

# *Bay Roberts Seventh-day Adventist Church*

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## **SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND MINISTRIES**

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, apostolic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love.

The words Jesus spoke just before He ascended to heaven were to change history. "Go into all the world," He ordered the disciples, "and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

To all the world? To every creature? The disciples must have thought it an impossible task. Christ, sensing their helplessness, instructed them not to leave Jerusalem but "to wait for the Promise of the Father." Then He assured them, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:4,8). Following Jesus' ascension to heaven the disciples spent much time in prayer. Harmony and humility replaced the discord and jealousy that had marred much of their time with Jesus. The disciples were converted. Their close communion with Christ and the resulting unity were the necessary preparation for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus received a special anointing with the Spirit to fit Him for His ministry (Acts 10:38), so the disciples received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) to enable them to witness. The results were electrifying. On the day they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, they baptized three thousand persons (see Acts 2:41).

### **The Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

Christ illustrated the gifts of the Holy Spirit with a parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey" (Matt. 25:14,15).

The man traveling to a far country represents Christ leaving for heaven. The man's "own servants" are His followers, who "were bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:20)--"the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:19). Christ redeemed them for service, and they live "no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15).

Christ gave goods to each servant according to his ability, and "to each his work" (Mark 13:34). Along with other gifts and abilities (see Chapter 20 of this book), these goods represent the special gifts imparted by the Spirit.

In a special sense, Christ gave these spiritual gifts to His church at Pentecost. "When He ascended on high," Paul said, He "gave gifts to men." Thus "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph. 4:8,7). The Holy Spirit is the agent who distributes "to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11) these gifts that enable the church to do its assigned work.

### **The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts**

The Holy Spirit gives a special ability to a member, enabling him to help the church fulfill its divine mission.

### **Harmony Within the Church**

The Corinthian church did not lack any spiritual gift (1 Cor. 1:4,7). Unfortunately, they bickered like children over which gifts were the most important.

Concerned about the divisions in their church, Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the true nature of these gifts and how they were meant to function. Spiritual gifts, he explained, are gifts of grace. From the same Spirit come "diversities of gifts," which lead to "differences of ministries" and "diversities of activities." But Paul emphasized that it is "the same God who works all in all" (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

The Spirit distributes gifts to every believer—for the edification, or building up, of the church. The needs of the Lord's work determine what the Spirit distributes and to whom. All do not receive the same gifts. Paul said the Spirit gives to one wisdom, to another knowledge, to another faith, to another miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (verse 11). Thankfulness for the working of a gift in the church should be directed to the Giver, not to the person who exercises the gift. And because the gifts are given for the church, not the individual, recipients should not consider the gifts their private property.

Since the Spirit distributes the gifts according as He sees fit, no gift is to be despised or belittled. No member of the church has a right to arrogance because of a particular appointment or function, nor should anyone feel inferior because of an assignment to a humble position.

#### **1. The model of operation.**

Paul used the human body to illustrate harmony in the diversity of gifts. The body has many parts that each contribute in a unique way. "In fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (verse 18, NIV).

No part of the body should say to another "I don't need you!" They all are dependent on one another and "those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it" (verses 21-24, NIV).

The failure of any organ would affect the entire body. If the body had no brain the stomach would not function; and if it had no stomach the brain would be useless. So the church would suffer if any member, no matter how insignificant, was missing.

Certain parts of the body that are structurally weaker need special protection. One may function without a hand or leg, but not without liver, heart, or lungs. We normally expose our faces and hands, but we cover other parts of the body with clothes for purposes of modesty or decency. Far from esteeming the lesser gifts lightly, we must treat them with greater care because the health of the church depends on them.

God intended the distribution of spiritual gifts in the church to prevent "division in the body" and to produce a spirit of harmony and dependency, so "its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (verses 25,26, NIV). So when one believer suffers, the entire church should be made aware of it and should help alleviate the suffering. Only when this person is restored is the health of the church secure.

After discussing the value of each of the gifts, Paul listed a number of them: "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues" (verse 28, RSV; cf. Eph. 4:11). Since no member has all the gifts, he encouraged all to "eagerly desire the greater gifts" (verse 31, NIV), referring to those most useful to the church.

## 2. The indispensable dimension.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit, however, are not sufficient by themselves. There is "a more excellent way" (verse 31). While the gifts of the Spirit will pass away at Christ's return, the fruit of the Spirit is eternal. It consists of the eternal virtue of love and the peace, goodness, and righteousness that love brings with it (see Gal. 5:22,23; Eph. 5:9). While prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will disappear, faith, hope, and love will remain. And "the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

This love God gives (agape in Greek) is a self-sacrificing and giving love (1 Cor. 13:4-8). It is "the higher type of love, which recognizes something of value in the person or object that is loved; love that is based on principle, not on emotion; love that grows out of respect for the admirable qualities of its object." Gifts devoid of love cause confusion and divisiveness in the church. The more excellent way, therefore, is for each one with spiritual gifts to possess also this totally unselfish love. "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts" (1 Cor. 14:1, NIV).

## Living to God's Glory

Paul also spoke about spiritual gifts in his Epistle to the Romans. Calling on every believer to live for God's glory (Rom. 11:36-12:2), Paul again used the parts of the body to illustrate the diversity and yet unity that characterize the believers who are joined together in the church (verses 3-6).

Recognizing that both faith and spiritual gifts have their source in God's grace, believers remain humble. The more gifts given a believer, the greater his spiritual influence, the greater should be his dependence upon God.

In this chapter Paul listed the following gifts: prophecy (inspired utterance, proclamation), ministry (service), teaching, exhortation (encouragement), giving (sharing), leadership, and mercy (compassion). As in 1 Corinthians 12 he ended his discussion with the greatest principle of Christianity—love (verse 9).

Peter presented the topic of spiritual gifts against the backdrop of the end of all things being "at hand" (1 Peter 4:7). The urgency of the hour dictates that believers must use the gifts. "As each one has received a gift," he said, "minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (verse 10). Like Paul, Peter taught that these gifts are not for self-glorification, but that "in all things God may be glorified" (verse 11). He also associated love with the gifts (verse 8).

## The Growth of the Church

In Paul's third and final discussion of spiritual gifts, he urged believers "to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3, NIV).

Spiritual gifts contribute to fostering of a unity that causes the church to grow. Each believer has received "grace...according to the measure of Christ's gift" (verse 7).

Christ Himself "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." These gifts are service-oriented ministries given "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (verse 11-13). Those who receive spiritual gifts are especially to serve believers, training them for the types of ministry according to their gifts. This builds up the church to a maturity that reaches the full stature of Christ.

These ministries increase spiritual stability and strengthen the church's defense against false doctrines, so that believers will "no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (verse 14,15).

Finally, in Christ, spiritual gifts bring about both the unity and the prosperity of the church. "From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (verse 16, NIV).

In order for the church to experience the growth God intends, each member must use the gifts of grace He supplies.

As a result, the church experiences a twofold growth—a growth in the number of members and an increase in individual spiritual gifts. Again, love is a part of this calling, for the church can realize this edification and growth only as it uses these gifts in love.

## **Implications of Spiritual Gifts**

### **A Common Ministry**

Scripture does not support the view that the clergy should minister while the laity merely warm the pews and wait to be fed. Both pastors and laity make up the church, "God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9, RSV). Together they are responsible for the well-being of the church and its prosperity. They are called to work together, everyone according to his or her special Christ-given gifts. The difference in gifts results in a variety of ministries or services, all united in their witness to extend the kingdom of God and prepare the world to meet their Saviour (Matt. 28:18-20; Rev. 14:6-12).

### **The Role of the Clergy**

The doctrine of spiritual gifts places the responsibility for the training of the congregation on the shoulders of the minister. God has appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip His people for ministry. "Ministers should not do the work which belongs to the church, thus wearying themselves, and preventing others from performing their duty. They should teach the members how to labor in the church and in the community."

The minister who does not have the gift of training, does not belong to the pastoral ministry, but to another part of God's work. The success of God's plan for the church depends on the willingness and ability of its pastors to train the members to use their God-given gifts.

### **Gifts and Mission**

God gives spiritual gifts to benefit the whole body, not simply the individuals who receive them. And, just as the recipient does not receive the gift for himself, so the church does not receive the totality of gifts for itself. God endows the church community with gifts to prepare it to fulfill the mission to the world He has assigned it.

Spiritual gifts are not rewards for a job well done, they are the tools to do the job well. The Spirit usually gives gifts compatible with a person's natural gifts, though natural gifts alone are not spiritual gifts. It takes the new birth to energize a person with the Spirit. We must be born again to be endued with spiritual gifts.

### **Unity in Diversity, Not Uniformity**

Some Christians try to make every other believer like themselves. This is a human plan, not God's. That the church remains united in spite of the diversity of spiritual gifts points to the complementary nature of the gifts. It indicates that the progress of God's church depends upon every believer. God intends that all the gifts, ministries, and operations

within the church blend together in the work of building on the foundation laid by the church of history. In Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone, "the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21).

### **Witnessing—the Purpose for Gifts**

Believers receive a diversity of gifts, an indication that each has an individualized ministry. Yet every believer should be able to witness about his faith, sharing beliefs and telling others what God has done in his life. The purpose for which God gives each gift, no matter what it may be, is to enable its possessor to witness.

### **The Failure to Use Spiritual Gifts**

Believers who refuse to employ their spiritual gifts will not only find that their gifts atrophy but also that they are jeopardizing their eternal life. In loving concern Jesus solemnly warned that the servant who did not use his talent was nothing less than a "wicked and lazy servant" who forfeited the eternal reward (Matt. 25:26-30). The unfaithful servant freely admitted that his failure was deliberate and premeditated. Thus he had to bear the responsibility for his failure. "In the great final day of judgment those who have drifted along, dodging opportunities and shirking responsibilities, will be classed by the great Judge with evildoers."

### **Discovering Spiritual Gifts**

For members to be successfully involved in the church's mission they must understand their gifts. The gifts function as a compass, directing the possessor toward service and the enjoyment of the abundant life (John 10:10). To the extent that we "choose not to (or simply neglect to) recognize, develop, and exercise our gifts, the church is less than it could be. Less than God intended it to be."

The process of discovering our spiritual gifts should be characterized by the following:

### **Spiritual Preparation**

The apostles prayed earnestly for a fitness to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. They put away the differences and desires for supremacy that had stood between them. Confession of sin and repentance brought them into close fellowship with Christ. Those who accept Christ today need a similar experience in preparation for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of the Spirit is not a onetime event; we can experience it daily. We need to plead with the Lord for that baptism because it gives the church power to witness and to proclaim the gospel. To do this we must continually surrender our lives to God, abide fully in Christ, and ask Him for wisdom to discover our gifts (James 1:5).

### **Study the Scriptures**

Our prayerful study of what the New Testament teaches about spiritual gifts allows the Holy Spirit to impress our minds with the specific ministry that He has for us. It is important that we believe that God has given us at least one gift to be used in His service.

## **Openness to Providential Guidance**

We are not to use the Spirit, but He is to use us, for it is God who works in His people "to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13, RSV). It is a privilege to be willing to work in any line of service that God's providence presents. We must give God the opportunity to work through others to solicit our help. So we ought to be ready to respond to the needs of the church whenever they present themselves. We should not be afraid to try new things, but we should also feel free to inform those requesting our help about our talents and experience.

## **Confirmation From the Body**

Since God gives these gifts to build up His church, we may expect the final confirmation of our gifts to arise from the judgment of the body of Christ and not from our own feelings. Often it is more difficult to recognize one's own gifts than those of others. Not only must we be willing to listen to what others have to tell us about our gifts but it is important that we recognize and confirm God's gifts in others.

Nothing is more exciting and fulfilling than to know that we are occupying the position or ministry or service that Providence has ordained for us. What a blessing is ours to employ in His service the special gift Christ has given to us through the Holy Spirit. Christ longs to share His gifts of grace. Today we can accept His invitation and discover what His gifts can do in a Spirit-filled life!