

Week 49

# Spiritual Gifts

## Key Verses

**I Corinthians 12: 7, 11** "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills."

## + Introduction

Listening to a recording pales in comparison to attending a live performance. Whether you focus on individual players, one of the sections, or the whole orchestra, you realize that what you are witnessing is the culmination of hours of work by gifted musicians who all perform together to create a memorable musical experience.

In his *Living Insights* commentary on I and II Corinthians, Charles Swindoll compares a symphony concert to the way spiritual gifts work within a church when the members are "tuned in" to their gifts.

It takes seeing each member of the church as an essential individual instrument, vital to the whole body. And it takes an appreciation for the work of the Great Conductor – the Holy Spirit – who gifts and guides each individual and the body according to His will and according to His purpose: the building up of the body of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

There is both fascination and confusion regarding spiritual gifts. Do all Christians possess gifts? Are some gifts more important than others? What gifts are available and operative in the 21st century? This lesson will examine three key passages from the writings of the Apostle Paul to review some basic teachings about spiritual gifts, how they function, and why they are important. We will also look briefly at how individuals can discover their gifts and explore some common misconceptions regarding the utilization of spiritual gifts within a body of believers.

## + What are Spiritual Gifts?

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was evident in the lives of men like Moses, Samuel, and Elijah, but the Spirit's work was limited to a rather small number of people and often empowered these

individuals for specific tasks and for only brief periods of time. But prophets such as Joel looked forward to a time when the Holy Spirit would “pour out” His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28). In the New Testament, this pouring out of the Spirit occurred at Pentecost. Along with this outpouring was “a widespread distribution of spiritual gifts to all people.”<sup>2</sup>

Ken Hemphill, in his helpful book *You Are Gifted*, states that “spiritual gifts are graciously given by God to enable believers to participate fully in the edification of the church and the advance of the kingdom.”<sup>3</sup> Other reputable definitions of spiritual gifts are similar:

Put simply, a gift from the Holy Spirit is a special skill or ability which enables each believer to contribute to the whole body of Christ with ease, joy, and effectiveness.<sup>4</sup>

A spiritual gift is any ability empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.<sup>5</sup>

A spiritual gift is “a capacity for service which is given to every true Christian without exception and which was something each did not possess before he became a Christian.”<sup>6</sup>

These definitions are valuable because they underscore essential Pauline teachings about spiritual gifts:

- They are given to believers by the Holy Spirit.
- Their purpose is to edify the body of Christ, the church.
- They are distinctly different from natural talents, skills, or personality traits.

Each of these truths will become clear as we examine a passage in I Corinthians 12 and individual verses in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4.

## ✦ Exploring the Key Passages

There are four key passages in which spiritual gifts are explained, and their value to the church is delineated. The passages are I Corinthians 12-14, Romans 12:4-8, Ephesians 4:4-11, and I Peter 4:10-11. Each passage contributes to our overall understanding of why spiritual gifts are important theologically and provides a fuller understanding of the grace of God personally. These passages detail our service within the church and explain how we relate to one another within the church.<sup>7</sup> While each passage includes a list of gifts; no two lists are identical. Many commentators feel this is explained by understanding the lists as illustrative, not comprehensive.

**I CORINTHIANS 12:4-11** *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.<sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.<sup>6</sup> There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.<sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.<sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*

The longest discussion of spiritual gifts is found in I Corinthians. In I Corinthians 12:1 Paul writes, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.” He then proceeds to provide instruction and correction of abuses within the church regarding their gifts, especially as some appear to have been boasting about possessing certain gifts they viewed as more important or as setting them apart as more “spiritual.”

Ken Hemphill summarizes I Corinthians 12–14 as follows:

Paul first redefines and broadens the understanding of gifts available. Second, he provides a positive redefinition of the evidence for the presence of the Spirit (chapter 13). He gave a radically different answer to the question of what proves one to be a spiritual person. Finally, he supplies clear guidelines for seeking and using spiritual gifts for the good of the community.<sup>8</sup>

To correct their confusion, Paul leads the Corinthians back to the fundamentals as he explains the source of spiritual gifts (12:4–6), their purpose (12:7), their identity (12:8–10), and their distribution (12:11). As he does so, he does not focus on the details of each gift, but instead explains how and why the gifts work together. What Paul says here forms the basis for what he writes in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. Some of the key teachings about gifts in these passages will be addressed in the next section of this lesson.

In I Corinthians, Paul introduces the illustration of the human body to explain how the parts of the body must work in harmony and how each part has value and is placed in the body by design. Hemphill explains that Paul establishes five critical points through this extended metaphor: there is one body, with diversely functioning members, sovereignly designed, with no useless appendages, which enables the body to advance the kingdom and provide mutual care to all members.<sup>9</sup>

**ROMANS 12:6–8** *And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly; if prophecy, according to <sup>8</sup> the proportion of his faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

Here, as in I Corinthians, Paul uses the word “charismata” to describe the gifts. This distinctly Pauline word derives from the root “charis” (meaning grace), emphasizing that our gifts are an expression of God’s grace, and that the variety of gifts shows how God’s grace is evident among His people. In Romans 12:3, Paul states that God has allotted to each a “*measure of faith*.” In this passage, Paul’s teaching is more instructive rather than corrective. He emphasizes that each believer has received a “measure” or “portion” of faith and has been placed in the body to fulfill a specific task. So the focus here is on the need for mutuality and diversity in the Christian community. We will

see in the next section that this truth that each person has received a gift or gifts should prevent either spiritual pride on the one hand or a “consumer” mentality on the other.

**EPHESIANS 4:11-12** *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.*

In this passage, Paul switches to the word “pneumatika” instead of “charismata” in his writing. The emphasis of this word usage is more on “the things of the Spirit,” perhaps suggesting that those who exercise ministry in the church are God’s gifts to the church. Ephesians 4:11-16 is a single sentence in the Greek, and the primary teaching here is that every part of the body is to perform its proper function. Leon Morris says this passage is a reminder that, as believers, we must exercise our gifts, so we are “neither slacking on it so that our work is left undone nor taking over functions that properly belong to someone else.”<sup>10</sup> In effect, Paul’s teaching here is that spiritual gifts are given to people, and these gifted people are then given to the church for the ultimate goal of Christian growth (see Ephesians 4:16).

## + Foundational Principles

Putting together the teachings of these key passages of Scripture, we recognize that there are overarching – and overlapping – principles that emerge. A basic understanding of spiritual gifts includes the following:

### Each Christian has been given a spiritual gift (or more than one)

When they receive Christ, all believers are “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-4). When this occurs, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within the believer. Each believer is also given a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit. These unique gifts are to be exercised for the building up of the body of Christ, the church.

### There are “varieties of gifts” (I Corinthians 12:4)

While every believer receives a spiritual gift, not all believers receive the same gift. Returning to the analogy of the body, Paul writes, “For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ” (Romans 12:4-5). Thus, both unity and diversity are necessary for the health of the church. James Montgomery Boice observes:

Without the unity, a unity of relationship to Christ through the work of God’s Spirit, there is no church at all. We are still in our sins. On the other hand, without diversity, the church cannot be healthy and will certainly not function properly, any more than a body without arms or legs.<sup>11</sup>

### There are no “useless appendages”

The parts of the body have different but equally important functions. Similarly, each Christian has a role to play in the church. Ken Hemphill explains how this principle prevents two dangerous

extremes. On the one hand, it prevents spiritual pride. He states, "When anyone sees his or her gift as a sign of advanced spirituality, it leads to arrogant destructive behavior that hinders the body of Christ."<sup>12</sup>

This principle also prevents the opposite extreme, in which people argue that they don't have any gifts to offer to the church. In this instance, "they become consumers of grace without ever becoming contributors to the church in its kingdom enterprise."<sup>13</sup>

### For the common good

Spiritual gifts are not an end in themselves, nor are they given to us for our own enjoyment. Our spiritual gifts say nothing about our spirituality or our spiritual maturity. Spiritual gifts equip us for service within the church. We are created with intentionality to fulfill our purpose in the body, and we are gifted for effectiveness within that body. The purpose of spiritual gifts is "to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns."<sup>14</sup>

### "As He wills"

The distribution of spiritual gifts is a matter of God's sovereign will. Paul states that *"God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for another"* (I Corinthians 12:24-25). We work best within the church when we recognize we are interdependent. Charles Swindoll puts it this way:

The Holy Spirit individually distributes the gifts according to His plan and pleasure. He selects our gifts for us personally, tailoring them to our personalities and skills to be used for His glory and purposes.<sup>15</sup>

## + Identifying our Spiritual Gift

Several diagnostic tools, questionnaires, and inventories are designed to help individuals with their gift "assessment." While these may be useful, they are not the only way to identify our individual giftedness. James Boice is helpful in this area, as he provides four keys for "finding" your spiritual gift:

1. Study what the Bible says about spiritual gifts. Learn what they are and how they function within the church.
2. Pray. Ask God to help you identify your gift and equip you to use it to glorify Him.
3. Assess your spiritual strengths and abilities. While spiritual gifts are not talents or skills, our spiritual gifts will often align with our interests and strengths.
4. Seek the wisdom of other Christians. As mature Christians watch you serving within your Bible Study class or at church events, they will affirm you in your area of giftedness.<sup>16</sup>

If we desire to grow and serve within the church, it is our responsibility to identify our gift, develop it through exercise, and use it in Kingdom work. Our gifts can be developed and strengthened through use, but they can also atrophy through neglect.

## + Conclusion

During the early months of Covid, the Houston Symphony had to cancel the rest of its spring program. Then, during the 2020-2021 season, the symphony had "live" performances for season subscribers, but these were limited to small ensembles and soloists due to Covid protocol. But, the weekend of September 17-19, 2021, the full orchestra opened the season with conductor Andres Orozco-Estrada directing after having been stuck in Europe for months. The orchestra played some favorites from classical literature, including an amazing violin concerto and the much-loved Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The energy in the room was palpable! It was as if everyone sensed the incredible difference it made when all orchestra sections were full, all the first chair musicians in place, and a talented conductor was in front of them, holding the baton and guiding their performance.

This is the way it is when a church is operating based on their giftedness, with staff, lay leaders, and volunteers all working together to serve the common good of the church, and without anyone seeking to draw undue praise or attention to his individual contribution. **We** have opportunities every week to witness the power of the Holy Spirit at work as we proclaim and teach the Word of God and minister to one another within the church, and equip one another to reach our city and beyond. No matter the challenge, we know that God will provide everything we need to enable us to work together for the good of the whole and for the glory of God.

Ken Hemphill offers a fitting observation and challenge as we conclude this lesson:

Let this idea sink in. You have been placed in the body by design! You are exactly who God designed you to be! Your function is vital to the body because God made you just as He desired and with the body in mind. Without you, the body would be lacking. Your goal in life is to please the One who created and designed you.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Swindoll, Charles R., *Living Insights: I & 2 Corinthians*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Hemphill, Ken, *You Are Gifted*. Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Swindoll, Charles R., *Living Insights: I & 2 Corinthians*.

<sup>5</sup> Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology*.

<sup>6</sup> Stedman, Ray, quoted by Boice, James Montgomery, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Hemphill, Ken, *You Are Gifted*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, Leon, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994.

- <sup>11</sup> Boice, James Montgomery, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*.
- <sup>12</sup> Hemphill, Ken, *You Are Gifted*.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology*.
- <sup>15</sup> Swindoll, Charles R., *Living Insights: 1 & 2 Corinthians*.
- <sup>16</sup> Boice, James Montgomery, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. (paraphrase, not direct quote)
- <sup>17</sup> Hemphill, Ken, *You Are Gifted*.