

SPIRITUAL GIFTS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY (FROM CHAPTER 7)

INTRODUCTION

“At the time of our conversion, God incorporates us into the body of Christ. He places us in a community relationship with all other believers in which we together share a common life in Christ. This is an objective fact; we are in fellowship with all other believers. This objective aspect of fellowship, however, is intended to provide a basis for experiential fellowship.

We are not meant to be passive participants or, to use a business metaphor, silent partners in the partnership of the gospel. Rather, God intends for all Christians to be active participants in the body, working partners in the enterprise of the gospel. To this end, God has assigned to every Christian a function in the body of Christ. There are no exceptions to this; every member has a function within the body that God has assigned him to fulfill.” (JB)

Illustration: William Carey and his sister

“Just as God assigns to each of us a function in the body of Christ, so He equips each of us to fulfill that function. In the New Testament, this equipping is called a ‘gift.’

- A spiritual gift is an ability given by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform the specific function within the body that God has assigned to each of us.
- Spiritual gifts are distinct from natural abilities, although the gifts frequently incorporate some natural ability. While both gifts and abilities are endowments from God, gifts are related specifically to the function God has assigned to us in the body.” (JB)
- *Romans 12:3-8 (esp. vv. 4-6)* — “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.” → notice the relationship between function and gift; “We all have different functions and, consequently, different gifts that enable us to fulfill those functions.” (JB)

In recent years, emphasis has been given to determining one’s spiritual gift, but not to determining one’s function in the body. This seems to be contrary to the biblical emphasis, which encourages us to know our function.

- *1 Peter 4:10* — “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”
- *1 Corinthians 12:7* — “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Key — Gifts are given for the purpose of enabling us to fulfill our function within the body. “We may be sure that God has equipped us, both in natural ability and in spiritual gifts, for the function He has called us to perform.” (JB)

- **Illustration:** “Over the years, I have concluded that my gifts are in the areas of administration and teaching, but I did not realize this at the beginning of my Christian experience. I entered full-time vocational Christian work at the age of twenty-five, and for a number of years, I simply worked at the tasks God gave me to do in The Navigators. Later I concluded, in retrospect, that God had given me the gift of administration because He had always assigned me to that type of ministry in The Navigators and had always enabled me to perform it. In the same way, I concluded that God had also given me the gift of teaching because I consistently found myself doing it and experiencing God’s blessing on my efforts.” (JB)
- *Koinonia* = “participation” or “partnership” → both imply a responsibility to fulfill our function. Although we don’t usually think of *koinonia* this way, it “is because we have lost sight of the biblical meaning of fellowship. Fellowship is not just a social privilege to enjoy; it is more basically a responsibility to assume.” (JB)
- *Koinonia* = “sharing” spiritual truths, material possessions, and the benefits of our spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 12:7)

Clearly, then, the use of our spiritual gifts is supposed to be exercised on the behalf of the Christian community.

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. **The purpose of all spiritual gifts is to serve others and glorify God (1 Peter 4:10-11).**

1 Peter 4:10-11 — “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

- Two purposes of our gifts: (1) serving others (“the common good”), (2) glorifying God
- We are “stewards” of these gifts. = We are managing these gifts; they are not our property, but are a trust committed to us by God to use as He directs.

Application: This rules out any seeking of recognition, fame, or self-fulfillment. Yes, some gifts, by their nature, are more public and thus prone to recognition (e.g., biblical teaching vs. facility administration), even as Paul recognized in 1 Corinthians 12 and as is true of the physical body. “As long as we keep in mind the purpose of gifts, however, we will not be concerned about recognition or fame. We will seek to use our gifts as stewards entrusted with the grace of God to be used to serve others and glorify Him.” (JB)

Discussion: In order to avoid the temptation to seek fame, how can the one with the public gift and the one with the “behind the scenes” gift keep in mind the purpose of gifts (**Illustration:** preaching competition—meditating on 1 Corinthians 1-2)?

2. **Every Christian has a gift, and every gift is important (1 Corinthians 12:7).**

1 Corinthians 12:7 — “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

- Not everyone has a public gift, but everyone has a job to do and thus a gift.
- Every gift (not just the public ones) is important (1 Corinthians 12:15-16).

Application: Several errors must be avoided:

- The one with the less noticeable gift comparing himself with the person with the more noticeable gift, and then feeling/concluding that he has no gift/place at all (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:15-16).
- The one with the more public gift disregarding/belittling the contribution to the body of those who have less noticeable gifts (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:21).
- The ones with the less noticeable gifts despising/envying the ones with the more public gifts and undermining their ministry with the slanderous accusation of showboating or “lime-light seeking.”
- The ones called to “serve in the shadows” ignoring any kind of Word-based ministry (i.e., “spiritual fellowship” or discipleship) that God expects from them, too (cf. Colossians 3:16).

Discussion: How can we avoid those errors (cf. Philippians 4:3)?

All functions and gifts are necessary, but some gifts are more important (1 Corinthians 12:28-31).

Discussion: (LEAD IN) How does that make you feel? Why is it that way (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 1:3-14)? How should we respond, according to 1 Corinthians 21:31?

3. **Gifts are sovereignly bestowed by God (1 Corinthians 12:11, 18).**

1 Corinthians 12:11, 18 — “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills....But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose.”

God determines what gift(s) you have.

- **Implications:** “He ordained a plan for your life before you were even born, and He has gifted you specifically to carry out that plan.” (JB)

- **Application:** (1) “Never disparage your gift...[and thus] the plan of God.” (JB) (2) “Never look down on the gift of another...[thus] scorning the plan of God for that person.” (JB)

God determines the extent of your gift(s).

- **Implications:** Two people with the same gift (e.g., teaching) may experience different results. This may be due to (1) where God puts you in ministry, (2) how greatly God gifts you in that area (cf. Matthew 25:14-30), or (3) what God has determined regarding fruitfulness (e.g., Isaiah).
- **Application:** It is our responsibility to use that gift to its full God-given measure in order to accomplish the plan of God. The one with the greater measure has a greater responsibility (Luke 12:48).

Discussion: How does this point affect our consideration of spiritual gifts?

4. **Every gift is given by God’s grace (Romans 12:6; 1 Peter 4:10).**

“Gift” = Gk. *charisma*, which means “a gift of God’s grace

Romans 12:6 — “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.”

1 Peter 4:10 — “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

Ephesians 3:7-8 — Paul’s testimony

Application: “The highly gifted person should not think he is so gifted because of his hard work or his faithfulness in previous service to God. Likewise, the person who feels he has wasted a good part of his life and is consequently undeserving of any spiritual gift should not despair.” All gifts are undeserved and given from God’s grace.

Discussion: (LEAD IN) How do we balance this humbling truth with the reality of “you have been faithful over a little, so I will set you over much” (Matthew 25:23)?

5. **All gifts must be developed and exercised (2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Timothy 4:14).**

2 Timothy 1:6 — “I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you.”

1 Timothy 4:14 — “Do not neglect the gift you have.”

2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:15 — Paul’s exhortation to Timothy, who had the gift of teaching, was to be diligent in cultivating and employing it.

Application: “This means hard work....Simply having a spiritual gift does not mean we can automatically fulfill our function in the body without conscientious effort.”

Discussion: (LEAD IN) How do you apply this point about working hard to use your gift to accomplish your function?

6. **The effective use of every gift is dependent on faith in Christ (John 15:5).**

John 15:5 — “Apart from me you can do nothing.”

- We cannot assume His blessing, just because we are using the gift He’s given us.
- We cannot assume His blessing, just because we’re working hard at using the gift He’s given us.

Colossians 1:29 — “For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.”

1 Corinthians 15:10 — “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Application: “To maintain the proper perspective of diligent personal responsibility and a sincere attitude of total dependence on Christ for His power requires constant vigilance in two directions.” (JB)

- “We can be guilty of slothfulness in the development or use of our gifts under the pretext that we are ‘trusting in the Lord.’” (JB)
- “We can either presume on God’s blessing as we attempt to use our gifts in the strength of our own abilities or assert the fact that we have ‘done [it] so many times.’” (JB) This applies to any gift, even the gift of service, which can be engaged in merely with dependence upon one’s own training, experience, and “practical wisdom” (cf. 1 Peter 4:11).

Whether teaching or serving, “without Christ we can do nothing.”

7. **Only love will give true value to our gifts (1 Corinthians 13).**

1 Corinthians 13 — This classic passage on Christian love is set right in the middle of the Bible’s most extensive treatment on spiritual gifts.

- Vv. 1-3 — Without love, we are nothing and accomplish nothing (even if we have great gifts). “Only love gives value to our gifts, our faith, and our zeal.” (JB)
- **Illustration:** A long row of zeros = “0”; add a positive number at the front, and immediately they have value → Spiritual gifts are zeros on the page, until they are driven by love. And as “2” is greater than “1” before that row of zeros, “more and more love can add exponentially greater value to our gifts.” (JB)
- Vv. 4-7 — Each dimension of love is in the area of interpersonal relationships. → Love must permeate and govern every aspect of our lives” (JB); otherwise, its absence “can undermine and destroy the effective use of our gifts.” (JB)
- **Illustration:** In *koinonia*, “is the cement of love that binds together those living stones that are being built into a spiritual house. Love is the ligament that binds the members into one body. And though our gifts are important

in the *functioning* of the body, it is love that gives *unity* to the body and makes that functioning effective.” (JB)

Application: “Therefore, any consideration of gifts must include the importance of love. We all believe this, but we often fail to practice it. We often place people in Christian organizations on the basis of gifts and other abilities with little regard to their ability to love. Pulpit committees screening pastoral candidates give great attention to preaching ability and counseling skill but seldom ever ask, ‘Does he exhibit love in the home or toward the custodian and secretary at the church?’ Most of our discipleship training — whether on the university campus, on the military base, or in the local church — emphasizes training in ministry skills. While this is certainly important, we must not neglect growth in love. I remember hearing of one university student of whom it was said, ‘He can lead people to Christ, but no one wants to room with him.’ Whether he could, given that immaturity of character, truly lead people to a saving knowledge of Christ may be questioned by some. But whether he could or not, it is true that a great big dose of love was needed to make him truly effective.” (JB)

“We must seek to grow in love towards one another. Otherwise, when the final chapter of our lives has been penned, we will have to write a final line: ‘I have gained nothing.’” (JB)

RECOGNIZING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

As we remain committed to mission and community, “we may be sure that [God] will so direct the course of our lives that we will begin to exercise our spiritual gifts and fulfill our function in the body of Christ.” (JB)

“Our awareness of what particular gifts God has given us can help us determine His specific will for us at certain times of decision making.” (JB)

Romans 12:3 — “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

Suggestions for assessing our gifts:

1. *You must be sure you are committed to doing the will of God that He has ordained for you.*

- Notice that this is a commitment to doing God's will, not to finding out what your gifts are.
- It does not work the other way around.

2. *You should consider how God has providentially led you.*

- What has He given you to do? What has He not given you to do?
- What service in the body have you tried and experienced His blessing? What have you tried and not experienced blessing?
- What opportunities to serve have been opened to you? What opportunities have been closed to you?

3. *You should consider your natural abilities and your temperament.*

- "Spiritual gifts build on some of our abilities and temperament traits." (JB)
- Caution: "Natural abilities and temperament are not always sure indicators of gifts." (JB) E.g., music and creative skills buried on a mission field where God has called one to

4. *You should consider confirmation from other Christians.*

- Natural words of appreciation and encouragement
- Request for additional ministry
- Inquiries of Christians you respect and can help you evaluate

CONCLUSION

"Whatever your gifts are, you may be sure that when you exercise them, you will find joy and fulfillment as you share with others in the body the gifts God has given you." (JB)