

UNDERSTANDING THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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CHARISMATIC GIFTS IN GENERAL

A) Understanding the Gifts

1. WHAT IS MEANT BY A CHARISMATIC GIFT?

A charismatic gift is a manifestation of God's power and presence given freely for God's honor and glory and for the service of others. Specifically the term refers to manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the scriptures, especially after Pentecost, and which have always remained with the Church in both her teaching and practice.

2. HOW MANY CHARISMATIC GIFTS ARE THERE?

Since the charismatic gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to say how many there are. Scripture provides a number of lists of offices and ministries. The classical list, used by most, is St. Paul's in 1 Corinthians (12:8-10), where nine gifts are described.

These nine gifts seem to be normal ministries that should be present in every local church.

"To one the Spirit gives wisdom in discourse, to another the power to express knowledge. Through the Spirit one receives faith; by the same Spirit another is given the gift of healing and still another miraculous powers. Prophecy is given to one; to another power to distinguish one spirit from another. One receives the gift of tongues, another that of interpreting the tongues." (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)

3. PLEASE LIST AND DESCRIBE THESE NINE GIFTS.

The nine gifts, according to the threefold division are:

The Word Gifts (The Power to Say)

- a) *The Gift of Tongues* – whereby the person gives God's message, in a language unknown to him, for the community present.
- b) *The Gift of Interpretation* – whereby a person, after the use of the gift of tongues, gives the general meaning of what the person has said, or a response to what has been said. Interpretation can also be used privately in conjunction with the gift of prayer tongues.

c) *The Gift of Prophecy* – whereby the person gives God’s message in the vernacular for the community or for an individual.

The Sign Gifts (The Power to Do)

a) *The Gift of Faith* – which enables the person at a given moment to believe, and to call upon God’s power with a certainty that excludes all doubt.

b) *The Gift of Healing* – which enables the person to be God’s instrument in bringing about the well being of another, on one or more levels, spiritual, psychological or physical.

c) *The Gift of Miracles* – which enables a person to be God’s instrument in either an instant healing or in some other powerful manifestation of God’s power.

The Intellectual Gifts (The Power to Know)

a) *The Word of Wisdom* – whereby a person is granted an insight into God’s plan in a given situation and is enabled to put this into words of advice or of direction.

b) *The Word of Knowledge* – whereby a person is granted in insight into a divine mystery or facet, of man’s relation to God and is enabled to put this into a word that helps others to grasp the mystery.

c) *The Gift of Discernment* – whereby a person is enabled to know the source of an inspiration or action, whether it came from the Holy Spirit, his own human spirit or from the evil spirit.

4. ARE THERE MORE THAN NINE CHARISMATIC GIFTS?

Since a charismatic gift is defined as a manifestation of God’s power, obviously there are more than nine ways in which God can act. In 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12, St. Paul was speaking from experience, both his own and that of the early Church. He realized that the Holy Spirit *regularly* manifested Himself in these nine ways. St. Paul wanted the Early Christians to be familiar with these *regular* manifestations, to learn about them, to expect them and to yield to them all. In fact, he expected all nine gifts to be present in each Christian community. The absence of these gifts would signify some weakness in the Church’s power.

5. ARE THERE NOT OTHER GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT? WHAT IS THEIR RELATION TO THESE CHARISMATIC GIFTS?

There are two sets of “gifts of the Holy Spirit.” One set is *personal* and the other is *charismatic*. The personal gifts sanctify the individual while the charismatic gifts are meant for the good of the community. It was the personal gifts of the Spirit which were listed in the *Baltimore Catechism* as the results of Confirmation. In our

discussion, gifts will be used as “charismatic gifts” and not the personal or sanctifying gifts.

B) The Gifts in the History of the Church

6. SINCE MANY OF THESE CHARISMATIC GIFTS SEEM TO BE MISSING FROM NORMAL CATHOLIC LIFE, WOULD THE CATHOLIC CHURCH THEN BE REGARDED AS WEAKER THAN GOD INTENDED?

In a certain sense, yes. The power of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the manifestations of the charismatic gifts, and the service of ministries, are meant to be regular parts of Church life. When these are not operative, the Church is not all that Christ meant it to be. In calling for renewal, the Church freely admits that she is not all that she could be.

7. HOW LONG DID THE CHURCH REMAIN CHARISMATIC, I.E., WHEN THE CHARISMS WERE REGULAR PARTS OF ITS LIFE?

The charisms seemed to die out in the second century. The stress in the Scriptures moved from charismatic activity in the Acts of the Apostles and the early epistles to the importance of office and order in the later pastoral letters (Titus and Timothy). The abuses of the gifts in the Montanist heresy (2nd century) hurried the demise of these signs and wonders which had helped the Christian message to spread quickly throughout the world.

8. WHY DID THESE CHARISMATIC MANIFESTATIONS DROP OUT OF THE CHURCH?

A number of reasons are offered by Church historians:

- a) The growth of the contemplative spirit (which seems to be a valid fruit of the charismatic prayer life).
- b) Abuses in the use of charismatic gifts causing the Church to institute safeguards, which unfortunately led to a loss of the gifts themselves.
- c) Loss of the dynamic faith of the Early Church.
- d) The union of the Church and State under Constantine and the beginning of mass conversions.

9. WERE THEY ACTUALLY SUPPOSED TO “DIE OUT”?

There is no scriptural basis for saying that God meant charisms to cease in the Church. If anything, the Church of the New Testament saw charisms as an integral

part of the Christian life. The abundance of the charismatic gifts in the modern Pentecostal prayer communities witnesses to the fact that the theologians were wrong in calling these gifts the prerogatives of the Primitive Church.

C) The Gifts in the Life of the Individual

16. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “MANIFESTING THE GIFTS” AND GOODNESS OF LIFE?

On this, two things could be said:

First, charismatic gifts, even if of a powerful and sensational nature, should not be equated with holiness of life. These gifts are quite distinct from sanctifying grace and are no indication of a person’s holiness. On the other hand, however, the use of the charismatic gifts can be a concrete manifestation of a very deep love and concern for the community. The correct use of the gifts should lead to the fruits of the Spirit, which are a true sign of holiness of life.

9. WHEN DOES A PERSON BEGIN TO YIELD TO THESE CHARISMATIC GIFTS?

A distinction has to be made between an occasional, almost accidental, manifestation of charismatic gifts and a regular and powerful use of these gifts. Probably every Catholic, at some time, has been used by God to further His Kingdom by doing or saying something that was a charismatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

A regular and powerful use of these gifts usually emerges after the person has come to experience Christ in a personal way:

- a) called by Pentecostals “The Baptism of the Spirit.”
- b) Has begun to pray in tongues.
- c) Has been praying privately for some period.
- d) Has been praying regularly in a charismatic prayer community.

10. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PERSON’S FREE WILL IN “CHARISMATIC MANIFESTATIONS”?

The person’s will remains free, even in the extraordinary manifestations of a charism. The gifts, therefore, are subject to the individuals’ will, in the sense that he freely chooses whether or not to yield to God’s activity. In fact, the will is very active in leading the various faculties to cooperate with God in yielding to the gifts. At times, however, the charismatic manifestation is so important to the life of the community that the

individual is almost forced to yield. The pain experienced by the Old Testament prophets when they refused to deliver God's message is an example. This unique manner of God's action is found among newcomers who have to be "pushed" to use the gifts and among the very mature in whom God's activity is deep.

11. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECTUAL FACULTIES IN CHARISMATIC MANIFESTATION?

First, the person must know about the gifts. Many people, because they are unaware of the gifts, do not use or manifest them to the degree expected by God. St. Paul stresses the intellect's role when he wrote, "I want you to know the truth about the spiritual gifts." A detailed knowledge and experience of the gifts is a necessary condition for growth.

Secondly, the imagination, memory and intellect are extremely active in all of the gifts, since these are the faculties directly touched by God's action. The Spirit prepares these powers of man to be used by Him, and gradually teaches the individual to recognize and yield to His promptings.

12. DOES THIS COOPERATION OF THE INTELLECT EVER CAUSE PEOPLE TO FEEL THAT "IT IS JUST THEM" AND NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT?

That doubt is frequently present with every individual who yields to the charismatic gifts. For newcomers, this doubt is very common, and they need the help of the prayer community to reassure them that it really is the Spirit's action. As the person gets through this initial stage of doubts, he is better able to discern when it is truly God's prompting and when it is merely himself. Constant trial, error, and discernment, both by the person and by the community, bring a confidence in the gifts. With experience the person matures and grows in discernment so that these doubts pass.

13. WHAT SHOULD A PERSON DO TO GROW IN THESE GIFTS?

It would be helpful if the person:

- a) Led a deep life of prayer and a life in close union with God's will.
- b) Studied the gifts and shared regularly with those who also exercise them.
- c) Acted like a little child, walking wherever the Lord led and not being afraid of honest mistakes.

If these things are done, the Lord, for His part, will do great things for the person and for the community.

14. WHAT IF THE PERSON DOES NOT GROW IN THE GIFTS?

Then the community definitely suffers, since the Lord wants to lead all prayer communities into a deeper life in the Spirit. He wants the people to sense that they are “getting somewhere” and that the group is growing in prayer. Also, the person might get discouraged with Charismatic renewal, not realizing that he is missing out on an important aspect of this movement. In a sense, growth of a prayer community depends very much on using the gifts, allowing the Holy Spirit to freely manifest Himself and lead the group where He wants it to go. Communities that are gifted with balanced leaders who are charismatically oriented do this best.

D) Having a Charismatic Ministry

15. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A “MINISTRY IN A CERTAIN GIFT” – SUCH AS PROPHECY OR HEALING?

To understand a “ministry in a certain gift,” the following should be kept in mind:

a) “Charismatic gifts” are not something we possess (so, in a sense, “gifts” is not the best word to express

God’s action here), but rather they are “ways” in which God regularly manifests Himself through an individual.

By charismatic gifts, we do not possess God as much as God possesses us and uses us for His people. Therefore, a person “yields” to a gift.

b) As a person is more and more faithful to God, recognizing and being sensitive to the activity of God’s Spirit, he yields more regularly to God’s action. In this way, God is able to use that person more frequently.

c) The person, although perhaps yielding to many of God’s charismatic gifts, tends to become sensitive and responsive to a particular one – as the gift of interpretation, or of prophecy or of discernment or of healing. The person then is said to exercise a “ministry.”

A ministry is a regular and frequent yielding to God’s action through a given charismatic gift.

16. WHAT, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD BE A “PROPHETIC MINISTRY”?

To have a “prophetic ministry” simply means that God uses an individual on a regular basis for prophetic utterances. The person has learned to cooperate with God and has willingly “yielded” to this gentle prompting of the Spirit. As the person becomes “trustworthy” with the prophetic gift, using it responsibly for the

building up of the community, God uses that person more and more. Prophecy becomes an almost permanent gift, manifested regularly. It is also manifested, at times, in rather extraordinary ways. The “prophet” is different from someone who experiences prophecy only from time to time, and then usually only in “ordinary ways.”

17. ARE THERE ANY DANGERS IN HAVING A “MINISTRY”?

There are two general dangers:

- a) The person feels that he is an “expert” in the field and refuses to submit to the judgment or discernment of other leaders, whom the person judges are not “experts” in his field.
- b) The person “specializes” in that ministry and does not develop the other gifts.

E) Correct Attitude Toward the Gifts

18. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “OPENNESS TO THE GIFTS” AND “CHARISMANIA”?

Being “open to the gifts” means that the person sees charismatic gifts as normal activities of the Holy Spirit, to which he yields in a childlike way. This correct attitude is based on the simple faith that God does intervene in our lives through charisms. *Charismania*, on the other hand, presents a twisted use of God’s gifts, often asking God to become subject to man.

Some aspects of charismania would be :

- a) Expecting God to intervene in a charismatic way, when natural powers would be enough to handle the situation.
- b) A refusal to do normal work, such as study or preparation, with the idea that God would provide through His gifts.
- c) Seeing charismatic activity as an end in itself rather than as a means to personal and community growth.

19. WHAT, THEN, IS A CORRECT ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GIFTS?

- a) The person should learn about them and pray for them.
- b) He should not be afraid of them, since these are ways the Holy Spirit wants to act.
- c) He should not hinder the Holy Spirit by creating a lot of human rules for their use.
- d) He should actively seek them and yield to them with childlike faith.

20. WHAT IS MEANT BY “NOT BEING AFRAID OF THE GIFTS”?

“Not being afraid” means to step out in faith in the use of the gifts and to trust the Lord, who will take care of any honest mistakes in their use. With the gifts, there has to be a certain boldness,” a “being at home” feeling.

se, the gifts will become objects of discussion and a source of tension. In addition, leadership must not stress the dangers involved in charismatic gifts to the degree that people are afraid to seek or use them.

21. SHOULD NOT A PRAYER COMMUNITY STRESS A GROWTH IN LOVE MORE THAN A GROWTH IN THE GIFTS?

Certainly love is the most important aspect of any prayer community. However, two things should be noted.

a) These gifts are means God gives to us to grow in love.

b) They are the tools for the garden which if used correctly, will certainly bring forth good fruit.

c) A community which plays down the gifts with the idea of aiming at love, might be guilty of a subtle pride, presupposing that it can arrive at love without using the normal ministries established by God.

22. WHAT ROLE DOES “LOVE” PLAY IN THE GROWTH OF THE GIFTS?

Since charismatic gifts are given to a person for the benefit of the community, love for others is the only atmosphere in which the gifts will grow. Also, the secret of growth in the gifts is a love for the Lord and for the brethren, and not a love for the gifts themselves.