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The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (X)

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DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (X)

X. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS: SOME OFT-ASKED QUESTIONS (PART FIVE)

How can I know what my spiritual gifts are?

At least six suggestions can be offered:

- Total dedication to God (Rom. 12:1, 2)—God may not show us our gifts until we surrender our wills.
- Bible study (2 Tim. 3:14-17)
- Prayer (Lk. 11:9, 10; Jas. 1:5)
- Evaluation from others—Sometimes those who know us best (parents, teachers, friends, spouses, relatives, Christian leaders, etc.) may recognize our spiritual gifts even before we do!
- Desire (1 Tim. 3:1)—Do you have a real desire to preach? To teach? To exhort? To involve yourself in organization or administration? If so, this very desire may be a strong indication of your gift.
- Ability
 1. God’s call to Moses: “. . . go, and I will be with thy mouth . . . ” (Ex. 4:12)
 2. God’s call to Jeremiah: “. . . Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth” (Jer. 1:8, 9)

As it can be seen God gave both Moses and Jeremiah the ability to do that which He had assigned them to do. This is simply to exercise certain gifts. For example, do you think you might have the gift of teaching? Then volunteer to teach a Sunday school class of rowdy boys and girls. Rest assured, in a few short weeks they will tell you whether yours is the gift of teaching!

Of course, the greatest two-fold aspect of ability is (1) availability, and (2) dependability!

Can I lose my spiritual gifts?

- In the ultimate, heavenly perspective, NO!
“For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance”(Rom. 11:29).
This is to say that God never removes from us any spiritual gift previously given to us.
- In the practical, earthly perspective, YES!

“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27). This is to say that sin can all but destroy the effective employment of one’s spiritual gift. Especially is this the case when a pastor/teacher permits sexual immorality to ruin his testimony.

Is it scriptural to ask for a spiritual gift?

- Some would say, yes, based on the following verses:

“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31).

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy . . . Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church . . . Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues” (1 Cor. 14:1, 12, 39).

- Some would say, no, for the following reasons—

1. The Holy Spirit determines what gifts we will receive:

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal . . . But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Cor. 12:7, 11).

2. This decision has already been made before the foundation of the world (Eph. 2:10).
3. We are told to be content with our gifts (1 Cor. 7:24).

Will God direct me to employ different gifts at different times and places?

This is definitely the case! For example, among our faculty here at Liberty University can be found—

- Pastors, who after faithfully leading their congregations have felt the call to join us, sharing their experiences in a classroom setting for the benefit of our church ministry students.
- Teachers, who after many years in the classroom, have answered God’s leading to (1) become a full-time church planter, or (2) assume the undershepherd role in an established church.
- A study of the Apostle Paul’s life reveals he was led to employ different gifts at different times, on various occasions, serving as an apostle, prophet, church planter, teacher, etc.

Am I expected to improve upon my gift?

In a word, absolutely!

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Tim. 4:14, 15).

“Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6).

“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5).

These verses make it very clear that God expects us to polish and perfect our gifts. But how can this be done? Here are some suggested ways:

- By asking God to give you insight and wisdom in regards to your spiritual gift
- By observing, and, if possible, seeking advice from those individuals who have (or are) successfully employed those same gifts you possess
- By refining and embracing your gift through constant practice. Thus, if your gift is that of teaching, then look for any and all opportunities to use it wherever and whenever possible.

Is it possible for God to bless the believer’s gift without actually blessing the believer himself?

It is indeed tragically possible for this to occur. A classic example is seen in Phil. 1:12-17. At this time the Apostle Paul was in a Roman prison. However, the gospel was still being preached in the city, but by two different groups of believers, each with a different motive:

- The group with the right motive—They were doing this out of love for Christ and respect for the imprisoned apostle.
- The group with the wrong motive—Paul’s confinement had indeed motivated them to witness, but this was done hoping their success would make the apostle jealous!
- Note Paul’s reaction upon learning of this—

“What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice (Phil. 1:18).

Thus, God would indeed bless the gospel message of both groups but only bless the messengers belonging to the first group!

Are some spiritual gifts more important than other spiritual gifts?

- The fiction

To the carnal and immature believer this would indeed seem to be the case. After all, was not the Apostle Paul who possessed the “greater” spiritual gifts of pastoring, teaching, and that of the evangelist, used more by God than Barnabas who seemed to have the “lesser” gifts of giving, mercy showing, and exhortation? Nothing of course could be further from the truth!

- The facts

In 1 Cor. 12:12-27, Paul compares the body of Christ and its many spiritual gifted members to that of the human body with its many physical members.

“If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?” (1 Cor. 12:15, 16).

1. Each member in both bodies performs a vital task, appointed by God Himself:
“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him . . . That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (1 Cor. 12:18, 25).
2. No member is to be independent of the other members.
 - a. The foot and the ear are not to show envy toward the hand and the feet (1 Cor. 12:15-17).
 - b. The eye and the head are not to show pride toward the hand and the feet (1 Cor. 12:21).
3. Every member is to rejoice and suffer with the other members—*“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it”* (1 Cor. 12:26).