

Spiritual Gifts and Prophecy



“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Cor. 12:4–6, NKJV).

Different Gifts but One God

INTRODUCTION

1 Cor. 12:1–11

I went to school with an intelligent, talented young woman who minored in theology at one of our Adventist colleges. I was out of the loop concerning what was going on in her life, because I was so busy with my own career and personal responsibilities. However, one day I did notice that I had not seen her much at the different religious programs held on campus and at church. This was unusual for her, because when she first came, she was quite enthusiastic and wanted to be actively involved in the spiritual development of other students.

When I finally caught up with other friends who knew her, I was told that she had left the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Apparently, she believed that she had the gift of tongues and wanted to incorporate this gift into the worship service of her new church. Needless to say, her desire was not well received. In fact, she started to attend a church of another denomination, likely because they valued her gift and because she felt accepted there.

This week's lesson is about spiritual gifts and prophecy. During the next six days, we will explore the biblical basis of spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. In addition,

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we will discuss practical ways to tap into these gifts with which God has endowed His church. At the end of the week, come back to this introduction and try to think of what you would have said to this young woman who left because she thought she had the gift of tongues. What could her church have done to encourage her to develop her talents for God? Finally, what lessons can we learn about how we deal with church members who might misuse their God-given gifts?

Editor's note: For an interesting treatment on the gift of tongues from the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, see Harry Lowe, "Speaking in Tongues" at <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/speaking%20in%20tongues.pdf>.

Unique Gifts? Genuine Quality

LOGOS

Acts 2:1–18; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 1:4–7; 13:8–12; Eph. 4:10–13;
2 Thess. 2:9, 10

Counterfeit Miracles (2 Thess. 2:9, 10)

The difference between genuine and counterfeit is usually in the quality of the product and the established track record of the original designer. Although two handbags may appear to be made by the same designer, you may discover that one is made by YSL (Yves Saint Laurent) with genuine leather, while the other is made by VSL (an unknown name) from a product called “sleather.” Everything produced by God is of the highest quality and backed with a 100 percent guarantee. Conversely, everything produced by the hand of the enemy is of the worst quality and has no guarantee of lasting success.

From the beginning, it has been Satan’s strategy to confuse God’s children by producing a counterfeit product that closely resembles God’s original. God’s gifts are designed to produce genuine miracles in our lives. Such miracles uplift us and enlighten our understanding regarding the Holy Spirit’s power. This is threatening to Satan’s existence and power. Therefore, it is only logical for him to manufacture counterfeits in an effort to deceive

us. It challenges us to become well acquainted with the truth about spiritual gifts so that we will not be easily deceived.

Colored Arches (Rom. 12:6–8)

Like the colors of the rainbow, our gifts may be different, but each colored arc is needed to complete a beautiful rainbow. Our gifts belong to the church body and are to be used for God’s glory in blessing our fellow church members.¹ Anyone desiring to function as an independent arc, highlighting his or her own color and giving glory to self, may be demonstrating signs of possessing a counterfeit gift. Romans 12: 6–8 encourages us to (1) realize that all gifts and abilities come from God, (2) understand that not everyone has the same gifts, (3) know who we are and what we do best, (4) dedicate our gifts to God’s service, and (5) be willing to use our gifts wholeheartedly.²

Confusing Gift (Mark 16:15–17)

According to Mark 16:15–17, the gift of tongues is a legitimate gift given to believers; but it is also the most misunderstood gift. Entire denominations have centered their faith around this gift, claiming that unless a person speaks in tongues he or she does not have the full indwelling of the Spirit. However, no one passage should be read in isolation. First Corinthians 12:4–7, 11 indicates that we do not all possess the same gifts, but that the Spirit distributes them according to His will. Therefore, possessing the gift of tongues is not the only indication that you are a true believer.

What is the gift of tongues? Is it an “unknown utterance” accompanied with physical manipulations of the body? Let’s allow the Bible to explain.

In Mark 16:17, the Greek word for “tongues” is *glōssai*, meaning a foreign language which one has not yet learned but is able to speak as a result of the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit.³ This was dramatically demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples were assembled in the upper room and a mighty wind swept through and filled the room. Read Acts 2:1–18.

“The ability to speak foreign languages was a gift given to the disciples for the special purpose of carrying the gospel message into all the world. Pilgrims from the four corners of the earth . . . were assembled in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. . . . For their sakes, and for those who would receive the message through them, the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to proclaim the gospel fluently in the pilgrims’ home languages. This was a major miracle and fulfilled one of the Lord’s last promises” in Mark 16:17.⁴

First Corinthians 14 emphasizes the importance of edification, exhortation, and consolation in all that is said and done in the church or worship setting. Whether the gift of a “tongue” or a “prophecy” is utilized, this passage seems to indicate that no one should be speaking in the presence of fellow believers without being *understood*. The message of salvation and God’s love are too important not to be communicated clearly. Spoken with power, the listeners could be convicted of sin, convinced of the saving grace of God, and committed to making the appropriate changes in their lives according to God’s will and purpose.

REACT

1. What is your special gift?
2. How can you decide whether or not a gift is genuine?
3. Is the gift of “tongues” as described above, a relevant gift today?

1. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 328.

2. *Application Study Bible*, p. 1902.

3. *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, Lexical Aids, p. 1817.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 137, 138.

TESTIMONY

1 Corinthians 12:12–31; 13; 14:1–4

“The teaching is very clear, that to the church has been given assurance that the spiritual gifts, which are so greatly needed, are to remain as long as the church is in the world. Moreover, the gift of prophecy is specifically mentioned as the gift to be desired and cherished above all others.”¹

Why is the gift of prophecy “to be desired . . . above all others”? Can it not be implied from 1 Corinthians 12:12–31, which describes the church as a unified, yet diverse body, that each member of the body (church) is equally important? Also, does the Bible not clearly state in 1 Corinthians 13 that the greatest of all spiritual gifts is love? As we examine 1 Corinthians 14:1–4, Paul begins to reveal some answers.

The gift of love is important, because without it, all other spiritual gifts are ineffective (1 Cor. 13:1–3). The tongue spoken about in 1 Corinthians 14 refers to an unknown language, which explains why it is not understood by those who hear it.

**Why is the gift of prophecy
“to be desired . . . above all
others”?**

However, those who prophesy are in fact edifying those who are willing to listen. The word *edify* means “to instruct and improve especially in moral and religious knowledge.”²

Arthur Daniells states that “the remnant church will place special emphasis upon three fundamental doctrines of the gospel,—the law of God, the faith of Jesus, and the spirit of prophecy. The law of God is the changeless standard of the righteousness which God requires of all responsible beings. The faith of Jesus is the means provided whereby man may receive power to keep that law. The spirit of prophecy is the channel through which the Lord will give instruction, warning, and guidance to the remnant church for the work assigned, and for the preparation required at the second coming of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”³

REACT

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White had the gift of prophecy. What is your favorite book written by her? If her writings have been abused by others in an effort to “make you believe,” try reading two of her best books—*Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages*.

1. Arthur Daniells, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy*, p. 168.

2. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/edify>. Retrieved November 6, 2007.

3. Daniells, pp. 168, 169.

God's Remedy for the Laodicean Church

Tuesday
January 13

EVIDENCE

Rom. 12:6–8

It is worth noting that while Paul provides multiple references to gifts in his letters to the early churches, the letter to the congregations in Rome is the only one where the gift of giving is specifically mentioned. An examination of the first century Christian church in Rome provides some context to Paul's exclusiveness.

Biblical scholars believe the book of Romans was written around A.D. 57 at which time Rome was quite similar to many of our large cities today. In this urban environment, there were both upper- and middle-class individuals among the ranks of church membership. In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul reveals this to be so by conveying greetings from church members in the highest levels of the Roman government (Phil. 4:22).

Read Revelation 3:17, 18. In these verses, God provides counsel to a last-day church also blessed with an abundance of wealth and, correspondingly, the gift of giving. These verses present a dilemma. How can we buy gold from God when He has described our condition as one of utter poverty? How is this accomplished? In Matthew 19:21, Jesus reveals the nature of this transaction. Here He instructs a young man who is seeking eternal life to sell what he has and to give to the poor. That way, he will have treasure in heaven.

**God's appeal in Revelation
3:17, 18 has never been
more relevant.**

Today's Christian church is composed of more individuals with a greater ability to give than at any other time in its history. God's appeal in Revelation 3:17, 18 has never been more relevant. As the last-day church, God counsels us to work as Christ worked, devoting our possessions and energies to alleviating the sufferings of our fellow human beings, thereby fulfilling our commission to reveal to the world the character of our heavenly Father. This is the heaven-ordained method for building the church, the purpose for which every gift is given.

REACT

What gifts could be considered especially relevant to the Laodicean church described in Revelation 3:14–19?

The Pursuit of the Spirit

HOW-TO

Luke 24:53; 1 Cor. 12:12

As children of God, we've all been called to do a special work for Him. He did not call us to do this work without supplying us with the tools to be effective. Our spiritual gifts are tailor-made for the purpose to which He has called us.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12. How awesome it is to know that each of us is as important to God's work as every body part is to the whole body. Our spiritual gift is our contribution to that life-sustaining flow that furthers the gospel. The Holy Spirit is the "sanguis," the blood or fuel that is essential to make the gift come alive.

How do we have access to the Holy Spirit?

Luke 24:53 tells us that before receiving the Holy Spirit, the disciples "stayed continually at the temple, praising God" (NIV). We must die to self and open our hearts to God to receive the Holy Spirit. Then God's will will be expressed through us by our spiritual gifts.

Ellen G. White says of the Holy Spirit, "Talk of it, pray for it, preach concerning it; for the Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit than parents are to give good gifts to their children."^{*}

"Talk of it, pray for it, preach concerning it."

1. *Talk of it.* Read Ephesians 4:29. Our minds should be set on things above. God want us to be always

focused on Him so that we will always be ready for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

2. *Pray for it.* "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31, NIV). Prayer is powerful. Through it, we have access to the throne of the Most High. God will no doubt fill us with the Spirit if we petition the throne.

3. *Preach concerning it.* God tells us in His Word, " 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation' " (Mark 16:15, NIV). When we allow ourselves to be used for the furtherance of God's work, the Holy Spirit will guide us each step of the way and will imbue us with the tools (gifts) we need to minister for Christ.

REACT

1. In your own life, how can you daily seek the Holy Spirit?
2. What are your spiritual gifts?
3. How can you use those gifts for the good of others?

^{*}*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 15, 1892.

The Unopened Gift

OPINION

1 Tim. 4:14

During my childhood in the Dominican Republic, my parents did not have a lot of money for gifts. Therefore, any little gift was precious to us. I remember when I received my first doll. It was a nurse doll with wide brown eyes and curly hair. I loved this doll so much that I didn't open the box for months. Inside her box, the doll was safely tucked away from dust and me. I remember sitting in front of the box, simply admiring the doll for hours while my sister played with her doll. One day, curiosity got the best of me. I wanted to feel the doll's curls. It was not until I opened that box that I had truly accepted the gift.

You see, a gift is not a gift if it isn't tapped into. Once used, the gift radiates joy in the lives of the giver and the receiver. So it is with God's gifts to His children. He "gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare [His] people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:11, 12, NIV). God's gifts have purpose, mission, and a reason to be. We will never truly enjoy His gifts until we open them and fulfill their purpose for the benefit of others and ourselves.

Have you opened your gift yet?

Looking from a distance at the talents God has given us will never make our spiritual gifts a reality. God wants you to discover and use His gifts! They are uniquely designed for you. God has called you for a special purpose, a higher calling. You "are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9, NIV).

Have you opened your gift yet? It's time to make your joy complete!

REACT

1. Are natural talents the same as spiritual gifts?
2. What do you think happens to unused spiritual gifts?
3. Do you think God has stopped giving spiritual gifts to His church?
4. Based on what you have learned this week, how would you answer the questions at the end of this week's Introduction article?

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 12:4–6

CONCLUDE

At times, I feel overwhelmed by the “task” of being a Christian. While the simplicity of the Gospels and the stories of the Bible are awesome, there are many competing voices and ideas that surround faith and the challenges of being a church member and a Christian in today’s world. But at such times, I must remind myself that I don’t have to do it by myself. God gives different and complementary gifts to His people to be used in the community we call church. Through His power and gifting, none of us has to do it all or know it all ourselves.

CONSIDER

- Giving a gift that you believe will be useful to someone you care about. How does the gift giving fit with your relationship with that person? How does watching them use your gift make you feel?
- Reflecting on what spiritual gifts you might have. List what you enjoy doing and what others say you are good at doing.
- Choosing one of your gifts from the list above and finding a practical way to use it or put it into practice this week.
- Practicing something (as in “getting better at”) that you enjoy doing and can use to help others. Is there a training program in your church, school, or community that might help you develop that gift?
- Identifying the spiritual gifts of members of your family, church, or group of friends. What do they do well, enjoy doing, and use to contribute to the church or God’s work? Write each person a note, thanking them for using their gift and affirming their giftedness.
- Making an appointment to talk with a representative of a church that practices speaking in tongues. Prepare a list of questions and listen to their explanation. Do this as part of a group and with a pastor or spiritually experienced, mature friend. Include time to debrief with your group and pastor or mentor after the meeting.

CONNECT

The Great Controversy, pp. viii–ix.

Seth Pierce, *Pride and Seek: An Unexpected Spiritual Journey*.