

Spiritual Gifts
Lesson Passages: 1 Corinthians 12
April 15

Donald Williams, a professor at Toccoa Falls College, analyzed some difficulties regarding spiritual gifts, “It is one of the great ironies of ecclesiology, one of the great tragedies of church history, and one of the great triumphs of Satan that a doctrine so conducive to the health and unity of the body of Christ as that of spiritual gifts should have become the occasion for an outpouring of divisiveness, fear, and polarization” (underline mine). Unfortunately, Williams words are true.

What is a spiritual gift? The Greek word translated “spiritual gift” is charisma. The Greek word for grace is “charis;” a charisma, therefore, is a grace gift. The suffix “ma” indicates results. A spiritual gift is a grace gift that produces results. Two truths apply to every believer. First, a believer neither earns nor deserves a spiritual gift. Second, a believer should expect a spiritual gift to produce results. A spiritual gift is an ability given by God to serve Him and the church that produces beneficial results.

The New Testament contains four spiritual gifts lists (1 Cor. 12:8-11; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). According to 1 Peter, one may categorize the gifts into two broad categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts. By adding the gifts mentioned in the gift list, one compiles a total gift list of twenty gifts.

What does Paul teach about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12?

First, God sovereignly bestows gifts upon believers (1 Cor. 12:4-7). This unit expresses seven truths. First, the passage highlights the Trinity. Father, Son, and Spirit in a concert of unison pour out the gifts. Second, the Spirit gifts the church with a rich variety of gifts. No one Scriptural list contains all the gifts; however, the spiritual gift lists place a premium on the gifts of communication of the Word of God, namely, prophecy and teaching. Third, believers exercise spiritual gifts in a variety of ministries. Two people with the same gift may exercise the gift in widely different ways. One believer with the gift of helps may use his/her gift of helps as part of the hospital ministry team; another believer with the same gift may use his/her gift of helps in meeting the needs of shut-ins. Fourth, God sovereignly bestows a variety of powers in the exercise of the gifts (v. 6). God energized Billy Graham to exercise the gift of evangelism on an international scale. Yet, the same God may energize a local church pastor with the gift of evangelism, yet few people outside his community may know him. Billy Graham and the pastor have the same gift but different empowerments. Fifth, the Spirit equips every believer with at least one spiritual gift (v. 7). No believer can claim he or she cannot serve the Triune God. Sixth, since a sovereign God bestows the gifts, the area in which a believer is gifted is a signpost to God’s will. A spiritual gift as a signpost reads, “Go this way.” Seventh, God graciously grants gifts for the one purpose of building up the Body of Christ. Gifts, then, are not for a believer’s satisfaction, selfish desires, or merely private benefit.

Second, spiritual giftedness means that believers share diversity, mutuality, and dependence (1 Cor. 12:12-31). Paul illustrated diversity, mutuality and dependence by means of the analogy of a body. Body parts have diverse functions. Paul notes that the eye has a different function than a foot, for example. Church members have diverse functions within the Body of Christ; each member, however, is important. We mutually need and depend on one another. When a body member does not function, the entire body suffers. Likewise, a believer that does not exercise his or her spiritual gift deprives the entire church.

Third, spiritual gifts provide a remedy for schisms (1 Cor. 12:25). Members should minister to each other through the area in which they are gifted. Mutual dependence and ministry rules out the possibility of schisms.