

A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A spiritual gift is a skill or ability given by the Holy Spirit that enables a Christian to perform a function in the body of Christ with ease and effectiveness for the glory of God.

The Bible contains several lists of spiritual gifts. While we do not believe that these lists are meant to be exhaustive, listing all of the gifts, we do believe that they are helpful in understanding the general way that the Spirit equips believers for ministry. The main passages describing the spiritual gifts are Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11.

We believe that there have been two destructive views of spiritual gifts at work within churches. The first is the belief that the gifts have ceased. We do not believe that the Bible supports this view in any way. In fact, there are commands that directly contradict it (1 Corinthians 12-14, 1 Thess 5:19-20). The second destructive view is an obsession with the gifts that places the gifts at the center of the church instead of the Gospel. We believe that all of these gifts are tools meant to display Christ and his Kingdom, not to be celebrated on their own.

GIFTS THAT MUST BE CAREFULLY DEFINED AND PRACTICED

Throughout the course of church history, certain gifts have become controversial, mainly due to the fact that they have been used in unbiblical ways. This has led to division within the church and confusion to those outside.

We are committed to the Biblical definition and practice of every gift, and realize that there are a wide variety of beliefs about Spiritual Gifts within the Christian Faith. Three gifts in particular need additional clarification:

1. Speaking in Tongues

Belief:

The Bible seems to present two different forms and Biblical uses for “tongues”, which in the Greek is simply translated “languages”. One form is private, and one form is public. Confusion seems to happen when the public form of tongues goes private, or the private form of tongues goes public.

First, there is a category that describes a private, unknown heavenly language for prayer. In 1 Corinthians 13:1, Paul says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels.” There seems to be a language of the angels, or a heavenly language. He also says in 1 Corinthians 14:2,4, “For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God.” This seems to indicate a private expression of “tongues”. Paul goes on to say that “the one who speaks in a tongue

builds himself up” and he explains that he personally had this gift (14:18-23). The private gift of tongues is never meant to go public. 1 Corinthians 14:27 instructs, “If any man speak in a tongue or a language, let there be only two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.” Paul instructs that there must be order- and that if there is no interpretation, or translation of the language, it is a private thing not meant for public.

Second, there is a category that describes a public, known earthly language for evangelism. The Holy Spirit allows people who know Jesus to talk to those who don't know Jesus in their own language so that they may come to know Jesus. This is the gift of “languages” in its most basic sense. God seems to empower people with this gift when it is needed to share the gospel. This form of tongues is prominently on display in the book of Acts. This form of tongues played a specific role within the overall framework of the Acts as it focuses on the evangelistic, strategic spread of the Gospel around the world, and as the confirmation from Jesus to his Apostles and those looking on that his ascension had taken place and that they would be empowered by the Spirit of God to fulfill what they had been commissioned by the Son of God to do. Thus, we would expect for this gift to be more prominent and visible in darker areas of the world where evangelistic work is being done.

In response to some that teaches tongues as an evidence of “second blessing”, or true spirituality, it is important to recognize the Biblical teaching that not everyone will have these gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-11). They are in no way an indication of salvation or maturity. With all of the gifts, some get it and some do not- not everybody gets to do the same thing. The Holy Spirit gives different people different gifts to build others up with, and each person is called to be who God has made you to be and do what God has made you to do for the good of the body and the glory of God.

Practice at Mosaic:

This breakdown of the public and private form of tongues leads us to believe that tongues are never intended to be used in a worship setting, other than in instances when the Gospel is being preached evangelistically to those who speak in other languages. In that case, it seems that God provides both those with the ability to speak in tongues (languages) and those with the ability to interpret. If both are not present, the Bible instructs that people should remain silent.

The Scriptures instruct us to pursue the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1, 39), exercise them in an orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:40), and subject them to the Word (1 Corinthians 14:37). As long as gifts are exercised in an orderly and humble manner, subject to the Scriptures, the context of the congregation and a spirit of love, we do not restrict any personal use of the gift.

2. Healing

Belief

God has the power to heal anyone in any condition. In fact, it is one of the central hopes that we have as a people. Not only can God heal, he wants to heal and has promised that he will

heal all that has been broken by sin. Some of Jesus' first recorded words (Luke 4) were a claim to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of a healer and redeemer, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, [19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This leaves no doubt that it is certainly God's will to heal all that has been broken by sin. He will heal us. We don't get to determine the timing, but we have been promised that every person who has placed their faith in Christ will be healed. It's just a matter of time. When God chooses to do the healing is up to him. It may come temporarily for us in this life, it will certainly come completely for us following our death and entrance into our resurrected bodies.

It is pretty natural to conclude that, since it is God's will to heal, we are to pray for it and seek it passionately, as we do for every other part of God's will. Beyond that, we are given a clear, biblical command to pray for healing. James 5:14-16 says, "[14] Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. [15] And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." When James instructed believers to "call the elders of the church" to pray over them when they are ill, he broadened the healing ministry from Jesus and the early Apostles, to the primary spiritual leaders in every local church.

As Pastor Gene Getz explains, "God may choose to heal a person supernaturally and even instantaneously from some physical ailment that seems to be primarily biological in nature... However, these healings seem to be rare- even though God can still choose to work the same kinds of healings that are described in the Gospels and the book of Acts. We must never limit God, but we must not put words in God's mouth that he has not uttered- that we can always be healed from bodily ailments if we have enough faith." Sometimes it is God's will to grant us a foretaste of the physical healing which he will grant us fully in the future. Other times, as in the case of Paul (2 Corinthians 12:8-10), God may choose to use our sickness, and even death, to display his strength through our weakness, and our faith even in the midst of suffering. We should pray for healing, and trust God and His perfect will, whether that means sickness or health, temporary healing or death, where we experience complete healing in God's presence.

1 Corinthians 12:9 says "...to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,". Again, this indicates that there are some who are particularly gifted with "gifts of healing", and will find their prayers for healing are answered more frequently and thoroughly than others. These are not "faith-healers". Even those who healed others in Scripture did not claim this title, but always gave glory to God when he chose to heal and accepted his will when he chose not to heal.

Practice at Mosaic:

Those who pray for healing need to use wisdom when working with people who are ill. Not praying at all for healing involves disobedience to Scripture (James 5). At the same time, telling people that God seldom heals today and that they should not expect it seems to violate the principles that Jesus laid down about having "faith" which produces healing in God's will. Telling people that God always heals today if we have enough faith is an errant and cruel teaching not supported by Scripture.

Thus, we conclude that all are to pray for healing, led by the elders (James 5). We are to guide our people to handle these issues sensitively and carefully as they pray with people. Ultimately, we can offer all people the hope that everyone who has placed their faith in Christ will be healed and made whole one day, as it is God's will and mission to heal all that was broken by our sin.

3. Prophecy/ Words of Knowledge & Wisdom

Belief

The spiritual gift of prophecy is listed among the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and Romans 12:6. The Greek word translated "prophesying" or "prophecy" in both passages properly means to "speak forth" or declare the divine will, to interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God which is designed to influence people. Prophecy is speech from God to man, through man, and can be to either edify the church (14:3), or to convince and convict unbelievers (14:24-25).

There are two primary types of prophecy in Scripture, foretelling (revelation of the future) and forth-telling (application of revelation to a particular setting). Most prophecy in Scripture is "forth-telling", in which there is fresh revelation and application of a timeless truth for a specific place and time. Many people misunderstand the gift of prophecy to be the ability to predict the future. While knowing something about the future may sometimes be an aspect of the gift of prophecy, it was primarily a gift of proclamation ("forth-telling"), not prediction ("fore-telling").

We believe this to be closely related to the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8 as "word of knowledge" or "utterance of knowledge." The Greek word for this gift is *gnosis* and it simply means knowledge and understanding. The Scriptural emphasis in 1 Corinthians 12:8 is on the ability to speak this knowledge to others in a given situation.

Practice at Mosaic:

The Bible speaks of the immense value of prophecy as the people of God are to seek and speak out his truths to one another through the power of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 14:1 commands us to "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." Verse 39 tells us "my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy...". Paul's command in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22, "Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is

good." implies that prophecy will sometimes be extra-biblical and in need of testing with what has already been revealed in Scripture. We believe that we are to follow those commands as a church and seek to speak truth to one another by the power of the Holy Spirit.

However, we must take Paul's command and warning seriously and be very careful in our handling of these gifts. Improper use of these gifts comes dangerously close to denying the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible is authoritative and Scripture is closed. Prophecy must be tested (14:29) to see if it is in line with the truth of Scripture.

The way that we speak about these gifts and to one another is also of utmost importance. That is the entire point of Paul's writing to the Corinthians about the gifts. Those who use these gifts in a damaging way often say something to the effect of, "I have a word from the Lord for you." In doing so, they claim to be speaking on behalf of God, and claim that their words are to be strictly obeyed. Often the gifts are used in attempt to gain power and influence over other people and to make others dependent on the one who claims to possess those gifts. This misuse of the gifts is clearly not of God.

Christians are to be very wary of those who claim to have a "new" message from God. It is one thing to say, "I had an interesting dream last night." However, it is quite another matter to say, "God gave me a dream last night, and you must obey it." No utterance of man should be considered equal to or above the written Word. We must maintain a careful balance, as we believe that the Bible teaches clearly that God still speaks through people to encourage, and edify, and challenge one another. At the same time, we must hold to the Word that God as our ultimate source of truth and carefully test all things according to it.