

UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS Part 1

1 Corinthians 12:1

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

Clearly, Paul did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts. This is because ignorance can affect a person's ability to effectively operate in the gifts!

1 Corinthians 13:9

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

Notice how it's impossible to prophesy beyond one's knowledge! We assume that knowledge comes with the gift, but it doesn't. Knowledge (understanding) is gained gradually over time. (We should also point out that just because you have doesn't mean you have access to the gift. Gifts are given by God.)

This brings me to the first thing we need to understand about spiritual gifts...

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE GIVEN BY GOD

The word "gifts" in the Bible is translated from the Greek word ***chárisma*** and it means that which is the result of God's grace.

You might be familiar with the English word that is spelled just like it, *charisma*. The English word *charisma* refers to a person's NATURAL ABILITY (to inspire/influence others). However, ***chárisma*** (spiritual gifts) are SPIRITUAL ABILITIES.

Yet, people still associate spiritual gifts with natural abilities. In fact, some people believe that it's possible to discover a person's spiritual gifts by taking what amounts to a "personality test". However, spiritual gifts aren't discovered by personality tests because spiritual gifts aren't the result of our personality or temperament. Spiritual gifts are the result of God's sovereign will!

1 Corinthians 12:11

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

And because spiritual gifts are the result of God's sovereign will, there is no room for boasting or glory!

1 Corinthians 4:7

7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Another important fact we must understand regarding spiritual gifts is this...

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:4

4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

The word “diversities” is really the word “varieties”! There are a *variety* of spiritual gifts listed in the Bible. The number of gifts changes depending on who you ask. This is because there’s no master list for spiritual gifts. You have to formulate the list by going to the various places in the Bible where spiritual gifts are listed.

1 Corinthians 12:8–10

8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; 9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; 10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

Here Paul lists a total of 9 different gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:28

28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Here Paul lists a total of 8 different gifts. (However, some of the gifts listed here are repeats from his previous list.)

Romans 12:6–8

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; 7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; 8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

This list contains a total of 7 different gifts. (Again, there are 1 or 2 carryovers from Paul’s previous lists.)

Ephesians 4:8, 11

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

There are a total of 5 different gifts listed in this passage.

If we combine all these lists together (and remove any duplicates) we come up with a total of 21 different gifts. But, there's another problem with this number. Some of the "gifts" listed in these passages, particularly in [Ephesians 4:11](#), are more like *ministries* than gifts.

Apparently, Paul mixes **spiritual gifts** with **ministry gifts** in his lists!

This leads me to my THIRD observation. Just like there are a variety of gifts...

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF MINISTRIES

1 Corinthians 12:5

⁵ And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

The word "administrations" means *roles* or *ministries*. Apparently, we're not only given a gift, but we're also given or assigned a role in ministry to operate our gift!

1 Peter 4:10–11

¹⁰ As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Notice how the Apostle Peter divides the ministries within the Church into two categories: *speaking* ministries and *non-speaking* ministries. Not everyone is given a speaking role in the Church. Does this mean not everyone is allowed to speak in the Church? No.

When we talk about "speaking ministries" we're talking about *offices* within the Church (apostle, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers). These ministries are allowed to speak "with authority" in the Church.

But, while there are only five speaking *ministries* in the Church, there are several speaking *gifts* in the Church (word of knowledge, word of wisdom, exhortation, prophecy, etc). Also, while not everyone is allowed to operate in a speaking *ministry*, everyone can participate in a speaking *gift*!

1 Corinthians 14:31

³¹ For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

Apparently, Paul is giving permission to EVERYONE to prophesy. Does this mean that everyone is given the gift of prophecy? No.

It means that prophecy (like ALL spiritual gifts) are SITUATIONAL. This means ANYONE can operate in a spiritual gift at ANYTIME. However, operating in a gift doesn't mean you occupy the office or ministry that is associated with that gift!

For example, just because you prophesy doesn't mean you're a prophet. And just because you were used to exhort doesn't mean you're an evangelist. What it means is that you must submit your prophecies to others (preferably an elder) for judgment.

1 Corinthians 14:29

29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

When Paul says "prophets" he doesn't mean those who are in the office of prophet. Instead, he's talking about those who prophesy in Church. Moreover, they must submit their prophecies to others (preferably someone in leadership) to judge. We know this because of what he says in verse 34.

Paul is NOT saying women aren't allowed to prophesy. He's saying they are not allowed to judge or a final authority. This is because women are to be under authority!

1 Corinthians 11:5

5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.

Prophesying with her head "covered" was simply a way of demonstrating that she under authority. Moreover, when you are under authority you are only allowed to say what you hear. In the case of prophecy, what she hears from God!