

Lay Ministry Defined and Refined

Part II

Gifts and Ministries of the Holy Spirit

The scriptures have much to say about spiritual gifts (the equipment or "tools" necessary for service) and ministries (the tasks that need to be performed by the body of Christ). Part of the problem of determining one's calling is difficulty in properly interpreting these Scriptures and correctly deciding which gifts and ministries are one's own. The following is an attempt to define and explain gifts and ministries, which are described in such passages as I Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4.

Spiritual Gifts (I Cor. 12): The supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are the Lord's divine aids to assist believers beyond their own natural, human abilities and strengths. Human intellect and action are subject to error; therefore, Christ's followers need divine intervention and help - the Infinite supplementing and directing the finite's feeble efforts. The nine spiritual gifts described in I Corinthians 12 are not one's natural talents or abilities, but rather, supernatural gifts bestowed by the Almighty for his own purposes and intents. Natural abilities are also used by the Lord, but they are supplemented from time to time with these supernatural abilities. These nine gifts may be categorized into three groups: mental gifts (wisdom, knowledge, discernment), action gifts (faith, miracles, healing), and vocal gifts (prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues). Because all the gifts are in Jesus, they may be more clearly explained as those things which Jesus thinks, those things which Jesus does, and those things which Jesus speaks. Because Jesus is the ultimate example, the manifestation of spiritual gifts becomes nothing more than thinking, acting and speaking like Jesus, or "letting this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus."

The Gift of Wisdom: This gift is divine guidance or a revelation of truth that comes supernaturally rather than from the human intellect. It is frequently given to those who are offering counsel or advice to others or to those who need supernatural wisdom in a moment of crisis or stress. An example of Jesus manifesting the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom occurred at the time his accusers tried to entrap him about paying tribute to the Roman government, and Jesus replied, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." The sermon on the Mount is an entire message of divine wisdom, for "turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, returning good for evil, and praying for enemies" are, not natural, human responses, but rather, supernatural and divine responses which only the wisdom of the Almighty could conceive. Another example of spiritual wisdom occurred when Peter and John appeared before the council of high priests, who "took knowledge of them and marveled because they perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men." Ignorant fishermen could match wits with the scholars because the supernatural gifts of God's wisdom was in operation. Practical applications of the gift of wisdom in Christian ministry may be observed whenever a counselor, teacher, or spiritual director speaks an inspired message or whenever anyone thinks thoughts or says words that are not one's own, but are divinely inspired. Such a word of wisdom will witness in the spirits of believers who are open to them as being God's truth revealed to humankind'

The Gift of Knowledge: This gift is the manifestation of supernatural understanding of circumstances or divine insight about people or problems transcending human experience, as when Jesus "knew" that the woman of Samaria had had five husbands and then told her "all things that ever she did." Because the Holy Spirit's knowledge was in operation, Jesus could do this, even though he had never met the woman before. Peter "knew" that Ananias and Sapphira had lied about the price of the land they had sold' even though Peter was not there when the transaction occurred. A word of knowledge may be given prior to a healing or other supernatural moving of the Holy Spirit in human affairs. A

minister may "know," who is to be healed or what the cause of the illness is or what a person's deepest needs are without prior instruction or experience about the matter. Other examples of the gift of knowledge in operation in daily life may include such things as guidance (knowing what to do without question); counseling (knowing the cause of a problem or knowing the proper solution); intercessions (knowing about a person or a situation in order to pray about it correctly); and signs to an unbeliever (supernatural knowledge witnessing to the person that God's power is at work).

The Gift of Discernment: Because Satan can counterfeit the gifts of the Holy Spirit (he can give a false prophecy through someone, bring about a healing through a medium or cultist, and do seemingly miraculous works in order to deceive the faithful), a Christian needs the ability to see through the disguises when Satan is appearing as "an angel of light" (II Cor. 11:14). Discernment is knowing that which is of the Holy Spirit and that which is of an evil spirit. Jesus exercised the gift of discernment when he rebuked Peter's seemingly encouraging word and said, "Get behind me, Satan ... Thou savorest not the things that be of God but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:22-23). Likewise, Paul discerned that the "truths" that came from the lips of the possessed damsel of Acts 16:16-18 were influenced by the power of divination, so he rebuked the spirit and commanded it to come out of her. This faculty for accurately discriminating in a questionable situation and recognizing that which is of the flesh or the devil (however camouflaged these works may be) is certainly needed in today's world where appearances are often deceiving. A discerning Christian - even without having read the pertinent Scriptures or without having received prior teaching - can receive an inner witness that something is amiss. This "alarm clock," which signals the detection of the difference between good and evil, is a powerful and necessary gift of the Spirit. Those involved in the ministry of deliverance (exorcism) certainly need such a gift, as do all those who become involved in any service for the Lord. Prayer group leaders must be conscious of the possibility of false prophets or disruptive influences, which can confuse or thwart the moving of the Spirit at a group gathering. Discernment is also necessary in counseling and healing ministries in order to ascertain the root causes of problems - whether they be of physical, mental, spiritual, or demonic origin. It is also an aid in examining one's motives for what may appear to be worthwhile actions but which, in reality, are not God's will in the matter. For reasons too numerous to mention, all Christians need the gift of discernment at work in their lives.

The Gift of Faith: The supernatural gift of faith is given in what appears to be impossible situations and enables one to "go out on a limb" to trust God rather than circumstances or human inclinations. When aged Abraham believed God for a son, when Noah built the ark under a cloudless sky, when Peter got out of the boat to walk on water and when the Virgin Mary believed that the Holy Spirit would father her child without a natural husband, these were people acting under "supernatural" faith. The fruit of faith (Gal. 5:22) is to be produced in the Christian's life by one's own actions of piety and devotion, but the gift of faith is given and received supernaturally. Both, however, require action on the part of the believer, for "faith without works is dead." There are innumerable times in the life of a Christian when the gift of faith is needed, for without faith it is impossible to please God or do his works. Whenever one receives a call to service, whenever a program or ministry is lacking in funds or support, whenever doctors give up in their efforts to effect a cure for a patient, whenever evangelistic efforts seem to be ignored, or whenever protection from difficulties or "impossible" situations is nowhere to be found, these are the times when the gift of faith is often put into operation to remove the mountains of doubt and to allow God's mighty hand to move. This kind of faith cannot be "worked up" emotionally or counterfeited. It is a gift from God to be received and then acted upon.