

How Will You Choose to Receive Spiritual Gifts?

Since the beginning of time, the Holy Spirit has looked for people through whom He can manifest Himself.

At the time of the creation, He “hovered” like a hen over her baby chicks (see Gen. 1:2).

After the Exodus, Moses said, “Oh, that all the people of the Lord were prophets” (Num. 11:29b).

The prophet Joel foretold a day when prophecy, dreams and visions would become widespread (see Joel 2:28-29).

After Jesus came and the Spirit was given to the church, Peter announced that the day prophesied by Joel had arrived (see Acts 2:14-21).

Today, we are still living in that day and God is ministering His gifts to those who will receive them and release them to raise a dying world to true life. God wants to give us gifts so that we can spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

How does He do it? Can we position ourselves receptively? How can we activate our faith here and now?

Granted, God is sovereign. He gives grace, ministries and offices as He desires, and His decision to bestow gifts is not dependent on the recipient’s preparation or choosing. It is God’s election, and we do not get to vote. (See Acts 2:1-4, Acts 4:32-33, Acts 10:44.)

We do get to speak up, however, and already-gifted people can help each other receive what God has chosen to give, often through the laying on of their hands.

We see this throughout the history of the people of God,

especially after the Holy Spirit was given to the church. Moses laid hands on Joshua: "Now Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. And the children of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord commanded Moses" (Deut. 34:9).

A Theological Tension

Surely you are aware of the theological tension within the church between God's sovereignty and human free will. Without addressing the controversy in detail, I want to say only that God chooses, but people get to choose His choice.

It is like the pedals of a bicycle. When one is up, the other is down, and they bring each other round and round. It takes pressure first on one, then the other, to make the bike roll forward.

In the same way, it takes two seemingly opposed truths joining forces to reach the goal.

Is it sovereignty or free will? Yes! I believe it is an interworking of both.

It took both divine sovereignty and human free will in the upper room on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2). None of the people could have caused the wind to blow or the tongues of fire to appear in the air over their heads. But, obedient to the word Jesus had given them, they waited together, patiently and expectantly. Jesus had commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "of which you have heard from Me. For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5).

The disciples postured themselves receptively, praying and worshipping, not really knowing what He was going to give them but willing to receive it.

Then, once they were filled with the Spirit, they voluntarily allowed their tongues to be loosened and their voices to speak out new sounds, “as the Spirit enabled them to speak” (Acts 2:4).

Nobody laid hands on anybody else on the Day of Pentecost, but they did it a lot afterward, as they figured out how God wanted to do things within the body of people that would be called the church.

He wanted everyone to be filled with His Spirit, and He equipped them with the character and wisdom necessary to make good decisions about methods and timing.

Hands or No Hands?

At other times, as with Ananias and Paul, the laying on of hands confers an impartation of great magnitude.

Sometimes we call this “casting a mantle,” because of the way Elijah’s actual mantle, his anointed piece of clothing, was cast over Elisha’s shoulders (see 1 Kings 19:19).

That simple act determined the course of the rest of Elisha’s life. He became Elijah’s servant and learned how to operate in God’s giftings. Finally, at the end of Elijah’s life, Elisha became the sole possessor of the mantle that had once been put over his shoulders (see 2 Kings 2:1-12) and went on to perform even more miraculous prophetic acts than his mentor Elijah had done.

Does He do any less today? Shouldn’t we expect more activity of the Holy Spirit today as the Last Days unfold?

You should be aware that it is quite possible to miss your chance to receive an impartation of God’s grace.

I remember hearing the healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman on a television broadcast late in her life. “I was not God’s first choice,” she confided, “God offered this gift, this ministry,

to a man first. And he refused. So then God came to a woman with red hair and freckles ... and I said yes.” She received the gift and the call because she made herself available.

How did Jesus’ disciples receive His impartations? They made themselves available when He called them and passed on to them His authority (see Luke 10:1-11).

Out into the countryside they went, without Him, to test their new gifts, and then they came back to report their successes to Him (see Luke 10:17). “Doin’ the stuff” brought them great joy, even in the midst of the personal sacrifices and difficulties that came with the territory.

An Abundant Supply of Gifts

Scripture presents a number of special spiritual gifts. Look at this wonderful list:

- Administrations (or “steerings”) – 1 Corinthians 12:28.
- Apostle – 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11.
- Celibacy – 1 Corinthians 7:7.
- Discerning of spirits – 1 Corinthians 12:10.
- Effects of miracles/powers – 1 Corinthians 12:10.
- Eternal life – Romans 6:23.
- Evangelist – Ephesians 4:11.
- Exhortation – Romans 12:8.
- Faith – 1 Corinthians 12:9.
- Healings – 1 Corinthians 12:9.
- Giving – Romans 12:8.
- Helps – 1 Corinthians 12:28.

- Interpretation of tongues – 1 Corinthians 12:10.
- Kinds of tongues – 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Corinthians 14.
- Leaderships (ruling) – Romans 12:8.
- Mercy – Romans 12:8.
- Pastor (shepherd) – Ephesians 4:11.
- Prophecy – 1 Corinthians 12:10.
- Prophets – 1 Corinthians 12:28; 1 Corinthians 14:1; Ephesians 4:11.
- Righteousness – Romans 5:17.
- Service – Romans 12:7.
- Teachers – 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11.
- Teaching – Romans 12:7.
- Word of knowledge – 1 Corinthians 12:8.
- Word of wisdom – 1 Corinthians 12:8.

I believe that the gifts of the Spirit are as expansive as God Himself, so there is no reason to adhere rigidly to a particular set or listing of them. Even within the scriptural lists, there are variations. It depends on their application.

Some of the gifts of the Spirit seem to function in a temporary manner, according to the need of the moment. We might call these “circumstantial” gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In other cases, believers in Christ operate consistently in one or more gifts; the gifts appear to reside within the believer. We can call these “ministry gifts” of the Spirit.

A select number of believers not only operate consistently in one or more gifts, but they have been set apart as gifts

themselves from God to the body of Christ, to equip the church to do the works of Jesus. This category of gifting is commonly referred to as “offices of the Spirit.”

Clearly, whether the gifting of God is circumstantial, consistent or a calling for an extended period of time, it happens by the great grace of God alone. You cannot earn the gifts of the Holy Spirit. That is why they are called gifts!

Being Good Stewards

We must pray to be good stewards of the gifts of the Spirit, praying for three things:

1. Fullness of power.
2. Fullness of character (fruits of the Spirit).
3. Fullness of wisdom.

Unless the fullness of the Spirit is complete, the gifts of the Spirit will be subject to misuse or disuse and the kingdom of God will be long in coming. Paul’s words to Timothy apply to each one of us: “Do not neglect the gift that is in you” (1 Tim. 4:14a).

The gifts He has given flow forth for the sake of other people. In fact, one of the greatest joys in my life is to see people have God encounters! It is better than going to a great movie. You and I get to be the actors on God’s stage in the greatest show on Earth!

So, let’s receive and release the spiritual gifts, calling them forth for the glory of God. Amen and amen! {eo}

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