

The Gifts of the Spirit



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Corinthians 12:4–7, 11; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:14–31; Romans 12:3–8; 1 John 4:1–3.

MEMORY VERSE: “There are different kinds of gifts. But they are all given by the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve. But they all come from the same Lord. There are different ways to work. But the same God makes it possible for all of us to have all those different things” (1 Corinthians 12:4–6, NIV).

A MAN WENT AWAY ON A LONG BUSINESS TRIP. He left his son in charge of running his business. The man told his son he wanted him to do a special job while he was away. But the son soon realized that his father had not given him the money and tools necessary to do the job. Frustrated, the son was forced to leave the work undone (not done).

In much the same way, Jesus left His disciples and went to be with His Father in heaven. He gave His disciples a special work to do. He told them to preach the good news of the gospel to the world. But Jesus did not leave His disciples without help. Jesus made it possible for His disciples to do what He asked. He asked them to preach the good news in His name and through the power and help of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that Christ gives us the spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit. And Christ gives us the gifts to build up His church.

This week we will study how the Holy Spirit is the Supreme Giver of God's remarkable gifts. We also will look at the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT AND THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT (1 Corinthians 12:4–7, 11)



Every Christian should show the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit have the same Author (God). But they are not the same. No one is required to show that they have been given a gift of the Spirit. But every Christian should show the fruit of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts do not mean that a person is spiritual. But the fruit of the Spirit does. There is only one fruit. There are many spiritual gifts. And some gifts are greater than others.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–7, 11. What is the basic meaning of Paul's teaching in these verses?

God designed all parts of the fruit of the Spirit to be seen in the lives of His followers. But not every believer has the same gift or gifts. There is no law that says everyone should have the same gift, such as speaking in tongues (languages). Instead, God gives His believers different gifts as He chooses. And God gives us the gifts of the Spirit so that we may serve others. We are to use the gifts to build up His church. God does not give us the gifts of the Spirit so that we may use them for our own pleasure and glory. Instead, He gives us these gifts to help His cause move forward.

Spiritual gifts, however, are worthless (without worth) without the fruit of the Spirit. It is interesting that Paul often mentions love when he writes about spiritual gifts. For example, Paul talks about the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. Right after that, he describes the highest form of love, in chapter 13. Ephesians 4:11–13 mentions the gifts God gave to the church, and why. Then love is mentioned in verses 15 and 16. Paul mentions the gifts of the Spirit in Romans 12:3–8. Then he speaks about love in verses 9 and 10.

The gifts are gifts of grace. In other words, they are gifts of love. God gives us the gifts out of love. He gives them to us to share His love with others. This means that we must love others. Then we will show the love of God to them.

Our God is loving and all-knowing. He gives His people what is needed to do what He asks them to do. Maybe that is why love is the greatest gift of all (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Why is love so important to all that we do as Christians? How does love give power to our witness?

GOD IS THE SUPREME GIVER OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS (Ephesians 4:7)

We do not decide what gifts we have. The Greek word for the gifts of the Spirit is *charismata*. This word tells us that the gifts of the Spirit are gifts of grace (mercy and forgiveness). We do not earn them by who we are or by anything we have done. God freely gives them to us out of love.

Read Ephesians 4:7. We often think of the Holy Spirit as the One who gives spiritual gifts. But the apostle (leader; teacher) Paul also connects Jesus Christ with the giving of the gifts. How is Jesus involved in the giving of the gifts?

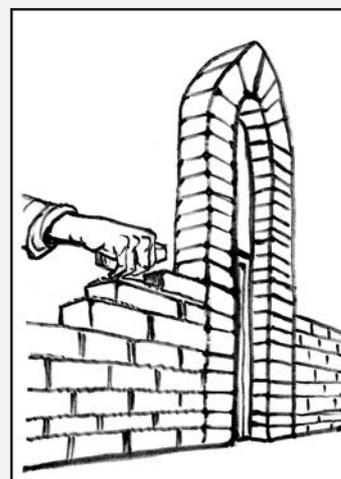
Paul says the grace of Christ made it possible to give us spiritual gifts. But the Holy Spirit is the one who gives them to church members. We must accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. We must believe in Him. Then the Holy Spirit will give us spiritual gifts “just as he decides” (1 Corinthians 12:11, NIV). So, God alone decides what gifts we are to receive.

Natural ability is not a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents developed through long and hard study. Many non-Christians are blessed with such God-given talents. In the end, “every good and perfect gift is from God” (James 1:17, NIV). God gives us the gifts of His Spirit to bless the lives of others and to build up His church.

What does Paul tell his readers in 1 Corinthians 12:14–31 about the giving of the gifts? Why is this truth so important for understanding how spiritual gifts are meant to be used in the church?

The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the gifts. He gives them to us according to (in agreement with) His wisdom and desire. He loves us and knows best how we can serve Him. So we do not need to be jealous of others and their gifts. To envy other gifts is a sign of not being grateful toward God for the gifts that we have. It is a sign that we doubt God’s wisdom in the gifts He has given.

What gifts has God given to members of your church? What message can you take away from the fact that different people have different gifts?



God gives us the gifts of His Spirit to bless the lives of others and to build up His church.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS (Romans 12:3–8)

Read Romans 12:3–8 and Ephesians 4:8–12. In these verses, what is the purpose of the spiritual gifts that God gives us?

God clearly gave us spiritual gifts to help us to serve Him and to do His work. Having spiritual gifts does not wash away our sins or make us holy. Only Jesus can do that. Spiritual gifts are not special tricks or miracles from God. He does not give them to us to satisfy our desire for miracles. They are not meant to “cure” our boredom.

Often, though, we do think that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to fill our spiritual needs. Or we think that they were meant to give us power in our walk with God. This kind of thinking results in a view of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that is more about the Christian than it is about Christ. This mindset (thinking) is more focused on (to put our attention on) us than on God. But we must keep God at the center of our understanding of the spiritual gifts. The gifts God gives fulfill (complete) many divine purposes. They are given to help the church join together as one in Christ. The gifts are meant for building up the church (Ephesians 4:12–16).

The gifts, however, never are given to please us. They are to teach others (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 14:12, 26). They are given to bring spiritual profit to the church. They are meant to improve the minds and characters (thoughts; feelings; actions) of believers. They are to instruct the whole church. In other words, God’s gifts are supposed to bring us all together as one in the church.

Also, too often we think that spiritual gifts are only talents and abilities that we receive from God. Talents are involved in spiritual gifts. But we should keep in mind that when the Holy Spirit gives us a gift, He also always gives a special job or work that goes along with the gift (1 Peter 4:10). So, we might say that spiritual gifts are certain abilities to do work for God.

Why do you think a main purpose of the gifts is to bring the church together as one in heart and mind? How can believers with different gifts be joined together as one in the church? What needs to take place so that different gifts in the church are a blessing and not a source of separation and division?



The gifts of the Spirit do not take away our sins. Only Jesus can.

THE GIFTS, THEN AND NOW
(1 Corinthians 14:1)

First read 1 Corinthians 14:1. Then compare¹ the different lists of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 27–31; Romans 12:3–8; and Ephesians 4:11, 12. Were those gifts given only to the New Testament believers? Why are the gifts still available today?

There are some Christians who think that the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament were limited to the times of Jesus and the apostles (teachers and leaders). They argue that the special spiritual gifts are no longer present in the church. They believe that the gifts stopped being available after the first apostles died. These Christians who think this way use 1 Corinthians 13:10 to support their view. In this verse, the apostle Paul says, “But when what is complete comes, the things that are not complete will pass away” (NirV). Yes, there will be a time when the gifts will stop. But they will stop only when what is complete has come. That is, when Jesus comes again.

The Bible tells us that the spiritual gifts are given to build up the church (1 Corinthians 12:28). Paul tells believers to “want the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives” (1 Corinthians 14:1, NirV). These gifts are necessary to the well-being of the church. There is no proof from the Bible that says that God has stopped giving us the gifts or gotten rid of them in the church. So, we have to believe that He wants them to remain until the church has completed its work. That time will be when Christ comes again.

God will not leave the members of the church without help in completing this work. But the gifts of the Spirit will never cause the Bible to be set aside. They will never fill the same place as the Bible. Instead, they are part of God’s Bible promise to help all believers to be ready to finish God’s work. The gifts help believers to build up the body of Christ and to prepare the world for the soon coming of Jesus.

Read Ephesians 4:11–13. Pay close attention to verse 13. It says, “[God’s giving of gifts] will continue until we all become one in the faith. We will also become one in the knowledge of God’s Son. Then we will be grown up in the faith. We will receive everything that Christ has for us” (NirV). What do these verses tell us about our need for the gifts in the church right now?

DEFINITIONS

1. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.



A true knowledge of the Bible is needed to discern (tell) if the spirit speaking is from heaven or is evil.

DEFINITIONS

2. discernment—the ability to see and understand people, things, or situations clearly and intelligently. Discernment is a spiritual gift. It helps a person to tell the difference between a message or miracle that comes from God and what is false and does not come from Him.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE GIFT OF DISCERNMENT² (1 John 4:1–3)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Corinthians 14:29; and 1 John 4:1–3. In these verses, why is the gift of discernment important?

There are true spiritual gifts present in the church. At the same time, the Bible also warns us not to believe every spirit.

We are warned that evil spirits or demons will try to mislead the church. Satan will try to counterfeit God's true gifts.

Today, many accept the truth that there is a need for spiritual gifts in the church. But they have placed too much importance on some spiritual gifts over other gifts. For example, they have placed too much importance on special signs and wonders. It is interesting that Paul lists the gift of discernment right *after* he mentions both the gift of “the power to do miracles” and the “ability to prophesy [tell the future]” and also lists the gifts *before* he mentions “the ability to speak in different kinds of languages” (1 Corinthians 12:10, NIV).

God wishes to keep His church pure in truth and one in faith. He wishes to safeguard His members from following false prophets (special messengers). He wants to keep believers from being tricked by false signs and miracles. So God gives the church the gift of discernment. A true knowledge of God's Word (the Bible) is needed to discern (know) if the spirit speaking is from heaven or is an evil spirit. Also, living a faithful life is an important part of discerning (knowing) what is from God. But the Bible is the foundation for having and practicing the gift of discernment. We must test everything by the Word. Such testing is the only way we can know for sure that what we are hearing or seeing is truly from the Lord or, instead, from somewhere else.

“Suppose a man makes the working of miracles the test of his faith. Then he soon will find that Satan can trick him by doing all kinds of miracles that will seem to be true miracles from God. . . . Do not lose any opportunity to search for the Lord with all the heart and mind and soul. We must accept the truth in love. If we do not, we may be among those people who will see the miracles done by Satan in these last days and believe them. Many strange things will appear as wonderful miracles. But these ‘miracles’ are false. They come from the father of lies [Satan]. . . . Men who are under the power of evil spirits will work miracles.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, volume 2, pages 52, 53.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [The War Between Christ and Satan]*, pages 511–517, 593–602.

Some have asked, “Why do we not see the same kind of miracles today, such as healing miracles, that were seen in Bible times?” First, we do hear stories about miracles. And some people have seen them firsthand too. Second, when reading the Bible, we can get the idea that miracles always were happening. But we get that idea only because the Holy Spirit inspired (led) the authors to write about events that were important in establishing (building) the early church. These events often included miracles.

And, finally, Ellen G. White writes, “Here is how Christ worked. He preached the Word [the good news]. He healed the sick by doing miracles. But I am instructed that we cannot now work in this way. Why not? Because Satan will also work miracles. God’s followers today could not work by means of miracles. Why not? Because false works of healing will be done in God’s name. For this reason, the Lord has marked out a way in which His people are to carry forward a work of physical healing. It is to be done along with the teaching of the Word. Sanitariums [healing centers] are to be established [built]. Workers who are hired there will carry forward true medical missionary work [medical work done by Christians to help the sick and to win their souls to Christ’s love]. In this way, God will safeguard patients who come to the sanitariums for treatment.”—Adapted from *Selected Messages*, book 2, page 54.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What is the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit?
- 2 We must understand that the gifts are given by a loving and wise God. How does understanding this truth help us to appreciate the different gifts in our church?
- 3 Why are miracles not a safe guide for knowing what truth is? What do we need along with them?
- 4 What important advice does Paul give to us in Romans 12:3? How “highly” should we think of ourselves?