

Spiritual Gifts

A Companion Study to: *Your Profile for Christian Service*

A Spiritual Gift is a special appointment to government service in the Kingdom of Heaven under our Lord Jesus Christ. A Spiritual Gift can also be a special provision for service, or a special political favor. The Bible regards the Kingdom of Heaven as a political reality—a political reality not of this world—a political reality nonetheless. In the Kingdom of Heaven, God is Head of State. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Head of Government. We Christians are the Lord's agents. We are assigned to our various ministries through, according to, and by that one Spirit we share with God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7–11).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of life and love. As we attend to the Spirit of Christ, we are given work in the service of Christ—not as individuals in isolation, but as members of the Body of Christ. Kingdom service means partnership. So it can be useful to name the various kinds of work we have been called to perform. As we attend to the Holy Spirit, we may be directed to formally commission certain ones to their special appointments (see Acts 13:1–2).

The Bible presents four lists of Spiritual Gifts: two lists in 1 Corinthians 12, a list in Romans 12, and a list in Ephesians 4. There is also an important reference to Spiritual Gifts in 1 Peter 4, but no list—only two broad categories: Gifts for Speaking and Gifts for Serving. The reference to Spiritual Gifts in 1 Corinthians was occasioned by specific problems in the Christian assembly in Corinth (see below). The apostolic instructions in Romans, Ephesians, and 1 Peter were written as general guidelines for all Christians everywhere. The references to Spiritual Gifts in those three epistles show that the subject of Spiritual Gifts holds an essential place in the Apostles' doctrine.

The Lord gives his gifts according to each follower's measure of faith—that is, according to each person's practical experience as a faithful partner in the Lord's service (Romans 12:3). The second list of Spiritual Gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 reflects the fact that the Lord gives a greater measure of responsibility to those who have obtained a greater measure of faith—a greater measure of faith obtained by way of active kingdom service. In that second list (1 Corinthians 12:28), the gifts are presented in a definite order: “first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings . . .” The order of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28 finds a parallel in Ephesians 4:11. The other lists follow no particular order.

Not all the Spiritual Gifts listed in the Bible are explained in the Bible—at least not directly. For example, Paul never expressly states what he means by “governments,” but it is possible to make an educated guess. The definitions below are based on: **1)** the terms employed in the Greek New Testament; **2)** the order in which those terms are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11; **3)** a comparison of all four biblical lists; **4)** a consideration of the teachings of Jesus and his Apostles on related topics (such as the Kingdom of Heaven, the Holy Spirit, the Christian Assembly, Christian Partnership, and Christian Servant-Leadership).

The Situation Addressed in 1 Corinthians 12

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul contrasts the Word of Knowledge with the Word of Wisdom. Apparently certain of the Corinthians were claiming tongues as a Word of Knowledge, which they seem to have understood as the ability to know the language of heaven apart from any training. It was a case of spiritual one-upmanship.

Paul had to remind the Christian assembly in Corinth that a person's ability to say "Jesus is Lord" is the single best evidence of the Holy Spirit at work. Paul also reminds the sisters and brothers that there is such a thing as a Word of Wisdom, the ability to speak from long experience as a faithful member of the Body of Christ. Later, Paul suggests that the expression "Word of Knowledge" more appropriately applies to the gift of prophecy.

In the Greek New Testament, knowledge is *gnosis*—the root of the word Gnosticism. Gnosticism became a recognizable movement in the Second Century A.D. It was a counterfeit form of Christianity, which abandoned the Jesus who came in the flesh for a reinvented, mystical Christ. Gnostic tendencies developed early among the Christian assemblies. Problems caused by those early Gnostic tendencies are addressed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12.

Paul does not reject tongues as a spiritual gift. He rejects arrogance and laziness. Paul makes it clear that even the newest, least-experienced Christian is a vital partner in kingdom service. He also makes it clear that there is no shortcut to spiritual maturity. Above all else, Paul wants his partners in Christ to understand that love is the hallmark of Christian spirituality (see 1 Corinthians 13).

A List of Spiritual Gifts

The following list of Spiritual Gifts is a composite of the four biblical lists. Included are five key positions of servant-leadership, two kinds of special provisions, three kinds of standard provisions, and two special favors. The biblical source for each listing is indicated as follows:

C1 = Corinthian List 1 C2 = Corinthian List 2
R = the Roman List E = the Ephesian List

The gifts are identified by their designations in the King James Bible, but they are defined according to the terms employed in the Greek New Testament.

Key Positions of Servant-Leadership in Kingdom Service

Apostles (C2, E)

Those appointed by Christ to be sent out from the local Christian assembly, two by two, as heralds of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Prophets (C1, C2, R, E), Word of Knowledge (C1)

Those appointed by Christ to speak for God.

Evangelists (E)

Those appointed by Christ to announce the good news of Christ's victory over sin, death, and Hell.

Pastors (E), Word of Wisdom (C1), Those Who Rule (R)

Those appointed by Christ to care for a local Christian assembly. (In the Bible, Pastors are also called Elders, and they are called Bishops. A bishop is a custodian.)

Teachers (C2, R, E)

Those appointed by Christ to lead, by example, in the Way of Jesus. (There is no strict difference between a pastor and a teacher. In Ephesians, Paul refers to "pastors and teachers" as though referring to a single group.)

Special Provisions for Kingdom Service**Miracles (C1, C2)**

The power of Christ to make possible the impossible.

Healings (C1, C2)

The power of Christ to restore and nurture life and love.

Standard Provisions for Kingdom Service**Helps (C2), Ministry (R)**

The heart of Christ to care for the children of God. Includes the gifts of Mercy (R), Giving (R), and Exhortation (R).

Governments (C2), Discerning of Spirits (C1)

The mind of Christ to seek first the Kingdom of God. (The Greek word translated "Governments" is *kybernaeseis*, guidance, direction. A *kybernaetaes* is a helmsman. In the Christian assembly, our helmsman is Christ. In this study, Discerning of Spirits is taken to be a reference to the spiritual gift of guidance in light of Jesus' saying, "My sheep hear my voice.")

Faith (C1)

The freedom of Christ to trust in the goodness of God.

Special Favors**Tongues (C1, C2)**

God's willingness to receive vocal, nonverbal prayer as an acceptable form of worship.

Interpretation of Tongues (C1)

The ability of Christ to find words to express inexpressible joy and anguish.

Comparing the Lists

Corinthian List 2 is presented by the Apostle Paul as an ordered list: “first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers . . .” The Ephesian List follows the order of Corinthian List 2. The other two lists follow no particular order. The four lists are arranged below so as to highlight the order of the Ephesian List and Corinthian List 2.

Ephesian List Eph. 4:11	Corinthian List 2 1 Cor. 12:28	Corinthian List 1 1 Cor. 12:8–10	Roman List Rom. 12:6–8
Apostles	Apostles		
Prophets	Prophets	Prophecy	Prophecy
		• Word of Knowledge	
Evangelists			
Pastors		Word of Wisdom	Ruling
Teachers	Teachers		Teaching
	Miracles	Miracles	
	Healings	Healings	
	Helps		Ministry
			• Mercy
			• Giving
			• Exhortation
	Governments	Discerning of Spirits	
		Faith	
	Tongues	Tongues	
		Interpretation	