

WHAT SPIRITUAL GIFTS CAN I USE?

1 Corinthians 12:4-13, 18-19, 27-31; 14:1, 39-40

Several years ago, there was a trend among the socially conscious to talk about their sign; that is, what sign of the Zodiac was associated with their birth date. This would be a question that would arise in small talk: "What's your sign?" The response might be, "I'm a Gemini. What's yours?" Supposedly, knowledge of the sign under which a person was born is supposed to tell us something about a person's personality or something like that. Given that Christians should not be dealing with astrology we might inquire, "Is there a similar question that a Christian might use in talking with another Christian?" In other words, what might all Christians have that others could inquire about to learn more about them? An appropriate question might be, "What is your gift?" Most Christians, today, might respond with, "What are you talking about?"

You have heard it said that every Christian has one or more spiritual gifts. If you read verse one of 1 Corinthians chapter 12 in most versions, you will find the word "gifts" following the word "spiritual." Consequently, we tend to think that this chapter is devoted exclusively to discussions about the Greek word "charisma" (or gifts) of the Spirit. If we look closely, we will find that the application of what Paul is teaching about is much broader than the concept of gifts or charisma. A better reading of verse one would be "Now regarding spiritual things, brethren, we would not have you to be misinformed or ignorant." Ignorance and misinformation may be a problem in many of our traditional churches today. Most Christians are either not informed or misinformed about spiritual things and the result is that the church is not as influential and effective as it could be.

It is clear that all Christians do not function in the realm of Spiritual gifts. Part of the reason is that many individual Christians, churches and ministers have never experienced the power that comes when the Holy Spirit is allowed to operate through the church. There are three elements to scripturally-based ministries: Training, Authorization, and Empowerment. Most ministers get the training in seminaries and most are authorized via some commissioning service; however, there is little evidence that there is any empowerment present in the operation of their ministries. The "spiritual things" are the enablement of God to do the work of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, spiritual things are not only desirable in the Church, they are absolutely necessary if we are to carry out the will of God on this earth. That, by the way, is the mission of the church: to carry out the will of God on earth. (See the Lord's Prayer for confirmation of this truth - "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.")

We All Have Gifts 12:4-10

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ 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. 1 Corinthians 12:4-10 (NASB95)

The "spiritual things" that Paul addressed are found in verses four, five and six. The things are "gifts" and "ministries" and "activities." As background information, the Greek word for gift is *charisma*, the Greek word for ministry is *diakonia* (root of the English word deacon) and the Greek word for "working, operation, effect, or activity" is *energema* from which we get our word "energy." It may be that Paul was making a distinction that certain function in the list

of nine things were gifts or more precisely “graces,” others were ministries, and others are workings or effects. The more conventional interpretation is that all nine are “grace gifts” and that these are used in various ministries and the ministries produce activities or workings.

The various gifts, ministries, and activities have various purposes relative to the functioning of the church. For example, the power manifestations (miracles, healing, faith) are equipment for evangelism. The inspirational evidences (tongues, interpretation and prophecy) are for functioning in the church among believers for edification of the church. The revelation expressions (word of wisdom, word or knowledge, and discerning of spirits) are essential to the functional operation of such office gifts as exhorting, teaching, and giving. All these areas are quite different and yet all are needed for the successful operation of the church. God is the source of all legitimate power in and for the church and even though there are differences in gifts, ministries and activities there should be unity in the church since all these are from the same source.

Imbedded in this discourse that Paul gave them on “spiritual things” we find a subtle teaching on the unity of the Godhead. The spiritual gifts are from the Spirit, the spiritual ministries are related to the Lord (meaning Jesus) and the spiritual workings are referenced to God who is at work in us. The implication would be that since God is One in three expressions or is Three in one purpose, then the church which is made of many members are to be unified in its purposes, goals and objectives.

In order to help the folks at Corinth understand the concept of unity in diversity, Paul picked an example from the physical world. The human body is such an example.

We Are Important to the Church 12:11-13, 18-19

¹² For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NASB95)

¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? 1 Corinthians 12:18-19 (NASB95)

The church is the Body of Christ and it should not be surprising that there would be different abilities and function among the members in the same way that our physical bodies are made up of parts that have different functions. The unifying factor for the church is the fact that all that are in the Body of Christ have the same Spirit residing in them. This is the Gift of the Spirit as opposed to Spiritual Gifts. The Gift of the Spirit is simply the Holy Spirit of God resident within the believer. Every Christian has a measure of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 says that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. All that are in the Church came in the same way and that was by a spiritual rebirth and it was the same for everyone whether he is rich or poor, black or white, Jew or Gentile, slave or free. (Recall what Jesus told Nicodemus - You must be born again.)

It is helpful sometimes to use a different word than we are accustomed to using when reading a familiar passage so that we can have a fresh understanding of the passage. For example, if we use the English equivalent of the Greek word that is transliterated “baptized” in place of that word, then verse 13 says “For by one Spirit we were all immersed into one body. . .” That change gets us away from visualizing the “baptism ritual” rather the practical reality of being immersed in an ongoing and continuing way in the body of Christ. When we make that simple change, then we also discover that the word “in” rather than “by” is a more appropriate translation of the Greek word “EN” used in the first part of verse 13. If you can visualize that picture of each individual born-again believer being immersed in the Spirit of God, then it would

make perfect sense that if they breathed in or drank in (while immersed) that they would breathe or drink in the Spirit that surrounds them. The result is that we are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. Everything taken together is then the Body of Christ.

Paul's use of the word "drink" rather than "breathe" (which would be a more natural picture since the Greek word for spirit is *pneuma* or air) is likely based on a tie in with the idea of water baptism or the teaching in Chapter 11 on the Lord's Supper where one "drinks" the fruit of the wine.

There are three basic requirements so that the work of God can be accomplished by the spiritual gifts, ministries, and activities:

1. Believers (individually and as a church) must be thoroughly consecrated to Christ's glory, only. It is not to be an ego trip. (An individual body part must be subject to the direction of the mind.)
2. An effective, fervent prayer life is necessary. God responds to the prayers of His people. One miraculous answer to prayer within a congregation will do as much to lift, encourage and solidify the people of God as any one thing. (For our physical bodies to function properly the network of nerves must be functioning so that communication routes are always connected. Prayer is our line of communication in the spiritual realm.)
3. The Christian must recognize his dependence on the Holy Spirit and be willing and able to exercise spiritual enablements that God has provided.

We Have Gifts for the Church 12:27-30

²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues. ²⁹ All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of miracles*, are they? ³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? 1 Corinthians 12:27-30 (NASB95)

In addition to the manifestations of the Spirit in the life of the believers (individually) and in the church (corporately), we see a list of offices and officers. We could call these "ministries" that are essential for the successful functioning of the church. Just as God had given the various evidences of the Spirit, He has "appointed" or "set" these offices and officers in the church. If it is God Who did the initiating and empowerment, then no one should be able to be boastful or feel "pride" in their ministry or position.

Arguments have been put forth that the particular order of the list (apostles, prophets, teachers, etc.) is related to the importance of these offices. It may be that this ordering is simply related to the time sequence in which each of these ministries were set in the church. On the other hand, it could be that Paul was making a list and these are listed in the order which he thought about them while composing the letter. (Sometimes we tend to over analyze the scriptures.)

There were controversies in the church about which gifts, ministries, or spiritual workings were the most important. Some people were puffed up because of their ministry and others were looked down upon because their gift was not as showy. Paul tried to show how ridiculous such arguments were by comparing physical body parts. Which is least important, your foot or your hand? Truthfully, I want to have both feet and both hands. It is the same way with sight or hearing – both are important. It is the same way in the Body of Christ. There are no unimportant members or parts of the body.

We could learn from the example of the physical body to help us operate better in the church. If evangelism is not a very strong ministry in a church, then not many people get upset

because evangelism may not be their "thing." Consequently, nothing is done to correct the situation. On the other hand, if your left foot was injured or if it was not very strong, then the whole body might suffer from it because you would not be able to do all the things you might like to do. It is very likely that the situation would NOT be ignored and corrective action would be taken to restore the body to wholeness. All areas of the church ought to be functioning and doing so in a strong and vigorous manner and each area ought to help the other areas to make sure that it happens.

It is important for us to realize that the Holy Spirit gives the various gifts and offices to the church so that all can benefit from those abilities. All believers have been enabled and are to contribute to the good of the entire body of believers. We all need each other in the church in much the same way that each part of the physical body needs the other parts to function and be healthy.

All the gifts, ministries, and workings are important and I'm sure that it grieves God to see His children boasting over their particular enablement at the expense of another person with a different gift or ministry. If a person boasts and feels proud of a spiritual gift, ministry or working in his or her life, then the underlying thought is that he or she believes that they deserved it or did something to earn it and simply does not understand what God's grace is about. On the other hand, if a person is not pleased with the gift, ministry, or spiritual activity they have been given and is envious of the gift, ministry or work of others, then he or she is questioning God's decision in distributing the spiritual enablements needed for the church (the body of Christ) to properly function.

We Are to Use Gifts Unselfishly 12:31; 14:1, 39-40

³¹ But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. 1 Cor 12:31 (NASB95)

¹ Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy. 1 Cor 14:1 (NASB95)

³⁹ Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. ⁴⁰ But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner. 1 Corinthians 14:39-40 (NASB95)

Paul had already instructed the Corinthians about the importance of prophecy. The same cautions would need to be heeded with exercising the enablement of prophecy as with speaking in tongue. The prophets would speak one at a time. Others would be allowed to speak as they were inspired and the first speaker would allow that to happen. Each of us should have something to share that will help someone else. Considering the way we conduct our "church services" today, it is rare that we learn from each other. We fear that the situation may get out of control and we tend to avoid letting people give a word from God to the church. This should not stop us from sharing insights with our friends and family in other settings. Sunday school classes or small group settings should be places where people would feel free to share spiritual insights with each other. Wherever it is done, the results should be to strengthen the church. Any type of behavior in our lives that brings confusion and doesn't move us from chaos to creativity should be questioned.

Just as in the Creation there was a time for chaos and a time for order. So it is in our worship. The touch of the Spirit should rearrange us. We should expect God to be in control of our worship times. This requires that we yield ourselves to His creative influence as He produces in us spiritual growth that comes out of the worship experience. As we yield, then God can put us in His order and we then become what He wants us to be rather than what we want ourselves to be.