

Spiritual Gifts

Expectation without Agenda

Spiritual gifts are supernatural empowerments given by the Holy Spirit to Christians so that they can do the work of building up the body of Christ (the Church) and extend the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

Spiritual gifts are not innate, natural talents, like an ear for music or the ability to draw, but rather they are empowerments that the Holy Spirit gives to a believer to minister to the body in ways that are not possible by mere natural effort apart from the Holy Spirit. In the ministry of the apostles in the book of Acts, we see that they performed miracles, healed people, preached, and spoke in tongues, which they had not been able to do apart from Christ.

Spiritual gifts are empowerments for building up the church and extending the Kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 14, the Apostle Paul instructs the congregation on the function of spiritual gifts. He repeats several times that these gifts are to strengthen or build up the church.

"But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort" (1 Corinthians 14:3).

"...try to excel in gifts that build up the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12).

"...All of these things must be done for the strengthening of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Of course, it must also be noted that Paul suggests that spiritual gifts can act as a witness to non-believers.

"But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" (1 Corinthians 14:24–25).

Who Can Have Spiritual Gifts?

The Holy Spirit is the owner and dispenser of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7,11). As believers, we are stewards of these gifts (1 Peter 4:10) and can expect the Holy Spirit to minister through us. *"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good..." (1 Corinthians 12:7).* This provides a dynamic relationship with the Holy Spirit where we can expect Him to move through us in multiple ways.

Spiritual gifts can be experienced immediately following conversion but are often received at various times throughout our spiritual journey. Paul encourages Timothy, *"Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you" (1 Timothy 4:14).* It is not clear exactly when this happened in Timothy's spiritual journey, but it was probably when he was commissioned by the church to begin his ministry. This also suggests that gifts can come

by impartation from spiritual leadership. This is not some kind of “magical” touch, but instead the culmination of a relationship of discipleship accountability and submission to authority. It is also clear from Scripture that spiritual gifts can be received when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:4; 10:44–48; 19:6*).

How Do Spiritual Gifts Work?

As we read the book of Acts, we see that spiritual gifts were very much a part of the ministry of the New Testament church. We also see them in operation in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus did His miraculous deeds in His Spirit empowered humanity (*Acts 10:38*). He asked his disciples to do the things that he had been doing (*Luke 9:1*). Since his ministry was a demonstration of spiritual gifts through a fully surrendered man, then he could with confidence say to his disciples, “*As the Father has sent me, so send I you*” (*John 20:21*). Our Alliance founder, A. B. Simpson said, When Christ healed the sick while he was on the earth, it was not by the Deity that dwelt in his humanity. He said, “*If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come upon you*” (*Matthew 12:28*). Jesus healed by the Holy Spirit. “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted*” (*Luke 4:18*). The Holy Spirit is the agent, then, by which this great power is wrought. We should especially expect to see his working in these days because they are the days in which it has been prophesied that there shall be signs and wonders

(The Fourfold Gospel, p. 48).

Alliance Pastor and Theologian, A.W. Tozer, recognized this dynamic when he said, “While our Lord Jesus was on earth, he did not accomplish his great deeds of power in the strength of his deity. I believe he did them all in the strength and authority of his Spirit-anointed humanity” (*Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, chapter 6). Though the focus of Acts is on the ministry of the Apostles, we also see that lay people exercised spiritual gifts (*Acts 6:8; 8:6–7; 9:17–19; 10:44–46; 19:6–7*). Thus, every believer can expect God to work through him or her with spiritual gifts.

Various passages in the New Testament mention a variety of gifts, principally 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 29–30; Romans 12:4–8; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:10–11. It is not easy to define or describe each of these gifts. Some seem to be quite evident in their nature. The Scriptures do not indicate that the list of spiritual gifts is exhaustive. The number of spiritual gifts is not important, but rather the understanding of what they are and how they are to be used.

Spiritual gifts should work together, complementing each other. There is a need for them to be active in the church. Paul exhorts the Corinthian congregation to eagerly desire spiritual gifts (*1 Corinthians 14:1*). This does not mean, however, that gifts should be used to exalt the individual or to feed an immature desire for attention. He repeats in v. 12 that they should try to excel in gifts that build up the church. Spiritual gifts must be used in love (*1 Corinthians 13; Romans 12:9; Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 4:8*). If they are not used in love they will be abused and cause trouble in the body, rather than blessing (*1 Corinthians 13:1–3*). Love, when used with spiritual gifts is like oil in a machine. It makes all the parts work well together. We must also remember that our “comfort zone” is not the same as spiritual discernment, and at times even a gift manifested in love may make those ignorant of it uncomfortable. Therefore, patient teaching on the gifts and their manifestations is a necessity (*1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Romans 12:4, 5; Ephesians 4:12, 15, 16*).

Is One Spiritual Gift More Important Than Another?

All the gifts are needed in the body of Christ and all the gifts are equally valid however the context of the ministry is often what determines the value of a particular gift. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, the Apostle Paul instructs the church that no one should despise their own gifts by comparing them to the gifts of others, and that no one should despise someone else's gifts as being less than their own gifts. Some gifts are more apparent than others, but each gift is important.

Paul indicates that the gift of prophecy is an important gift, one to be desired (*1 Corinthians 14:1*) and in 1 Corinthians 14:1–25 compares the gift of prophecy and the gift of speaking in tongues in the context of public worship. The clear indication is that the gift of prophecy is more profitable for building up the body of Christ than the gift of speaking in tongues, unless the tongues are interpreted (*1 Corinthians 14:5, 27–28*). Paul also teaches in 1 Corinthians 14:13 that the person with the gift of tongues should pray that they may also interpret to maximise the edification of the congregation as they speak.

In some worship services there is a style of worship expression where people pray audibly at the same time. In these types of settings tongues can be used without interpretation as the tongue speaker is essentially praying privately, albeit within a public setting. Interpretation is needed to edify the body when there is just one person praying, or when one voice rises noticeably above others.

While much has been said about the proper use of the gift of tongues it must also be stressed that the interpretation of tongues is an important gift for the church which needs to be exercised properly to bring a more complete blessing of public tongue speaking. Those blessed with this gift should be encouraged to exercise their gift to the glory of God.

In private settings the gift of tongues is a powerful gift which the apostle Paul was blessed with (*1 Corinthians 14:18*) and which needs no interpretation. It is used for personal prayer and worship and at times when praying for others. This, of course, is also of value to the individual believer's edification and for the edification of the church and should not be considered a lesser gift.

What's the Evidence of Being Filled with the Spirit?

There are some who believe that the gift of tongues is the "initial, physical evidence" of being filled with the Spirit and this is traditionally the position of our Pentecostal brothers and sisters. While we affirm tongues as a valid gift for today, but we do not believe that the Scripture supports tongues as the only evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul, as he writes to the believers in the Ephesian church, commands them to... "*be filled with the Spirit*" (*Ephesians 5:18*). "Filled with the Spirit" is a frequent expression in the Book of Acts describing the source of the mighty power of God working in believers in Christ. This expression implies being under the control of the Holy Spirit. We believe this is still a valid command for today, and every believer should seek to be filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit. So, what is the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit?

There is a record of people receiving spiritual gifts when they were filled with the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:4; 10:44–48; 19:6*) and there are other instances of people being filled with the Holy Spirit where there

is no mention of spiritual gifts (*Acts 4:8, 31; 8:15–17; 9:17–18; 13:9, 52*). Some may speak in tongues when they are filled with the Holy Spirit, others do not. While rejecting the “initial evidence doctrine” mentioned earlier, we must be careful to say there “should be” and “will be” evidence that a person has been filled with the Holy Spirit. As Tozer strongly notes, “no one ever received the Holy Spirit’s power without knowing it” (*Keys to the Deeper Life*, p. 57). A creed of power without the experience of power is worthless. One phrase that could describe our posture in this encounter with God is **“Expectation without Agenda.”** It would seem to be a dangerous thing to try and convince someone they have been filled with the Spirit if there is no manifest evidence in their lives. Our expectancy should be that God will meet His people in a powerful way. However, it would be equally dangerous to demand a specific agenda or manifestation in that moment. Again, we should come to the Lord with great expectation, while seeking to free ourselves from human agendas or motives.

Regardless of the gifts or manifestations a believer may experience, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, as described in Galatians 5:22–23 is the primary evidence of the Spirit-filled life. These qualities are produced by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The fruit of the Spirit shows that the Holy Spirit is in control of the believer’s life.

Another indication of being filled with the Holy Spirit is a fruitful ministry. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would give believers power to be His witnesses. We often mention the scope of our ministry - Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, but we also need to focus on the source of power for our ministry - the Holy Spirit, who wants to fill us for a holy life and effective service.

Finally, 1 Corinthians 12 lists a variety of manifestations that occur when the Holy Spirit is ministering. We have no reason to believe this is an all-inclusive list of manifestations or evidences. Weeping, for instance, is not mentioned. Yet many believers have experienced tears as a manifestation of the Spirit’s work and power. Others may experience a manifestation of great joy and God’s love but never shed a tear. Rather than demanding a single gift or manifestation as the evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit, we ought to gratefully embrace all the gifts, manifestations, and fruit that the Lord desires to bring into our lives without compromising wisdom and discernment.

Have Some Spiritual Gifts Ceased to Exist?

No. Spiritual gifts were given to build up the body of Christ, and as long as the church is under construction, spiritual gifts are needed. A day will come when spiritual gifts will no longer be needed (*1 Corinthians 13:8*) however, we do not believe that day has come yet. It will come when perfection comes (*1 Corinthians 13:10*). Some interpret this “perfection” to be the completion of the canon of Scripture (*the Apostolic Age*); however, this is not a good rendering of the Greek text. We believe that this refers to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the church, the bride of Christ is complete and perfect, and spiritual gifts will no longer be necessary.

How Can I Discover My Spiritual Gifts?

Paul warns Timothy not to neglect his gift (*1 Timothy 4:14*), and he also encourages him to “*fan into*

flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hand” (2 Timothy 1:6). Therefore, it is a biblical necessity that believers discover and move in the arena of spiritual gifts. It has been said that Christians are not primarily natural beings having temporary spiritual experiences, rather, we are spiritual beings having a temporary natural experience. We live in a spiritual, Kingdom reality.

If the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts, then their discovery must by nature be a spiritual experience. When we walk in obedience, we must trust that the Holy Spirit will respond with the revelation of His gifts in our lives. There are also some practical observations we can make, and other can make about us which help with our spiritual gift discovery.

What kind of ministry do you enjoy the most and shows the most fruitfulness in your life? These activities probably indicate where there are spiritual gifts operating in your life. If you enjoy teaching and find that people are edified through your teaching ministry, it is likely that the Holy Spirit has given you a gift of teaching. If you find that the Lord puts people in your path who are ready to surrender their life to Christ, you probably have a spiritual gift of evangelism. If you enjoy inviting people to your home, either for a meal or to stay, you probably have a gift of hospitality.

There are also “tests” available that might indicate your spiritual gifting; however some mix up a person’s natural talents with spiritual gifts, and others focus on past experience and are not always a good indicator of what the Holy Spirit might lead us into in our future ministry. While these assessment methods have their flaws, they can still be useful when used in the context of your local church.

The best way of confirming a person’s spiritual gifting is through the local congregation and its leadership. What do the leaders, and the local body think that you do best that contributes to the welfare of the congregation? That is probably your spiritual gift. A person does not need to announce or advertise their spiritual gift. The local congregation will recognize and validate genuine spiritual gifts as the gifted person’s ministry contributes to the building up of the local church body. This does require the individual believer to step out in faith and obedience to God’s Word because the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate through obedient and faith-filled disciples.

Conclusion

The Christian & Missionary Alliance is a movement that believes that spiritual gifts are supernatural empowerments given by the Holy Spirit to Christians to build up the church and extend the Kingdom of God. As we approach God for the release of His empowerment in our lives and the lives of the people to whom we minister, our attitude should be *“Expectation without Agenda.”* Jesus is our focus and completing His mission is our mandate. The gifts of the Spirit are to serve His purposes in the church and in our world. With the guidelines we have been given in God’s Word, believers everywhere should embrace the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and move out to fulfil our Lord’s Commission.

The Alliance Churches of New Zealand

The main contents for this document came from an article originally published by
The Christian & Missionary Alliance (USA). Minor adjustments have been made to suit the NZ context.

Updated 28th May 2025