

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

For contemporary readers, there will be no question about the current interest in the subject of spiritual gifts. Christians of all denominations and of all theological persuasions are presently writing with proliferation on this topic. Many who have for years been conservative, even fundamentalist, in their theology seem to have only in recent times come to an awareness of gifts as a present reality.

Runia recently wrote:

Thanks to our Reformation heritage, we evangelicals have learned to describe the Spirit's work in salvation in two aspects: justification and sanctification. In justification the Holy Spirit takes the righteousness of Christ and applies it to our lives. In sanctification the Spirit takes the holiness of Christ and applies it to our lives. Through the first, we have forgiveness of sins and the assurance of an eternal inheritance with Christ. Through the second, we gain the power to fight against sin, and our lives reflect the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, etc.

But is this all we can say about the work of the Holy Spirit? What are we to say about the many references in the New Testament to the gifts of the Spirit? Is it really true, as many evangelicals have been taught, that the Spirit's gifts were meant only for the apostolic age?¹

In reality, however, the doctrine has not been so unknown, but rather certain forceful movements within and without the church in recent times have drawn attention to the matter, and many are now attempting to more precisely understand to properly employ spiritual gifts.

Howard observes:

¹Klaas Runia in Eternity, January, 1972.

Up to the Reformation spiritual gifts remained on the periphery of doctrinal interest and investigation. During and following the Reformation renewed interest in the Scriptures brought renewed concern for all doctrine, including spiritual gifts.

In the twentieth century men continue to focus their attention on Scripture and on the doctrine of spiritual gifts. Some are far too rational. Others are far too radical. The continuing need is for a realistic and relevant treatment of the subject, based on divine revelation.²

Ignorance and excess are today as always the two poles around which Christian believers tend to be grouped even at the present. But both are tragic, for the reality of spiritual gifts is that which gives to the church its functional unity in every age and in every place.

Walvoord has put it this way:

The church from the beginning has been plagued by two opposing extremes in its doctrine of spiritual gifts. From the first, as the Corinthian Epistles bear witness, there was abuse of spiritual gifts. In the course of the history of the church, excesses of the wildest kind are found in relation to this doctrine. On the other hand, there has been an appalling failure to appreciate the importance of spiritual gifts as determining the ministry of the church and as being essential to all its fruitfulness.³

Serious and sound attempts have been made both in the past and in the present to place the gifts into proper and useful perspective. Local churches in many parts are stressing and practicing various methods for identifying the spiritual gifts of their members and are successfully mobilizing the congregation accordingly for maximum lay ministry. One pastor teaches the doctrine of gifts for his church in this manner:

The church is primarily and fundamentally a body designed to express through each individual member the life of an indwelling Lord and is equipped by the Holy Spirit with gifts designed to express that life. It follows that there could hardly be anything

²Grant Howard, 5.

³John Walvoord, 163.

more abortive or pathetic than a church which fails to understand this and substitutes instead the business methods, organizational proceeding and pressure politics of the world to accomplish its work. That is a certain recipe for frustration and ultimate death. But to rediscover the divine program for the operation of a church is exciting and challenging.⁴

In the past century, James Morgan⁵ enumerated four "lessons" which the doctrine of spiritual gifts has to teach Christian communities: (1) our hope is mightily encouraged; (2) our diligence is demanded to the utmost; (3) the gifts of every one are for the good of all, and those of all for the benefit of every one; (4) all should unite their efforts in the one great cause of truth and righteousness. Gifts are taking an increasingly important place in the thinking of leaders outside of the local church as well. Cummings depreciates the lack of this in the past:

The call to service . . . is not where we are to go, but what we are to be, as we are equipped by God. Very few of our churches and training institutions give young people practical teaching and help in developing spiritual gifts. Consequently, many would-be missionaries lack a clear conviction that God has called or equipped them for a certain ministry.

So his advice is that:

perhaps greater attention to these truths by mission leaders, particularly Candidate Secretaries, would stimulate young people and missionaries to greater spiritual exercise in discovering and using this divine equipment.⁶

It is in sympathy with current trends to train and mobilize evangelical Christians in accordance with their spiritual gifts that this paper is written.

⁴Ray Stedman, Body Life, 51.

⁵James Morgan, 408-9.

⁶Norman Cummings, 6.

THE PLAN OF THIS PAPER

The thrust of this paper is two-fold, to examine exegetically the major Scripture passages on gifts and to develop characterizations of each spiritual gift. This will be done in eight chapters. Two will present the exegesis of principal passages, one will advance a functional definition of a spiritual gift, three will characterize the gifts, and the last will be the summary chapter. The scheme for any definition and categorization of the several gifts will, hopefully, be deduced from the study of I Peter 4:7-12; Ephesians 4:7-16; Romans 12:3-8; and I Corinthians 12-14.

Some assumptions underlie this approach to spiritual gifts.

(1) Spiritual gifts are as real and functioning in the church today as in any age, unless there be found Scriptural information indicating otherwise for any or all of the gifts. (2) Scripture alone is adequate and trustworthy for guidelines regarding the nature and exercise of the gifts. (3) A simple definition of each gift alone is insufficient for recognition and mobilization; rather what is needed is a description of each in behavioral terms, including attitudes, overt behavior and personality qualities which accompany each gift. (4) Each gift will have certain qualities in common with the Greek word for that gift as it occurs everywhere throughout the New Testament. (5) Spiritual gifts *per se* are a New Testament phenomenon for which the New Testament alone will be consulted.

All Greek words, including those contained in direct quotations, have been transliterated into English type. Brief mention is made in

the notes of all authors cited; a fuller biographical description for each work is located in the Bibliography at the end of the paper.

The appendices are four in number. The first is a summary of the New Testament uses of the term charisma, "gift," of the several words used of spiritual gifts. The second is a grammatical diagram of Romans 12:4-8 illustrating the syntactical unity and interrelations of that passage, upon which its interpretation is based. The third is an attempt to describe each spiritual gift strictly in terms of covert, overt and qualitative behavior. The format followed for each gift varies at points in order to conserve space. The last appendix is a summary of New Testament preaching as distinguished from prophecy per se and from evangelization.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN I PETER 4:7-11

Peter's first Epistle deals with Christian salvation and its present ramifications. It covers the nature of salvation (chapters 1-2), the implications for Christian relationships (2-3), the applications to suffering and service (3-4), and the principles of Christian discipline (5). It is among other important instructions for the New Testament church life and service that Peter presents his discussion of spiritual gifts.

The Context

Christian salvation, in Peter's view, is not only an eternal decree (1:1-2), a past fact (3) and a future hope (3-4), but it is as well a present process (5) which ought to affect all of one's