

3 Ways to Judge the Misuse of Spiritual Gifts

At some point, every pastor confronts a seeming paradox of Pentecost: If a person is demonstrating a genuine spiritual gift, how is it possible to misuse that gift?

Scripture doesn't leave us in the dark on this matter. Paul, in writing to the Corinthian church about the use of spiritual gifts in a worship gathering, made it clear: "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets" (1 Cor. 14:32, NIV). In other words, the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to speak in tongues, to interpret tongues, to prophesy—but He does not force us to blurt out those gifts. He expects His gifts to be exercised with discretion and maturity.

The test that I believe should be applied to all spiritual gifts is simple and threefold:

- 1. Does it glorify Jesus Christ?**
- 2. Does it edify the saints?**
- 3. Is it a good witness to nonbelievers?**

If it fails any one of those tests, it probably is out of order.

"But wait a minute," someone might object, "if something is bringing glory to Jesus Christ, don't the saints and nonbelievers have a problem if they can't receive that?"

Not really. An utterance that simply proclaims praise to Jesus is not truly glorifying to Him if it is disruptive, compromises the spiritual life and growth of the redeemed, or puts a roadblock in the path of those needing redemption. Jesus is truly glorified when His church worships in unity,

creating an environment where the Holy Spirit can powerfully convict and transform the lost.

The acid test of spirituality is whether or not a person can receive correction. The person who is unreceptive or even defensive because he or she is corrected in the use of a spiritual gift is really demonstrating a lack of preparation to be used in that gift expression in the first place. By the same token, a pastor who might read the guidance offered in this article and take offense should do some soul-searching. Is he or she truly prepared to encourage the kind of gift expression in the congregation that will bring about the fullest possible spiritual life?

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