

Spiritual Gifts, Part 2

Review

In our last session, we explained that every believer receives at least one spiritual gift, with some receiving more than one. These spiritual gifts are for the purpose of executing God's plan for your life for His glory. When you exercise your spiritual gift(s), you will be carrying out the "work" that God has for you. The outcome of this work will be divine good, as opposed to human good.

We define human good as work done through the power of the flesh for the purpose of personal glorification or to gain God's approval. It is neither initiated by God nor does it glorify Him, even if the results are positive.

Divine good, on the other hand, is the work performed by the believer under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit to advance God's plan and glorify Him. Divine good builds up the Church (1 Corinthians 12:7).

These spiritual gifts serve as the main function of a believer's spiritual life. They represent what God is calling each believer to do for Him. Each gift is sovereignly issued to the believer according to God's will, rather than personal desires. The use of your spiritual gifts will be the primary topic of discussion between you and God at the Bema judgment after resurrection. The manner in which you utilized the logistical assets provided by God for the operation of your spiritual gifts, along with their outcomes, will be evaluated. Wood, hay, and straw (human good) will be burned as useless. Gold, silver, and precious stones (divine good) will endure the fire test and are rewarded in eternity (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Understand that divine good is not limited to the products of a believer's spiritual gifts. A believer can perform works that qualify as divine good entirely apart from the function of their spiritual gift. The qualifier for divine good is always motivation: was it Spirit-led and enabled?

In our last session, we examined a list of spiritual gifts and provided brief definitions. As I previously mentioned, some spiritual gifts were not included in our discussion. I withheld them because I believed they deserved special attention. The reason for my belief will become clear shortly. The remaining gifts are:

Apostle – *Apostolos* - A delegate or ambassador of the gospel, a messenger, or one who is sent. It is the gift through which the Spirit appoints certain Christians to lead, inspire, and develop the churches of God by proclaiming and teaching true doctrine. See Acts 12:1-5, Acts 14:21-23. We generally take the position that those who had this gift were limited to the twelve during the first century.

Knowledge – *Gnosis* - Primarily a pursuit of understanding; particularly, an exploration of spiritual truth. It is a special gift that enables certain Christians to comprehend, in an extraordinary way, the profound truths of God's Word and to apply them to specific situations in the church. Those who possess this gift exhibit remarkable insight into revealed spiritual truths. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

Prophet – *Prophetesia* - Signifies the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God (*pro* - forth, *phemi* - to speak). It primarily involves “FOREtelling” in the Old Testament and “FORTHtelling” in the New Testament. This practice edifies, exhorts, and consoles, aiming also to build up the church. It is a special gift whereby the Spirit empowers certain Christians to interpret and apply God's revelation in specific situations. This may pertain to some future event, such as the rapture or end times, but it can also simply mean interpreting some revelation from God (1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 14:30-33; 37-40).

Effecting of Miracles - *Energema* - An effect, operation, or working. *Dunamis* - Force, a specific miraculous power not produced by natural agents or means. A sign gift. Miracles were acts performed by Christians that transcended the limits of natural phenomena or any explanation. To qualify as a miracle, it must be something that could not have occurred through normal or logical means.

Healing – *Lama* - A cure. It signifies a means of healing and is plural in 1 Corinthians 12:9. This is another sign gift, a special gift through which the Spirit employs certain Christians to restore health to the sick. Such healing occurs without any human intervention beyond a touch or a command to be healed. (James 5:13-16, Luke 9:1-2)

Tongues - Glossa - A language that is unlearned. It is a special gift through which the Spirit empowers certain believers to speak in human languages they do not know, speak, or even understand.

Interpretation of Tongues - Hermenia - Translation. It involves explaining the meaning of words in another language. In our context, this is a special gift that enables a believer to understand and clarify what is being articulated by another who is speaking in tongues (*Glossa*).

What makes these seven spiritual gifts especially unique is that they no longer function in the Church today. While some denominations claim they remain functional and even “practice them,” that does not change the fact that whatever so-called manifestations of these gifts they are experiencing are not legitimate and, in some cases, are demonically driven. The reasons they are not legitimate today are quite varied. They all served specific functions in the early apostolic period of the Church, and most were intended to help establish the early Christian Church. Once they were no longer needed for that purpose, they were removed.

Specifically, the gifts of apostles, prophets, miracles, knowledge, and healing were bestowed upon believers by the Holy Spirit during the apostolic period of the Church Age in the first century AD. They addressed distinct needs of the first century as a transition from the interrupted Age of Israel to the mystery doctrines of the Church Age. This new Age of Grace represented a radical departure from the previous Age of the Law. Israel was to undergo divine discipline for its religious apostasy, rejection of the Messiah, and blaspheming of the Holy Spirit by accusing Jesus of performing miracles through the power of Satan. Israel would be destroyed in 70 AD and dispersed among the nations. As of now, that has been nearly 2,000 years.

God’s plan would advance despite Israel’s failure. Their rejected Messiah was given to the Gentiles instead. This new age or dispensation marked a shift in how God related to mankind, transitioning from the Law to Grace. The doctrines outlining what was being offered and required under the Age of Grace were not yet fully revealed, let alone disseminated among the rapidly growing Church. That process would take until around 96 AD or a bit later, when the last book of the canon of Scripture, Revelation, would be written and fully distributed to various churches. Until the canon of Scripture was complete, revealing all of God’s plan for the Church Age,

and distributed, there was a need for certain gifts to fill that void. Those gifts included apostles, prophets, miracles, healing, and knowledge.

In addition to these five gifts, there are two more: tongues and the interpretation of tongues, which also functioned during this early apostolic church period. Their function was markedly different from that of the other five temporary gifts. Tongues served a specific purpose: to evangelize Israel and warn them of their impending discipline. Once Jerusalem fell in 70 AD, tongues ceased as a spiritual gift, as their purpose was no longer needed. More on tongues later.

The Early Church

By the time of his death, Jesus had been teaching for three and a half years, and the message that the Messiah had come was already spreading well beyond Israel. After Pentecost, the Church was growing, but nothing existed in written form to satisfy the thirst and need for information of all the new converts. There was a lack of available information on how to function under this new system. Paul refers to this information as the “mystery.” The Greek word is *musterion* and means a hidden or secret thing that is revealed to those who have a right or need to know. The rituals of ancient fraternal orders, for example, were a *musterion* revealed only to its members.

Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and

generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

The Gospels and Acts are believed to have been written around 70 AD. Romans and Galatians are dated between 50 and 65 AD. First and Second Corinthians were written in 56 and 57 AD, respectively. Ephesians is thought to have been written around 61-63 AD. Philippians is dated around 55 AD, while the date of Colossians remains uncertain. First and Second Thessalonians were written around 51 or 52 AD. First and Second Timothy and Titus were probably written between 62 and 70 AD; Philemon was composed between 61 and 63 AD. Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter were authored before 70 AD. If Peter penned 2 Peter, it would have been before his death, which is believed to have occurred between 64 and 67 AD. First, Second, and Third John were written after the Gospel, assuming John wrote them all. Jude is thought to have been composed around 80 AD, and Revelation is believed to have been completed as late as 95-96 AD.

If the Cross occurred in 30 or 31 AD, then there was a lengthy period between Pentecost and the circulation of the first books of the New Testament, lasting twenty years or more. It would take 65 years or more from Pentecost for the entire canon of New Testament Scripture to be written and circulated.

Since the entirety of the New Testament that we now take for granted was not yet revealed, written, or circulated until about 65 years after Pentecost, a significant doctrinal knowledge void existed that needed filling. Unbelievers required the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be presented to them. Once converted, these new believers understandably sought to learn more. The Torah provided some guidance, but much of what would form the Christian Way of Life in the New Testament was not fully revealed and shared with the entire Church for decades.

Believers needed to understand the doctrines necessary for fulfilling the Christian Way of Life. God was obliged to convey that information to them. He accomplished this by using specialized spiritual gifts to fill that void

until the canon could be completed and disseminated. These five spiritual gifts were designed to address the scriptural void and connect the Old Testament with the New Testament. Once the void was filled by the completed canon of Scripture, these specialized gifts were no longer necessary.

Meanwhile, this void created three specific problems that required immediate attention:

1. Get the mystery doctrines of the Church Age published, as they are revealed to mankind by God.
2. Disseminate them to the body of Christ as soon as possible. Without email or even printing presses, multiple hand-copied letters were forwarded from church to church in cities all over the known world. The church at Corinth or Ephesus might receive a letter from Paul. A scribe there would create one or more hand copies of that letter, and those would be hand-delivered to other nearby churches, repeating the process until the letter to Corinth or Ephesus had reached all of Christendom. This was clearly a slow and laborious process.
3. Meanwhile, until the New Testament canon was completed and fully disseminated, it was essential to provide the new churches with sufficient information for the Body of Christ to function properly as intended.

To those three, we can add a fourth mission: growing the new church. All of this was a significant challenge! God used these specialized spiritual gifts to achieve that mission and to fill the doctrinal void in the local churches until the completed canon became available.

How was that done?

First, the gospel needed to be spread. That responsibility initially fell to the apostles (the twelve) and some early disciples of Jesus. The gift of apostleship was given to those tasked with establishing the mystery doctrines of the Church Age and developing the Body of Christ through proclamation and teaching of true doctrine. They were endowed with impressive special gifts, such as miracles, healing, knowledge, and tongues. These gifts of healing and miracles, in particular, served as their

credentials. They were designed to immediately attract attention to the messenger and establish them as exceptional individuals, and most importantly, as someone speaking under the authority of God. This granted them legitimacy that proved the divine source of their teachings. Apostles healed and performed miracles or spoke in tongues – and both unbelievers and believers listened! Wouldn't you?

Healing and Miracles

First, understand something about healing. It was never done solely for the purpose of healing, not even when performed by Jesus during His ministry. If that had been its purpose, then Jesus would have been remiss in not healing the entire world. Consider this: why did Jesus heal only some and not all? He certainly had the power to do so. Jesus used healing (and miracles) to establish His credentials as the Messiah, the anointed one from God—to draw the attention of the entire nation to Himself and His message that the Kingdom was at hand and that He was the promised Messiah.

The gifts of healing and miracles served the same purpose for those who received them during the apostolic period. They were solely meant to establish the credentials of the apostles as individuals sent by God and to grant authority to their message.

Acts 5:12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Acts 8:4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and **saw the signs** that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of

many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

Acts 9:33 There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. ³⁴ And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, **and they turned to the Lord.**

Acts 28:8 It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. ⁹ And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. ¹⁰ They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

Hebrews 2:3 ... It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Paul was said to be a particularly gifted healer. He could heal the sick at will, often simply by having them touch items he had once used.

Acts 19:11 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

As he traveled from place to place among the Gentiles, in each new location, this supernatural calling card established him as having authority from God. People listened to his message, the gospel spread, and the Church was rapidly built.

Romans 15:19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ

However, as early as 62 AD, he was unable to heal even his dear friend Epaphroditus.

Phillipians 2:25 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

In 2 Timothy, we see a reference to another instance of Paul failing to heal through the gift of healing.

2 Timothy 4:20 Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus.

These gifts of healing and miracles were temporary. By that time, Paul's credentials were fully established, and the more spectacular gifts had been removed. Having served their purpose, there was no longer a need for them. If they were to remain, they would have become a distraction from the Gospel message. However, although the gifts themselves were removed (more on that later), God still performs miracles and healings today. While televangelists do not, God still does. You are encouraged to pray for healings and miracles.

Knowledge

Before Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire, the apostles were indeed quite ignorant. That may sound harsh, but it accurately reflects how they portrayed themselves in their own writings.

John 13:5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "**What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.**" ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "**If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.**" ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "**The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet,**

but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”

¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

When Jesus washed their feet in the upper room, He taught them about service to others and the necessity of the “washing away” of sin through the partial washing of confession after salvation. Peter didn’t understand. When Peter protested that he needed a whole bath, Jesus replied that he needed only partial washing — “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean...” (John 13:10). Jesus then pointed out that one of them was not clean, “For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean’” (John 13:11). Jesus was pointing out the difference between the whole washing of regeneration and the partial washing for our daily failures. Peter was “washed,” but Judas was not.

In verse 7 Jesus said, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Pentecost was what Jesus described when the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and His illuminating ministry came upon them as tongues of flame, enabling them to understand everything Jesus had been trying to teach them.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

With their minds cleared of fog, everything suddenly began to make sense to them! Consequently, they became a fountain of information.

But that wasn’t enough. The church desperately needed the mystery doctrine, and lots of it. This need was first addressed by the apostles and

early disciples, who were the initial church planters, as they conveyed the doctrines through word of mouth or letters. However, there were so few apostles! To help fill the void, God granted the gift of knowledge to members of the small groups forming as local churches. Those with this gift received direct revelation from the Holy Spirit regarding the mystery doctrines of the Church Age. They, in turn, communicated these revealed doctrines to their local churches. If a letter was received from Paul, Peter, or John, those with the gift of knowledge bore the responsibility of interpreting the doctrines in that letter and conveying them to the local church. These men were likely also gifted as pastor/teachers and functioned in that capacity (multiple spiritual gifts). The apostles and writers of the Scriptures also possessed this gift.

Prophecy

God had taken care to get the doctrines needed for the Christian way of life out to the new church, but He had much more to reveal about the future. There was a vast amount of eschatology that God planned to disclose to the Church. While the gifts of apostle and knowledge focused on revealing the many mystery doctrines of the Church Age, the gift of prophecy concentrated on future matters, unveiling all that God wanted them to know about what was coming. John was certainly gifted in this regard, but he was the last of those so endowed. Once the Revelation of Jesus Christ was given to John on the island of Patmos around 95 AD, this gift ceased to operate. God had revealed all that He wanted to share. Mankind then had the complete and disclosed plan of God in the fully revealed canon of Scripture.

There have been no legitimate prophets since John died. Under the Law, the standard of a true prophet is 100% accuracy! Anything less is not a true prophet from God, and those without a perfect batting average were promptly stoned to death as prescribed under the Law.

Once the canon was completed, direct revelation from God ceased. As the church became established and the apostles passed away, the gift of apostleship also ended and was fully replaced by evangelists and pastor/teachers who continued to spread all the New Testament mystery doctrines that had already been revealed.

Discerning Spirits

There is another spiritual gift called “discerning spirits,” and some debate surrounds this one. Some say it was a gift of the apostolic period for the purpose of determining whether the source of doctrine is true from God or false from Satan, and that it is not active today. A person gifted with discerning spirits could easily tell if the information was from the Holy Spirit or from an evil spirit. This individual was the “watchdog” of the local church, identifying false teachers and their false doctrines; there were many such individuals during those early days. We may see it demonstrated in Acts 5 with the Ananias and Sapphira incident; Peter seemed to know that the two were not telling the truth.

Some commentators believe this gift still functions today, possibly in a more limited form. I tend to agree with the argument that it is an extinct spiritual gift whose purpose was to protect early churches from false doctrine. Today, we have Scripture to measure the truth of someone's teachings against. However, we must be knowledgeable about what is in Scripture through diligent study in order to discern false teachings. We must weigh anything we hear by searching the Word ourselves to confirm its veracity. Be like the Bereans.

Acts 17:10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.
¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Less spectacular but equally important are gifts such as pastor, teacher, evangelist, helps, giving, ministering to others, and administration remain active today. Others not listed in Scripture, I believe, are created by God as the need arises. Examples might be the Christian in a local congregation gifted in managing the church website or running the sound/video equipment during services. God has work for you to do and has given you at least one spiritual gift for that purpose.

We have not finished our study of spiritual gifts. We still need to address tongues and the interpretation of tongues. More on this subject in the next session.