

Spiritual Gifts

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Integration Question: *What is the nature of the “spirituals” I 1 Cor. 12:1ff? Is there a difference between gifts and talents?*

Theological Statement

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul introduces the topic of general spiritual living in verse one before addressing specific spiritual gifts starting in verse four. While many English translations translate 1 Corinthians 12:1 as, “Now, about the gifts of the Spirit,” in the Greek, there is only one word, *pneumatikos*, which just means things of the spirit. In other words, Paul is initially introducing a broader spectrum of Spirit living, then three verses later, he specifically focuses on gifts, *charisma*. This is an important distinction that is often overlooked, and as a result, many people only equate “spirituals” as the more extreme eruptions of living in the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, prophesy, or miraculous healings, and not with every day passions and talents. Just verses later, Paul puts wisdom, faith, and knowledge, very common traits or talents that people possess, alongside the more vibrant ones (1 Cor. 12:7-10). The difference between natural talent and spiritual gift, then, is that the Spirit connects the talent to the mission of Jesus while the gifts of the Spirit are already meant to be attributed to kingdom investments.

I believe the “spirituals” and giftings that Holy Spirit displays in, with, and through followers of Jesus are meant to equip the believer, and build up and edify the church. They come in many forms, such as ordinary abilities, to talents, all the way to supernatural giftings. While some may be given at birth, some may be given later in life, even long after conversion. In fact, the biblical authors never give an exhaustive list. The ones listed in the four letters, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter, are not all-encompassing. Even within these lists, very few are the same. Rather, the biblical examples are real life happenings of Holy Spirit moving and working in those specific communities that the biblical authors deemed fit to encourage or

correct. The gifts that Paul deep dives into in 1 Corinthians 12 range from supernatural eruptions and endowments, like speaking in tongues, prophecy, miraculous healings, all the way to natural skills and abilities that the people seemed to have possessed all their life, like teaching and being filled with joy, kindness, self-discipline. Followers of Jesus may or may not experience them at all times, but regardless, the gift of itself is nothing without the realized true gift of Holy Spirit empowering the believer for the mission of Jesus.

Ministry Application

First and foremost, an important application of the theology of spiritual gifts is the fact that Spiritual gifts still exist for the believer today, even amidst the false spirituals. Many will argue, “how can we trust the gifts if they are so abused today?” While it is true that spirits and spirituals must be tested (1 John 4), and there are many people who have seemed to fake, manipulate, and deceive others on behalf of and under the banner of the spirituals, New Covenant followers of Jesus have the same active Spirit, just like Jesus had, in order to advance His kingdom. Just because there are false teachers (entire book of 2 Peter, 2 John, etc.), does not mean we should not teach and preach the gospel. Rather, it means we must always test what the truth is with His truth. Similarly, we can live in the fullness of the outpouring of Holy Spirit while also testing all spirits.

A second application is for people to live into their talents. When many people become followers of Jesus, they set aside all their talents and passions in pursuit of “putting off the old self.” Jesus may be leading some to do this, and if that is you, faithfully walk in obedience. But there are many cases where Jesus wants to use one’s passions and talents for His kingdom. A Christian allowing their talent of sports, business, or finances, to advance God’s kingdom as they live in mission for Jesus is what transforms those talents into spiritual gifts. The warning for

Christians is that not every talent or passion necessarily needs to be dropped in pursuit of relationship with Jesus. That is why living in relationship with Jesus is so important, so one can hear His direction and movement in their life. In my experience, more times than not, Holy Spirit wants to use one's gifts and talents for His kingdom. This means that if someone is gifted in accounting, they should utilize that gift in the workplace to bring His love, truth, and power to that office. As long as the gift remains a gift and does not become an idol, Holy Spirit yearns for people to walk in their spirituals, from passions and talents all the way to speaking in tongues and performing miraculous healings.