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How do I Find and Use my Spiritual Gifts?

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Ask the Prof

How Do I Find and Use My Spiritual Gifts?

There seems to be a great deal of confusion surrounding the doctrine of spiritual gifts. Without doubt far more heat than light has been shed on this subject, if recent literature tells us anything. Here are four general principles that may not answer all the questions but should serve as guidelines to help the individual discern how he ought to approach the issue in his own life.

First, spiritual gifts are God's gifts to God's people, for God's glory (1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 4:7-13). Genuine spiritual gifts are never legitimately exercised to blaspheme God or to violate His Word. God controls both the giving and the exercise of them. Many so-called Christian feminist writers have asked, "If God gives a woman the gift of pastor-teacher, should she not cultivate and exercise it?" The problem here is not so much in the question as in the asking of it. Scripture clearly teaches that women are not to serve as pastors (1 Tim. 2:12; 3:1-7). For God to give such a gift would entail a contradiction of His Word. This applies equally to men who fail to measure up to the standards for pastors given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. I sincerely doubt that a divorced pastor still has the gift—if he ever had it.



Answered by **Daniel R. Mitchell**, Professor of Theological Studies at Liberty Baptist College and Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia. He holds a Th.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary.

Second, some spiritual gifts are applicable only to the first-century church. Few question that the gift of apostle was temporary and given specifically for laying the foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:10, Eph. 2:20). Yet many fail to recognize that the "sign gifts" were given only in conjunction with that of the apostles (Heb. 2:3-4). In other words, they are given exclusively to validate and enhance the apostolic ministry and they have passed away with the apostles. The New Testament seems to single out the miraculous and the revelatory gifts in this category (1 Cor. 13:8-12; Heb. 2:3-4). To seek such a gift is like asking God to place you back in a previous time. Obviously, He cannot be expected to do this.

Third, spiritual gifts are not given for personal edification, but for the benefit of the body of Christ and the propagation of the gospel (1 Cor. 12:6-7; 14:5-6, 24-25). When gifts are used for personal enhancement they no longer have a legitimate function, and such behavior receives the censure of the New Testament. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 14:4 to explain what was happening in Corinth. However, he never commends or condones this practice. Indeed, the remainder of the chapter rebukes it. This eliminates the so-called "private" use of some gifts, often asserted today to justify the exercise of tongues.

Fourth, spiritual gifts are given sovereignly in relation to the individual's placement in the body. There is far less emphasis in the New Testament upon being able to pin a label on our gifts than upon the need to exercise ourselves in love toward one another. Indeed in such actions we will not only exercise our gifts but we will be a gift to the church.

This is the whole thrust of 1 Corinthians 12 to 14. If you have been placed of God into a position of leadership . . . lead. If you are given great wealth . . . give. If you are given a Sunday school class . . . teach. Whatever God has placed in your hands—a rod or a shovel, a desk or a dishpan—use it for His glory and the edification of the church. This is your gift and God's gift to the church. Indeed, I am inclined to think that it would be far more helpful to ask, "Where can I serve?" than "What is my gift?" □

Is there a Bible text or scriptural problem that has particularly perplexed you? We invite you to "Ask the Prof," c/o *Fundamentalist Journal*, Lynchburg, Virginia 24514. Questions selected for publication will be answered by a specialist from the Liberty Baptist College faculty.

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