

Lesson 4 – Spiritual Gifts Up-Close

There are many different ways you can categorize the spiritual gifts, as well as dozens and dozens of different lists you could create of what the gifts of the Spirit are. For this study, I am going to try to break up the gifts into three categories: **Speaking gifts, serving gifts, and signifying gifts.**

Speaking gifts are simply those gifts that we do by using our voices for God. Serving gifts are those things we do with our actions for God. And signifying gifts are those things are mysterious that we do to direct people's focus onto God. This week, we will look at the speaking gifts.

Paul puts special emphasis on the gift of prophecy – and on the speaking gifts as a whole – because they build up the whole church and don't require an explanation of the mystery of what people are experiencing. This is not to say the other gifts are lesser, but rather put the focus on God and on the church without putting the focus as much on the individual. They are all miraculous – even if they don't appear that way to an outsider.

Apostolic

This is a gift that's definition has changed over time. For the early church, an apostle was one who had been with the Lord from the time of John's baptism until his ascension. Paul began to change this in 1 Corinthians 15 when he makes the case that he (and James, the brother of Jesus) is just as much an apostle as the 12. Because of this, the church's definition changed. But still many stick with the "biblical" meaning of apostle.

Our books tend to take the original definition, so that no person walking the earth today would have this gift. But the meaning of the word apostle in Greek is "ambassador" or "a messenger or herald" or even "one who is sent out". It comes from two different ideas: a nautical term for a vessel that is authorized to carry cargo, and a political term for one who represents another with full power and authority.

The apostle today "forms a strong attachment to the personality, teaching, and influence of Jesus Christ. Then the person spreads the teachings and extols the virtues of Christ. **This apostle of Christ is sent out to bear Christ's authority.**"¹ Now, this is not the same as a missionary, who go in AFTER an apostle is sent. Some missionaries have this gift, but not all. Nor should this gift be confused with the offices of elder, bishop, or deacon. Nowhere in the Bible is an apostle considered an office, but rather a spiritual gift. Some have also seen a sense of "apostolic succession" which raised those who had this gift above others, but the Bible doesn't support this idea.

The apostolic gift is used to unify the church by reflecting and representing the power of our Lord. **People see Christ in them.** When they work as administrators, powerful operations accompany their efforts. They have a special gift to get groups of people on the same track toward common goals. They are equally effective with people who know them and those that don't.

Prophecy

The gift of prophecy is not exactly being the next Nostradamus or Miss Cleo. In fact, it is a misnomer to consider prophecy to be tied with telling the future. That would be a "prognosticator." **A prophet is one who speaks for God.** Now this may include a word about the future – although most prophets speak of what will happen IF things don't change. The message of the prophet can be both positive and negative. It is a relevant message for the church in a particular time or place. The prophet's message, though, is

¹ C. Bryant, "Rediscovering Our Spiritual Gifts," pg. 63.

consistent with biblical truths. The message carries with it the power of the written Word of God. Prophets also clarify things that have happened in the world.

Wisdom and Knowledge

In 1st Corinth., Paul talks about “the message of **wisdom**”. The definition I grew up with for wisdom was “applied knowledge,” although some other people refer to wisdom as “common sense.” The spiritual gift of wisdom and knowledge, thus, aren’t common nor “just good sense” but rather a gift from God for His use. Our books refer to this kind of wisdom as being the “hidden and secret wisdom of God.” Another text explains this as “the extraordinary ability to make concrete and specific applications of divine knowledge received directly from God, from one’s spiritual gift of knowledge, or from another’s shared gift or gifts.”

The gift of **wisdom** is not a divine insight, but rather this is a consistent gift that allows them to be a source of wise behavior and words. **They are able to apply divine truth to daily living and ministering to others.** They have a knack for sharing something that just fits with what you need to hear, even you don’t realize it at the time. They also tend to ask the right question that makes creates clarity in difficult situations.

The gift of **knowledge** is not simply a smart person but rather a person who knows the “universal and timeless truths and facts relating to God’s will and the mission of the church.” This is not necessarily a very well trained or educated person on all things, but rather specifically knowledgeable about spiritual things. This gift enables this person to reveal God’s truth for the church in its mission through Christ for justice and righteousness in the world.

A person with the gift of knowledge tends to simply think theologically. This doesn’t necessarily mean spouting off Bible verses, but rather one that can relate a verse to a situation at hand. This gift allows the person to relate the words of the 1st century to today’s church.

The difference between these two gifts is this: **wisdom is practical and knowledge is inspirational.** The gift of wisdom shows us how to hang in there. The gift of knowledge helps assist us in doing it.

Exhortation (or Encouragement)

The gift of **exhortation** is closely related to the gift of knowledge. This is the ability to inspire, encourage, and strengthen others in and through their efforts to live out God’s will and calling as Christians in pain, pleasure, want and plenty. With whatever they say, whether it be a word of caution or instruction, those gifted with exhortation always speak with an unmistakable spirit of caring. They know instinctively how to say things, how to be with and for someone else. They don’t seek to solve the other’s problem, but rather to be a strength and comfort for them. Acts 4:36-37 refers to Barnabas as a “son of encouragement.”

The gift of exhortation offers us comfort and companionship along life’s way.