

Handling Spiritual Gifts in the Church

For those who exercise spiritual gifts and / or would like to:

DON'T assume that giftedness equals spiritual maturity. Sometimes the exact opposite is true! Gifts are given to help us grow together, not to prove that we have grown! **1 Corinthians 12:7**

DON'T see them as the important component. If we had to choose between gifts and quality of life, quality of life would be more important. **1 Corinthians 13** is the well-known passage about love, but it is placed in the middle of a whole section about spiritual gifts. It is not “either-or” but rather “both-and”. Fortunately, we do not have to choose!

DON'T make those without apparent gifts feel excluded or left out. We all have much to learn from each other and we each make a vital contribution to the life of the Church. **1 Corinthians 11:14-27**

DON'T be gullible and think that just because spiritual power is being exercised, it is automatically from the Lord. Counterfeits exist, but even this is some encouragement. The enemy would not bother with fakes if the real thing didn't exist - no forger would even consider making a fake £6 note! **1 John 4:1-3 & 1 Corinthians 12:1-3.**

DO exercise them lovingly – to promote growth. This is what gifts are about. in **1 Corinthians 12:7**, “for the common good” literally means “towards bearing (fruit) together”. The “together” bit is vital. Unfortunately, some people in the past have seen exercising gifts as an end in itself, rather than as a means to strengthen the Church.

DO realise that they are “grace gifts”, given out of our Father's love, not as rewards or “spiritual Brownie points”. They are gifts, not something we can earn or take any credit for! **1 Corinthians 4:7**

DO recognise their limitations and worth. Gifts will not automatically make us grow spiritually. To the extent that they increase our revelation and appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ, they will contribute to our growth. It is revelation of him that we need! **Ephesians 1:17 & 2 Corinthians 3:18**

DO check up what Scripture says about them. The key passage is probably **1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13 & 14**. Don't miss out chapter 13 – it is part of the whole discussion.

DO “eagerly desire spiritual gifts”. This is more than a vague idea that it would be nice to have them in our meetings! As the Church in the present day surely needs to hear clearly what God is saying to his people, we would be very foolish to ignore any means that he has provided for us to learn to hear and recognise his voice. . . “especially the gift of prophecy”. Let us “try to excel in gifts that build up the church”. **1 Corinthians 14:1-12.**

DO express appreciation when you are blessed through others' gifts, whether these are “spiritual” (i.e. supernatural) or not. Each part of the body has its part to play, and the whole body is only at its best when each part is working properly. **Ephesians 4:16 & 1 Corinthians 12:21-27.**

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

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For those who don't exercise spiritual gifts and / or don't want to:

DON'T reject them or dismiss them out of hand. It is plain from Scripture that they are part of God's provision for the Church, and I can not find any scriptural evidence that they are to be withdrawn before the Lord Jesus Christ returns. **1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

DON'T be afraid of them. They are given to us by God for the benefit of all in the Church. **1 Corinthians 12:7**. He does not give us harmful gifts. **James 1:17 & Luke 11:11-13**.

DON'T aim to criticise those who exercise them. Those who are exercising spiritual gifts or are interested in them are not perfect any more than you are! **Galatians 5:15**.

DON'T feel inferior or left out by your apparent lack of gift. We all have a vital part to play in the life of the Body of Christ, whether it is a "spectacular" role or a "humble" one . . . in fact, the Lord's assessment of what is important may well be different to ours . . . we need to learn to live to him, not by human comparisons. **Romans 14:7 & 1 Corinthians 12:14-27**.

DON'T throw out the baby with the bath water! Just because you have heard some strange stories about people exercising spiritual gifts, it does not necessarily mean that gifts are not part of God's plan. **1 Thessalonians 5:19-22**.

DO be sceptical of unreality. Gamaliel was unconvinced (he was Saul of Tarsus' teacher!), but was prepared to test reality by time and experience. **Acts 6:33-39**

DO be open to God using other people's gifts in your life. This is a tough one, especially if we think we are more mature than they are! We all need each other and cannot grow properly without each other's help. **1 Corinthians 12:21-26**.

DO check up what Scripture says about them. There is no point in discussing our ideas about spiritual gifts (or anything else!) unless we are ready to hear what God has to say about them. The classic passage is **1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14**, but there are other references in **Romans 12, Acts 11, 13 & 21**, and elsewhere.

DO recognise their potential worth as well as their limitations. In the passages from **Acts**, God uses the gifts to express his mind to the Church. As the present-day Church seeks to be fully available to whatever the Lord has in mind, surely we need to be open to any way in which he chooses to communicate with us. **1 Corinthians 2:9-13**.

DO express appreciation when you are blessed through others' gifts. This applies to all ways in which we are helped by other believers. We all know how encouraging it is to know that we have really helped someone where they felt they needed it, so if the Lord has blessed you through someone else, encourage them by saying "thank you" as well as thanking the Lord for them. **1 Corinthians 12:18**.

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

Dave Taylor 1994 ?

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