

## **THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

### **The general authority of every believer**

*Every believer is a prophet, a priest, and a king.*

*[Adapted from Tim Keller's "Romans for Everyone"]*

#### **Every believer is a prophet.**

Every believer is called to exhort, counsel, evangelize and teach, with the Word of Christ "dwelling richly" in each of us.

Believer, you must speak!

#### **Every believer is a priest.**

We all have access to the presence of God, as did the priests of old, and have the responsibility to offer spiritual sacrifices and deeds of mercy.

Believer, you must serve!

#### **Every believer is a king.**

We all have authority over the world, over the flesh, and over the devil.

We all have divine weapons to demolish strongholds and obstacles to the kingdom of Christ.

Believer, you must "reign over your life"!

**This is called the "universal office" of the believer**, and it is nothing short of revolutionary. A layperson ministers in word (as a prophet) and deed (as a priest), and need not wait for a pastor to request it (because he is a king). Jesus himself said that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist (Matt.11:9-11). Who can outrank an "ordinary" Christian? No one! So we see that every lay person has the responsibility to initiate, to plan, to guide and to manage ministries of both word and deed. Lay people must not be passive.

#### **The specific calling of believers to minister**

Though every believer is prophet, priest, and king, each of us has received spiritual gifts that make us especially fruitful in particular areas of ministry. I Corinthians 12:4-6 teaches us: *"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all."* (NIV)

This text can be expounded by asking three questions:

#### **First, "What is a spiritual gift?"**

A spiritual gift is an ability from the Holy Spirit to meet the needs of people (I Cor.12:7). Gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to every believer; every Christian has one or more ("to each"). Verse 7 also calls it a "manifestation," which is something visible. (For example, though you may be angry, the anger is not manifest until you do something in anger.) Thus, while spiritual fruit (Gal.5:22f) is what you *are*, spiritual gifts are what you *do*. Each gift is an ability to "edify" another and to "build up" the church.

Therefore, though God may adopt a natural "talent" to become a spiritual gift, he often edifies through performance that experts judge as substandard. An excellent example of this is the two great contemporaries, D.L.Moody and C.H.Spurgeon. Spurgeon had such great natural gifts of oratory that, had he not been a Christian, he could have risen to be Prime Minister of Britain. Moody, on the other hand had very few gifts in the area of rhetoric or speech. But God used the preaching of each in mighty ways. Thus J.I.Packer writes, "What constitutes and identifies a "Gift" is not the form of the action, but the blessing of God on the action." (*Keep in Step with the Spirit*)

Spiritual gifts generally break into three categories:

There are *speaking gifts* (prophecy, teaching, exhorting, knowledge, evangelism, discernment, missions), *Leading gifts* (government, administration, wisdom, faith), and *Serving gifts* (giving, service, helps, mercy, hospitality). [Some add a fourth category—*Sign Gifts* (tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles and healing). They should probably be seen as serving gifts.]

**Second**, “*What is a ministry?*” Spiritual gifts are expressed through ministries, which are a particular channel of service that focuses on a particular “people need.” On the one hand, a particular gift can be fulfilled through many ministry channels. A person with the gift of wisdom does not simply sit on the “wisdom committee” while a person with exhortation sits on the “exhortation committee.”

For example, the gift of exhortation is the ability to encourage and build up another. A person with this gift could serve as the leader of a single parents fellowship group, since such folk need lots of emotional support. Or the same person could be recruited by the pastor to nurture and help a new believer/church member for a six month period. Or the same person could be teamed with a good teacher in order to start an evangelistic home Bible study. Or this person might be recruited into a peer counselors training program. Notice that each different ministry focuses on a somewhat different people need, but in each case the same gift can be brought to bear.

On the other hand, a particular ministry can be fulfilled through many different gifts.

For example, consider what it takes to be a Sunday school teacher. A person with an evangelistic gift could be a good Sunday school teacher, and the class would probably have a good outreach. A person with the gift of mercy could be an excellent teacher for a senior adult class which would become a very supportive, caring fellowship. A person with a gift of teaching will do an excellent job and will probably put more emphasis on content and classroom work. He may not think as much about the social and outreach aspect of the class. We see, then, depending on the purpose and philosophy of your Sunday School, you may not want only people with a gift of teaching to be teaching!

**Third**, “*What are ‘workings’ in v.6?*” This refers to different levels of power and effectiveness granted sovereignly by God. All gifts of teaching are not alike; some teachers are more gifted than others. There is the diversity of “energy levels,” of ministry channels, and of gifts themselves. We see that the variety of ministry possibilities is overwhelming as we consider levels of diversity with the same gift. No one has been simply stuck into a single slot where he or she must labor. Rather, Christians must recognize their limitations and strengths and go about finding fruitful ministry channels within the area of ministry that draws them (which is actually the Holy Spirit leading us in the way that He knows what is best for us). We may be drawn to a specific individual human need: a problem or hurt that people have that we suddenly recognize. This could be a corporate need of the church, the need for better organization, or the need to care for a group we see the church is overlooking. This could be a community or cultural need in the neighborhood or city that we would like to see addressed.

This interest and sensitivity is a clue to our giftedness and calling, needs that “vibrate” with us. We should look at the various kinds of human needs and ask God to lead us in His special way, with our special gifts. Then we will see the Church strengthen and grow, as believers are willing “to offer themselves as a living sacrifice”, as both priest and lamb, learning and entering into God’s will, and reigning in this life as the kings Jesus intends us to be.