

Wednesday Bible Study

Fall, 2008

Pneumatology: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Section 5

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

I. Introduction

God has given each believer a combination of opportunities and gifts that is perfectly suited to his or her situation in life. Every Christian is really a minister with a unique contribution to make to the body of Christ. The central thrust of your ministry depends on the spiritual gifts you have received. In this booklet, we will look at the definition, design, desirability, and description of the gifts of the Spirit. We will also see how to discover and develop spiritual gifts and consider the danger of their abuse and directions for their use.

II. Diversity and Unity in the Body of Christ

When the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#), a new organism was created. This organism consists of all those who have received the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. In [Romans 8:14-17](#), [Galatians 4:4-7](#), and [Ephesians 2:19](#), it is described as a spiritual household or family. By virtue of both adoption and new birth, we have become sons and daughters of God. This organism is also called a holy temple in [Ephesians 2:20-22](#) and [1 Peter 2:4-5](#), and believers are its living stones. But the most frequently used metaphor for this new creation is the body of Christ (see [Rom. 12:4-5](#); [1 Cor. 12:12-27](#); [Eph. 1:22-23](#); 3:6; 4:4-16; 5:5:23-30; [Col. 1:18](#); 2:19).

The three major New Testament lists of the gifts are all introduced by a description of the unity and diversity in the body of Christ. Paul's metaphor for the church could not be more appropriate, because both the universal church (all believers) and the local church (geographically localized groups of believers) are unities which are built out of diverse elements. All believers have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)). Christ is the head, the ruler of the body ([Eph. 1:22](#); 4:15; [Col. 1:18](#)), and believers are the individual members or components. In this analogy, each Christian has been given a special function to perform and the ability to fulfill it in a way that will benefit the other members. There is quantitative and qualitative growth when believers discover and actively use their spiritual gifts. Each part of the body depends on the rest for its well-being, and there are no useless organs. This is why edification through

teaching and fellowship is so necessary in the local church. The biblical concept of *koinonia* or fellowship communicates the fact that isolation leads to atrophy. Just as no organ can function independently of the others, so no Christian can enjoy spiritual vitality in a relational vacuum. The Spirit has sovereignly distributed spiritual gifts to every member of the body, and no single member possesses all the gifts. Thus, growth does not take place apart from mutual ministry and dependence.

The body of Christ is an organism, not a dictatorship or a democracy. As such, the local church is best structured around the distribution and function of the spiritual gifts found in its members.

Exercise: In [Ephesians 4:4-16](#), Paul outlines the role of God-given gifts in the edification of the body. What are the seven points of unity found in verses 4-6? According to 4:7-10, what is the basis for the giving of gifts to the church? Verse 12 speaks of quantitative (corporate) growth, while verse 13 speaks of qualitative (individual) growth. How does 4:11-13 relate to 4:14-16?

III. Definition and Design of Spiritual Gifts

A. Definition

The Greek word most frequently used for spiritual gifts is *charismata*, a word that relates to the grace (*charis*) of God. Concerning these gifts, Paul writes, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" ([Eph. 4:7](#) NET Bible). Another word, *pneumatikos*, means "spiritualities," or "spiritual things." William McRae defines a spiritual gift as "a divine endowment of a special ability for service upon a member of the body of Christ." C. Peter Wagner offers a similar definition: "A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ according to God's grace for use within the context of the Body."

B. Design

Here are twelve principles that relate to God's design for spiritual gifts:

1. Every Christian has one or more spiritual gifts.

"To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all" ([1 Cor. 12:7](#)).

"It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these

things" ([1 Cor. 12:11](#)).

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" ([Eph. 4:7](#)).

"Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace

of God. ([1 Pet. 4:10](#)).

Spiritual gifts are not limited to a sub-group of believers; they are distributed by the Spirit to all Christian men, women, and children.

2. Many believers have evidently received more than one spiritual gift. Because there is such a variety of gifts, the number of possible combinations is great. Each multi-gifted Christian has received a combination of spiritual abilities that is perfectly suited to his or her God-given ministry.

3. Spiritual gifts may be given at the moment of regeneration, but they may lie undiscovered and dormant for a long period of time. Multi-gifted Christians often discover their combination of gifts through a gradual process.

4. Spiritual gifts can be abused and neglected, but if they are received at regeneration, it would appear that they cannot be lost. The Corinthian church illustrates the fact that believers can be highly gifted but spiritually immature.

5. Spiritual gifts are not the same as the gift of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit has been bestowed on all believers ([John 14:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#)), and every member of the body should appropriate this gift. The gifts of the Spirit, on the other hand, are distributed "as he decides to each person" ([1 Cor. 12:11](#)).

6. Spiritual gifts are not the same as the fruit of the Spirit. Spiritual fruit is produced from within; spiritual gifts are imparted from without. Fruit relates to Christlike character; gifts relate to Christian service. The fruit of the Spirit, especially love, should be the context for the operation of the gifts of the Spirit. Paul made it clear in [1 Corinthians 13](#) that spiritual gifts without spiritual fruit are worthless. Fruit is eternal, but gifts are temporal ([1 Cor. 13:8](#)); the former is a true measure of spirituality, but the latter is not.

7. Spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents. Unlike the natural abilities which everyone has from birth, spiritual gifts belong exclusively to believers in Christ. In some cases, the gifts of the Spirit coincide with natural endowments, but they transcend these natural abilities by adding a supernatural quality. Both are given by God ([Jas. 1:17](#)), and should be developed and used according to their purpose for the glory of God ([1 Cor. 10:31](#)).

8. All Christians are called to a ministry, but not all are called to an office. Ministry is determined by divinely given gifts and opportunities ([Eph. 3:7](#)). Offices (e.g., elder,

deacon, evangelist, and teacher) are humanly recognized and appointed spheres of ministry within the body.

9. Some spiritual gifts are more desirable in the church than others because they result in greater edification of the body. Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to "be eager for the greater gifts" ([1 Cor. 12:31](#); see 12:28-30; 14:5).

10. *Charismata* literally means "grace-gifts"--they are sovereignly and undeservedly given by the Holy Spirit. There is no basis for boasting or envy. Every member of the body has a special place and purpose. Whether more or less prominent in the eyes of men, the same standard applies to all: it is required of stewards that one be found faithful ([1 Cor. 4:2](#)). Work with what God has given to you ([2 Tim. 1:6](#)), and seek to please Him rather than men ([Gal. 1:10](#); [1 Thess. 2:4](#)).

11. Gifts are God's spiritual equipment for effective service and edification of the body.

They are not bestowed for the self-aggrandizement of the

recipient, or as an evidence of a special endowment of the

Spirit, but for the profit and edification of the Body of

Christ. The possessor is only the instrument and not the

receiver of the glory (J. Oswald Sanders).

Gifts were given "so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ" ([1 Pet. 4:11](#)).

12. High mobilization of spiritual gifts was the key to the rapid multiplication of the church in the New Testament (cf. [Rom. 1:11](#), [Eph. 4:12](#), [2 Tim. 2:2](#)).

IV. Desirability of the Gifts

It is important that every Christian discover and develop the spiritual gifts that have been bestowed on him or her by God. These gifts are desirable for three basic reasons:

A. You Will Be Satisfied

Knowing and using your gifts will give you an understanding of the unique and indispensable ministry you have been called to accomplish in the body of Christ. You will discover a significant part of your purpose for being on this planet and realize that God has made you competent to produce something that will last for eternity. You will have a sense of fulfillment and joy in the service of others as you become an available instrument through which the Holy Spirit can work.

In addition, knowledge of your spiritual gifts will greatly assist you in discerning and affirming the will of God at various points in your life. God will not call you to accomplish anything without giving you the power and enablement to do it. You will be able to make more intelligent decisions about possible involvement in specific opportunities and training in light of your God-given function in the body ([Rom. 12:4](#)). You will also use your time more effectively by focusing on the things you have been equipped to do well rather than expending your energy in areas of minimum potential.

B. Others Will Be Edified

Knowing and using your gifts will lead to the edification of other members of the body of Christ. As you exercise your spiritual gifts, you will play a substantial role in building up other Christians and leading them into maturity ([Eph. 4:12-16](#)). If you fail to develop your gifts or let them decline through disuse, your brothers and sisters in Christ will actually be hurt because they will be deprived of the unique ministry that only you could perform in their lives.

C. God Will Be Glorified

According to [1 Peter 4:10-11](#), your spiritual gifts are ultimately designed to bring glory to God. This is your highest calling, and it relates to all three Persons of the Godhead. As you use your spiritual gifts in conjunction with the power and fruit (especially love) of the Holy Spirit and in the name and Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Father receives the glory.

Digging for the Gifts

[Romans 12](#), [1 Corinthians 12-14](#), and [Ephesians 4](#) are the three primary biblical passages on spiritual gifts. [First Peter 4:8-11](#) provides supplementary information on this vital subject. Before moving to the next section, use this chart to list the gifts you find in these passages. Then ask yourself these questions:

- What is the nature of each of these gifts?
- Are all of these gifts present in the church today?
- Are there any other gifts that are not mentioned in this list?

V. Description of the Gifts

A spiritual gift is a "manifestation of the Spirit ... given for the benefit of all" ([1 Cor. 12:7](#)). As a supernatural endowment, its source is always the Holy Spirit, and its purpose is the building up of others to the glory of God.

A. The Gifts in [Romans 12](#), [1 Corinthians 12](#), and [Ephesians 4](#)

1. **Prophecy** ([Rom. 12:6](#); [1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29](#); [14:1-40](#); [Eph. 4:11](#))--The ability to receive and proclaim a message from God. This could involve the foretelling of future events, though its primary purpose as seen in [1 Corinthians 14:3](#) is forthtelling: "one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and consolation." This gift provides a word from God to a specific group, not the normative Word of God to all believers. Some maintain that prophecy is still operative in this sense today, while others say that the nearest current equivalent is Spirit-empowered preaching.

2. **Service** ([Rom. 12:7](#))--The ability to identify and care for the physical needs of the body through a variety of means. The Greek word for this gift is the same as that for "ministry" or "deacon," but the gift should not be confused with the office.

3. **Teaching** ([Rom. 12:7](#); [1 Cor. 12:28-29](#); [Eph. 4:11](#))--The ability to clearly explain and effectively apply the truths of God's Word so that others will learn. This requires the capacity to accurately interpret Scripture, engage in necessary research, and organize the results in a way that is easily communicated.

4. **Exhortation** ([Rom. 12:8](#))--The ability to motivate others to respond to the truth by providing timely words of counsel, encouragement, and consolation. When this gift is exercised, believers are challenged to stimulate their faith by putting God's truth to the test in their lives.

5. **Giving** ([Rom. 12:8](#))--The ability to contribute material resources with generosity and cheerfulness for the benefit of others and the glory of God. Christians with this spiritual gift need not be wealthy.

6. **Leadership** ([Rom. 12:8](#))--The ability to discern God's purpose for a group, set and communicate appropriate goals, and motivate others to work together to fulfill them in the service of God. A person with this gift is effective at delegating tasks to followers without manipulation or coercion.

7. **Mercy** ([Rom. 12:8](#))--The ability to deeply empathize and engage in compassionate acts on behalf of people who are suffering physical, mental, or emotional distress. Those with this gift manifest concern and kindness to people who are often overlooked.

8. **Wisdom** ([1 Cor. 12:8](#))--The ability to apply the principles of the Word of God in a practical way to specific situations and to recommend the best course of action at the best time. The exercise of this gift skillfully distills insight and discernment into excellent advice.

9. **Knowledge** ([1 Cor. 12:8](#))--The ability to discover, analyze, and systematize truth for the benefit of others. With this gift, one speaks with understanding and penetration. Some also associate supernatural perception with this gift.

10. **Faith** ([1 Cor. 12:9](#))--The ability to have a vision for what God wants to be done and to confidently believe that it will be accomplished in spite of circumstances and appearances to the contrary. The gift of faith transforms vision into reality.

11. **Healing** ([1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30](#))--The ability to serve as a human instrument through whom God supernaturally cures illnesses and restores health. The possessor of this gift is not the source of power, but a vessel who can only heal those diseases the Lord chooses to heal. Inner healing, or healing of memories is sometimes associated as another manifestation of this gift.

12. **Miracles** ([1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 29](#))--The ability to serve as an instrument through whom God accomplishes acts that manifest supernatural power. Miracles bear witness to the presence of God and the truth of His proclaimed Word, and appear to occur most frequently in association with missionary activity.

13. **Distinguishing of spirits** ([1 Cor. 12:10](#))--The ability to clearly discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (cf. [1 John 4:6](#)). With this gift, one can distinguish reality versus counterfeits, the divine versus the demonic, true versus false teaching, and in some cases, spiritual versus carnal motives.

14. **Tongues** ([1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30](#); 14:1-40)--The ability to receive and impart a spiritual message in a language the recipient never learned. For other members of the body to be edified, this message must be interpreted either by the recipient ([1 Cor. 14:13](#)) or by another person with the gift of interpretation ([1 Cor. 14:26-28](#)).

Because of the controversial nature of this gift, here are several observations:

a. Paul qualified the public use of this gift, stating that in a meeting of the church, two or at

the most three could speak in a tongue, it must be done in turn, and a person with the gift of interpretation must be present so that the body would be edified ([1 Cor. 14:26-28](#)).

b. There are a number of differences between the manifestation of tongues at Pentecost ([Acts 2:1-13](#)) and its use in Corinth ([1 Cor. 14](#)), and these differences suggest that the two are not identical (see J. Oswald Sanders, *The Holy Spirit and His Gifts*, p. 125).

- c. In his list of spiritual gifts in [1 Corinthians 12:28](#), Paul spoke of "kinds of tongues." This, coupled with the statements in [1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 14-15, 28](#) has led many to distinguish a private use of tongues, often called a "prayer language" ([1 Cor. 14:14-15](#)), from the public use of tongues which must be interpreted. Paul wrote that " if there is no interpreter, he should be silent in the church. Let him speak to himself and to God" ([1 Cor. 14:28](#)).
- d. This gift is easily counterfeited and often abused. It can be a source of spiritual pride, excessive preoccupation, and divisiveness.
- e. Contrary to some teaching, tongues are not the only sign of the filling of the Spirit, and not all believers are to manifest this gift ([1 Cor. 12:17-19,30](#)).

15. Interpretation of tongues ([1 Cor. 12:10, 30](#); 14:5, 13, 26-28)--The ability to translate into the vernacular a message publicly uttered in a tongue. This gift may be combined with the gift of tongues ([1 Cor. 14:13](#)), or it can operate separately ([1 Cor. 14:26-28](#)).

16. Apostleship ([1 Cor. 12:28,29](#); [Eph. 4:11](#))--In the New Testament, the apostles were not limited to the Twelve, but included Paul, Barnabas, Andronicus, Junias, and others as well ([Acts 14:14](#); [Rom. 16:7](#); [1 Cor. 15:5,7](#); [1 Thess. 2:6](#)). If the requirement for the office of apostle includes having seen the resurrected Jesus ([Acts 1:22](#); [1 Cor. 9:1](#)), this office ceased to exist by the second century. However, many believe that the gift of apostleship continues to be given. As a spiritual gift, this is the ability to begin and/or to oversee new churches and Christian ministries with a spontaneously recognized authority.

17. Helps ([1 Cor. 12:28](#))--The ability to enhance the effectiveness of the ministry of other members of the body. This is the only usage of this word in the New Testament, and it appears to be distinct from the gift of service. Some suggest that while the gift of service is more group-oriented, the gift of helps is more person-oriented.

18. Administration ([1 Cor. 12:28](#))--This word, like helps, appears only one time in the New Testament, and it is used outside of Scripture of a helmsman who steers a ship to its destination. This suggests that the spiritual gift of administration is the ability to steer a church or Christian organization toward the fulfillment of its goals by managing its affairs and implementing necessary plans. A person may have the gift of leadership without the gift of administration.

19. **Evangelism** ([Eph. 4:11](#))--The ability to be an unusually effective instrument in leading unbelievers to a saving knowledge of Christ. Some with this gift are most effective in personal evangelism, while others may be used by God in group evangelism or cross-cultural evangelism.

20. **Shepherd or pastor** ([Eph. 4:11](#))--Peter was commissioned by Christ to shepherd His sheep ([John 21:16](#)), and Peter exhorted the elders in the churches of Asia Minor to do the same ([1 Pet. 5:2](#); cf. [Acts 20:28](#)). A person with this spiritual gift has the ability to personally lead, nourish, protect, and care for the needs of a "flock" of believers. Not all people with the office of pastor (elder, overseer) have or need the gift of pastoring or shepherding, and many with this gift do not have or need the office.

B. Other Gifts

None of the lists in [Romans 12](#), [1 Corinthians 12](#), and [Ephesians 4](#) is complete, and it is evident that there are other spiritual gifts apart from those listed above. C. Peter Wagner in *Your Spiritual Gifts* suggests seven others: celibacy (the ability to enjoy being single and maintain sexual self-control; [1 Cor. 7:7-9](#)); voluntary poverty (the ability to renounce material comfort and adopt a life-style of relative poverty; [1 Cor. 13:3](#)); martyrdom (the ability to display an attitude of joy while suffering or even dying for the faith; [1 Cor. 13:3](#)); hospitality (the ability to welcome and provide for those in need of food and lodging; [Rom. 12:13](#); [1 Pet. 4:9](#)); missionary (the ability to minister effectively in a second culture); intercession (the ability to pray for a long period of time on a regular basis for the ministries and needs of others); and exorcism (the ability to discern and cast out demons with authority). Other spiritual gifts (e.g., music, craftsmanship) are also given to members of the body of Christ for mutual edification.

C. Combinations and Variations of Gifts

Many if not all believers have combinations of two or more spiritual gifts. Some combinations are unusual, while others are commonly combined. Gifts that work together include shepherd (pastor)-teaching, leadership-administration, evangelism-teaching, tongues-interpretation, and discernment-exorcism. In addition, Paul distinguishes three parameters in [1 Corinthians 12:4-6](#): "gifts" (*charismaton*), "ministries" (*diakonion*), and "effects" (*energmaton*). In *Body Life* (pp. 40-41), Ray Stedman links gifts to the Spirit, saying that a gift is a specific capacity or function; he links ministries to Jesus, saying that a ministry is the sphere in which a gift is performed; and he links effects or energizings to the Father, saying that an energizing is "the degree of power by which a gift is manifested or ministered on a specific occasion." There are not only variations in the gifts and gift-combinations, but also in the spheres and manifestations of gifts. For example, there are many variations in the spiritual gift of teaching. Some are more effective with small groups, others with large groups; some can effectively communicate with youth, while others are best at teaching adults.

D. Classification of Gifts

Perhaps the best classification of spiritual gifts emerges from [1 Peter 4:10-11](#):

Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God. Whoever speaks, let it be with God's words. Whoever serves, do so with the strength that God supplies, so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

These verses imply a twofold classification: (1) speaking gifts (ministry of the Word), and (2) serving gifts (ministry of practical service).

Exercise: Classify all the gifts listed above according to this distinction. Do any of them overlap? Before looking ahead, can you think of other ways of classifying the gifts?

E. Debate Over the Gifts

Some of the gifts like prophecy, miracles, healing, tongues, and interpretation are the subject of considerable controversy. The vast majority of Christians are charismatics in the sense that they believe in the exercise of spiritual gifts (*charismata*). But in another sense, not all believers are charismatics; those who describe themselves by this term believe that all the gifts are still given today, while non-charismatics believe that the controversial gifts mentioned above have ceased. The latter generally make a distinction between sign gifts and edification gifts. Sign gifts, they say, served their purpose in the first century by attesting to the authority of the apostles and their divinely-inspired message. Once the New Testament canon was complete, miraculous gifts were no longer necessary, and they gradually disappeared from the church. [Hebrews 2:3-4](#), for example, is used by non-charismatics to imply that signs and wonders had already ceased by the time of the second generation of Christians. Some also build a case for the cessation of sign gifts from [1 Corinthians 13:8-10](#).

Charismatics generally maintain that while these gifts declined in the early church, they did not disappear. They also contend that the non-charismatic argument from [1 Corinthians 13:8-10](#) is not conclusive, because "the perfect" may refer to the second advent of Christ rather than the completion of the canon of Scripture. In addition, they say that the gifts of prophecy, miracles, healing, tongues, and interpretation are not merely for signs, but also for edification.

There are also differences of opinion even within the charismatic and the non-charismatic camps. Charismatics, for example, do not all agree on the role of tongues and the filling of the Spirit.

Exercise: Study [1 Corinthians 13:8-13](#) and develop your own perspective on the meaning of this passage. What do you think is the primary purpose of [1 Corinthians 13](#) in the broader context of chapters 12-14?

VI. Discovering Your Spiritual Gift(s)

A. Three Prerequisites

As you seek to discover your spiritual gift or gifts, ask yourself these questions:

1. Have I received Christ as my Savior? Unlike natural talents, spiritual gifts are bestowed only on

believers.

2. Am I walking in fellowship with the Lord? To be effective, spiritual gifts must be manifested in the

context of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This fruit is impeded by unconfessed sin and a failure to abide

in Christ ([John 15:4](#)).

3. Do I really want to develop my gift(s)? A prerequisite to knowing your gifts is a willingness to go

through the effort to be involved in discovering and developing them.

B. Six Steps

1. **Asking.** Begin to ask God to show you your gifts (cf. [Phil. 4:6-7](#); [Jas. 1:5](#)). God wants you to

discover and implement the gifts He has given you, and this is a request you can make with

confidence and expectation.

2. **Awareness.**

a. Expose yourself to the biblical teaching on spiritual gifts by studying [Romans 12, 1 Corinthians](#)

12-14, and [Ephesians 4](#).

b. Expose yourself to one or more of the helpful books on spiritual gifts.

c. Expose yourself to other Christians who clearly know and use their spiritual gifts. Ask them about

their gifts and how they discovered them.

3. **Aspiration.** God is committed to your joy, not your misery. "Then you will take delight in the Lord,

and he will answer your prayers" ([Ps. 37:4](#)). As you pray and learn about the various gifts, ask

yourself what you would most want to do. "For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to

work for His good pleasure" ([Phil. 2:13](#)). Your feelings should not be the only test, but they may

indicate the direction for you to take. For example, Paul told Timothy, "If someone aspires to the

office of overseer, he desires a good work" ([1 Tim. 3:1](#)).

4. **Activity.** Just as we discover our natural talents by trying our hand at numerous things, in the same

way we can discover our spiritual gifts by experimenting with several of the available gifts. If we

don't try, we will never know. This requires availability and a willingness to learn our weaknesses

as well as strengths.

5. **Ability.** Activity eventually points to ability. Don't be premature in your personal evaluation,

because ability increases with practice. Be sensitive to areas of improvement. Look for opportunities

within the community of believers of which you are a part, and seek the evaluation of mature

Christians who are familiar with your activities. Because of the danger of self-deception, spiritual

gifts are best recognized by other members of the body.

6. **Affirmation.** The final affirmation of a spiritual gift is the blessing that should result from its

exercise. As you use your gift or gift-combination in the power of the Spirit, God will confirm and

establish you in your ministry, and there will continue to be positive feedback from those to whom

you minister. It has been said that "desire may indicate it, ability will confirm it, and blessing will

accompany it."

VII. Developing Your Spiritual Gift(s)

Having discovered your gift or combination of gifts, you are accountable to yourself, others, and God to develop and cultivate that which the Spirit has implanted within you. In *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, William McRae suggests that the gifts of the Spirit are developed in three ways:

A. By exercise. Like natural talents, spiritual gifts are developed by practice, not just by desire.

Without regular exercise, they will suffer from atrophy. Continue to pursue opportunities and

persevere in the use of your gift(s).

B. By evaluation. Be open to the evaluation and counsel of other believers. Periodically ask godly

people to evaluate your ministry in terms of strengths, weaknesses, and ways to improve.

C. By education. More educational and developmental materials are available today than ever before.

Take advantage of the best books, classes, tapes, and seminars that can help you improve your God-

given abilities.

VIII. Danger of Abuse

The mobilization of spiritual gifts is critical to the qualitative and quantitative growth of the body of Christ. For this reason, we must be careful to avoid the many pitfalls associated with this crucial subject. Here are ten:

A. Spiritual gifts are not merely for personal use. They are designed for the edification of others. Others should benefit primarily; the user should benefit secondarily.

B. Spiritual gifts are not gained by merit or by begging. The very term *charismata* tells us that they are given solely by the grace of God (see [Eph. 4:7](#)). The Holy Spirit distributes them "as he decides to each person" ([1 Cor. 12:11](#)).

C. Spiritual gifts can be abused by being exercised in the power of the flesh. If they are not being used in the power of the Spirit and through the love of Christ, they are of no value ([1 Cor. 13:1-3](#)).

D. The discovery and use of spiritual gifts is not a game or an option. Your gifts will determine your ministry, and your ministry can have eternal consequences. God has called us to be committed and faithful to Him, and this is reflected in part by our stewardship of the abilities and opportunities He has given to us.

E. Spiritual gifts should not be a cause of discouragement. As a rule, they develop gradually, and this requires time and work. Don't be in a hurry, and don't become jealous of the gifts bestowed on others. As we have seen, gifts vary in nature, combination, extent, and intensity. God is sovereign in His distribution, and He has given you the gift(s) that perfectly suit your personality and circumstances. There is no reason to envy another person's ministry. God has called us to faithfulness, not results.

F. Spiritual gifts should not be a cause of pride. Since they are sovereignly distributed according to the grace of God, they ought to be regarded as divinely-entrusted responsibilities, not status symbols, achievements, or trophies. Christian character and maturity is measured by the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)), not spiritual gifts.

G. Spiritual gifts should not be sought as ends in themselves. In some circles, there is a tendency to exalt the gifts above the Giver.

H. Avoid extreme positions on the gifts that are not warranted by Scripture, like the teaching that we should not seek to discover spiritual gifts, or the teaching that a Spirit-filled Christian can have all the gifts.

I. The gifts of the Spirit can be counterfeited not only by the flesh but also by Satanic and demonic forces. Scripture counsels us to be sensitive to this problem. See [Matthew 7:22-23](#); [24:24](#); [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#); [1 Timothy 4:1](#); [2 Peter 2:1](#).

J. Avoid the temptation of projecting your gifts onto others. Our thinking is naturally colored by the gifts we have been given, and if we are not careful, we will take the prescription that works for us and turn it into the norm for everyone. This can lead to a judgmental perspective on our part and a sense of guilt on the part of others who are not gifted in the same way.

X. Directions for Use

Here are four principles that should govern our use of spiritual gifts:

A. Remember that the Holy Spirit is the true dynamic behind the gifts. They must be exercised in dependence upon His power.

B. Spiritual gifts function best in the sphere of love (the "way that is beyond comparison"; [1 Cor. 12:31](#)). Paul placed his great description of love ([1 Cor. 13](#)) right in the middle of the most extensive biblical passage on spiritual gifts ([1 Cor. 12-14](#)). It is no accident that the two other major lists of spiritual gifts ([Rom. 12](#) and [Eph. 4](#)) also include exhortations to love (see [Rom. 12:9-10](#); [Eph. 4:15-16](#)).

C. Exercise: Go through the characteristics of love listed in [1 Corinthians 13:4-8](#) and visualize each of them in relation to the exercise of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ.

D. In your ministry, concentrate your energy in productive areas. It is wise to maximize time in gift-related activities and minimize time in activities for which you are not suited.

E. On the other hand, Scripture commands all believers to perform certain ministries regardless of individual gifts. Christian roles like intercession, faith, service, helps, mercy, and giving are the responsibility of all Christians, not just those who are specifically gifted in these areas. For example, some have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but all believers have a role of evangelism that corresponds to the opportunities they have been given. Be careful to avoid the spiritual "cop-out" mentality that says, "That's not my gift!"

Exercise: All believers are required to participate in certain Christian roles, and some of these roles correspond to several (but not all) of the spiritual gifts. Look up the references in the right column and see how they correspond to the gifts in the left column:

Spiritual Gifts to Some Commands to All

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1. Evangelism 1. [Acts 1:8](#)
2. Teaching 2. [Matthew 28:19](#)
3. Faith 3. [2 Corinthians 5:7](#)
4. Giving 4. [2 Corinthians 9:7](#)
5. Discernment 5. [1 John 4:1](#)

6. Exhortation 6. [Hebrews 3:13](#); 10:25
7. Knowledge 7. [2 Peter 3:18](#)
8. Mercy 8. [Ephesians 4:32](#)
9. Service 9. [Galatians 5:13](#)
10. Wisdom 10. [James 1:5](#)

XI. Reflections

1. Write out your own definition of a spiritual gift.
2. How do spiritual gifts relate to the unity and diversity of the body of Christ?
3. What is the difference between spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit?
4. What is the difference between spiritual gifts and natural talents?
5. List the three principle reasons for discovering and developing your spiritual gifts.
6. Do you fulfill the three prerequisites for discovering your spiritual gifts? What are the six steps for discovering your gifts? How far have you moved in this process?
7. Go through the description of each of the spiritual gifts and ask these diagnostic questions as you do
so:
 - a. Do I have a strong sense of concern in this area?
 - b. Is this something I would enjoy doing?
 - c. Have I shown any ability in this area?
 - d. Have others given me positive feedback in this area?

XII. Scripture Memory Cards

[Romans 12:4-5](#); [1 Corinthians 12:7](#); 13:13; [Ephesians 4:12](#); 4:15; [Colossians 1:18](#); [2 Timothy 2:2](#); [1 Peter 4:10](#).

