



Pentecost 2020

WEEK 2 - Answers

9. ARE ALL GIFTS EQUAL?

Yes. The New Testament teaches that every gift is important in the church of Christ. All gifts are interrelated, and none functions well without the support of other gifts. Paul indicates this also by saying, *“If one member suffers, all suffer together”* (1 Cor. 12:26). If one member is swollen with pride, whether over a gift, a position held, or an accomplishment, all members suffer because the one member elevates himself above all others. The Bible does not classify specific gifts as “greater” or “lesser.” Instead, it points to the incredible variety of the working of the Spirit among his people, the church. We are to rejoice that each member has been given a different function.

Spiritual gifts fall into two categories which together enable Christians to do their work in the church and in the world. The first is message gifts (prophecy, teaching, knowledge, wisdom, exhortation) and the other is service gifts (giving, helps, mercy, faith, discernment, craftsmanship). The message gifts help all members to know what their job is; the service gifts are the ways in which the job is done.

The concluding words of 1 Corinthians 12, *“But earnestly desire the higher gifts,”* imply that the message gifts are important, because the growth of the church depends on them. But these words do not suggest that the church can grow by such gifts alone; it needs the active support of all other gifts. All gifts together are needed to equip Christians for their cooperative building, so that the church may grow. *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others”* (1 Pet. 4:10).

10. DO SPIRITUAL GIFTS DIFFER FROM NATURAL TALENTS?

Spiritual gifts and natural talents are similar in several ways; both are given by God to believers. Both can be used for the glory of God. However, they are not the same. When the apostle Paul enumerates and describes spiritual gifts, he speaks of abilities that build up the church and advance the cause of Christ. Believers, who possess these gifts, may also possess a broader base of natural abilities which are used in such activities as exploring God’s world, earning a living, pursuing leisure time activities, and so on. Such activities, though not without significance for the church and the kingdom, might better be classified under the broader mandate of “subduing the earth” (Gen.1:28).

In comparing spiritual gifts and natural talents, we need to avoid two dangers. One is to see gifts and talents as radically different. We must recognize that all abilities are from God. We also need to avoid the other extreme, which is to see Spiritual Gifts and talents as almost identical, Spiritual gifts are not only significant abilities, but are abilities used specifically for a biblically defined purpose. They also involve a commitment to serve. Michael Green says:

“The charismatic gifts are nothing other than the gifts of God’s love. They begin with our redemption. They include the heightening of qualities already present or latent within us, such as the gift of administration, leadership, teaching, marriage or celibacy. These natural qualities can be charismata [spiritual gifts, ed.] if, and so long as, they are dedicated to the service of the Lord and the building up of His people in the strength that He gives. If they are used selfishly, they can be disastrous”. (I believe in the Holy Spirit, page 40)

11. ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS DIFFERENT FROM THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT?

Yes, they are. The fruit of the Spirit are virtues intended to be part of each Christian’s life. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Spiritual gifts, in contrast, are abilities for service. While every Christian should show all the fruit of the Spirit, not all of the spiritual gifts are meant for each Christian. Each has only some of the gifts. In a sense the fruit is greater than the gifts. After mentioning varied gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says, *“But I will show you a still more excellent way”*; and he means love. Without love, gifts are *“but a noisy gong or a clashing cymbal”* (1 Cor. 13:1-2).



Also, while gifts are temporary, fruit is eternal. All the gifts Paul mentions will pass away, but the fruit of love never ends (1 Cor. 13:8).

12. HOW DO SPIRITUAL GIFTS DIFFER FROM OFFICES IN THE CHURCH?

Service is not limited to a few select individuals in a church; it is the office of all members. All serve to the end that human needs may be met and the church built up. The model for the Christian is the Master who said, *“I am among you as one who serves”* (Luke 22:17). Christ came to restore to all believers the office which was theirs by virtue of creation: namely, the office to serve others and all of creation.

The offices in the church are positions to which the church elects some gifted members for the purpose of performing official ministries. They serve to build up the people of God and to keep them in fellowship with their Lord. In addition, they serve to help the people of God to fulfill their office to serve each other and the world. They function correctly only when they assist the office of all believers to come to its fullest expression.

The appointment to an official church ministry is called ordination. It does not follow that a person who has the desirable gift-mix and the necessary personal qualifications to be an office bearer must necessarily be appointed to office. The Protestant church has always resisted the notion of ministry being primarily professional.

13. IF ALL CHURCH MEMBERS ARE GIFTED, WHY DOES THE CHURCH NEED SPECIALLY ORDAINED MINISTERS?

No essential difference exists between the ministries of gifted members of the church and the ministries of office bearers. The distinction is one of function only, not of essence. All Christians minister by means of spiritual gifts. All represent Christ, and all function with Christ's power and authority. Then why have offices at all? The answer may be found along the following lines: The Scriptures set some believers apart for particular tasks (similar to church offices today). God initially established this pattern by appointing in the New Testament church "*first apostles, then prophets, third teachers...*" (1 Cor. 12:28).

God provided grace-endowed leaders with an office which would allow them to function for the benefit of the ministry of all church members. Ministries of enablement are strategic to the development of other gifts (Eph. 4:11-12). God has given enabling gifts to apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers to help them carry out their functions. If they function well in these positions, others are equipped, and the church is able to carry on Christ's work in the world more effectively. Christ has appointed them and given them authority—an authority which is for the sake of their task. "*Obey your leaders and submit to them,*" says the Bible, "*for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will have to give account*" (Heb. 13:17).

14. AREN'T ALL CHRISTIANS TO DO WHAT GIFTED CHRISTIANS DO WITH SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

Yes. In many cases the Bible commands us all to do what the spiritually gifted person is doing more specifically. All Christians are commanded to give generously, to be merciful, to have faith, and to pray. However, some Christians have the spiritual gift of giving, others have the spiritual gift of mercy, and still others have the spiritual gifts of faith or prayer.

It is helpful to distinguish, as C. Peter Wagner does, between spiritual gifts and roles. If one has a spiritual gift, he is called to exercise that gift to a greater-than-average degree. If a man has the gift of intercession, the gift itself is his call to spend more time in prayer than most of his fellow-believers. If a woman has the gift of leadership, she is called to give leadership and will probably be looked upon as a leader, while others are followers. This is part of having a gift.

But we all have responsibilities in each area of service, whether we have the specific gift or not. No Christian is excused from serving God in any area of basic responsibility just because he does not have a special gift for it. In fact, it is as we obediently serve in all areas that we discover our gifts. It is not likely that a person will discover his gifts if he does not obediently serve wherever God calls.

15. DO WOMEN HAVE THE SAME GIFTS AS MEN?

Many gifted women are introduced to us in Scripture. The New Testament church had such outstanding women as Dorcas (Acts 9:36-39), who had the gift of mercy, and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9), who had the gift of prophecy. Many women worked in gift-related ministries. In Romans 16, Phoebe engaged in a service ministry for the church of Cenchreae and in that connection ministered to Paul himself (vv. 1-2). Priscilla stood alongside of her husband, Aquila, as a fellow worker with Paul (v. 3). Mary "worked hard" among you, said Paul. The verb he used to describe Mary's work is the very word used to describe ministerial labors in 1 Corinthians 15:10 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12.

Today, one need not be active in the church very long to find that the ministry of the body still depends upon the gifts God gives to women as well as men.

The important point is that all gifts are meant for ministry, whether they are possessed by men or women. There are ample opportunities for ministry for all members of Christ's body in our needy, hurting world.

16. DO WE KEEP THE SAME SPIRITUAL GIFTS ALL OUR LIVES?

The New Testament gives us no reason to believe that gifts are temporary possessions. Gifts are integrally related to who we are. It seems that ordinarily they are lifetime trusts. It is possible for gifts to become dormant if they are not developed and used. Paul tells Timothy to *"not neglect the gift"* (1 Tim. 4:14). He says, *"Stir up the gift of God that is within you"* (2 Tim. 1:6). In Romans 12:8, Paul's concern is that gifts be used to their fullest potential for ministry. He says, *"If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully"* (NIV). Gifts are not likely to become dormant if used with the measure of faith God has given. As we move from one situation to another, a gift may be used or temporarily unused, depending upon the opportunities available. This is not necessarily bad. It is impossible for us to develop all of our gifts to their fullest potential at once.

It may also happen that, as the Lord leads a person into new life situations (e.g., a woman in middle age freed from the responsibility of caring for her children, or an active person paralyzed by accident), he also awakens gifts of which the person has not previously been aware. We should be open at all times to the Holy Spirit's call to new kinds of service.