

EQTH105 Basic Bible Doctrine

Unit 5c The Holy Spirit and Gifts

Presented by the



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Welcome back. As we explore the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit, one subject we need to discuss is that of spiritual gifts. But before we do, we need to have an understanding of what the spiritual gifts are. Though the Bible does not give a definition of spiritual gifts, it does tell us much regarding their nature and function. The word normally translated “gift” in the New Testament is the Greek word *charismata*. The word means gifts of grace and refers to the gifts or special abilities God has given believers through the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts or the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not the same as *the* gift of *the* Holy Spirit. I know this sounds like a theological fine point, but the point is that there are many gifts of the Spirit but there’s only one Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is received the moment a person trusts Christ as savior. Simon Peter said to the multitude on the day of Pentecost, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive *the* gift of *the* Holy Spirit.” That’s in Acts 2. [Acts 2:38] So that’s the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now, let’s talk about gifts of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts are abilities God gives the believer for the purpose of service. They are not human talents. Human talents are inadequate to do the work of God. The Bible says, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.” [2Co 10:3-4] Spiritual gifts are either supernatural abilities that God has bestowed on individuals or God-given natural abilities that function through the direction of the Holy Spirit. Gifts such as miracles, tongues, healing, and prophecy are supernatural in origin. Other spiritual gifts such as teaching, administration, and helps are God-given abilities to perform a particular role in God’s program. Though nonbelievers may have the same abilities, they do not function under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes these God-given abilities and uses them for his purpose in the lives of believers. Therefore, the gifts of the Spirit are abilities, either natural or supernatural, given by God for the work of his ministry.

Now, the Bible says that all gifts ultimately have their source in God. We read, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” [Jas 1:17] Now, again, not to confuse you with theological mumbo-jumbo, but the gifts of the Spirit are not the same as the fruit of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit have to do with service, while the fruit of the Spirit has to do with character. They are described in Galatians. We read, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against these there is no law.” [Gal 5:22-23] Spiritual gifts are the means. Spiritual fruit is the end. Gifts are what the believer possesses, but the fruit of the Spirit is what the believer becomes. Spiritual gifts will someday cease, while spiritual fruits are permanent.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not the same as the various offices mentioned in the New Testament. For example, the office of apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, elder, and deacon. Those who occupy such offices should possess the spiritual gift that goes with it. Yet a person can have the gift of prophecy or teaching, for example, without occupying the office of prophet or the office of teacher. Conversely, the opposite is true. One can be a teacher or a prophet without the gift of teaching. The gifts of the Spirit are listed in four different portions of Scripture:

Romans 12 [Rom 12:6-8], 1 Corinthians 12 [1Co 12:4-11; 1Co 12:28], and Ephesians 4 [Eph 4:11]. They have been classified in many different ways, but we will examine them in three groups.

First, we have ministering gifts: the gifts of an apostle, evangelist, pastor, teacher, exhorter, and discerner of spirits, the word of wisdom, and the word of knowledge. Second, we have serving gifts: the gifts of ministering, giving, ruling, showing mercy, and displaying faith. And third, we have the sign gifts: the gifts of prophecy, healing, miracles, tongues, and interpreting tongues. These gifts are not necessarily in order from the greater to the lesser. Some of the gifts overlap. And this list is not to be taken as complete. There may be more spiritual gifts than these listed here.

Now, the logical question to ask is “How does a person discover their spiritual gifts?” Everyone has at least one spiritual gift. How can someone discover his or her spiritual gift or gifts? Unfortunately, the Bible does not give us any formula for finding out what the spiritual gifts might be. Yet there are certain things that we can do. First, and most obvious, one must find out what spiritual gifts are available. We just shared that there are four passages of Scripture that list the gifts: 1 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, and so on. Once you know the spiritual gifts that are available, the next step is to pray for guidance. Once the believer recognizes what gifts are available, he should pray for God to show him his or her particular gift or gifts. The Bible encourages us to pray for guidance. It says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” [Mat 7:7-8] James wrote, “You do not have because you do not ask.” [Jas 4:2]

Now, a word about this prayer. It is entirely possible, indeed probable, that God will not answer at once. He may, but we have become conditioned in our culture to expect instant response. And God doesn't work that way. Most likely, you will need to enter into a season of prayer, not an immediate prayer. However, once you pray, step out in faith. We should exercise by faith the gift or gifts we feel God has given us. The author of Hebrews tells us, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must first believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” [Heb 11:6]

Now, I suppose there is a time that you could damage the kingdom and ministry of Christ by improper use of your gifts. You might not be called to use the gift of ministering, for example, so baby steps are a good idea. And never exercise your gifts in a silo. Submit yourself to a body of believers. Operate within a dynamic and vibrant Bible-believing and Bible-preaching church. Believe me, there is safety and strength in numbers. Which leads me to the next step. Get feedback from others. Once we start exercising our gifts, we should get feedback from others to see if we are edifying the body of Christ. Seek godly counsel and get some honest assessment. Have a person whom you trust, who is spiritually mature, tell you if your exercise of what you think your gifts are, are actually benefiting the body of Christ. Paul tells us the manifestation of the Spirit is given through the profit of all. [1Co 12:7] As you work through this, you should realize that you have at least one spiritual gift, and may have more than one, but you may not possess them all, probably don't. Your gift is essential to the smooth functioning of the body of Christ.

So let's sum this up. To discover your spiritual gifts, the believer should first find what gifts are available. Second, be available to receive. Third, pray for God's guidance. Fourth, step out in faith. Fifth, get feedback from others. As we work through this, I want to circle back to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit guides the believers. In John, we read, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." [John 16:13] We also read, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." [1Co 2:12]

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come and guide the believer into all truth, and this includes the use of gifts. The work of the Holy Spirit illuminates the heart and mind of the believer to the things of Jesus Christ. The Bible reveals to us that Satan has put a spiritual blindfold over the minds of those who do not believe. We read, "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." [2Co 4:3-4] Once a person trusts Christ, the blindfold is removed and the Holy Spirit begins the work of illuminating the meaning of Scripture to his newly believing mind. This helps him better understand the things of God. And this maturation process is a lifelong journey. Guided by the Holy Spirit, rightly and effectively exercising our spiritual gifts, we travel the road of becoming more Christ-like.