

**Understanding Spiritual Gifts**  
**Session 3**  
**“What are the Spiritual Gifts?”**

---

- I. Introduction
- II. The Difficulty of Spiritual Gifts
  - A. The difficulty of specifics
    1. Supernatural or natural? Talents or abilities? Gift or ministry?
    2. “A curious feature of the gifts is that despite the confident claims of many, it is difficult to discover precisely what they were.”<sup>1</sup>
    3. “The New Testament provides us with relatively little detailed information regarding any specific spiritual gift. In fact, in the case of several of the gifts we know only their names.... Apart from the gift of tongues, little information is given regarding the use of any other specific gift.”<sup>2</sup>
  - B. The difficulty of identity
    1. “A spiritual gift was a supernatural, Holy Spirit-energized ability that was sovereignly given by God for service within the local church during the transition from old covenant program to the new covenant program.”<sup>3</sup>
    2. “A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.”<sup>4</sup>
    3. “A spiritual gift is an ability given to an individual supernaturally by God through the Holy Spirit so that the recipient may utilize that ability to minister to the needs of the church, the body of Christ. God supernaturally gives the believer special ability for service. This definition is important.”<sup>5</sup>
    4. “Paul’s lists are lists of ministry-assignments that are given by the Holy Spirit. The ‘spiritual gifts’ should not be thought of as fundamentally the abilities to do ministry; they should be thought of as the ministries themselves.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 78.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit: Affirming the Fullness of God’s Provision for Spiritual Living* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 160.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 1016.

<sup>5</sup> Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> From interview with the author Andrew Faris, “What Are Spiritual Gifts? An Interview With Dr. Ken Berding,” Someone Tell Me the Story Blog, entry posted January 23, 2013, <http://someone-tell-me-the-story.com/blog/what-are-spiritual-gifts-an-interview-with-dr-ken-berding/> (accessed February 13, 2013).

### III. The NT vocabulary for spiritual gifts is diverse

#### A. A survey of NT terms<sup>7</sup>

1. *pneumatikos*, “spiritual things” (Romans 1:11; 1 Cor 12:1)
2. *charisma*, “gifts” (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4, 9, 28, 30–31; 1 Pet 4:10)<sup>8</sup>
3. *energema*, “effects/operations” (1 Cor 12:6)
4. *phanerosis*, “manifestations/showings” (1 Cor 12:7)
5. *doma*, “gifts” (Eph 4:8)
6. *diakonia*, “ministries” (Rom 12:7)

#### B. Summary:

1. No single word carries the full theological weight of the teaching on gifts. Each word must be carefully studied and defined according to its individual context.
2. Some of the words emphasize the gifts are “given.”
3. Some of the words emphasize the gifts are “activities” so they are tangible ministries.
4. Some words emphasize the spiritual over natural but this does not mean all gifts are inherently supernatural.
5. “These various terms all stress the *spirituality* of the gifts, showing that they come from the Holy Spirit, and since the gifts come from the Holy Spirit they are supernatural.”<sup>9</sup>

### IV. The NT suggests two larger categories

**1 Peter 4:10–11** “As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. <sup>11</sup> **Whoever speaks**, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; **whoever serves** *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

- A. “Not inappropriately these verses may be taken as providing a brief, compressed overview of the entire New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts.”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> See also the discussion of significant Greek words in James F. Stitzinger, “Spiritual Gifts: Definitions and Kinds,” *MSJ* 14.2 (2003): 151–154.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 4:10 is the only use of the term outside of Paul’s letters.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2018), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993), 52.

B. Keys to note:

1. Peter divides the gifts between “speaking” and “serving.”
2. The variously distributed character of the gifts given to the church
3. The gifts are manifestations of God’s grace to His church.
4. The gifts are intended as ministries in the church.
5. The gifts are generally conceived along lines or categories of word and deed.
6. It is crucial we obey vs. 10. We are each called to give our life to the work of ministry in the church, no one is exempt.
7. While we study this great subject, look to the relationships God has given you, and in love, serve their needs.

V. The NT lists *some* specifically-identified gifts

<b>1 Cor 12:7–10</b>	<b>1 Cor 12:28–30</b>	<b>Rom 12:6–8</b>	<b>Eph 4:11</b>
<i>“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”</i>	<i>“And God has appointed in the church...”</i>	<i>“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...”</i>	<i>“And He gave...”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• word of wisdom</li> <li>• word of knowledge</li> <li>• faith</li> <li>• gifts of healings</li> <li>• miracles</li> <li>• prophecy*</li> <li>• discerning of spirits</li> <li>• tongues</li> <li>• interpretation of tongues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apostles</li> <li>• prophets*</li> <li>• teachers</li> <li>• miracles</li> <li>• healings</li> <li>• helps</li> <li>• administrations</li> <li>• tongues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prophecy*</li> <li>• service</li> <li>• teaching</li> <li>• exhortation</li> <li>• giving</li> <li>• leading/ruling</li> <li>• mercy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apostles</li> <li>• prophets*</li> <li>• evangelists</li> <li>• pastor-teacher</li> </ul>

- A. There is no indication that Paul intended to be all-encompassing in his list of gifts. Some gifts may overlap. There may have even been other gifts with the ones mentioned being representative in nature.<sup>11</sup>
- 1) “Most agree that the list isn’t exhaustive, though it is difficult to know what to add to the list.”<sup>12</sup>
  - 2) “[I]he more one studies the different lists and the various classifications of the gifts, the more evident it becomes that Paul had no intention of giving an exhaustive list of the gifts of the Spirit.”<sup>13</sup>
- B. Only the gift of prophecy/prophet is common to all four of the lists (\*).
- C. Some gifts also function as leadership offices for the church
- D. Each gift belongs to one of two basic categories (cf. 1 Peter 4:10–11)
- E. A caution:
- 1) I think we need to back away from the idea of “abilities” or skills. All the actual activities that Paul lists in these passages can all be described as ministries, but they cannot all be described as abilities.
  - 2) Contextual words such as *appointed*, *functions*, and *equipping* alert the reader to see these as ministries.
  - 3) The “abilities” view of the gifts assumes that gifts should flow out of one’s strengths but we’re often called to minister in weakness.
  - 4) It may be more profitable to speak of the gifts as “Spirit-enabled ministries.”
- F. A closer look at Romans 12:6–8
- 1) Prophecy
    - i. The revelatory action that reveals the heart and mind of God.
    - ii. A prophet was one who taught or wrote exactly as God gave revelation to them (2 Pet 1:20–21).
    - iii. Along with Apostles, the prophetic office, they laid the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20; cf. 1 Cor 12:28–29).

---

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Some see marriage and/or celibacy as a specific gift mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:7. For a detailed study of this passage see Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 173–211.

<sup>12</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 52.

## 2) Service

- i. This corresponds with 1 Peter 4:11, “serving.”
- ii. The divinely bestowed willingness and desire to use one’s time, energy, and natural abilities to meet temporal and physical needs which arise in the body of Christ (Rom 12:7; 2 Cor 9:10-15).

## 3) Teaching

- i. The word *didaskalia* means to put into the mind with implication to convict the will.
- ii. The divinely bestowed desire and ability to communicate the truths of God’s Word so it can easily be understood by His people (Rom 12:7; 1 Tim. 4:13; 5:17; James 3:1).
- iii. Schreiner convincingly argues that “word of knowledge” and “word of wisdom” in 1 Cor 12:8 refers to teaching.<sup>14</sup>
- iv. “Teachers expound, explicate, and unpack the Word of God, imparting instruction based on truth already revealed. It differs from prophecy in that it is not based on new revelation, and all elders should have this gift at least to some extent (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).

## 4) Exhortation

- i. The divinely bestowed desire and ability to (a) effectively exhort and urge other believers on toward greater obedience and/or (b) graciously extend comfort and encouragement to those who are fainthearted (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor. 14:12; 1 Tim. 4:13).

## 5) Giving

- i. The word *metadidomi* refers to imparting or sharing. Paul used this term in Rom 1:11 to refer to imparting a spiritual gift.
- ii. It can refer to giving to those in physical need (cf. 1 Cor 13:3) or giving of one’s self (e.g., 1 Thess 2:8).
- iii. It is characterized by generous liberality; also simple sincerity (Rom 12:8).
- iv. The divinely bestowed desire and ability to sacrificially contribute material substance (money or goods) in order to meet the needs of the saints and

---

<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 20–21.

support the ministries of the church (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor. 13:3; 2 Cor. 9:7; Phil. 4:18).

6) Leadership

- i. The term *proistemi* refers to the ability to be out ahead of others.
- ii. It carries the idea of managing, conducting, ruling with direction.
- iii. In some cases it refers to those who “have charge over” the flock (1 Thess 5:12) which is described as “work” (1 Thess 5:13).
- iv. Romans 12:8 says it is characterized by “diligence/zeal/eagerness/willingness.”
- v. The gift described in Romans 12:8 is likely indistinguishable from “administrations” in 1 Cor 12:28.

7) Mercy

- i. The divinely bestowed desire and ability to extend compassion to those who are experiencing some kind of pain, misery, or distress (Acts 9:36; Rom 12:8; Jam. 2:13).
- ii. We are all called to be merciful, but this gift is a spiritual enablement that goes beyond the level of most.
- iii. This mercy is to be marked by a “cheerfulness” of attitude (Rom 12:8).