

Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-11 [New King James] *“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:” ... “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”*

When we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our lives, He brings into our lives at least one spiritual gift, [Acts 5:32; Romans 12:1-2].

Every “*born again*” Christian [**John 3:3-8**] should be using their gifts to serve others, [**1 Corinthians 12:7**].

No Christian has all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so we need each other within a fellowship, [Malachi 3:16].

No spiritual gift is given to every Christian.

God decides who receives which gift, [1 Corinthians 12:11].

The awareness of spiritual gifts is a great blessing to every Christian fellowship, however even good things can be misused, and problems can develop in connection with spiritual gifts.

For example, some people have used the concept of their spiritual gifts as an excuse to refuse to serve others outside the extent of their gifts.

One may claim to have the gift of teaching, [*“prophecy”*] and only serve in this way.

I believe this is the very opposite of what Paul intended, he explained that God’s gifts people to service, not for refusal. Sometimes work needs to be done by all the fellowship, whether they are not especially gifted for it.

For example compassion needs to be given when tragedies strike, whether or not you happen to have the gift of healing mental pain by a show of love and faith in the compassionate and loving God.

All true Christians need to be able to teach even if they do not have the special gift of teaching, [Colossians 3:16] and especially able to explain the gospel [good news] message that Jesus Christ brought from God the Father, [1 Peter 3:15] even if they do not have the gift of evangelism, [wisdom and the gift of prophecy, presentation of God’s Word in a way that everyone can understand whatever their level of intellect – Acts 4:13; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29].

Service often requires that we get out of our “*comfort zone*,” that is out of the area in which we feel gifted. After all, God may be wanting to develop in us a gift we did not know that we had!

Service is a responsibility of every true Christian, **not** a matter of “*I will accept it only if I like doing it.*”

Now a few thoughts about how we determine what spiritual gifts we have –

Always keep in the forefront of our minds what Jesus Christ told His disciples.

John 15:1, 4-5 [New King James] *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.” ... “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; **for without Me you can do nothing.**”*

Every act of service is dependent on our personal relationship with our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

There are several approaches to determining what spiritual gifts we have.

1. Self-analysis tests based on our interests and experiences.
2. Judgement of those who know us well.

These can be helpful, especially if they lead to the same answer, but they are not infallible.

Another question we should consider is based on our own observation of what kinds of need to we see in our own Christian fellowship!

Often we do not know our gifts, or what the Creator God desires we do in serving others, in and out of Christian fellowship, until we have put them to use and seen whether we do well in that type of activity.

Not only do gifts grow through experience, they can also be discovered through experience.

This website is an example of this.

After 28 years as a bi-vocational minister [that is, not taking any expenses from the church in which I served, following Paul’s example – **1 Corinthians 9:16-17**], I retired as an active minister and as a result of church members’ suggestions set up this website, mostly using the presentations I had given in church fellowships adapted to articles. The first year only resulted in about 1,000 hits in total, we are now having over 150,000 hits a year, and just short of 10 million Kbytes of information being downloaded a year. **All this is totally the work of the Holy Spirit in and through me.**

The gift of tongues –

Historically, the most controversial gift given by the Holy Spirit is the gift of tongues. It was controversial on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, when the miracle was more in the hearing than the speaking, the Holy Spirit causing the people to hear the message in their own language, [Acts 2:4-12].

It was controversial a few years later in the church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 14:1-5 [New King James] *“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.”*

Note the speaking in tongues was something between the person and God.

The speaking in tongues is not a show of spirituality, it is to edify the self, not to impress others, [verse 4]. If it edifies the self, that is wonderful.

Romans 8:26 [New King James] *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

This is what Paul was referring to when he referred to speaking in tongues himself, [**1 Corinthians 14:6, 18-19**].

Paul did **not** tell the Corinthians to stop speaking in tongues. **However, Paul did lay down some regulations, and they were quite limiting.** For example: only one person should speak at a time and only in public if there is an interpreter, [**1 Corinthians 14:27-28**] for the Holy Spirit does **not** inspire more than one person to speak at a time.

Incidentally, it is interesting that many people want to speak in tongues, but not many “seek” the gift of interpretation, even though it is of greater value to the church fellowship.

I feel this shows that tongues have been overvalued.

Unfortunately, in some churches tongues are often spoken without an interpreter present.

After all, if the gift is genuine, the speaker should be able to control it, [**1 Corinthians 14:32-33**].

God does **not** bypass a person’s willpower, in fact part of the fruit of the active presence of the Holy Spirit is self-control, [**Galatians 5:23; 2 Timothy 1:7**].

Speaking in tongues is also a distraction in a public worship service for almost always it focuses on the speaker, not on the Creator God.

Non-Christians are usually put off by tongues-speaking in public.

Some find it quite fascinating of course, and some even consider it to be proof of divine blessing, but most do not.

1 Corinthians 14:23-25 [New King James] *“Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.”*

It is confusing and if the person realises that various non-Christians also speak in tongues, it is also inconclusive.

People need to be impressed by the gospel message that Jesus Christ brought from God the Father, not by unusual phenomena.

If the person is convinced by emotional impressions rather than the truth, that person has an unstable foundation for belief.

Emotions are important, of course, but they should be a response to the gospel message, not a substitute for it.

Expressing joy in Jesus Christ –

Pentecostal churches are now the fastest-growing segment of Christianity, especially in Latin America, but also in North America, Europe and Asia.

I suspect that one major reason it is growing is that Pentecostal churches encourage people to express their emotions rather than suppress them.

This can be bad, of course, if people's faith is built on emotions, but it is good if these emotions are a genuine response to the good news that Jesus Christ brought from God the Father, not just an opportunity to have an entertaining experience.

When we really understand the depths of our sinful state, of how utterly disgusting it is in the Creator God's eyes, and of the greatness of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us, of how astonishing His grace towards us is, then it is natural to respond with joy and exuberance, expressed in widely different way from person to person. We have something to be happy about and sing praise to God about.

Of course, Pentecostal churches are **not** the only ones who effectively express their joy in worshipping Jesus Christ their Saviour.

Although I cannot agree with all their theology and certainly not the emphasis on the public practice of tongue speaking, mostly without anyone to interpret what is being said, I do applaud them for the things they are doing well.

Always remember that God's Word, the Christian Bible, is the ultimate authority for what we do.

Remember also that "speaking in tongues" is found in various non-Christian religions, from ancient pagans to modern Buddhists. Tongue speaking, in itself, is no proof of anything.

People who are yearning for spiritual experience in this commercial, Godless society, and are **not** completely grounded doctrinally, by a solid foundation on God's Word, the Christian Bible, can be overwhelmed by a particular experience such as "*speaking in tongues.*"

I do not doubt that the experience can be powerful and spiritual, an enormous spiritual highlight in one's life. But we are commanded in God's Word to "test the spirits," to know what spirit being is behind this spiritual experience.

1 John 4:1-3 [New King James] "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*"

The Creator God has allowed Satan to rule the world until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, [1 John 5:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 8:44].

2 Corinthians 11:12-15 [New King James] "*But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*"

There have been in the past and still found today many other paranormal activities in religious fellowships.

Such as being "*slain in the spirit,*" [fainting and remaining motionless for several hours.] "*Laughing in the spirit,*" [uncontrolled waves of laughter.] "*Weeping in the spirit.*" **These may be called the Toronto Blessing or the Pensacola Blessing or some other blessing.**

I do not doubt that these experiences are extremely powerful and they feel authentic.

Yet they have unfortunately led many astray, away from the authority of God's Word, into an authority that is based on personal experience.

Jesus Christ in His ministry never resorted to such actions in His earthly ministry.

People who are “slain in the spirit” do not come out any better than they went in. The experience may encourage them, reassure them, but it does **not** edify the body of Jesus Christ, the true Christian Church, [Colossians 1:13-18] and should **not** be considered as normal or preferable experience for a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Eventually such people who partake in such activities yearn for something yet more exciting and exotic, eventually even more unusual “signs.”

Whatever spiritual gift you have, use it to serve others, always keeping God’s Word, the Christian Bible, as your ultimate authority for faith and practice.