

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO KNOW .

~~DO I NEED TO DISCOVER MY SPIRITUAL GIFTS?~~

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"If we do not understand what our spiritual gifts are, then we will not experience meaningful achievement in life."

"Only through the exercise of spiritual gifts on the part of each believer will the body be built up."

"Gifts are not the important thing. Indeed, all of the gifts may only have been given to the early church and none are being given today. The ~~t~~important thing is to be mature in Christ."

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In 1956 I ^{first} preached a sermon on spiritual gifts. I can well remember that every~~t~~ime I preached that sermon (certainly I repeated it!) the reaction was one of excited astonishment ~~that~~ when people realized that God had endowed them with abilities to serve Him. Some people simply blossomed right before my eyes as they realized that they too could serve the Lord by exercising their spiritual gifts.

Of course, I was not the first person to preach on spiritual gifts-- nor ^{will} have I been the last. Indeed, in recent years the subject of spiritual gifts has received a lot of publicity. Books, ^{in whole or part,} have been devoted to the subject. Seminars ^semphasize the ^{truth.} subject. Outlines and charts elaborate on the doctrine. ~~Every~~ Almost everybody is conscious of the matter of spiritual gifts.

This emphasis in our day is breeding several reactions. For one, there are some believers who consciously or unconsciously exhibit ^{decide} the feeling that unless they can know their own particular gift or gifts they really cannot serve the Lord. So they are spending their time analyzing, discerning, and discussing in an attempt to discover their gifts. ^{by the other hand,} a few seem to be throwing the baby out with the bath water, ^{they say.} by stating that no gifts are being given today. God wants us to develop maturity, not discover and exercise spiritual gifts,

Just what should be our emphasis on spiritual gifts today? Here are some important facts to keep in mind.

First of all, God is giving spiritual gifts to His people today. There are two biblical reasons that attest to this. ~~For~~ one, the later epistles of the New Testament affirm that spiritual gifts are given to believers. Although it may be true that some particular gifts were given only to the first generation of Christians, the act of giving gifts was not limited to the first generation. First Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, where gifts are listed, are earlier epistles, but Ephesians 4 is one of (written around 61 AD.) Paul's later epistles. Also Peter says that every Christian has received a spiritual gift (1 Pet. 4:10), and this letter was written around 63 (some ~~second~~ ^{second} generation place it as late as 65). In other words, Christians scattered throughout the Roman provinces in Asia Minor had been given gifts and were expected to use them in ministering to each other.

A second reason that compels us to believe that God is giving gifts to His people today is that gifts are necessary for the proper functioning of the body of Christ. This is certainly the emphasis of Romans 13, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. Again, it seems to be true that ^{although} certain gifts were given for the beginning of the church (Eph. 2:20 says that apostles and prophets were given to found the church, the body of Christ), other gifts continue to be necessary as long as the body is not complete in numbers and maturity. So as long as the church is incomplete there will be a need for God to give gifts. Or to put it another way, as long as the Great Commission is not yet ~~un~~fulfilled, it will be necessary for God to give gifts and for believers to use them. Evangelism, helps, showing mercy and so forth are ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~XX~~ involved in bringing people to Christ, and teaching, exhortation, helps, administration, to name some, are indispensable in "teaching them to observe

all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This is a task that will not end until the church is taken to heaven and fully perfected, so that we can never fully fulfill the Great Commission. That's a good thing, for if we could fulfill the Great Commission in this or any generation, then the church would feel that it could rest on her laurels, for the task would be finished. Let us hope and work to blanket the world with the Gospel, ~~but~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ and let us work to teach the whole counsel of God to believers, but as long as we have sin natures we simply will not obey all of His commands, and thus there will always be need for the continual exercise of gifts within the body in obedience to the Commission.

So let's not throw out the baby with the bath water--~~giftsxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the exercise of maturity is the goal for every Christian, but gifts ^{are} necessary to achieve that (Eph. 4:13, "perfect" means mature in the verse).

A second important fact to remember today is that it is not necessary ^{your} to know ~~what~~ gift or gifts before you can serve the Lord, and ~~even~~ serve Him effectively. After all, there is no ^{verse} command in the New Testament ^{That commands you} to discover your spiritual gifts, but there are many commands to serve. Indeed, it is striking to notice that many of the commands to serve involve the same activities ~~as~~ as are involved in exercising some of the gifts. For example, there is a spiritual gift of giving, but all Christians are to give. There is a gift of evangelism, but all are to witness. Or to put this idea in a chart, it looks like this.

The Spiritual Gift to Some	The Command to All
1. Pastor (shepherding)	1. "Edify one another" (1 Thess. 5:11)/
2. Ministering or helping	2. "By love serve one another"(Gal. 5:13)
3. Teaching	3. "Teaching them to observe all things . . ." (Matt. 28:19)
4. Exhortation	4. "Exhorting one another" (Heb. 10:25)
5. Giving	5. "Every man as he hath purposed in his heart" (2 Cor. 9:7)

so let him give

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| 6. Showing mercy | 6. "Be ye kind one to another" (Eph. 4:32) |
| 7. Faith | 7. "For we walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7) |
| 8. Evangelism | 8. "Ye shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8) |
| 9. Discerning spirits | 9. "Try the spirits" (1 John 4:1) |

The gift of ruling or administration is not given to all nor commended except in relation to the qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim 3:4,12). The other eight specifically listed gifts are considered by many

to have been limited to the early believers (prophecy, apostleship, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and healing). Even if they were not ^{so} limited there ~~XXXX~~ are no ~~commands~~ corresponding commands which are given to all believers. Nowhere are all believers told to prophecy, be apostles, ^{heal} etc. ~~Indeed, Paul makes it clear that~~ However, we must ^{not} lose sight of the main point by debating whether or not certain gifts were limited to the early church. ~~The~~ And at the risk of being tedious, may I rehearse again that main point: there are clear commands in the New Testament to all believers which we ought to be obeying whether or not we "discover" that we have the corresponding spiritual gifts.

Herein lies an important clue! Activity may lead to discovery!

If ~~enough~~ you are active in doing what you know to be pleasing to God, then the Lord will ^{en} trust other opportunities to you, and in the fulfilling of these opportunities you will be able to see the spiritual gifts or spiritual abilities which you are using for His glory.

When we are first introduced to Philip in the ~~Be~~ book of Acts, we find him helping distribute the relief money to a group of bickering ^{widows} women (6:5). I doubt he sat down and tried to decide whether or not he had the gift of ministering or helping before he allowed his name to be proposed along with other six who were chosen to be helpers to the apostles. Here was an opportunity to serve, so he took it. He was willing to do even this rather menial task and he was faithful in doing it. The Lord then entrusted him with another ministry, that of evangelizing the Samaritans (8:5). This was certainly

one of his spiritual gifts, ^{later} for he is called Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8).

The same is true of Stephen. He first served along with Philip in ministering to those widows in the church (Acts 6:5). But he also had faith (6:8) and of course he was ~~xxx~~ a great witness (7:54). Faithfulness in one ministry lead to other opportunities and the enablement (including the spiritual gifts) fo fulfill them.

And herein lies another clue! Dedication or willingness is more important than discovering your spiritual gifts!

In all of our attention today on the matter of discerning one's spiritual gifts, we seem to have forgotten that being willing to do anything God might desire is ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ of top priority. The passage on gifts in Ephesians 4 begins with an exhortation to a worthy life and lowly walk (4:1-2). The ~~xxxx~~ extended discussion on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is preceded ^{in this letter} by several exhortations to dedication (3:16; 6:19-20; 10:31). And the ~~great~~ passage on gifts in Romans 12 begins with the ^{at} great call to dedication of life ^{in verses 1 and 2.} (12:1-2). He gives the gifts, but we make the dedication. So dedication is our first concern.

Yes, the risen head of the church is giving gifts today to the members of His body. But our responsibility is not so much to try to discover those gifts as to be sure that we are unreservedly dedicated to the Lord and that we are faithfully serving Him in all the opportunities He gives us each day.

Perhaps the day ~~xxxxxx~~ the believer dies, he can look back over his life and discern with some clarity what spiritual gifts God gave him. Perhaps he can do it sooner at various points along life's path. But whether he can or not, he can test his dedication and service each day, and the Lord will certainly be well-pleased with that.