know how to delegate responsibility.

Word of Wisdom. ***“To one there is given through the Spirit the message (word) of wisdom” (I Cor. 12:8).*** Some think this is an extra-ordinary gift. However, it is not mentioned anywhere else neither in the Scripture nor in any other early Christian literature. This spiritual gift is the ability to bring practical, spiritual insight in a timely way to a specific problem. It is the ability to apply the Word of God to any situation. Gaining knowledge may not be this person's forte but he or she is strong in living to apply the Word of God in a practical way. This is wisdom based on biblical content not on mystical experiences.

Word of Knowledge. ***“To another the message (word) of knowledge” (I Cor. 12:8).*** This is a gift mentioned only in 1 Corinthians 12:8, so there is no biblical or historical help with this gift. Some think this is an extra-ordinary gift. This spiritual gift is the ability to deal with the theoretical and philosophical aspects of the Word of God. This person has great ability to perceive and systematize the great truths that hidden in the Word of God.

The word of knowledge could possibly be keen insight into specific problems such as when Christ saw into the Samaritan woman's many husbands or when Peter had Holy Spirit leading on Annanias' and Sapphira's real problem of lying to the Holy Spirit.

Today charismatics claim word of knowledge is a gift of getting special revelation from God. We have all seen and heard on TV during the healing time where the host says, “The Lord is telling me someone with a stomach ulcer will be healed” or “I am visualizing a woman who has just come back from the doctor who told her she has cancer, but God says you are being healed – “just believe.” What we see in these so-called TV healers is primarily the subtle power of suggestion and there is no way this can be substantiated. *Yet, God at times does providentially guide Christians so as to lay strongly on their hearts that something is going to happen. If this is truly from Him, this impression will surely come to pass.*

Faith. ***“To another faith” (I Cor. 12:9).*** This gift is the ability to believe God's power to supply and provide. This is the ability to see something that needs to be done and believe that God will do it even when it looks impossible. Some think this is an extra-ordinary gift and is linked with miracles, healing and casting out of demons, but there is no reason to think that this is nothing more than extraordinary faith, which believes God to move mountains.

This is not the kind of faith we hear about today which dogmatically and defiantly asserts, “You are healed” or “The pain will go away” or “You will not die” when in reality the pain has not gone away, the person is not healed and the person dies anyway. This is

presumption and self-deception not faith. *Yet, in some situations, God does grant extraordinary faith and things supernaturally happen.*

Discerning Spirits. ***“To another distinguishing between spirits” (1 Cor. 12:10).*** This gift is mentioned only here and nowhere else in the Bible; therefore, it is hard to know exactly what this gift may be. This gift is the ability to spot a phony, to detect false doctrine and to point out counterfeits. The person with this gift must be careful about getting a negative attitude, becoming judgmental, jumping to conclusions about words, actions and motives, displaying a unforgiving spirit and cutting off those who do fall into error or sin.

Some believe this is an extra-ordinary gift. If so, then it includes the ability to recognize the influences of the Holy Spirit or demonic spirits in a person.

Extra-ordinary Gifts

Apostle. ***“It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).*** Technically “apostle” refers to the office of Apostle that was given to the original Twelve. ***“Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20).*** Only the Twelve will sit on the throne judging over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28), and in the eternal city will have twelve foundations with name of the Twelve Apostles (Rev. 22:14). There are no apostles today with apostolic authority as the original Twelve. The office of apostle passed out of existence after the first century.

Some believe that the gift of apostle may still be with the church today but not the office of apostle. The gift of apostle continues today in a non-technical sense. The word “apostle” means, “send one”. It would be equivalent to the modern day missionary or church planter. We know the Bible refers to James (Gal. 1:19) and Barnabas (Acts 14:14) as apostles. Others of lesser status were also called apostles such as Epaphroditus (Philip. 2:25) and Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7). There is no continuing official office of Apostle but there is the continuing of the gift of apostle that is primarily church planing or a pioneer missionary.

Healing. ***“To another the gifts of healing” (1 Cor. 12:9).*** This gift is the ability to heal physically, psychologically and spiritually. Literally, this says, “gifts of healings.” A person may have the gift to be the instrument God uses to effect supernatural physical healing, or he might have the natural gift of healing coupled with faith to be used in healing the physical body through natural means. There may also be psychological, inner healing by supernatural means or by the skills of a talented counselor with the gift of faith.

Miracles. ***“To another miraculous powers” (1 Cor. 12:10).*** This literally says, “the workings of powers.” It is in the plural so it may indicate different levels of miracles. This gift is the ability to release the power of God in a unique and supernatural way. Christ and the Apostles did miracles such as putting back a cut off ear, shaking buildings, walking on water, raising people from the dead, etc. (2 Cor. 12:12). There are men and women today who claim to have this gift as there have been those who claimed to have it in the past, but they do not seem to meet the biblical criteria. At the highest level, I do not believe there are gifted Christians who are doing miracles with the same intensity as those of Christ and the Apostles. However, if miracles imply the ability to cast out demons as some claim, then I believe that this gift is most certainly in the church today.

Prophecy. ***“To another prophecy” (1 Cor. 12:10).*** This is the ability to speak the mind of God whether that is by preaching the Bible or telling something which God has spontaneously brought to mind.

Tongues. ***“To another speaking in different kinds of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:10).*** This is the ability to speak forth a language one has never learned and which he or she does not understand. These tongues could take the form of a literal foreign language as set forth in Acts 2 or an unintelligible verbal prayer language as set forth in 1 Corinthians 14.

Interpretation of Tongues. ***“And to still another the interpretation of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:10).*** This is the ability to interpret a foreign language one has never learned or to give an intelligible interpretation of an unintelligible verbal utterance.

GENERAL STATEMENTS ABOUT GIFTS

Most gifts are sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. ***“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Cor. 12:11).*** ***“But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be” (1 Cor. 12:18).*** However, it may be that some gifts are given after salvation. ***“But eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31).***

Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. ***“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others . . .” (1 Pet. 4:10).*** There is no such thing as a true Christian without a spiritual gift.

The Christian probably has more than one gift. The Apostle Paul had the gifts of apostle, evangelist, teacher and tongues (1 Tim. 1:11; 4:5; 1 Cor. 14:18).

Gifts differ in value to the body but all are important. ***“And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of administration and those speaking in different kinds of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:18).*** ***“He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified” (1 Cor. 14:5).*** Notice that tongues is put at the end of the list. Tongues may be the least important gift.

Gifts probably differ in degree as seen through general observation from experience. One person may be more effective than another when both may have the same gift and are filled with the Spirit. Paul was a more effective evangelist than Timothy or Titus but all were evangelists.

Spiritual gifts are to always be used in love or they will divide the body of Christ. ***“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1-2).*** Those with extra-ordinary gifts often think of themselves as more spiritual than those who do not have these gifts (1 Cor. 14:36-38).

APPLICATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO LIFE

However small the gift or insignificant the place, every Christian is essential to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:22). Every believer has a place in the body of Christ that no other Christian can fill. Each person is unique to the body of Christ. There is a divine purpose in the life of every Christian and spiritual gifts are in keeping with that purpose.

Every Christian has a ministry to fulfill for which he has been equipped by God and for which God holds him responsible. It is sin not to know one's gift and be using it for the glory of God.

Spiritual gifts are only effective for eternity when one is controlled by the Spirit of God. Great gifts do not make great Christians. One may use a gift in the flesh but in so doing, no glory will be brought to God. One must be yielded to the Spirit for the gift to be fully operative.

The members of the body of Christ are dependent upon the Head, Christ, for leadership and upon each other for cooperation.

When a believer is not using his gift for the glory of God, then the whole body suffers. If the church is lame and sick today, it may be because the members are not exercising their gifts. ***“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).***

HOW TO DISCOVER SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Do you have a desire for a particular gift? It would seem strange for God to impart a gift and then give no desire for it. A person may have a gift and a desire but be afraid to try something new or be frightened of people. Failure is no shame. Failure may simply show that you do not have the gift in an area and then you seek to find what your gift is.

Others will recognize this gift in you. While you may feel insecure or awkward in a gift, others will recognize your potential. You may not even be aware that you have a gift, but others will bring it to your attention.

Others will be blessed by the use of your gift. You may feel as though you are inadequate in some gifting, but others will declare spiritual blessing when you use your gift.

There will be fruit in the particular area of your gift. Those who claim certain gifts will see fruit and get definite results from their gifts as they use them in the body of Christ.

DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Although gifts are supernaturally bestowed, they must be developed. ***“But eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31). “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong--that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith” (Rom. 1:11). “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6).***

An individual may be ambitious to exercise certain gifts but this ambition can only be fulfilled by study and hard work. If you are called to be a teacher or a pastor-teacher, you will have to give many hours to study of God's Word.

Never measure your gift by your fruit now. Fruitfulness comes with the gradual development of your gift. Set out to find your gifts and then through patience and perseverance seek to put them to work in the Lord's service, preferably in the local church.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND THE MINISTRY (Eph. 4:7, 11-16)

A more literal translation from the original Greek of Ephesians 4:11,12 is:

“And he (Christ) gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastor-teachers for the equipping of the saints (Christians) unto the work of ministry (the unsaved), unto the building up of the body of Christ (the saved).”

The average Christian today thinks that the clergy is to do the work of the ministry and his job is to pay the clergy to do it. But the Bible teaches that the saints (Christians) are to do the work of the ministry. A failure to see that the role of the clergy is to train the saints to do the work of the ministry has resulted in untold damage to the Christian Church. The concept of ministering saints must be driven home again and again to Christians until they understand that God has placed upon them the responsibility of the ministry.

Gifted Men to the Church (Eph. 4:7,11).

Spiritual gifts have been given by God’s grace to every Christian. The subject of Ephesians 4:11-16 is about spiritual gifts.

Christ has given gifted men to the church – apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers. Some believe that “apostles” and “prophets” are used in a special sense (technical) and refer to the first century gifts of the Apostles and Prophets that are not now operate in the church. However, others take “apostles” and “prophets” in a more general sense (non-technical) and refer to the gifts of church planter and missionary. These would train those who feel called to plant churches and encourage the body.

The gift of evangelist is a special gift of reaching the lost and bringing them into the body of Christ, the church. The evangelist probably has the responsibility of training the saints to be evangelistic. The pastor-teacher has the duty of caring for and instructing the flock from the Bible.

Gifted Men Are to Equip the Saints (Eph. 4:12a)

The gifted men (clergy) are to equip the saints. The word “equip” can be translated complete or perfect. The task of the gifted men is to equip or train the saints to do the work of the ministry. The word “for” in the Greek is the word *pros*, and in context, speaks of the immediate or near goal that is to be attained; that is, the equipping of the saints.

Saints can only be equipped as they are grounded in the Word of God, encouraged to put this knowledge to work in their experience, and shown how to use their gift for the glory of God. This training involves not only teaching but also showing them how to do the work of the ministry with their particular gift.

The Saints Are to Reach the Lost (Eph. 4:12).

Saints are to be trained “unto the work of the ministry.” The “ministry” most likely refers to reaching the lost for Jesus Christ. This word “ministry” is used in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19:

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

Obviously, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 is referring to reaching the lost with the message of reconciliation. The word “ministry” is the same word as that in Ephesians 4:11-12, and seems to be referring to reaching the lost for Christ.

The “unto” is the Greek word *heis*, which in context refers to the far or distant goal; that is, saints reaching the lost with the gospel. The world will never be reached for Christ until the saints do it. No local church will ever be truly evangelistic until the saints become personally involved in reaching the lost for Jesus Christ.

The Saints Are to Build the Church (Eph. 4:12c)

Saints are to be trained “unto the building up the body of Christ.” It is the Christians who are to do most of the building up of the body of Christ, not the clergy. ***“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11).***

The pastor is not to do all the visitation, calling on the sick, instruction, administration, etc. It must be done by the saints or no local church will function properly.

The Process of Gifted Men Training the Saints for the Ministry Produces Maturity (Eph. 4:13-16)

This process is to continue until all Christians exercise unity in the Faith, demonstrate a full knowledge of Christ and reach ultimate maturity, experiencing the fullness of Jesus Christ. This process will go on until the Second Advent of Christ (4:13).

This maturing process is to keep the Christian from doctrinal instability and false teaching (4:14). It is also to develop the Christian in love, so the believer may learn to speak the truth in love (4:15-16).

