

“The Gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Part 2)

Last week in the first of four messages on the gifts of the Holy Spirit I said that the Spirit gives every believer at least one gift (Greek “charisma”). These are special Spirit-given tools for ministry to build up the Church and get the gospel out. Spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents, which are given to everyone. I also mentioned that the Holy Spirit distributes these gifts as He chooses so the work of Christ can get done!

Today we will look at one of the gift lists in Scripture. It is found in Romans, chapter 12. In the New International Version, Romans 12:6-8 says, “We have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”

The first gift mentioned here is *prophecy*. Most of the time when people think of “prophecy” they think of *foretelling* or *predicting the future*. This can be an aspect of prophecy. For instance, the Book of Acts gives several instances of a prophet named Agabus describing what is going to happen in the future. But prophecy basically means “to speak for God”. The Greek word means “before-speak” or “forth-speak”. (As someone has said, prophecy is not so much “foretelling” as it is “forth-telling”).

If a prophecy relates to what will happen in the future, it is often *conditional*. For instance, prophets like Jeremiah in the Old Testament can say to the nation Israel, “Thus says the Lord, ‘If you don’t turn from your wicked ways I will send the enemy to conquer your nation.’” They didn’t listen, and God did exactly what He said He would do.

Prophets are able to look at what is happening and discern what God is saying or doing through those events. The prophet Isaiah can say to God’s people, “Your return to your homeland is a sign that God has forgiven you and is restoring you.” Prophets are able to discern God’s hand in the events that take place around them.

There are a number of people in the New Testament called “prophets”, so apparently they exercised this gift of prophecy over and over again.

How does this gift operate in the church today? I have been in gatherings where people have stood up and prophesied. They may say, “Thus says the Lord”, and then proceed to say what God is going to do, or what God wants us to do. One person who has this gift says, “It’s just like opening a packet of tissues. I receive a few words in my mind, and as I speak them out, I’m given a few more, and so on, until it suddenly stops.” A friend with this gift says when he has prophesied, he usually doesn’t remember much of what he said, because it was not planned or thought out – it just comes from the Spirit. My friend also says that since the essence of prophesy is telling God’s will *for a particular situation*, if a person taped a prophecy and played it for another group, it may not have much meaning.

Are there other ways the gift of prophecy can operate? Perhaps. If the Spirit prompts a person

to say something from God, in a personal conversation, or in a sermon. Or if some are saying what a nation must do to get back to God. Haven't you ever thought: Wouldn't it be nice if God would just speak to us directly? Well, when the gift of prophecy is being exercised, God *does speak* directly to His people. It can be a word of instruction, warning, comfort, encouragement.

A second gift listed in Romans 12 is **service** (the New Revised Standard Version translates it "ministry"). "If it (your gift) is serving, then serve..." Romans 12:7. The Greek word is "diakonia", which means service, or ministry.

Now, *every Christian* is to serve. Our lifestyle is to be one of humbly serving God and serving others. Mark 10:42-45 says, "So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'" However, for some, the Spirit gives this as a special gift; it is their special charisma.

There is no limit to the number of ways this gift can be expressed! In every congregation, there are people who specialize in doing the practical things that keep a church functioning well! It may be cooking for a church dinner, taking a meal to someone just out of the hospital, preparing communion elements or changing altar cloths, doing repairs at the church, updating a bulletin board in one of the hallways. People with the spiritual gift of service usually aren't ones preaching a sermon or leading a class or a meeting, but doing the helpful, practical things that are *just as important*. Many in the church seem to have this gift. Often they feel this gift is not important since it's so common and ordinary. They may not even recognize it as a gift of the Spirit. But this gift of service is just as vital to the church as the more spectacular gifts. For example, I couldn't begin to prepare a meal for a church dinner!

Teaching is the third gift listed in Romans 12. Verse 7 says, "If it (your gift) is teaching, then teach..." There are many, many references to teaching and teachers in the New Testament. Here again, teaching others is something *every believer* should do! Colossians 3:16 tell us, "Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom..." In other words, we ought to be learning from each other in our Christian walk! But some people have the *spiritual gift* of teaching.

A natural question to be raised is this: If a person has been professionally trained as a teacher, or has a natural ability to teach, is that the same as the spiritual gift of teaching? Probably not. The Bible does not define this gift, but the Greek word for "teaching" implies that *truth or the meaning of the gospel* is presented in such a way that lives will be changed, and persons will develop spiritually. A person might have a degree in education and not have the *gift of the Spirit* to teach. It's also possible to have no training in educational methods, but one is a Spirit-gifted teacher! It seems this gift is more than just passing along information, or speaking in a lively fashion before a class. *It is teaching that leads to people being disciplined and growing spiritually.*

There are many different ways that the spiritual gift of teaching can be exercised: obviously in a

Sunday School class, or Bible study group. Or, it could be that one teaches as part of preaching, or teaching through personal conversations with people. One could also teach through writing books or poetry, or through music.

Do you know anyone with this gift of the Spirit? Someone who just has a way of communicating the truth of the gospel so that people receive guidance or inspiration to grow as a Christian believer.

Moving on in the list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12, there is **exhortation, or encouragement**. “The exhorter, in exhortation.” Or, “If it is to encourage, then give encouragement” (Romans 12:8). The Greek word is “parakaleo”. It literally means “call to the side of”. It suggests one called in to comfort, counsel, or entreat - i.e. to encourage others!

Here again, *all believers* in the Body of Christ are to encourage one another. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” But some are given this as a special charisma of the Spirit. *Barnabas* is someone in the early church who had this gift. The name “Barnabas” means “son of encouragement” – if you look up references in the New Testament to Barnabas, you will see that he was always encouraging people!

Maybe you can think of persons who just have a knack of giving you a boost - not just a superficial pep talk or trite “cheer up” – it seems to go deeper. They just have a wonderful gift of lifting your spirits and hopes. Maybe you are one of these people, and never realized that’s a gift of the Spirit!

Giving is next on the list. “If it (your gift) is giving, then give generously...” (Romans 12:8). Again, *every follower of Jesus* is to give liberally and sacrificially to the Lord’s work. But some of us are given a Spirit-gift of being able to contribute large amounts, or an unusually high percent of our income, to others. It says in Romans 12 if “giving” is your spiritual gift, you are to give “generously” or “in liberality”. This literally means “without folds” – in other words, giving is to be honest and straightforward, with no hidden motives or pressures. Unpretentious, joyful giving!

I’m thinking of a man in a church I served. He gave large amounts to the church, but behind the scenes, he would give money for all kinds of things: to pay peoples’ way to seminars, or give to families where a person had lost their job, etc. It was a spiritual gift that he had.

People with this gift are not always well off financially. They can have a modest income, but they’re just motivated to give well above the tithe (or 10%). Kenneth Kinghorn makes a good point: he suggests that often the person possessing this spiritual gift will feel led to give exactly the amount someone needs when that person has been praying that God will provide!

The next spiritual gift is **leadership**, or in some translations it is rendered as **giving aid**. The Greek word means “superintendent” – to stand over or place over. But it can also mean “to care for”. So, it is “giving aid” not in the sense of aiding the poor and needy through charity, but

“giving aid” by *leading* others toward worthwhile goals. It is the gift of leadership, and is the same word used in other places in the New Testament where it refers to *ruling over* others).

The Holy Spirit gifts some to be leaders in the church. The nature of this leadership is not to lord it over others in a selfish or manipulative way, but to lead others in a way that *aids and cares for* the Church, Body of Christ. Sometimes churches get desperate for people to chair or head committees or groups. The temptation is to stick any warm body willing to serve in a leadership role, but this does not work! The church functions best when people with the *gift of leadership* are leading! Romans 12:8 says if our gift is leadership, we should “*do it diligently*”. Leaders are to lead in a conscientious and enthusiastic way!

There are many ways this gift can be used: chair a committee or task force...help the church establish long-range goals...develop a new ministry...provide wise guidance for a church through a difficult time. Those with the gift of leadership are often visionary people who can see the big picture, and what needs to be done. But then they rely on people with the *gift of administration* to follow up with the details, and get the job done! (we will look at the gift of administration in a later sermon).

The last gift we’ll look at today is ***acts of mercy/compassion***. “If it (your gift) is to show mercy do it cheerfully...” (Romans 12:8). The Greek word means “to feel sympathy with or for others.” Now, once more, *every Christian* is to be merciful and compassionate. But for some in the Body of Christ, this is their special charisma or gift.

Those who have this gift tend to be drawn toward suffering people, and they have a certain amount of ease and naturalness relating to them. Take hospital visiting, for instance. Some Christians dread it. They try to avoid visiting anyone in the hospital. They feel uncomfortable doing it. While others (some of whom may have this gift of mercy) are drawn to it. They just seem to know what to say and do.

Those with the gift of “mercy” or “compassion” often are found working with the sick, the physically and mentally challenged, prisoners, poor people, the aged, or shut-ins. Peter Wagner tells of a Baptist Church in Hammond, Indiana which has mobilized members with the gift of mercy. When Wagner once visited this church there were 450 educable slow learners receiving patient and compassionate care and teaching through that church. There were busses equipped with hydraulic lifts to bring the guests there, and growing programs for the blind and deaf. So, here’s a church that organized an entire ministry around people with this spiritual gift of “showing mercy”. There are many churches where members of the congregation are organized to visit shut-in members, or assist the pastor with hospital visitation, etc.

Today we’ve looked at 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit. Are any of these your gifts? Maybe you’ve been doing some of these things, and didn’t realize it’s because the Spirit gifted you for this! Maybe the Spirit will give you one of these gifts sometime in the future!

Next week we will look at 1 Corinthians 12, and some gifts listed there.

