

Is it Important to know and exercise your Spiritual Gifts?

Some are saying, "The gifts were only given to the early church and none are being given today. The important thing is to be mature in Christ." This view is very troubling. Let us, therefore, examine the true biblical guidelines about the gifts:

1. In the First Place, It Must Be Stated That God is Giving Spiritual Gifts To His People Today.

The New Testament abundantly affirms that gifts are given to all believers. Those who say that the gifts were only for the first generation of Christians and the founding of the church usually point to the book of Acts and Paul's earlier epistles like 1 Corinthians 12. But what about Ephesians 4? Also, there is 1 Peter 4:10 which says that every Christian has received a spiritual gift. Both Eph. and 1 Peter, according to conservative scholars, were written in the early 60s.

In other words, second generation Christians scattered throughout the Roman provinces in Asia Minor had been given gifts and were expected to use them ministering to each other.

2. A Second Reason That Compels Us to Believe That God Is Giving Gifts Today Is That Gifts Are Necessary For The Functioning of The Body of Christ.

This is certainly the emphasis of Romans 12, 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4. Although it seems to be true that certain gifts were given only for the beginning of the church (Eph. 2:20 says that apostles and prophets were given to found the church, the body of Christ), other gifts continue to be necessary as long as the body is not complete in numbers and maturity. Or to put it another way, as long as the Great Commission is not yet fulfilled, it will be necessary for God to give gifts and for believers to use them.

Obviously the gifts of evangelism, helps, showing mercy and so forth are involved in bringing people to Christ, while such gifts as teaching, exhortation, helps and administration are indispensable in "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." So let's not throw out the baby with the bath water - maturity is the goal for every Christian (Eph. 4:13), but the exercising of gifts is a part of achieving that maturity.

3. The Key To Discovering Your Gifts Is Your Willingness To Serve.

After all, there is no verse in the New Testament that commands you to discover your spiritual gifts, but there are many commands to serve. Indeed, it is striking to notice that many of the commands to serve involve the same

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activities as are involved in exercising some of the gifts. For example, there is a spiritual gift of giving, but all Christians are to give. There is a gift of evangelism, but all are to witness. The accompanying table relates several of the Spirit's gifts with the corresponding commands which are directed to all believers.

The Spiritual Gift to Some	The Command to All
1. Pastor (shepherding)	1. "Edify one another" (1 Thes. 5:11)
2. Ministering or helping	2. "By love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13)
3. Teaching	3. "Teaching them to observe all things..." (Matt. 28:19)
4. Exhortation	4. "Exhorting one another" (Heb. 10:25)
5. Giving	5. "Every man as he hath purposed in his heart, so let him give" (2 Cor. 9:7)
6. Showing Mercy	6. "Be ye kind to one another" (Eph. 4:32)
7. Faith	7. "For we walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7)
8. Evangelism	8. "Ye shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8)
9. Discerning spirits	9. "Try the spirits" (1 John 4:1)

4. Finally, Serving (following your passion) Will Lead To The Discovery Of Your Gifts.

If you are active in doing what you know to be pleasing to God, then the Lord will entrust other opportunities for you, and in the fulfilling of these opportunities you may be able to see what your spiritual gifts are. When we are first introduced to Phillip in the book of Acts, we find him helping distribute the relief money to a group of needy women (6:5).

I doubt he sat down and tried to decide whether or not he had the gift of ministering or helping before he allowed his name to be proposed along with the other six who were chosen to be helpers to the apostles. Here was an opportunity to serve, so he took it. He was willing to do this rather menial task, and he was faithful in doing it. The Lord then entrusted him with another ministry, that of evangelizing the Samaritans (8:5). Evangelism was certainly one of his spiritual gifts, for later he is called Phillip the evangelist (Acts 21:8).

The same is true of Stephen. He first served along with Phillip in ministering to those widows in the church (Acts 6:5). But he also had faith (6:8) and of course he was a great witness (7:54). Faithfulness in one ministry leads to other opportunities and the enablement (including the spiritual gifts) to fulfill them.

Yes, the risen Head of the church is giving gifts today to the members of His body. But our responsibility is not only to try to discover those gifts but to be sure we are unreservedly dedicated to the Lord, and that we are faithfully serving Him in all the opportunities He gives us each day.