

Are You Following Biblical Guidelines for Spiritual Gifts?

If you're going to have **spiritual gifts** operate, you must have wisdom accompanying that operation. Too often, pastors go in one of two extremes. Some are afraid to exert too much control.

One reason why gifts die out in many of our churches is the abuses that arise through a lack of control. On the other hand, some pastors want to get through the program and not make room for gifts at all because they fear that some of the ways gifts might be expressed would be destructive to the life of the congregation.

It can be especially difficult to correct abuses when you have a smaller congregation. Family members are quick to defend the person corrected; even gentle correction can make someone feel alienated. But you still have to tackle it if you're going to have growth.

I was determined to protect the growth in my church. I was also determined there would be opportunity for verbal gifts, whether it was tongues, interpretation of tongues or a prophetic word. When we began to get new people in the congregation, I asked that verbal exercise of the gifts be limited to people I knew were spiritually fruitful. If I did not know someone who was exercising a spiritual gift, I would intervene. It didn't happen a lot, but it happened several times.

Pastoral intervention does not have to be radical. "My brother, my sister, you're not familiar to us," I would say, "and I'd like for you to establish your walk in this congregation so we know of your life and ministry prior to

your exercising a gift.”

If the gift expressed was in order, I would always give an explanation, because at every service there would be people who had never seen that happen before.

“What you have just heard expressed,” I would say, “is described for us in the Bible. The Holy Spirit gives gifts, and among the gifts are tongues, interpretation and prophecy.”

I would explain how our church leadership put a great deal of planning into the service, but that on occasion the **Holy Spirit**, who knows our hearts, had a very pointed personal message to give to one or several in the congregation or sometimes to the entire congregation.

“It may be something we hadn’t thought of, we hadn’t planned, we hadn’t prayed for in the service,” I would say. “The Spirit has not interrupted this service; He has particularized an agenda He has that we didn’t see. This is the Lord’s way of talking to your heart personally. You’ll have to take that to your heart and assess it yourself.”

With guidelines in place, our people learned what the uses of the gifts are. Prophecy, for example, is for correction, consolation and encouragement. A **prophetic word** can be an anointed sermon—a person speaking on behalf of God. A prophetic word from the congregation, when sensitively presented, can also accomplish valuable spiritual goals.

But if we throw guidelines aside, if we only accept as **prophecy** some sort of extemporaneous speech that happens unplanned or interrupts a service, I believe we are missing out on the full dimensionality of what exercising prophetic gifts is really all about. Guidelines, then, are intended to maximize what the Holy Spirit would accomplish among God’s people.

The true servant of God who desires to have the greatest

impact for good on fellow members in the body of Christ and on the lost will not resent instruction or correction. He or she will partner with a pastor to ensure God's purposes are fulfilled in the church.

I pray that a new generation of church leadership will catch a vision for the vast spectrum of spiritual gift expression that has empowered the Church since its birth. I pray that congregations across our Fellowship will perform some prayerful soul-searching and identify anything that would hinder or in any way deform the pure and powerful use of the Holy Spirit's ministry.

As Paul said to the Corinthians, "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ... Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

When spiritual gifts are used properly and correctly, they produce powerful results in our churches.

George O. Wood *is general superintendent of the Assemblies of God.*