

LESSON ESSENTIALS

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

LESSON 1: WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

What are the spiritual gifts? And what are we supposed to do with them? What purpose do they serve? The study of spiritual gifts has raised a lot of questions and disagreements over the years; avoiding the controversies there are still many areas of agreement and many applications for the believer's life.

When a person comes to faith in Christ, they receive the gift of salvation. Along with that priceless gift come many other spiritual blessings. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a marvelous reality, and one that is often misunderstood. Read on for an introduction to the idea of gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We have been given the Spirit at the moment of our conversion. Because of His presence within us, we can now live and serve according to His gifts.

Before you can use your gifts properly, you must understand why the gifts are given. 1 Peter 4:10 reminds us “as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”. Primarily, the gifts are given so that we can serve the Church, and thereby serve the Lord.

When the disciples watched Jesus ascend in to Heaven, they were most likely very sad to see Him go and assumed that they would feel the lack of His presence. However, He left them with a promise: He said that He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them (John 14:16, John 15: 26, Acts 1:4). This was certainly not a lesser gift or a poor substitution for the presence of Jesus with them. The disciples knew that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit were one in power and divinity. Now, instead of having the man Jesus Christ walking with them, they would have the very power of God, by His Spirit, dwelling within them! Amazingly, believers today share that same experience. We have been given the Spirit at the moment of our conversion. Because of His presence within us, we can now live and serve according to His gifts.

What are these gifts? Surely the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ are among the gifts that He brings to life in us (Galatians 5:22-23). However, these are universal gifts that that all believers have, and that all are required to use and to develop.

On the other hand, what specific gifts or abilities are granted to believers? There are several lists given in scripture that name specific gifts and there are broad categories given that sum up those specific gifts. (See 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4:1-14). However, regardless of what your personal spiritual gifts are, there are some guiding principles surrounding use of the gifts to keep in mind.

Before you can use your gifts properly, you must understand why the gifts are given. 1 Peter 4:10 reminds us “as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”. Primarily, the gifts are given so that we can serve the Church, and thereby serve the Lord. That is to say, the gifts are not primarily for your own personal benefit, and using them is not optional.

Remember the parable of the talents? We read in Matthew 25 the story of a master giving two, five, or ten talents to his servants. While the master was away, the servants were expected to do something with the talents that would bring increase and benefit to the master’s account. While two of the servants invested and planned and dramatically increased the value of what they had been given, one servant simply hid his talent in the ground. He was sorely punished for this behaviour.

In the same way, the Lord grants us ‘talents,’ or the Spiritual gifts. Many people may easily, and willingly, begin to use the gifts God has given, and may have no hesitation in serving the Lord and His people with those gifts. Others of us may be more reticent. Perhaps we are shy or afraid. Perhaps we have not been taught how to use a certain gift, or our personalities or circumstances hinder us from using the gifts for any number reasons. This is not pleasing. The Lord has given you His Spirit’s gifts. He will surely also give you the opportunity and the ability to use them. If you are unwilling to serve Him with what He has given you, it is an act of disobedience.

Some may argue at this point and say, “But I am willing to use the gifts; I am merely waiting until I am fully skilled at using them so that I can serve and glorify God with excellence.” This sounds humble and reasonable, but truly the Lord is not waiting for us to become experts. He does not want us to wait until we ‘figure it out’ or until we ‘feel ready.’ No; maturity, understanding, experience, skill, excellence: all these traits come through practicing the gifts, not through waiting for the perfect moment. Certainly some gifts more suited to being developed through lessons or training, and that kind of learning and developing is certainly encouraged. But in the meantime, trust the Lord to use your faithful obedience and to make something beautiful out of it.

Another principle to remember is that while you have been given a limited number of specific gifts, you are not necessarily free to never function in the other gifts. For example, you may not have been given the gift of evangelism. That does not free you from the responsibility of telling others about Jesus when the opportunity arises (see 1 Peter 3:15). In the same way, you may not have been given the gift of compassion. That does not free you from the responsibility of lovingly meeting needs in the lives of others (see Colossians 3:12).

Over all, rejoice in the fact that the Lord has made His presence real to you by His Holy Spirit within you. Thank Him for the gifts He has given you, without envying the gifts you did not receive. Ask Him for courage, wisdom, and opportunity to use the gifts for His glory. And then walk in obedience using His gifts for the edification of His church and the furtherance of His gospel!

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IN REVIEW

- While there are general gifts given universally to all believers, the Holy Spirit also gives specific gifts to each individual believer.
- The gifts are not to be used for selfish gain, nor to be hidden for selfish comfort. The gifts are to be used to serve and strengthen the Church and to further the gospel.
- Fear or lack of experience may hold someone back from using their gifts, but it is in obedience to the Lord and practicing the gifts that skill, confidence, and increased effectiveness come. The Lord blesses our obedience even when we are new in our faith or in our service.
- Being gifted in one particular area does not remove the responsibility to also walk in the general gifts, or to sometimes walk in the specific gifts as needs arise.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Take time to read through the lists of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4) and pray for insight to understand which gifts you might have. Ask a trusted friend or mentor to help you identify your gifts.

- Pray for opportunities and boldness to use your gifts.

- Consider asking other believers with complimentary gifts to yours to work with you in ministry so that you have a more complete skill set to serve with (for example, in a small group scenario having many different gifts represented in your members allows you to serve the community or new comers in many different ways ensuring that their needs are well met.).

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