

A Spiritual Gift to equip you

There is no doubt that some people show extraordinary natural ability in certain areas of life, but where does that talent and ability and giftedness come from? Mother nature? Parental nurture and motivation? The fate of the gods? James says, in his typically direct way, that 'every good and perfect gift comes from God, the Father of lights'. How kind of God, in his common grace, to give such good and useful gifts to the human race, for our lives would all the poorer without them.

The Bible speaks of another suite of gifts however, that are not commonly distributed across the human race, but are given specifically to the church. These are typically called 'spiritual gifts', and they form the subject of this study.

Icebreaker



Have each person choose someone in your group, and tell them what you think they're good at. Make sure that you don't exaggerate, nor 'gild the lily', nor frame it negatively – watch out for banter, and make sure that you don't leave anyone out.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Introduction

The Bible paints many different pictures of the church. Sometimes as a flock of sheep. Sometimes as a house of living stones. Sometimes as a family. Sometimes as a beloved bride. But in this letter to the Corinthians, Paul paints the church as a body, with many different parts, all connected together, with the ideal of diversity working in unity.

From Chapter 7 of this letter, Paul takes up questions that the Corinthian Christians have put to him: on marriage (7:1); on worship (8:1); on men and women (11:2,3); on the Lord's Supper (11:17). In chapter 12, Paul tackles this question of spiritual gifts, and in a way that makes evident that the Christians in Corinth were confused, and that this confusion was troubling the congregation's peace and fellowship.

Question 1

The seventh verse is very helpful. What does it tell us about (i) the purpose of spiritual gifts? (ii) the recipients of these spiritual gifts? (iii) the giver of these spiritual gifts?

Question 2

Multiple Choice

According to verses 2 & 3, what is one of the chief marks of a genuine converting work of the Holy Spirit?

- A. The possession of a spiritual gift.
- B. The avoidance of pagan worship.
- C. A right knowledge of, and submission to, Jesus Christ.
- D. A strong conviction that the Presbyterian Church is the one true church.

If your answer was 'A', you may want to consult Matthew 7:21-23. If you answered 'B', you may wish to look up Matthew 23:15-32. If your answer was 'D', it may be good for you to read again 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

Question 3

What do you think is Paul's main point in verse 4-6?

Theological Comment

Paul in his letters to the Corinthians, the Romans, and the Ephesians, compiles lists of spiritual gifts:

1 Corinthians 12

Message of wisdom
Message of knowledge
Faith
Gifts of healing
Miraculous powers
Prophecy
Distinguishing spirits
Speaking in tongues
Interpretation of tongues

Romans 12

Prophecy
Serving
Teaching
Encouraging
Contributing
Leading
Showing mercy

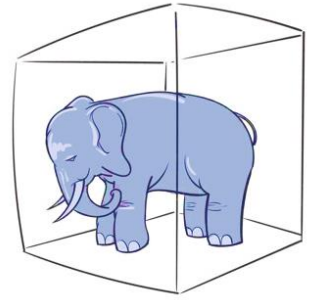
Ephesians 4

Apostles
Prophets
Evangelists
Pastors
Teachers



It is unlikely that these lists are exhaustive. The question of just how many spiritual gifts there actually are, is not easily solved, and is wisely not debated.

Another area that it is not always profitable to debate, is the question of whether all the gifts that Paul mentions are to be found in the Christian Church today. Some are of the strong opinion that all of them are present. Some are of the equally strong opinion that the more miraculous gifts have fulfilled their purpose, and are no longer to be expected in today's church. The Presbyterian Church, along with those who sit in the stream of Reformed Theology, tend to the position that the more 'spectacular gifts' (eg miraculous powers, gifts of healing, speaking in tongues, apostleship) have passed from the life of the church, and are no longer to be expected in regular congregation life. (For example, since the Scriptures were completed, and the gospel mission was understood to go to the world, those gifts that permitted and fostered these achievements fulfilled their purpose.)

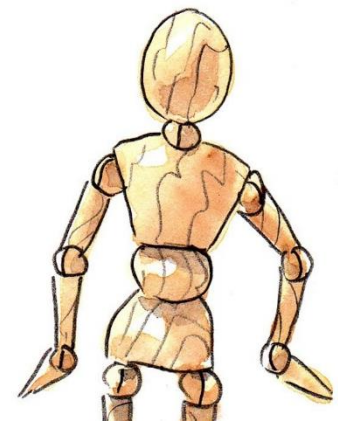


Question 4

Looking over the lists above, what gift do you think that God may have given to you? (Try and help each other out.)

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.



²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all

apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Question 5

Is it possible for a Christian to use their spiritual gift without love? Give an example if you can. Do you think that's why Paul goes on in Chapter 13 to say what he does?

Case Study – an old story

Once upon a time, animals organized a school. They adopted a curriculum of running, climbing, swimming, and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all of the subjects. The duck was excellent in swimming; in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his web feet to be badly worn, so that he was only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that – except the duck. The rabbit started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much homework in swimming. The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed muscle strain from overexertion, and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running. The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing class, he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there.

Question 6

The story above has an obvious moral, and has some resonance with what Paul is saying to the Corinthians. What are some of the points of similarity? How many connections can you make?



Prayer

Now finish in prayer, giving thanks for each member of the group, and being mindful of our confession: *I believe in the holy catholic church. The communion of saints.*

In your prayers, ask for wisdom to discern your spiritual gift, and for earnestness to use it for the benefit of other believers. In your prayers, beware of things like false modesty, pride, jealousy and independence. But also in your prayers, remember that the Holy Spirit is at work within us, fostering love, cultivating contentment, and inspiring passion for the Kingdom, and so 'do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'.

Close this study by affirming together the 'most excellent way'. (Don't rush the phrases, and try hard to keep together.)

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.