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## ***The Disciple-Making Minister***

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

### **Chapter Seventeen**

#### **The Gifts of the Spirit**

The Bible is full of instances when men and women were given sudden supernatural abilities by the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, these supernatural abilities are called “gifts of the Spirit.” They are gifts in the sense that they cannot be earned. We should not forget, however, that God does promote those whom He can trust. Jesus said, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much” (Luke 16:10). Thus we would expect that gifts of the Spirit would be more likely to be given to those who have proven their trustworthiness before God. Being fully consecrated and yielded to the Holy Spirit is important, as God is more likely to use those kinds of people supernaturally. On the other hand, God once used a donkey to prophesy, so He can use anyone He pleases. If He had to wait until we were perfect to use us, then He couldn’t use any of us!

In the New Testament, the gifts of the Spirit are listed in 1 Corinthians 12, and there are nine altogether:

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:8-10).

Knowing how to define each individual gift is not crucial to being used by God in the spiritual gifts. The Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings, as well as the ministers of the early New Testament church, all operated in the gifts of the Spirit without knowledge of how to categorize or define them. Nevertheless, because the gifts of the Spirit are categorized for us in the New Testament, it must be something that God wants us to understand. Indeed, Paul wrote, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware (1 Cor. 12:1).

#### **The Nine Gifts Categorized**

The nine gifts of the Spirit have been further categorized in modern times into three groupings: (1) the utterance gifts, which are: various kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, and prophecy; (2) the revelation gifts, which are: the word of wisdom, the word of

knowledge, and discerning of spirits; and (3) the power gifts, which are: working of miracles, special faith, and gifts of healing. Three of these gifts *say* something; three of them *reveal* something; and three of them *do* something. All of these gifts were manifested under the old covenant with the exception of various kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Those two are distinctive of the new covenant.

The New Testament offers no instruction concerning the proper use of any of the “power gifts” and very little instruction about the proper use of the “revelation gifts.” A significant amount of instruction, however, is given by Paul concerning the proper use of the “utterance gifts,” and the reason for this is probably two-fold.

First, the utterance gifts are those manifested most often in church gatherings, while the revelation gifts are manifested less often, and the power gifts are manifested the least. We would need, therefore, more instruction concerning the gifts that would tend to be manifested most often in church gatherings.

Second, the utterance gifts seem to require the greatest degree of human cooperation, and they are, therefore, the gifts most likely to be mishandled. It is much easier to add to and ruin a prophecy than it is to ruin a gift of healing.

### **As the Spirit Wills**

It is important to realize that gifts of the Spirit are given as the Spirit wills and not as any person wills. The Bible makes this quite clear:

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually *just as He wills* (1 Cor. 12:11, emphasis added).

God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit *according to His own will* (Heb. 2:4, emphasis added).

A person might be used frequently in certain gifts, but no one *possesses* any of the gifts. Just because you are anointed once to work a miracle is no indication that you can work a miracle any time you desire; nor is it any guarantee that you will ever be used again to work a miracle.

We will briefly study and consider a few biblical examples of each gift. Keep in mind, however, that God can manifest His grace and power in an infinite number of ways, so it is impossible to define exactly how each gift will operate every single time. Moreover, there are no definitions of the nine spiritual gifts in Scripture—all we have are their labels. Thus we can only look at examples in the Bible and attempt to determine under which label each one should fall, ultimately defining them by their apparent differences. Because there are so many ways that the Holy Spirit can manifest Himself through supernatural gifts, it may be unwise to try to be overly strict in our definitions. Some gifts might actually be more like combinations of several gifts. Along these lines Paul wrote:

Now there are *varieties* of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are *varieties* of ministries, and the same Lord. There are *varieties* of effects [or operations], but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:4-7, emphasis added).

### **The Power Gifts**

**1) The gifts of healings:** Gifts of healings obviously have something to do with sick people being healed. They are often defined as sudden supernatural endowments to heal physically sick people, and I can't see any reason to question that. In the previous chapter

we considered one example of a gift of healing manifested through Jesus when He healed the crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda (see John 5:2-17).

God used Elisha to heal leprous Naaman the Syrian, who was an idol-worshiper (see 2 Ki. 5:1-14). As we learned when examining Jesus' words in Luke 4:27 concerning Naaman's healing, Elisha couldn't heal any leper any time he desired. He was suddenly supernaturally inspired to instruct Naaman to dip in the Jordan River seven times, and when Naaman ultimately obeyed, he was cleansed of his leprosy.

God used Peter to heal the crippled man at the gate called Beautiful through a gift of healing (Acts 3:1-10). Not only was the crippled man healed, but the supernatural sign drew many people to hear the gospel from Peter's lips, and about five thousand people were added to the church that day. Gifts of healings frequently serve a dual purpose of healing sick people *and* drawing the unsaved to Christ.

When Peter was delivering his message to those who gathered that day, he said:

Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? (Acts. 3:12).

Peter recognized that it wasn't because of any power that he possessed in himself, or because of his great holiness, that God used him to heal the crippled man. Remember that Peter, just two months prior to this miracle, had denied he ever knew Jesus. Just the fact that God used Peter so miraculously in the first pages of Acts should bolster our confidence that God will also use us as He wills.

When Peter tried to explain how the man had been healed, it is highly unlikely that he could have categorized it as a "gift of healing." All Peter knew was that he and John had been walking by a crippled man and he suddenly found himself anointed with faith for the man to be healed. So he commanded the man to walk in the name of Jesus, seized him by the right hand, and lifted him up. The crippled man began "walking and leaping and praising God." Peter explained it this way:

And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all (Acts. 3:16).

It takes a special faith to seize a crippled man by the arm and lift him up and expect him to walk! Along with this particular gift of healing an impartation of faith would have also been needed to bring it to pass.

Some have suggested that the reason this gift is in the plural (that is, "gifts" of healings) is because there are different gifts that heal different kinds of sicknesses. Those who have been used frequently in gifts of healings sometimes discover that particular sicknesses are healed through their ministries more frequently than other sicknesses. For example, Philip the evangelist seemed to have particular success in getting paralyzed and lame people healed (Acts 8:7). There are some evangelists of the past century, for example, who have had greater success with blindness or deafness or heart problems, and so on, depending upon which gifts of healings were manifested through them most frequently.

**2) The gift of faith and the working of miracles:** The gift of faith and the gift of the working of miracles would seem to be very similar. With both gifts, the individual who is anointed suddenly receives faith for the impossible. The difference between the two is often described this way: With the gift of faith, the anointed individual is given faith to *receive* a miracle for himself, whereas with the gift of the working of miracles, the individual is given faith to *work* a miracle for another.

The gift of faith is sometimes referred to as "special faith" because it is a sudden impartation of faith that goes beyond *ordinary* faith. Ordinary faith comes from hearing a

promise of God, whereas special faith comes from a sudden impartation by the Holy Spirit. Those who have experienced this gift of special faith report that things they would consider impossible suddenly become possible, and, in fact, they find it *impossible to doubt*. The same would be true for the gift of working of miracles.

The story of Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego provides an excellent example of how "special faith" makes it impossible to doubt. When they were cast into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow before the king's idol, they were all given the gift of special faith. It would take more than ordinary faith to survive being cast alive into white-hot flames! Let's look at the faith these three young men displayed before the king:

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this. If it be so [if you are going to cast us into the furnace], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and *He will deliver us out of your hand*, O king. But if not [if you don't throw us into the fiery furnace], let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan. 3:16-18, emphasis added).

Notice that the gift was operating even before they were cast into the furnace. There was no doubt in their minds that God was about to deliver them.

Elijah operated in the gift of special faith when he was fed daily by ravens during the three-and-a-half year famine of evil King Ahab's reign (see 2 Kin. 17:1-6). It takes more than ordinary faith to trust God to use birds to bring you food morning and evening. Although God has not promised us anywhere in His Word that ravens will bring our food each day, we can use ordinary faith to trust God for our needs to be met—because that's a promise (see Matt. 6:25-34).

The working of miracles was in operation quite frequently through the ministry of Moses. He operated in this gift when he split the Red Sea (see Ex. 14:13-31) and when the various plagues came upon Egypt.

Jesus operated in the working of miracles when He fed the 5,000 by multiplying a few fish and a few loaves of bread (see Matt. 14:15-21).

When Paul caused Elymas the magician to be blind for a season because he was hindering Paul's ministry on the island of Cyprus, that too would be an example of the working of miracles (see Acts 13:4-12).

## The Revelation Gifts

**1). The word of knowledge and word of wisdom:** The gift of the *word of knowledge* is often defined as a sudden supernatural impartation of certain information, past or present. God, who possesses all knowledge, will at times impart a small portion of that knowledge, which is perhaps why it is called a *word of knowledge*. A word is a fragmentary part of a sentence, and a word of knowledge would be a fragmentary portion of God's knowledge.

The *word of wisdom* is very similar to the word of knowledge, but it is often defined as a sudden supernatural impartation of the knowledge of *future* events. The concept of *wisdom* normally involves something regarding the future. Again, these definitions are somewhat speculative.

Let's look at an Old Testament example of the word of knowledge. After Elisha cleansed Naaman the Syrian of leprosy, Naaman offered Elisha a very large sum of money in gratitude for his healing. Elisha refused the gift, lest anyone think Naaman's healing was purchased rather than graciously granted by God. Elisha's servant, Gehazi, however, saw an opportunity to gain personal riches, and he secretly received some of Naaman's intended payment. After Gehazi had hidden his deceitfully acquired silver, he appeared before Elisha. We then read,

And Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere." Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go with you, when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kin. 5:25b-26a).

God, who knew full well Gehazi's dirty deed, revealed it supernaturally to Elisha. This story makes it obvious, however, that Elisha didn't "possess" the gift of the word of knowledge; that is, he didn't know everything about everyone all the time. If that had been the case, Gehazi would never have imagined he could conceal his sin. Elisha only knew things supernaturally when God occasionally revealed those things to him. The gift operated as the Spirit willed.

Jesus operated in the word of knowledge when He told the woman at the well of Samaria that she had had five husbands (see John 4:17-18).

Peter was used in this gift when he supernaturally knew that Ananias and Sapphira were lying to the congregation about giving the church the full price they had received for their recently-sold land (see Acts 5:1-11).

As for the gift of the word of wisdom, we see frequent manifestations of this gift throughout all of the Old Testament prophets. Whenever they predicted a future event, the word of wisdom was in operation. Jesus was granted this gift quite frequently, too. He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, His own crucifixion, and events that would befall the world before His second coming (see Luke 17:22-36, 21:6-28).

The apostle John was used in this gift as the judgments of the Tribulation Period were revealed to him. These he recorded for us throughout the book of Revelation.

**2). The gift of discerning of spirits:** The gift of discerning of spirits is often defined as a sudden supernatural ability to see or otherwise discern what is occurring in the spiritual realm.

A vision, seen through the eyes or mind of a believer, could be classified as discerning of spirits. This gift might permit a believer to see angels, demons, or even Jesus Himself, as did Paul on several occasions (see Acts 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11).

When Elisha and his servant were being pursued by the Syrian army, they found themselves trapped in the city of Dothan. At that point, Elisha's servant looked out over the city's walls and, seeing the masses of soldiers assembling, became quite concerned:

So [Elisha] answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kin. 6:16-17).

Did you know that angels ride around on spiritual horses and in spiritual chariots? You'll see them one day in heaven, but Elisha's servant was granted the ability to see them on earth.

Through this gift, a believer might discern an evil spirit oppressing someone and have the ability to identify what kind of spirit it is.

This gift would include not only seeing into the spiritual realm but any other kind of discernment into the spiritual realm. It could involve, for example, hearing something from the spiritual realm, like the very voice of God.

Finally, this gift is not, as some have thought, "the gift of discernment." People who claim to have this gift sometimes think that they can discern the motives of others, but their gift could be more rightly described as the "gift of criticism and passing judgment on others." The truth is, you probably had that "gift" before you were saved, and now that you are saved, God wants to deliver you from it permanently!

## The Utterance Gifts

**1). The gift of prophecy:** The gift of prophecy is the sudden supernatural ability to speak by divine inspiration in the speaker's known language. It can always begin with, "Thus says the Lord."

This gift is not preaching or teaching. Inspired preaching and teaching do contain an *element* of prophecy because they are anointed by the Spirit, but they are not prophecy in its strictest sense. Many times an anointed preacher or teacher will say things by sudden inspiration that he didn't plan on saying, but that is really not prophecy, although I suppose it could be considered *prophetic*.

The gift of prophecy by itself serves to edify, exhort and console:

But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3).

Thus the gift of prophecy, by itself, contains no revelation. That is, it doesn't reveal anything about the past, present, or future, as do the word of wisdom and word of knowledge. As I stated previously, however, the gifts of the Spirit can work in conjunction with one another, and so the word of wisdom or word of knowledge can be conveyed by means of prophecy.

When we hear someone deliver a prophecy in a gathering that foretells future events, we really didn't hear *just* a prophecy; we heard a word of wisdom conveyed through the gift of prophecy. The simple gift of prophecy will sound very much as if someone were reading exhortations from the Bible, such as "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" and, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Some are convinced that New Testament prophecy should never contain anything "negative," otherwise it supposedly does not fit the parameters of "edification and exhortation and consolation." That, however, is not true. To limit what God may say to His people, only permitting Him to say what they consider "positive" even if they may deserve some rebuke, is to exalt oneself above God. Rebuke can definitely fall under the categories of both *edification* and *exhortation*. I noticed the Lord's messages to the seven churches in Asia, recorded in John's Revelation, certainly contain an element of rebuke. Shall we discard them? I don't think so.

**2). The gift of various kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues:** The gift of *various kinds of tongues* is the sudden supernatural ability to speak in a language that is unknown to the speaker. This gift would normally be accompanied by the gift of *the interpretation of tongues*, which is a sudden supernatural ability to interpret what was said in an unknown language.

This gift is called the *interpretation* of tongues and not the *translation* of tongues. So we should not expect word-for-word translations of messages in tongues. For that reason it is possible to have a short "message in tongues" and a longer interpretation, and vice versa.

The gift of the interpretation of tongues is very similar to prophecy because it also contains no revelation in itself and would normally be for edification, exhortation, and consolation. We could almost say that, according to 1 Corinthians 14:5, tongues plus interpretation of tongues equals prophecy:

And greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

As I previously stated, there is no instruction given in the Bible regarding how to operate in the power gifts, very little instruction about how to operate in the revelation

gifts, but quite a lot of instruction given on how to operate in the utterance gifts. Because there was some confusion in the Corinthian church regarding the operation of the utterance gifts, Paul devoted almost the entire fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians to that issue.

The foremost problem concerned the proper usage of speaking in other tongues, because as we have already learned in the chapter about the baptism in the Holy Spirit, every believer who is baptized in the Holy Spirit has the ability to pray in tongues any time he desires. The Corinthians were doing a lot of speaking in tongues during their church services, but much of it was out of order.

### **The Different Uses of Other Tongues**

It is of utmost importance that we understand the difference between the public use of unknown tongues and the private use. Although every Holy Spirit-baptized believer can speak in tongues at any time, that does not mean God will use him in the public gift of various kinds of tongues. The *primary* use of speaking in tongues is in the private devotional life of each believer. The Corinthians, however, were coming together and simultaneously speaking in tongues without any interpretation, and, of course, no one was being helped or edified by it (see 1 Cor. 14:6-12, 16-19, 23, 26-28).

One way to differentiate between the public use of tongues and the private use of tongues is to classify the private use as *praying* in tongues and the public use as *speaking* in other tongues. Paul mentions both uses in the fourteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians. What are the differences?

When we *pray* in tongues, our spirits are praying *to* God (see 1 Cor. 14:2, 14). Yet, when someone is suddenly anointed with the gift of various kinds of tongues, it is a message *from* God *to* the congregation (see 1 Cor. 14:5), and it is understood once the interpretation is given.

According to Scripture, we can pray in tongues as *we* will (see 1 Cor. 14:15), but the gift of various kinds of tongues only operates as the *Holy Spirit* wills (see 1 Cor. 12:11).

The gift of various kinds of tongues would normally be accompanied by the gift of the interpretation of tongues. The private use of praying in tongues, however, would normally not be interpreted. Paul said that when he prayed in tongues his mind was unfruitful (see 1 Cor. 14:14).

When an individual prays in tongues only *he* is edified (see 1 Cor. 14:4), but the *entire congregation* is edified when the gift of various kinds of tongues is in manifestation with the accompanying gift of the interpretation of tongues (see 1 Cor. 14:4b-5).

Every believer should pray in tongues every day as part of his daily fellowship with the Lord. One of the wonderful things about praying in tongues is that it doesn't require the use of your mind. That means you can pray in tongues even when your mind must be occupied with your work or other things. Paul said to the Corinthians, "I thank God, I speak in tongues *more than you all*" (1 Cor. 14:18, emphasis added). He must have spent a lot of time speaking in tongues to outdo the entire Corinthian Church!

Paul also wrote that when we pray in tongues, we are sometimes "blessing the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:16-17). Three times I have had my "prayer language" understood by someone present who knew the language in which I was praying. All three times I was speaking in Japanese. Once I said to the Lord in Japanese, "You are so good." Another time I said, "Thank you very much." On another occasion I said, "Come quickly, come quickly; I am waiting." Isn't that amazing? I've never learned a word of Japanese, but at least three times I've "blessed the Lord" in the Japanese language!

### **Paul's Instructions for Speaking in Tongues**

Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church were very specific. In any given gathering, the number of people who were permitted to speak out publicly in tongues was limited to

two or three. They should not all speak at once, but should wait and speak in turn (see 1 Cor. 14:27).

Paul did not necessarily mean that only three “messages in tongues” were permitted, but that no more than three people should speak out in tongues in any given service. It is thought by some that if there were more than three people who were frequently used in the gift of various kinds of tongues, any one of them could yield to the Spirit and give a “message in tongues” that the Spirit desired to be manifested in the church. If this is not so, Paul’s instruction would actually limit the Holy Spirit by limiting the number of messages in tongues that could be manifested in any given meeting. If the Holy Spirit would never give any more than three gifts of various kinds of tongues in a gathering, there would be no need for Paul to give such instructions.

The same could well be true for the interpretation of tongues. It is thought that perhaps more than one person in the assembly might be able to yield to the Spirit and give the interpretation of a “message in tongues.” Such people would be considered “interpreters” (see 1 Cor. 14:28), as they would be used frequently in the gift of interpretation of tongues. If that is true, perhaps that is what Paul was referring to when he instructed, “let one interpret” (1 Cor. 14:27). Perhaps he was not saying that only one person should interpret *all* the messages in tongues; rather he was warning against “competitive interpretations” of the same message. If one interpreter interpreted a message in tongues, then another interpreter was not permitted to interpret the same message, even if he thought he could give a better interpretation.

In general, everything should be done “properly and in an orderly manner” in church gatherings—they should not be a hodgepodge of simultaneous, confusing and even competitive utterances. Additionally, believers should be sensitive to any unbelievers who may be present in their gatherings, just as Paul wrote:

If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? (1 Cor. 14:23).

That was precisely the problem in Corinth—everyone was speaking in tongues simultaneously, and often there were no interpretations.

### **Some Instruction Concerning Revelation Gifts**

Paul offered some instruction regarding the “revelation gifts” in regard to their manifestation through prophets:

And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (1 Cor. 14:29-33).

Just as there were members of the body in Corinth who apparently were frequently used in the gift of the interpretation of tongues who were known as “interpreters,” so there were those who were frequently used in the gifts of prophecy and revelation who were considered “prophets.” These would not be prophets in the same class as Old Testament prophets or even someone like Agabus in the New Testament (see Acts. 11:28; 21:10). Rather, their ministries would have been limited to their local church bodies.

Although there might be more than three such prophets present at a church gathering, again Paul placed limitations, specifically limiting prophetic ministry to “two or three prophets.” This again suggests that when the Spirit was giving spiritual gifts in a gathering, more than one person might yield to receiving those gifts. If this is not so, Paul’s

instruction could result in the Spirit giving gifts that would never be enjoyed by the body, as he limited how many prophets could speak.

If there were more than three prophets present, the others, although restrained from speaking, could help by judging what was said. This also would indicate their ability to discern what the Spirit was saying and possibly imply that they could have yielded to the Spirit themselves to be used in the very gifts that were manifested through the other prophets. Otherwise they could have only judged prophecies and revelations in a general way, by making certain they were in agreement with revelation God has already given (such as in Scripture), something any mature believer could do.

Paul stated that these prophets could all prophesy sequentially (see 1 Cor. 14:31) and that “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” (1 Cor. 14:32), indicating that each prophet could restrain himself from interrupting another, even when given a prophecy or revelation from the Spirit to share with the congregation. This shows that the Spirit might give gifts at the same time to several prophets present in a gathering, but each prophet could and should control when his revelations or prophecies were to be shared with the body.

This is also true concerning any utterance gift that might be manifested through any believer. If a person receives a message in tongues or prophecy from the Lord, he can hold it until the proper time in the gathering. It would be wrong to interrupt someone else’s prophecy or teaching to give your prophecy.

When Paul stated, “you can all prophesy one by one” (1 Cor. 14:31), remember that he was speaking in the context of prophets who had received prophecies. Some have unfortunately taken Paul’s words out of context, saying that *every* believer can prophesy at *every* gathering of the body. The gift of prophecy is given as the Spirit wills.

Today, as much as ever, the church needs the Holy Spirit’s help, power, presence and gifts. Paul instructed the Corinthian believers to “desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). This indicates that our level of desire has something to do with the manifestation of the Spirit’s gifts, otherwise Paul would not have given such instructions. The disciple-making minister, desiring to be used by God for His glory, will indeed earnestly desire spiritual gifts and will teach his disciples to do the same.