

Spiritual Gifts

Introduction

The subject of spiritual gifts, also called “charisms” from the Greek word *charismata*, is both profound and practical in the life of the Christian believer. Spiritual gifts are special endowments given by the Holy Spirit to individuals for the edification of the Church, the advancement of the Kingdom, and the glory of God. The New Testament, especially the writings of Paul, is foundational in shaping the Christian understanding of these gifts. This perspective explores Faith Forward Ministries views on spiritual gifts from a comprehensive biblical perspective, examining their nature, purpose, diversity, and practical application, while addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities for the modern church.

The Origin and Nature of Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts originate from God. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” Here, Paul affirms the Trinity’s involvement—gifts from the Spirit, service to the Lord, and activity empowered by God the Father. Spiritual gifts are not skills or talents acquired by human ability, but are supernatural graces, given at God’s discretion for specific purposes within the body of Christ.

The Old Testament foreshadows this reality. In Exodus 31:1–5, for example, Bezalel is filled with the Spirit of God and given skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts to build the Tabernacle. Similarly, judges, kings, and prophets were empowered by the Spirit for particular tasks. However, the New Testament broadens the scope: these gifts are distributed to all believers, regardless of social status, background, or natural ability.

Biblical Catalogues of Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are referenced in several New Testament passages: Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12–14, Ephesians 4:11–13, and 1 Peter 4:10–11. While the lists differ slightly, there is significant overlap and a clear emphasis on diversity and unity.

- Romans 12:6–8: Prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy.
- 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 28–30: Wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostles, teachers, helpers, administrators.
- Ephesians 4:11–13: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.
- 1 Peter 4:10–11: Speaking and serving gifts.

These passages demonstrate that spiritual gifts are broad and multifaceted. Some are public and dramatic, others subtle and deeply personal. The lists are not exhaustive,

suggesting that the Spirit can bestow gifts as He wills according to the needs of the Church throughout history.

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

The biblical purpose of spiritual gifts is consistently clear: they are given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7), to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12), and to glorify God (1 Peter 4:11). Spiritual gifts are not meant for personal status or self-aggrandizement; rather, they are entrusted to believers as stewards for communal benefit. Paul writes, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Gifts are meant to foster unity, not division. Paul likens the Church to a body, with many members each playing a vital role (1 Corinthians 12:12–27). The diversity of gifts reflects the manifold wisdom of God and ensures that the Church lacks nothing to fulfill its calling.

Edification of the Church

Each gift is directed towards the upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation of God's people. For example, teaching clarifies and communicates doctrine, prophecy exhorts and warns, mercy extends compassion and giving supplies tangible needs. When gifts are exercised in love, the Church matures in faith and unity (Ephesians 4:13–16).

Mission to the World

Spiritual gifts also serve the Church's outward mission. Evangelists, for example, are uniquely gifted to proclaim the gospel; those with gifts of hospitality or service create welcoming spaces for outsiders. Miraculous gifts, such as healing or prophecy, can serve as signs authenticating the message about Christ (Hebrews 2:4).

The Diversity and Unity of Spiritual Gifts

Paul celebrates the diversity of gifts while emphasizing the necessity of unity. No one possesses all the gifts, and no gift is given to all believers. Rather, each member is vital. Paul warns against envy (desiring another's gift) and pride (considering one's gift superior). "If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing?" (1 Corinthians 12:17).

Unity is maintained through love, which Paul elevates above all gifts in 1 Corinthians 13. Gifts must be exercised in love or else they are empty and ineffective. Love is the "more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). In the diversity of gifts, believers are called to mutual honor, dependence, and self-sacrifice.

The Temporary and Permanent Gifts Debate

A significant theological debate concerns whether some spiritual gifts, particularly the more miraculous or "sign" gifts (e.g., tongues, prophecy, miracles, healing), ceased after the apostolic age ("cessationism") or continue today ("continuationism"). Both

perspectives appeal to Scripture. Cessationists cite passages such as 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 (“when the perfect comes...”), while continuationists highlight the open-ended nature of passages like 1 Corinthians 14:39 (“do not forbid to speak in tongues”).

A balanced biblical perspective recognizes that the Spirit is sovereign and that God can grant any gift at any time for the advance of the gospel and the health of the Church. Careful discernment, humility, and submission to biblical teaching are essential as the Church seeks to exercise and interpret the gifts.

Discovering and Using Spiritual Gifts

The New Testament assumes that every believer has received at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10). Discovering one’s gifts involves prayer, study of Scripture, self-examination, and affirmation from the community. Gifts often become apparent as believers serve, respond to needs, and receive feedback from others.

Once discovered, gifts should be developed and exercised diligently. Paul exhorts Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift you have” (1 Timothy 4:14). This involves training, accountability, and a willingness to step out in faith. All are called to use their gifts for the good of others, not bury them out of fear or apathy (Matthew 25:14–30).

Guidelines for the Use of Spiritual Gifts

The New Testament, particularly 1 Corinthians 12–14, offers practical guidelines for the proper use of spiritual gifts. Paul insists that all things be done “decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Gifts are to be exercised with humility (Romans 12:3), in love (1 Corinthians 13), for the building up of the Church (1 Corinthians 14:26), and with respect for the conscience and understanding of others (1 Corinthians 14:27–28).

Paul also warns against the misuse and abuse of gifts. Problems in the Corinthian church included pride, competitive spirit, disorder, and confusion. Paul corrects these distortions by returning to the centrality of love and the corporate good.

The Role of Leaders

Church leaders have a particular responsibility to train, equip, and release believers in their gifts (Ephesians 4:11–16). They are to discern and test prophecies (1 Thessalonians 5:20–21), ensure sound doctrine, and foster an environment where all gifts are valued and exercised appropriately.

Spiritual Gifts and the Fruits of the Spirit

It is crucial to distinguish between spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). Gifts are about what we do for God and others; fruit is about who we are in Christ. Spiritual gifts can operate without spiritual maturity, but the fruit of the Spirit is the evidence of ongoing transformation into Christlikeness. The most effective and authentic ministry happens when gifts are exercised through lives marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities

The topic of spiritual gifts continues to be a source of vitality and controversy in the global church. Some traditions emphasize certain gifts, while others downplay or ignore them. There is a danger in both extremes: seeking the gifts more than the Giver or suppressing the Spirit's work out of fear or tradition. The biblical challenge is to "earnestly desire the higher gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31) while pursuing love above all.

In a world fragmented by individualism, the biblical vision of a unified, interdependent, and Spirit-empowered community is deeply relevant. Spiritual gifts, rightly understood and practiced, can bring healing, encouragement, and direction to the people of God and to the world they are called to serve.

Conclusion

A biblical perspective on spiritual gifts recognizes them as sovereignly given, diverse in expression, unified in purpose, and vital for the health and mission of the Church. Every believer is called to discern, develop, and deploy their gifts in love, humility, and service. In doing so, the Church reflects the wisdom, power, and beauty of its Lord, becoming a living testimony to the world of God's grace and truth.

As Paul exhorts the Corinthians, "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1). May every believer and every church heed this call, that the manifold grace of God might be displayed in ever-increasing measure, for the glory of Christ and the good of all.