



Spiritual Gifts

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. (1 Corinthians 12:1)

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Ephesians 4:7)

As Each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:10)

THESIS: God has gifted his body according to accomplish his purposes. These spiritual gifts are God's grace working in and through believers to build up his body to maturity. It is important to understand their nature, purpose, and contemporary applicability so we can serve in the manner and power God has given us.

WHAT IS AT STAKE: The purpose of this gifting is our maturity and good and God's glory, and as a result a failure to understand how and why God has gifted the body of Christ leads to an immaturity in the body. It is a detriment to the body to be dismissive of gifts, thinking they are unimportant, or to be narcissistic about gifts, thinking that they are about us.

The New Testament passages that teach on spiritual gifts highlight three important points: they are from God, for the good of the body, and to the glory of God. Spiritual gifts are first of all spiritual, from God to believers (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:7-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11). These verses also affirm that they are gifts given by God to believers upon conversion. They are repeatedly described as God's grace; indeed, the word gift is a reflection of the Greek $\chi \acute{\alpha} \rho \iota \sigma \mu \alpha$ (charisma), which is related to the word for grace, $\chi \acute{\alpha} \rho \iota \varsigma$ (charis). It is true that every gift and talent we have comes from God's hand. What is important to note is that spiritual gifts are uniquely given to God's people for the building of God's body. This is true not only in ministry that takes place from believer to believer for the spiritual edification of Christians, but also in the ministry that takes place towards unbelievers in presenting the gospel and living as witnesses.

There is no necessary relationship between a person's vocation and how they serve the Church. A teacher by vocation may or may not be gifted by God to teach the body. A leader in the church may or may not be qualified to lead outside of the church. It is certainly reasonable that a person with a passion for teaching, encouragement, leading, hospitality, etc. should seek to serve in those same ways inside the church. But we should never assume that we can determine for ourselves or for others how God will use them to build the body of Christ simply

by virtue of what they do vocationally or in their hobbies. The only way to determine how God has gifted an individual is for that individual to serve and see how God uses them.

Second, spiritual gifts are for the body (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 12-27). Because spiritual gifts are meant to be used in the service of others they must be exercised in community. They are not meant to elevate us over other people, but to serve them, as 1 Corinthians 12 makes clear. Because they are for the good of the body they cannot be exercised in a disinterested manner, either. Apart from love, the greatest acts of service and spirituality are meaningless (1 Corinthians 13).

Finally, this working is not only for the good of the body but the glory of God (1 Peter 4:11). In serving the body we are not promoting ourselves or our local church. We are seeking to exalt God. As local churches grow through the ministry of the body to one another and the world, God's glory is displayed for all to see.

The lists of gifts that occur in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 are best understood as representative and not exhaustive. All ministry that takes place in the church is by God's grace for our good and to his glory. Further, these lists speak more of broad kinds of ministry, not how that ministry is carried out. A person with the gift of teaching may teach adults, children, or both. They may teach through preaching, counseling, leading bible studies, writing music, or many other venues. The same is true with most of the gifts, and we should be quick to encourage creativity in how people minister.

While God gifts people differently, we are still called to a wide range of service. While not all Christians are gifted in teaching, we are all called to teach (Deuteronomy 6:7; Romans 15:14). While we are not all gifted in encouragement, we are all called to encourage (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:25). While we are not all gifted with hospitality, we are all called to be hospitable (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2). This pattern does not hold true with every gift or form of ministry, but wherever there is an overlap in the general call to serve and the specific gifts of the Spirit, all Christians are called to minister, but not all will do these ministries in the same way.

There is no indication in the New Testament that any of the gifts have ceased to function. While Paul says that gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues will one day fade, this is a reference to the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Regarding these two gifts, which are the two most often held to have ceased, inspired Scripture expressly commands us to not ignore them (1 Corinthians 15:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:20). Scripture also provides clear and extensive instruction on how these gifts should be exercised, namely intelligibly and in good order (1 Corinthians 14). The failure of many Christians to follow these instructions is not an indictment on the gifts, but those congregations.

SO WHAT: During Jesus' earthly ministry, he was clear that he would build his church. Jesus' ongoing ministry of building the church, both in numbers and maturity is the ministry of the

Spirit through the giving and exercising of God's grace in the individual members of the body of Christ for the service of the body. It is important for the church to have a healthy understanding of spiritual gifts not so we can think better of ourselves, but so that we understand the means of grace which God uses to build the church, namely, the members of the body. All Christians have been called and equipped to serve, and when a member fails to do so they do not simply deprive themselves of the joy of serving but they withhold from the body from what God has given to it.