

Description Of The Spiritual Gifts

by Lambert Dolphin

Natural talents and personality traits are natural human resources which all of us have. These are not the same as spiritual gifts which are given by sovereign choice, by the Holy Spirit, at the time we become Christians. These are supernatural enablements so that we may serve God more effectively in the world and in the church. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, many are given more than one gift. All Christians are called to the work of the ministry and distinctions between "clergy" and "laity" are foreign to the New Testament.

Both spiritual gifts and natural talents must be employed in the power of the Holy Spirit and not in the self-energy of the flesh in order to please God and bring positive results.

The various spiritual gifts are listed in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, I Corinthians 13-15, and elsewhere. Commentators differ as to whether the list totals 22, or fewer, gifts. The gifts are divided into (1) teaching/leadership gifts, (2) service gifts, and (3) sign gifts given to authenticate the work of apostles and prophets, particularly at the beginning of a new age (dispensation) when God does something new and different in the world. Here is a rather complete list:

1. **Apostle** (apostolos). The Greek word means "one sent forth" (on an official errand), i.e., an ambassador. In addition to the twelve original disciples who became apostles, Paul was added to the list of those commissioned by God to lay the foundations of the Christian church and impart a full body of truth which would guide Christian faith and conduct. There were also other apostles, for example, Barnabas, Acts 14:4,14; Andronicus and Junia, Romans 16:7, 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25. The need for apostles diminished as the church became established. If there are any apostles today they might be found among pioneer missionaries who establish churches in foreign lands where the gospel has not yet been proclaimed. Christians today are under apostolic authority, however there is no Biblical reason to believe in the so-called apostolic succession of authority in the church. Ray Stedman likens the apostles in the Body of Christ to the skeleton and musculature of the human body.

2. **Prophet**, prophecy. (prophetes), lit: "to speak forth," to proclaim the mind and counsel of God, i.e., the gift of preaching. Differs from pastor-teacher in scope. Ray Stedman compares the role of the NT prophet to the nervous system of the body. NT prophets do not make predictions about the future as the OT prophets did, but gather their message from the Scriptures. Nor is God giving the church new revelation through such individuals today. The gift of prophecy is likewise not for giving secret messages from God to individuals in the church. Prophets vigorously stimulate and challenge the Body of Christ, pastor-teachers patiently feed the sheep and care for their needs. Prophets are to edify, exhort and console, (see 1 Cor. 14:3).

3. **Evangelist**, evangelism. (evangelistes) from eu = well, plus angelos = messenger. The gift of bringing the good news of God to unbelievers individually and in groups. The content of the message is outlined in I Cor. 15. Ray Stedman compares this gift to the digestive apparatus of the human body which has the ability to take material which is not a part of the body and transform it into parts of the body. Evangelists are also to teach other believers how to lead people to the Lord Jesus. Timothy evidently did not have this gift but Paul nevertheless urged him to "do the work of an evangelist".

4. **Pastor-teacher** (poimenes kai didaskalos), shepherd and teacher. Ray Stedman describes this gift as analogous to the circulatory system of the human body which "cleanses and feeds" the members of the body. Ray Stedman once said he believed this was a common gift, given to perhaps a third of Christians.

5. **Administration**. (kubernesis = government). To pilot, guide, or steer as one steers a ship. To preside over the assembly and guide the proceedings. In order to preserve order in Christian meetings the person in charge should know how to direct the course of events towards a spiritual goal as led by the Spirit.

6. **Leadership**, (proistemi) "to stand before" that is attend to with care and diligence, as the head of a family does. Perhaps this also includes setting the pace, imparting direction and goals in a ministry since sheep are lazy and helpless and prone to wander off course. Most people like to follow a good leader. God's leaders are not only visionary they lead by serving.

7. **Faith**. (pistis), Faith-vision: the ability to believe God for new direction and power---visionary faith that sets in motion events others can join in and follow. All Christians have some faith because "without faith it is impossible to please God." Also anyone's faith grows as it is exercised. However there is also a gift of "faith-vision" which pioneers new ministries, encourages others and helps them to grow in faith. "Without a vision the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

8. **Knowledge**. (logos gnoseos), lit: "word of knowledge," systematic understanding of truth in broad, sweeping terms so that others may be trained and instructed. Not supernatural utterances from God. All Christians have some knowledge, but there is also a gift of knowledge given to some so they may teach and edify the Body. The ability to sum up lots of information or pieces of knowledge so as to give a clear concise overview.

9. **Wisdom** (logos sophias), lit: "word of wisdom." The ability to make wise choices and decisions at critical forks in the road. Very valuable to an individual or a group when it needs to choose but has no specifically clear information on the best choice. All Christians can grow in wisdom as they make a series of wise choices over a life-time, however there is also a gift of wisdom given to some in the Body of Christ.

10. **Exhortation**, encouragement. (paraklesis), to call alongside, comfort, strengthen, to counsel, exhort, bring aid, admonish. The same Greek word describes the Holy Spirit's role in our lives.

11. **Discernment** (of spirits) (diakriseis pneumatou), is a gift to judge or evaluate the spirits so as to distinguish whether something is from God or from an evil source. Similar to the natural talent of intuition but of course more reliable and consistent.

12. **Ministering** (diakonia), to serve (hence our word deacons). A wide variety of activities one performs with the help of God to comfort, encourage, support and build up God's people. Also, (huperetes), an under-rower or servant as distinguished from an ordinary seaman on a Roman galley.

13. **Service** (helps) (antilempsis), "to lay hold of (and support)", especially the weak and needy. To minister to others and meet their needs.

14. **Giving**, (metadidomi), is the gift of sharing and imparting, not only money but other resources. All Christians should learn to give generously since "God loves a 'hilarious' giver", however certain individuals are given the gift of giving so they can act as stewards over material resources in the Body of Christ.

15. **Tongues** (that is, "kinds of languages") (glossa). The ability to speak in other languages not previously learned, but known languages to men. The gift is for the purpose of praising God. It must be directed to God, not to be used to pass a message from one member to another or from one member to the congregation. Not a means of communication from the Lord to the flock. A sign to Israel especially to mark the beginning of a new dispensation. A sign to unbelievers.

16. **Interpretation of Tongues**. The ability to translate unknown languages so as to edify and instruct others regarding what has been said.

17. **Miracles**. (energumata dunameon) The ability to raise men from the dead, call fire down from heaven and otherwise present signs that authenticate the power of God in certain situations.

18. **Healing(s)**. (charismata iamatou) (plural). Ability to heal at the physical, emotional and spiritual levels. The word is plural in Greek, probably suggesting that the ability to heal refers to all three levels of man. Today, God sometimes heals physically, but more often emotionally and spiritually. A valuable gift for a counselor.

19. **Mercy** (eleos) An ability to touch inwardly with compassion. To be exercised with "cheerfulness".

20. **Hospitality**. (philoxenia), lit: "love of strangers." May not be a spiritual gift but definitely a Christian virtue. Those who believe this is a separate gift also hold that all believers are to practice hospitality.

Note: A Christian's service involves the entire Trinity.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are the sovereign choice of the Holy Spirit.

The place of our service is chosen by the Son of God, and the style, of our ministry is determined by the Father.

This is made clear by the following passage:

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord (Jesus Christ); and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God (the Father) who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Cor. 12:5-7).