

Spiritual Gifts

The gift of tongues. St Paul wrote "If I speak in tongues of men and Angels (1 Corinthians 13 v 1) thus giving an indication that on many occasions the new tongue or pray language that God will give us if we ask Him is not always a known earthly language. But why would anyone want to speak in a language that they do not understand? Acts chapter 2 verses 4 – 7 speaks of the disciples being able to speak in a language they did not understand, but those stand around on the Day of Pentecost recognised it as their own native language.

It doesn't say whether the miracle was with the speaker or the hearer. It could have been both. In this case St Peter speaking in a language he did not know or understand resulted in three thousand people coming to salvation that day. On the face of it, there seems to be a great need for this type of miracle today. Many are the reports of similar things happening to various missionaries throughout the world. So much for the tongues of men, what about the Angelic tongues?

What possible use could this be to a Christian today? What St Paul is speaking of in Romans chapter 8 verses 26 and 27 is simply when we cry out to God having come across a situation about which we do not know how to pray. At these times, if we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit He will lead us to pray in a language we do not understand, the very thing that is on the heart of God for us to pray in that situation.

There is the temptation of asking for this gift as a "cop out". In other words, an excuse for less effort and compassion on your part. However, when we do that, we pray in conjunction with the Holy Spirit and we do not understand what we are saying, so in 1 Corinthians 14 verses 14 and 15 St Paul writes "Pray with your spirit by all means, (in tongues) but pray with your understanding also. We cannot be active in Christian circles for very long before we meet situations we want to pray about but simply don't know what to pray.

At such times we need to be led by God to pray in full accordance with His will. 1 Corinthians 14 verse 6 suggests the possibility of yet another use of this gift, not just in your private prayers but also in public also. Many people have expressed the deepest feelings of their heart through a brief prayer in an unknown language. Expressing our heart – feelings is difficult when limited to our own language, and can be expressed much better before God with a language which does not have such limitations. However, St Paul insists that this must not happen in public unless it is followed by an interpretation of that tongue.

Interpretation of tongues This does not necessarily mean a perfect translation, but a summary of what has been spoken. 1 Corinthians 14 v 6 – 19 explains why, in a public worship meeting speaking in tongues should only take place if it is followed by an interpretation. Sometimes, through the interpretation of a tongue we are given the words of a wonderful prayer of praise, exultation or thanksgiving. Often you will know that the person giving such a prayer is not able to have said such beautiful things themselves, only through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This can have a tremendous impact on a meeting, and often several minutes of silence follow, because the people are so touched by it. A tongue spoken and interpreted can be a message from God in a heavenly tongue, and when it is interpreted it is a word of prophecy.

Although the second gift mentioned is interpretation of tongues, the gift of interpretation can be used much wider than this. All the gifts that we shall be looking at are subject to the user,

they are under no compulsion to speak, but do so only because they feel moved by God so to do. This does not mean that the person can operate the gift at will, although when you come to a meeting you may have been given one of these gifts in advance. It is then up to you to decide when the appropriate time to use it is.

Since God requires willing vessels whether and where we operate these gifts when we have one to share publicly is subject to the authority of the leader of the meeting or the Minister in charge. They may decide it should wait until a later point in the meeting. If they forbid it to be given at all at the meeting that could well be a quenching of the Spirit for which they will have to answer.

Many have been frightened away by the loud abuse of these gifts. If there are visitors present and such gifts are used, the leader of the meeting should explain what is happening and why. The user should always bear in mind that they should not shout, but just speak slightly louder and slower than they normally would. As St Paul so rightly said, "Let everything be done with decency and in order."

Prophecy This is a much misunderstood gift since, despite what many people believe, prophecy in the most part has nothing to do with foretelling the future, although it will sometimes involve that. The simple definition of this gift is "The speaking out of Rhema, the word that God wants to say to His people right now." Anyone, even an unbeliever can take a section of the bible and give an interesting talk on it, but a prophetic word usually is a short word of instruction or encouragement to an individual, a group or a church. It could come from a minister or any lay person.

It may be a piece of scripture and it may be accompanied by a word of knowledge. What the church needs so much today is to have more and more people who have personally heard from God as to what word of instruction or encouragement to bring to the next meeting, so that the people may be built up in the word and become even more victorious. That's what our spirits need to be fed with from the front, something of substance from the throne room of God, not a subject selected at random by the speaker on a Sunday morning.

If what is brought to the meeting has not been given to that person as a result of being before God in fellowship and prayer then it should be left unsaid. (see John chapter 12 verses 49 and 50). It does not take a word of knowledge or a prophecy to tell you that you should be winning the lost for Christ in the place where you live, it only becomes such when it is accompanied by an instruction as to how you should go about it. Sometimes you will hear prophecies giving details of events which are to happen in future days. This type of prophecy is much less common but if the source of the information is the Holy Spirit it will be both totally accurate and totally authentic.

Discernment A very convenient gift to speak of after prophecy. Not everything that you hear or read under the general heading of prophecy is genuine. Some of it can be misguided, other times downright dangerous and still other times the product of a vivid imagination. The gift of discernment will cause you to sense in your spirit whether what is being said is of the devil, of someone's imagination or of God.

Check everything with scripture as far as you possibly can no matter what is said or who says it. Another form of discernment is practice when a person can walk into a room and sense immediately whether there is anyone there who is oppressed or even possessed by an evil spirit. Many famous killers are given psychological treatment and are imprisoned in

institutions for many years being treated, when what they really need is exorcism, the driving out of the controlling evil spirits.

If you look through the scriptures you will find several times when Jesus is ministering to people of the same symptoms, they are both deaf and dumb. To the one He says "Be open" to the other He says "Deaf and dumb spirit I command you to come out." Jesus quickly discerned whether the problem was physical or spiritual.

Words of knowledge Although this example is connected to another spiritual gift, you will find that the gift of knowledge is often used together with one of the other gifts. There was once a man in a small group prayer meeting who felt the urge from God to speak out some words. "There is among us someone whom the Lord is telling to lay hands on his neighbour that he might be healed, don't be afraid, don't doubt it just obey it." Nobody admitted to it being them that the word of knowledge was talking to.

Two weeks later one of the people there approached the man who spoke the word and told the story of how his neighbour had been bedridden for many years, and he felt that it was him God was telling to pray and lay hands on his neighbour. This he had done a few days ago; now his neighbour is up and around, walking about the house again after many years. Beware of false words of knowledge.

It may be genuine if the person says that there is somebody here suffering from migraine, or back trouble, if it is then those people can receive healing if prayer is directed at the root cause of the problem rather than praying only about the symptoms. Praying like this requires a word of knowledge also. Where nobody responds then it might not have been correct. Do not be afraid of making a mistake, everybody does at times, but we can learn from our mistakes.

A car can only be guided in the right direction once it is moving, so it is with these gifts, encourage everyone to speak out if they think they have something from God, and then they can grow and develop a very precious gift, stamp them down early on and they may never dare to try again after that. If you are prepared to step out, God is prepared to guide you.

Healing This gift is dealt with in detail in "How to restore the healing power of God to the church" so there is not much more to be said except a few short things. Firstly there are two types of healing basically, the first is healing of the body and the second is the healing of the mind. In each case if you listen out the Lord will direct you as to what you should do as long as you have prepared yourself beforehand for ministry, through prayer and fasting.

Whether the healing requested is emotional or physical, if there is any unconfessed sin or unforgiveness in the person's life, then this could block the healing. Often such difficulties can be passed on through generations, like curses of Freemasonry or Alcoholism and others. These must be dealt with before a full healing can take place. Once again the key will come from listening to and obeying the instructions of God.

Wisdom There are so many times when this gift is very much needed. God's wisdom you need, not man's. Often the two can be very different. You may have a lot in your diary which needs your attention, and you need wisdom to know which ones you can leave till another day and which ones you should give priority to. Should I be with the family this evening or should I be at the meeting?

Should I do overtime tonight or is there another priority in the Lord's schedule for me? Nobody can tell you the right answer to these things; you have to learn through your relationship with Him, to hear God for yourself on these matters.

Faith There is a great deal of difference between wishful thinking and faith. Faith comes through hearing, hearing the word of God. If you act on something without having been told to do it then you are acting on presumption, not faith. The gift of faith is where you will meet a situation, somebody needing counselling or prayer for healing, and suddenly you are one hundred per cent convinced you know what God is going to do, so you speak it out.

You would not normally have the faith to believe that, but that is why this supernatural gift is needed in many cases, so that you respond on impulse to the prompting of God, knowing that what you have spoken shall indeed come to pass.

The gift of miracles This is a rare gift and is only given to a person to meet a certain occasion. There are some people who speak at meetings and many genuine miracles happen during those times, they have the special anointing for it, although any one of us can be used in miraculous healing at any time, the person who truly has the gift of miracles will be a person who is called to that particular ministry.

The greater the gifting, the greater the cost and responsibility that go with it. Even some who have been given such ministries have been unable to handle it themselves and fallen from grace. God will always deal with people where they are at, handle the gifts God has given you well know, and He may give you greater gifting later on. These gifts are given through grace, and not on merit, therefore there is always plenty of room for humility whatever the gifts you have been given.

Summary and brief description of the five-fold ministry gifts.

Apostle In the New Testament the Apostle was the one who went round setting up, or advising others on how to set up, and structure a new church. Therefore this must be his primary function, to train them in the biblical criteria for leadership which are that they must not be drunkards, lovers of money or "empire builders", people who try to set up as many churches as they can for their own glory, not God's glory.

They must also be hospitable to all and be men of good reputation. Matthew chapter 20 v 25 and 26 give a very important guide to the conduct of a leadership, they should not enforce their authority on the church members, they must be people who are willing to perform all kinds of service for their brothers and sisters in Christ, and leading by example of humility, gentleness and love.

Prophet

The actual definition of a prophet is one from whom the church (and sometimes individuals) will call upon for wisdom and direction, and should be someone who is genuinely humble and compassionate to the brothers and sisters in the church. The prophet should be someone who is available to all, not a chosen few, who will bring God's word into a situation without fear or favour. The prophet, if genuine, will be one who lives constantly in fellowship with God, not simple 2 or three hours per day.

Evangelists

Although the main function of an evangelist is to win souls, to say so is not as obvious as it may first appear, since there are many who claim to be evangelists who have never had anyone come to Christ during their ministry. Such people cannot be true evangelists. However, if they are winning souls for Christ then in order to build up the body of Christ they must teach the church how to pray in order that they can carry out their function even more successfully.

Building up the body of Christ, which is the function of each one of the five-fold ministry, is not a matter of simply increasing numbers, it is also the enabling of all church members to carry out whatever function they have been anointed to do.

Pastors

Some people mistakenly lump this ministerial gift together with the teacher. They are two very different functions. A pastor may not be a good teacher, and a teacher might be greatly anointed, but not called to a pastoral ministry. You cannot be a pastor or senior pastor and have a travelling ministry for most of the year, since by definition you are supposed to be caring for the flock that is put into your charge by God.

Treat each one equally, whether a leader or the lowliest of members of the church. Do not allow anyone to buy their way into being given privileges that would not normally be afforded to anyone else in the church. Never invite a fellow pastor to preach in order that he will invite you to preach in his church at a later date. Your calling is looking after the sheep of God, not looking after your own selfish desires.

Teacher

This is a position which should be reserved not simply for people who have had a wonderful education and know what is the literal translation of a whole collection of verses, remember you cannot find God through being intellectual otherwise those of little or no education would never be able to find salvation.

Those who are allowed to teach in the church should only be those who consistently demonstrate an anointing for doing so, in order that they speak the heart of God and not teach lifeless doctrine. As with all these ministerial callings, if there is for example an evangelist in the church and someone comes in who is being trained up by God for an evangelistic ministry, then the evangelist must take the prospective evangelist under his wing, stepping aside on occasions so that the person can gain experience, and demonstrate the calling of God on his life. This principle applies to all five ministerial gifts. Do not crush ministries, but be humble enough to facilitate and encourage them and you will not quench the Spirit of God.