

# The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church: Gifts of the Spirit

## WHAT ARE THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT?

The Bible teaches that Christians will be equipped by the Holy Spirit with certain abilities described as gifts (Gk: charisma). The New Testament does not provide a single exhaustive list of spiritual gifts.

*Read: Romans 12v6-8; 1 Corinthians 12v7-10 & 27-28*

How many different spiritual gifts can you identify in these passages?

Are you surprised to discover that some of these abilities are 'gifts of the spirit'?

Which of these gifts do you consider to be supernatural or miraculous in nature?

Does Paul draw a distinction between miraculous and non-miraculous gifts?

## SPECIFIC GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The exact nature of some of the abilities which are identified as spiritual gifts is disputed. We considered the gift of prophecy in Session 4. The fact that we cannot be sure about the exact nature of some of these gifts suggests that we should exercise a degree of humility in our understanding of them.

### Message of knowledge/wisdom

In contemporary Christianity it is often thought that the word of knowledge means the receipt from God of specific information about another person (e.g. about a specific sin or sickness). It is not clear that this is what is meant by the message of knowledge/message of wisdom (1 Corinthians 12v8) and it seems that the receipt of such information should properly be regarded as prophecy (1 Corinthians 14v25). Given the context of 1 Corinthians (especially 2v6) it is much more likely that Paul means a special ability to speak the gospel message, or to give wise advice about specific situations.

### Gift of Tongues

It is often thought that the gift of tongues is a means by which God may speak to the church. The evidence of 1 Corinthians suggests rather that the gift of tongues enables a person to pray to God in a language other than his or her own (1 Corinthians 14v13-17)

### Gift of interpretation

The gift of interpretation enables a person to translate the prayer or thanksgiving of a person who is speaking in tongues into ordinary language so that it can be understood by the rest of the congregation (1 Corinthians 13v27-8). It is important to realise that this means that everything said in tongues could equally be said in ordinary language - tongues are not a more effective or more spiritual way of praying (cf. 1 Corinthians 14v13)

### Contributing to the needs of others/helps

The ability to give money to help others is a spiritual gift, which should lead those who are so gifted to generosity (Romans 12v8). The gift of 'administration' (1 Corinthians 12v28) is more properly translated 'helps' and means the provision of practical assistance to those in need rather than efficient organisation.

## DO ALL CHRISTIANS HAVE THE SAME GIFTS?

*Read: 1 Corinthians 12v4-11 & 27-30; Romans 12v6*

Do all Christians have the same gifts?

Who determines whether a Christian has a specific gift?

Do all Christians speak in tongues?

## **WHY ARE CHRISTIANS GIVEN SPIRITUAL GIFTS?**

Whilst the Corinthian church was very gifted, it had fundamentally misunderstood why Christians are given spiritual gifts. This led to misuse of the gifts its members had received.

*Read: 1 Corinthians 12v7 & 12-26*

Do Christians have any reason to be proud if they have received spiritual gifts?

For whose benefit should Christians use their spiritual gifts?

Why might the allocation of spiritual gifts amongst a congregation of Christians cause division?

How should more gifted Christians treat less gifted Christians?

## **ARE SOME SPIRITUAL GIFTS MORE VALUABLE THAN OTHERS?**

Whilst every Christian is equally valuable to God, the New Testament indicates that some gifts are more valuable than others. Paul urges the Corinthians to 'eagerly desire the greater gifts' (1 Corinthians 12v13). The value of a gift is not determined by how spectacular it might seem, but by its usefulness in building up the body of the church (1 Corinthians 14v12). For this reason Paul considers that prophesy is more valuable than tongues which are not interpreted (1 Corinthians 14v1-5). Whilst Paul considers some gifts more valuable than others he also urges the church to pay special attention to Christians who do not have the most valuable gifts because they are 'indispensable' to the church (1 Corinthians 14v22-26)

## **USING SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

Where God has given individuals spiritual gifts these should be put to use so that the church can be built up and encouraged. In Romans 12v6-8 church leaders are urged to let those who are gifted 'use' their gifts. Whilst churches need to be vigilant against the misuse of spiritual gifts, they are not to prohibit their use (1 Corinthians 14v39) or to treat them with contempt (1 Thessalonians 5v19-20).

## **MISUSING SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

Paul highlights a number of ways in which spiritual gifts may be misused

### **Gifts misused for personal prestige**

Spiritual gifts are given to individuals for the benefit of the church as a whole. They are not to be used to gain personal prestige or power. There is no place for the 'spiritual show-off'. This was happening in Corinth, where it appears that the tongue speakers thought that they were a spiritual elite. Spiritual gifts must be exercised in a context of loving fellowship, otherwise they are useless (1 Corinthians 13, esp v1-3).

### **Gifts misused by those who are spiritually immature**

In Romans 12v6 Paul considers that a person should only exercise the gift of prophesy 'in proportion to his faith.' This is a useful reminder that a person should only exercise gifts in the church to the extent that he or she is spiritually mature enough to do so.

### **Gifts misused in a disorderly manner**

In 1 Corinthians 14v26-40 Paul taught that spiritual gifts must be exercised in an orderly way (v40). It is not unspiritual for church leaders to insist upon an ordered structure for the exercise of gifts, in fact it is a responsibility of the Elders to make sure that order is maintained. This means that there must be a limit on the number of people permitted to speak in tongues (v27) and that prophesies must be tested (v29). Contrary to some popular teaching chaos is not a mark of the work of the spirit - 'God is not a God of disorder but of peace' (v33)

### **Tongues misused in public if not interpreted**

The gift of tongues must never be used publicly in the church unless an interpretation is given as this will enable the whole body to be built up. A person who wishes to speak in tongues should first pray that he or she will be able to interpret, so that he or she can pray in ordinary language (1 Corinthians 14v13). If this is not possible, and there is no recognised interpreter at the church meeting, a person who wishes to speak in tongues must remain silent (14v28). Uninterpreted tongues are prohibited because they give the appearance of spirituality but do not build up the church. Instead they edify only the speaker (14v4). Paul is desperately concerned to make sure that intelligible words in the church are not replaced by an emphasis

on incomprehensible tongues (14v18-19). Use of tongues without the accountability of interpretation leads to the temptation to become a 'spiritual show-off'.

**For Further reading:**

Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, IVP, pp 224

D A Carson, *Showing the Spirit*,

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, IVP, pp 1016-1088

J I Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit*, IVP, pp 81-85; 178-179, 200-234

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, IVP, pp 191-239