

Spiritual Gifts



**“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”
(1 Corinthians 13:1)**

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Apostle Paul's counsel on "Spiritual Gifts" follows:

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

"Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

"Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost [Spirit].

"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.

"For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

"To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

“To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

“But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

“For the body is not one member, but many.

**“If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?”
(1 Cor. 12:1-15)**

The lesson we would particularly like to emphasize is in the last verse. Here a Christian is condemning himself because he does not possess the gifts that a fellow Christian has. In inspecting his own life, he realizes he lacks certain qualities that others have, and therefore, he misjudges himself. However, the Apostle Paul taught that every Christian has some talent, some gift, some portion of the Holy Spirit, that he is to utilize in service for the Lord.

“And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?” (1 Cor. 12:16)

Whether the ear says it is of the body or whether the ear says it is not of the body does not matter, for *it is of the body*.

“If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?”

“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

“And if they were all one member, where were the body?”

“But now are they many members, yet but one body.” (1 Cor. 12:17-20)

The diversity of gifts in connection with Christian service is a very helpful condition of variety and harmony, with each Christian supplying something that is lacking. As a result, all of the saints and their services compact the body together into a communion of fellowship that is most wholesome and sweet (Eph. 4:16). The analogy is carried forward in the next verse, as follows:

“And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” (1 Cor. 12:21)

As Christians, we must recognize that other Christians have abilities and that we do not possess everything ourselves. Not only for our own good and our own Christian development must we recognize that others possess qualities we can emulate and benefit from, but also we must be careful not to imply that others are not of the body if they do not follow along with us in the acquisition of certain gifts. Thus those in the body of Christ are susceptible to two kinds of dangerous condemnation. One is where the Christian, in self-examination, condemns himself unnecessarily, and the second is where the Christian looks down on others in the body as not performing any particular needful function. Indeed there is room for Christian service in the body of Christ in varying capacities, and the Holy Spirit operates through all the members. Appreciating and recognizing these characteristics in one another will benefit the whole body.

**“Nay, much more those members of the body,
which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.”
(1 Cor. 12:22)**

While the hand may be very prominent in certain activities and the foot, the eye, and the ear in other activities, the remaining members of the body are just as essential for other biological functions. Therefore, all are needful in varying degrees and in the services that they perform.

“And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

“For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

“That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.” (1 Cor. 12:23-25)

An important lesson for the Christian is that the members of the body should have the same care one for another.

“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

“Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

“Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:26-30)

The obvious answer is no. The Apostle has just finished reasoning that not all Christians have the same gifts, but among all of the gifts, he begins to show us a better way.

“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

(1 Cor. 12:31; 13:1)

Now we come to an important consideration in connection with this subject. The Apostle cautioned that though we were to speak with the tongues of men or of angels, we would, in reality, be only a “tinkling cymbal” of “sounding brass” if we lacked the quality or disposition of charity or love. The Revised Standard Version translates the passage, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.”

(1 Cor. 13:2)

By no means was the Apostle Paul trying to minimize the importance of spiritual gifts and saying that the acquisition of

knowledge and faith is not necessary for the Christian life, for all of the gifts are helpful in varying degrees. However, he was emphasizing that the most important fruit of the Spirit is charity, love, Godlikeness—for “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8).

**“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”
(1 Cor. 13:3)**

Everyone in the early Church received a certain mechanical gift through the laying on of hands of the apostles: the gift of prophecy, the gift of a certain degree of knowledge, the gift of predicting famines and earthquakes, the gift of remembering and repeating large portions of the Old Testament, the gift of explaining and interpreting the meaning of the portions of Scripture that were declared from memory, the gift of healing, or some other kind of gift. All of these gifts were more or less like toys a child receives. They were given to the early Church to encourage them in their Christian growth and development. However, the possession of the gifts received from the laying on of hands was *nothing* in comparison with the *fruits* of the Holy Spirit, which Christians could and should develop by obeying the Word of God. The Apostle Paul was trying to lead the early Church to this *higher* type of gift, for even if they had *all* of the mechanical gifts and possessed faith to move mountains and gave all of their

money to the poor, the gifts would mean nothing without the superior quality of love and a character likeness to God and His dear Son. A lack of love would prevent them from attaining the blessing and “prize of the high calling” (Phil. 3:14).

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

“Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

“Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

“Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

What is “love”? There is no easy definition. Some have likened love to a prism of light as broken down by the Apostle into various characteristics in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. However, we are not to think of this chapter in a mathematical sense or as being all-inclusive. Rather, it shows the qualities of love and different facets of its operation. The essence of the chapter is that charity shows love *for others* and is solicitous for the welfare of *others*. Our conduct in life, our preaching, and all of our activities should be in the direction of edifying the children of God, for the desire to edify and help others is the basic characteristic of love, which operates in various fields of activity.

“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

(1 Cor. 13:8-10)

Many of the other gifts are transitory in nature, but the quality of love is another matter. Love lasts for *eternity* in comparison to the gifts that are “childish things.”

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1 Cor. 13:11,12)

In the early Church, the gifts that came mechanically were a particular blessing. These gifts of the Spirit were conferred instantaneously and outright to the individual, whereas the other gifts, the fruits of the Spirit, are a *slow process of development*, often requiring many years to attain by obeying the instructions in the Word of God. Of these two types of gifts of the Spirit, the developed fruits are the more important ones. These are the superior

gifts that Paul was trying to get Christians to “covet earnestly” (1 Cor. 12:31).

The Bible as we know it was not available to the early Church. Many years passed before the Gospels, the epistles, and the Book of Revelation were collated into what is now called the New Testament. In the absence of the written Word, the gifts of knowledge (memorization) and interpretation were helpful and essential for the growth of the Church. Not only did the gifts encourage early Christians in development, but also the brethren needed one another in assembly to get the benefit of the Word of God. However, as the New Testament was recorded in the next century, the various mechanical gifts began to “fail” or pass away because they were no longer necessary.

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” (1 Cor. 13:13)

This verse gives us a clue. Paul’s point was not that of the gifts, only the three—faith, hope, and love—will be of an abiding nature in the Kingdom of heaven, that they are the only gifts Christians will take with them beyond the veil. He was saying that the mechanical gifts would cease, that they would be done away with in the early part of the Christian or Gospel Age. When the apostles fell asleep in death, the mechanical gifts began to decline because they were obtained by the laying on of hands by

the apostles. When the apostles were off the scene and no one else could impart the mechanical gifts, the gifts died in a natural way. Throughout the remainder of the Gospel Age, however, the other three qualities would remain: “And *now* [that is, in the Gospel Age] abideth faith, hope, [and] charity, these three; but the greatest of these [three] is charity.”

The present age is an age of *faith and hope* for *coming* glory. In the Kingdom, it will not be necessary for Christians to exercise faith in God and in His promises, for if faithful unto death, they will have inherited that for which they aspired. They will occupy the very position they are now trusting, by faith, they will inherit. The logic is clear. If we obtain that for which we hope, why would we still hope? We would not. And so Paul said, “When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (1 Cor. 13:10). Therefore, when the Gospel Age ends, even faith and hope will cease for the Christian, but love will endure forever, throughout eternity, because, as stated previously, “God is love.”

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.” (1 Cor. 14:1)

Although love is the *chief* fruit of the Spirit that the Christian is to seek after, other lesser spiritual gifts are to be desired. Among these is the ability to prophesy. And this prophesying,

which is not so much in the predictive sense of foretelling events yet future, is the ability to expound the Word of God, whether it be done publicly to more hearers or locally in the Church. The Christian should aspire for this quality, this ability, to interpret the Word of God, to teach and instruct others so that they can get benefit from the Word of God. This ability is of far greater importance than speaking in tongues. Paul said, “Yet in the church I had rather speak *five words with my understanding*, that by my voice I might *teach* others also, *than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue*” (1 Cor. 14:19). In other words, Christians should consider well and long what benefit their activity is having on behalf of others. Accordingly, Paul gave some guidelines in prophesying, as follows:

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

“He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.” (1 Cor. 14:3,4)

In the early Church, the tendency of those with the ability to speak in tongues was to become so enamored with this gift that they used it as a toy. As a result, it blessed only them and not others, and yet they used the gift as if it were a chief gift. In fact, they felt that if one could not speak in tongues, there was something wrong with that individual. To counteract this

attitude, the Apostle Paul said that the ability to interpret and to expound the Word of God is *far more important* than speaking in tongues. He thus showed the fallacy of those who looked (or who still look) for this particular gift. In any event, it was predicted that the gift of speaking in tongues, as well as the other mechanical gifts, would cease. Our aspiration now should be for an *understanding* of God's Word rather than for the ability to speak in a mechanical manner.

“Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

**“In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.”
(1 Cor. 14:20,21)**

The Law in the Old Testament predicted the ability to speak in tongues in witnessing to the world, as happened at Pentecost, but the Law also predicted that this gift would not specially benefit the Church. Speaking in tongues was a sign to *unbelievers*. For edifying the Church, the understanding of God's Word was more important. Moreover, when Christians gathered together, they were to do all things in the proper order.

“How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation.

**Let all things be done unto edifying.”
(1 Cor. 14:26)**

When the various mechanical gifts began to cease with the death of the apostles, thus ending their laying on of hands, other gifts supplanted them, so that even today there is a counterpart to all of the mechanical gifts. For example, some Christians have the gift of Psalms (singing), some have a gift of memory, some have a gift of home study in classes and in church meetings, and some have an oratorical ability to expound to the public. These gifts are present-day counterpart experiences and benefactions. And instead of speaking in a mechanical way, Christians have the gift on a little higher plane. *All who fully consecrate their life to the Lord* have a particular ability such as exhortation, comfort, or evangelism. The variety of talents should be employed for the edification of the Church—just as the Apostle Paul tried to direct the gifts in the early Church for their edification.

“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.

“But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.” (1 Cor. 14:27,28)

If one in the early Church had the ability to speak in a tongue, but no one had the ability to interpret that tongue, Paul

said it was better for the individual to keep quiet; that is, it was better to have silence in the Church. The individual could speak to himself and to God, but he should not speak to the congregation. The counterpart today, from a negative standpoint, would be those who are caught up with the gift of *glossalalia* (speaking in tongues), and nobody understands what they are saying. Their moaning and groaning and speaking in an unknown language do not benefit the understanding of the Church at large. The Apostle's counsel is to keep quiet. Therefore, in regard to the mechanical operation of the phenomena occurring today in the Christian Church, we question if they are of God, for Paul specifically stated that speaking in tongues in this fashion is out of order and should be inhibited.

“Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.” (1 Cor. 14:29)

When several Christians in the early Church had the same gift, each was given an opportunity of service, and the congregation was to determine what benefits they got from the service of the various brethren. In other words, no one Christian was to monopolize the attention of the whole ecclesia, but rather, each was given a turn in due order.

“If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.” (1 Cor. 14:30)

The principle being enunciated is that to have certain blessings in our fellowship together in a Bible class or meeting, we should not suppress the enthusiasm of others who might have something to contribute to the edification of the ecclesia. One who feels moved to reveal a testimony or an understanding of the Lord's Word and wants to communicate with the group should be afforded an opportunity to do so. "If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by," the brethren who are holding the attention of the class should be of the Christian disposition to give that individual an opportunity to speak. Another Scripture tells us to communicate one with another: "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6:6).

"For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." (1 Cor. 14:31)

This verse again gives the basis for speaking in the Church. Each of the brethren has a service and in due order, not all at once, as is commonly practiced in some congregations where multiple individuals might be speaking in tongues at the same time. Such a practice is not in harmony with the Holy Spirit or the Apostle Paul's counsel. Therefore, we can discern the source of such confusion.

"And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." (1 Cor. 14:32)

In the Christian Church and in congregational fellowship, each one who is elected to an office of speaking or teaching (an elder, for example) should recognize and respect the good qualities in another. The office should be shared among themselves so that the class will benefit. One might have a gift and be a blessing to a certain segment of the congregation, and another might be a blessing to others. Therefore, the teachers in the Church should have a disposition to fraternize and share in connection with the privileges of service and teaching the congregation. No one individual is to monopolize the ecclesia.

**“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”
(1 Cor. 14:33)**

The next counsel pertains to women and their place in the Church.

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

“And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” (1 Cor. 14:34,35)

Women should “be under obedience.” While they do have opportunity to speak under certain conditions, they should not be

allowed to teach from the pulpit. Therefore, “women’s liberation” in the Church is out of order. Paul said, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12). And in the Book of Revelation, Jesus stated, “I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Rev. 2:20). Although Jesus was speaking along another line, this text shows the principle that a woman’s place is not to be a teacher in a public manner. Any teaching a woman does must be under other circumstances. Without going into a fuller explanation, we can say simply that a woman’s key function is at home—in teaching her children and in keeping and maintaining a godly atmosphere in her own private home (Titus 2:5).

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