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## **Part 1**

### **The Nature of the Gifts**

# The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The New Testament depicts Christianity as a supernatural way of life. To be functioning members of the body of Christ, as well as more effective witnesses for Him in the world, we need an understanding of the nine supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit and their operation in our lives. The apostle Paul listed these gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:

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.

(1 Corinthians 12:4–11)

These gifts are all supernatural. None of them could be explained by natural talent, education, or ability. A word of wisdom or knowledge is not the kind of wisdom or knowledge that comes from spending fifteen years in college and having three degrees. It is wisdom or knowledge that is given by the Holy Spirit. Healing is not the type of healing that is administered by the general physician or the surgeon—though we respect medical science and are grateful for it. This is supernatural healing.

## The Nine Gifts of the Spirit

Let us look at a more literal translation of some of the gifts of the Spirit from the above passage to prepare us for exploring each of them in some detail in coming chapters. In verse eight, where the *New King James Version* reads, “*For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,*” there is actually no “the” in the Greek. I therefore translate these gifts as “*a word of wisdom*” and “*a word of knowledge.*” In verse ten, “*to another the working of miracles*” is literally “*workings of miracles.*” Both significant words are plural. Likewise, “*discerning of spirits*” should be “*discernings of spirits.*”

Four of the gifts are therefore plural in nature: (1) gifts of healings, (2) workings of miracles, (3) discernings of spirits, and (4) kinds of tongues. Recognizing the plural nature of these gifts is important for understanding how they function.

The nine gifts are readily divided into three groups of three, under the headings of Revelation Gifts, Power Gifts, and Vocal Gifts.

### **Revelation Gifts**

- a word of wisdom
- a word of knowledge
- discernings of spirits

### **Power Gifts**

- faith
- gifts of healings
- workings of miracles

### **Vocal Gifts**

- different kinds of tongues
- interpretation of tongues
- prophecy

For many years, Bible teachers and commentators have listed the spiritual gifts in groups of three for the purpose of easy reference and classification—three groups, with each group containing three gifts or manifestations. This particular grouping is not the only way we can view the gifts, but it is a useful way to arrange them and

helps us to understand them more clearly.

A word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, and discernings of spirits are revelation gifts; they convey revelation we could not receive in any other way. Faith, gifts of healings, and workings of miracles are gifts of power—they get things done. They could also be called dramatic gifts; they are the gifts that really arrest people’s attention. Different kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, and prophecy are vocal gifts because they necessarily operate through human vocal cords.

## **Ministry Gifts and Spiritual Gifts**

To avoid potential confusion, it is important to consider the relationship and differences between the ministry gifts, which are found in Ephesians 4:11, and these nine gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The context for the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 is the resurrected Christ, for we read in verses eight and ten: “‘He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ . . . He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” Verse eleven specifies five main gifts the resurrected Christ gave to humanity: “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.”

Let us look at the gifts in two parallel columns:

### **Ministry Gifts**

Apostles

Prophets

Evangelists

Pastors

Teachers

### **The Gifts of the Spirit**

a word of wisdom

a word of knowledge

faith

gifts of healings

workings of miracles

prophecy

discernings of spirits

different kinds of tongues

the interpretation of tongues

These two groups of gifts are distinguished from one another in three ways.

## **The Person as Gift/The Gift Given to a Person**

First, with the ministry gifts, the believer himself is the gift given by Christ to His church. The wording emphasizes this: “*He Himself gave some to be apostles....*” He did not give to some “apostleship,” but He gave some *to be* apostles. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are Jesus’ ministry gifts to His church because the church can never be what He intends without them. For example, the apostle Paul was Jesus’ gift to the Gentile believers.

In contrast, with spiritual gifts, the gift is given to the person, who is then able to minister it to others. Paul wrote, “*To one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit...*” (1 Corinthians 12:8). Therefore, with ministry gifts, the person *is* the gift, and with spiritual gifts, the person *has* the gift.

## **The Gift as Lifework/The Gift as Brief Manifestation**

Second, with a ministry gift, every aspect of the total ministry makes up the gift. It is like an athlete who runs the mile faster than anybody else. His whole life centers on running the mile. Similarly, for the person who is a ministry gift to the church, his whole life centers on being an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher. Paul often compared Christian ministry to the activities of athletes because there is so much that is parallel between them in terms of the need for training, discipline, and dedication. A ministry is a lifework.

On the other hand, the nine supernatural gifts are brief, dramatic, brilliant, arresting manifestations that happen and are finished. For instance, a prophetic utterance may last seconds or minutes, and it is complete. It is not something that goes on all the time. A word of wisdom occurs in a few seconds. A man suddenly gets a revelation that directs him to do something that he could not have known to do by natural understanding. When the gift of discernings of spirits is given, a person may suddenly see there is a spirit of pride or lust in someone. The spiritual gift is almost like a flash of lightning or a thunderclap. It is there, and then it is finished.

## **Character Essential/Character Not a Prerequisite**

Third, a ministry gift cannot be divorced from a person’s character. It has to be

so because of the very nature of ministry gifts; it is essential to their outworking. On the other hand, with spiritual gifts, character is not necessarily involved. It seems as if it should be, but this is not always so. It is important for us to learn this or we will be headed for bitter disappointment. Sometimes, people's faith is even harmed when they meet someone whose character does not seem to match the gift he is exercising.

For example, if a person is lazy and irresponsible before he receives a spiritual gift, he may be just as lazy and irresponsible after receiving the gift. He may stand up and prophesy like an angel, yet keep you waiting for every appointment he ever makes with you. While Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11, "[Christ] *Himself gave some to be...prophets,*" he also wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:31, "*For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.*" All believers may exercise the spiritual gift of prophecy. Yet God never says we will all be prophets. Prophesying, in itself, does not give you the ministry of a prophet, nor the character that necessarily corresponds with a ministry gift. However, if you receive a supernatural gift, it does increase your responsibility. And a responsible person will conduct himself in such a way that the gift will go together with the rest of what he does. What we find is that not all who receive a gift take that responsibility or are mature enough in that way.

To help us understand this concept better, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are like presents under a Christmas tree. It does not take long to put a gift under a Christmas tree or to open a gift. These are momentary acts. I once opened a Christmas present and found I had received an electric shoe polisher, but it did not make me a different person from what I was before I received the shoe polisher. It didn't change any part of my character.

Please do not misunderstand me. It is certainly not my purpose to belittle gifts. My purpose is only to point out the differences between various ways through which the grace of God (His free and unmerited favor) and the Holy Spirit operate, as well as their parameters. If we think merely exercising a spiritual gift makes a person spiritual, we should remember Balaam's donkey. This will bring us down to earth again. God made a donkey talk to the prophet because the prophet would not listen to God. (See Numbers 22:22–40.) The lesson can be summarized in this way: If you

were a donkey before you prophesied, do you know what you will be afterward? Spiritual gifts alone do not change nature or character. God can use a donkey as a last resort. Again, this does not belittle the gifts, but we must realize they are gifts.

## The Gifts and Fruit of the Spirit

Another way to look at gifts and character is to realize spiritual gifts are one thing, and spiritual fruit are another. We have seen there are nine gifts of the Spirit, and Galatians 5:22–23 reveals there are also nine forms of the fruit of the Spirit: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness [“faith” KJV], gentleness, self-control.”* Many Christians lose out on what God has for them in some measure by failing to make a very basic, logical distinction between the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit. I said earlier the gifts are like presents under a Christmas tree. We can also say the difference between the gifts and the fruit is like the difference between ornaments on a Christmas tree and fruit on a fruit tree. Putting an ornament on a Christmas tree just takes a moment, and the ornament is not actually a part of the tree. Yet you can’t place an apple on an apple tree. It arrives by a process of cultivation, growth, and maturation. You know it is going to take a considerable period of time for that apple tree to bear apples that are worth eating. Similarly, there is a process involved with the growth of spiritual fruit. It has to be cultivated by labor, patience, and skill.

It would be absurd to expect a ready-made apple or orange on a tree. The apostle Paul wrote, *“The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops”* (2 Timothy 2:6). Fruit does not come forth without labor. I think this is a fact we often overlook. We speak about fruit growing spontaneously without effort. Fruit can grow on its own, but in the world markets today you could not possibly market any kind of fruit that was simply left to grow by itself. All fruit requires very careful and often intensive cultivation that involves time and care. Similarly, no one will bring spiritual fruit to perfection who does not cultivate it. We should also realize that a gift of the Spirit will not be as effective as it should be unless the fruit of the Spirit is cultivated alongside it. And *exercising* the gift may produce a change in character, even though receiving it does not.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1–2, Paul pointed out that having all gifts of the Spirit without love is of no value to the person who has them. His statements are very interesting because the gifts may still be valuable to somebody else. If I have the gift of healing and I exercise it without love, it doesn't profit me anything, but it may profit the person who gets healed. Oral Roberts related an incident about this I have never forgotten. A woman was bothering him after a meeting. She was overstepping her bounds and running after him. He told her, "The meeting is closed. I don't pray for people privately." She stuck to him so long that, eventually, in a fit of impatience, he put out his hand and touched her—and she was healed. Even though she was healed, he said, "I got no blessing from it; it didn't profit me anything." The one who exercises the gift does not profit from it unless it is exercised in love. I have had similar experiences at times. I have been surprised at the results, considering how I felt! But God is greater than we are.

Some people say they do not need gifts because they have spiritual fruit. Experience has taught me to question just how much fruit people have who talk like that. Suppose someone says, "I have love; I don't need gifts." This is totally unscriptural because the Bible says, "*Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts*" (1 Corinthians 14:1). One of the evidences we are pursuing love is that we are desiring the spiritual gifts. In fact, spiritual gifts are the tools by which love works. The gifts are the means by which love is made effective. Love without the gifts is left largely impotent and frustrated. I am sure that love will never lead a believer to refuse God's gifts. My reply to such a person would be, "What are you going to do with all your love? How are you going to help humanity with it? You need the gifts for that." Imagine a mother sitting by her sick child and saying, "Honey, I love you, but I'm just going to sit here. I'm not going to check your temperature, I'm not going to give you medicine, I'm not going to call the doctor, and I'm not even going to pray for you. But I love you." How much love does that mother really have? She has love in word but not in deed.

Again, one of the main means by which love is enabled to act is by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For instance, if we want to edify the church because we love the church, then we will desire the gift that most edifies the church, which is prophecy.

Or, if we love the sick, we will desire the gifts that will enable us to minister to the sick, which are gifts of healings and workings of miracles. Biblical love is always very practical. It does not sit around using nice phrases; it does something.

We must not be one-sided. We need both gifts and love. We need both gifts and fruit. We need both spiritual gifts and ministry gifts. None of these is a substitute for any of the others. We need all of them.

## **All Believers Have Spiritual Gifts**

As we continue to explore the nature of spiritual gifts, I would like to address certain perspectives people have about spiritual gifts that are confusing and unscriptural. The first is that some people believe it is wrong to talk about believers “having” spiritual gifts, as if this indicates pride. Yet a person has nothing to be prideful about when he has received a gift. In the first place, as we have seen, it does not make him any different from what he was before he received it. Second, he has nothing that makes him any different from anybody else except the gift, and it is not something that came from him or that he went out and obtained. A person can have a gift and be grateful for it without being prideful about it.

Second, some people do not think believers should say, for example, “I have a gift of healing.” They think if someone is healed, the person who was healed received the gift. Or if prophecy is manifested, they think the recipient obtained the gift. This perspective can have a very confusing effect on people, and I want to point out that it is not really scriptural. If God gives you or me a gift, we have an obligation to confess that He has given it. I know men who obviously have a divine gift of healing but who, in order to avoid controversy or criticism, will not own up to it. They say, “I’ve never claimed to have a gift of healing. God heals.” It is true that God heals, but He uses human instruments through which to heal.

Let us look at a number of places in the New Testament that specifically state believers have gifts.

First Corinthians 12:7 says, “*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all*” (emphasis added). With the Greek language, the tenses of the verbs are often of vital importance. In this verse, the verb is the continuous

present tense. “To one is *regularly* given by the Spirit a word of wisdom,” and so on. A person who has these gifts regularly manifests them.

“***Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them***” (Romans 12:6, emphasis added).

“***Each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that***” (1 Corinthians 7:7, emphasis added).

“***Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?***” (1 Corinthians 12:30). This is an important verse because it includes one of the gifts people are hesitant about saying they have. When Paul wrote, “***Do all have gifts of healings?***” he clearly meant not all do, but some do. Otherwise, it would have been a meaningless rhetorical question. Here is clear scriptural authority for believers to say, “I have gifts of healings [or the interpretation of tongues, and so on]. God gave them to me. It doesn’t make me any better than I was before, but I have to say, as a matter of experience, it is regularly manifested through me.”

“***Earnestly desire the best gifts***” (1 Corinthians 12:31). If we could not have gifts, there would be nothing to desire. It is clear you are in the will of God to desire to have gifts.

“***Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership***” (1 Timothy 4:14, emphasis added), and “***I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands***” (2 Timothy 1:6, emphasis added). Paul wrote to Timothy in such a way that it is absolutely clear he considered Timothy to have a certain gift. If the gift is in you, then you have it.

“***As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God***” (1 Peter 4:10, emphasis added). Peter used language similar to Paul’s. You cannot minister what you do not have. First you have to receive it. Peter assumed all Christians would have gifts, thus enabling us to minister to each other. Real poverty is having nothing to contribute. That’s the tragic condition of probably 90 percent of churchgoing Christians who profess faith in Christ. They have not received what God has made available to them, so they cannot give it. But this is not the will of God. No believer in Jesus Christ needs to be

without his own distinctive manifestation of the Holy Spirit. *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all....But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills”* (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11).

While all believers are given distinct gifts, this does not limit the Holy Spirit from manifesting any gift through any person at any time He wants to, because all the gifts are resident in Him. For example, if you are in an emergency and somebody is dying in front of you, you do not have to stand there and say, “I don’t have the gift of healing, so there is nothing I can do.” If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you potentially have everything in Him. There is nothing to prevent the Holy Spirit from manifesting the gift of healing through you at that moment. However, the Scripture would not justify your saying you have the gift of healing unless it is regularly manifested in your life. God can give any manifestation that is needed to any person, but this is not the same as having the gift. We would not say that Balaam’s donkey had the gift of prophecy. Why? Because it happened on only one occasion.

Paul therefore began and ended his list of the gifts of the Spirit by reminding us that, as believers, each one of us is entitled to his own specific manifestation(s) of the Holy Spirit in his life. Paul does not suggest that God rations to us just one manifestation. But if we live in our spiritual inheritance, we are entitled to enjoy the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Any believer who is living without these manifestations is living below the level of God’s provision for his life.

## **Have the Gifts Been Withdrawn from the Church?**

Some people tell us that the gifts were withdrawn from the church after the first century. Yet Paul said the church is to exercise the gifts while it waits for the return of the Lord Jesus.

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, **so that you come short in**

**no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

(1 Corinthians 1:4–8, emphasis added)

The closer the return of the Lord, the more we need to manifest the gifts. There is not a Scripture in the Bible that suggests the supernatural gifts of God's grace will ever be withdrawn from the church of Jesus Christ. When the church, as the bride, goes to meet Jesus, the Bridegroom, she will be adorned with the gifts He sent to her.

The reason why some believers do not have these manifestations is that they have never taken the vital step out of the natural into the supernatural. I believe the first essential step is the baptism in the Holy Spirit, accompanied by the miraculous manifestation of speaking in other tongues. Once you have entered into the realm of the supernatural, it is the will of God that you should continue to function in that realm.

Spiritual gifts are not something remote from a bygone age; neither are they reserved for a few spiritual giants or preachers and missionaries in foreign lands. The New Testament reveals the gifts as part of the spiritual equipment for normal Christian living for believers throughout all ages until Christ returns.

## **The Ultimate Purpose of Spiritual Gifts**

Let's close this chapter by discussing the purpose of the gifts from God's point of view. We often make the mistake of viewing His purposes and provision only from the perspective of what they will do for us. For instance, you hear people saying about the baptism in the Holy Spirit, "You'll feel wonderful if you get the baptism." You will not feel wonderful *all* the time. Sometimes you may feel worse than you have ever felt before because you may become aware of problems, needs, and spiritual forces you were not previously aware of. Others may say, "It'll help you tremendously with your study of the Bible," which is true. Or they may tell you, "You'll have power to witness." This is also a wonderful result of the baptism. However, all these reasons for receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit are directed

toward what it will do for you. The great reason for having the baptism in the Holy Spirit is what it will do for the body of Christ.

“[In] *one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Why? To make us effective members of the body of Christ. This will glorify God. The Westminster Catechism includes this statement: “What is the chief end of man?” It is “to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” Few of us grasp the fact that the supreme end of life is to glorify God. Somebody once said to me, “If you don’t exist for the glory of God, you’ve got no right to exist.” That’s the truth. Everything was created for God’s pleasure. Why are spiritual gifts important? It is because they bring glory to God.

The book of Ephesians contains some absolutely breathtaking phrases in regard to this.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...[has] predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved....That we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

(Ephesians 1:3, 5–6, 12)

What’s the ultimate purpose of God in adopting us as His children? That we may be for “*the praise of the glory of His grace.*” I like the way one version translates the end of verse six: “...*which has made us graciously favored in the beloved.*” Grace is heaped on us. Grace is given to us when we don’t deserve it, making us the object of God’s special favor. We are the object of His favor more than anything else in the universe because of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

I also like the version we previously read, “*He has made us accepted in the Beloved,*” because about one in five people in America has a basic problem of feeling rejected. I have ministered to scores of people whose basic problem was that, because of some traumatic experience in life—usually a lack of love from parents—they have gone through life feeling unwanted.

Yet, we who are the least worthy, who were the farthest off, have been made the closest. All the riches of God's favor have been heaped upon us so that we should be to the praise of the glory of His grace throughout eternity. This is where the gifts have a part to play. Ephesians 3:10 says, "*To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.*" The church of Jesus Christ is to be the revelation to the whole universe of God's wisdom. Our English translation says "*manifold wisdom,*" but the Greek word is even stronger, meaning "infinitely varied wisdom." Our exercise of the gifts is a significant way in which God fulfills His purpose of making known His infinitely varied wisdom by the church.

In the next chapter, we will see more of this beautiful and vital connection between God's grace and the gifts He bestows on us.