

A Discourse on the Gifts of
the Spirit As They Relate to
Individual Personalities

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A Discourse on the Gifts of the Spirit As They Relate to Individual Personalities

A Preamble: You Have a Talent God Wants You to Use

You have an ability (talent) that God wants you to use. You may have several abilities, but, whether one or several, God expects certain things of you and your ability. The Apostle Paul lists a number of abilities or talents in the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians:

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power [miracles – KJV], then gifts of healing, forms of assistance [helps – KJV], forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? [The answer is obviously No; there are more gifts or abilities that are not named here.]” (1 Cor. 12:27-30 NRSV)

For reference you should read the following related passages: 1 Cor. 12:7-11; Eph. 4:11, 12.

None of us can offer a valid excuse by saying, “I don’t have any of the abilities listed in the Bible.” Oh, but you do. The apostle is not saying that the abilities he has mentioned are the only ones in the Church. He is just throwing out a few morsels to whet our appetite and to give us an idea of what God has given to the Church and to us as individuals. Then, too, if you’ll look at one of the abilities, “forms of assistance [helps-KJV],” it’s clear that many abilities can be placed under that canopy. Many offices that seem to be minor are in the category of “helps.” The point is that everyone has some sort of ability that God expects

him or her to use in service to the One who gave them the ability. Is that unfair; is it too demanding?

Paul, in a letter to Timothy, gave him a charge that can be paraphrased to fit this discourse. Paul said,

“¹⁷Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; ¹⁸That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; ¹⁹Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Tim. 6:17-19)

It’s clear that Paul was referring to material wealth, but we could look on riches as including the possession of a divinely given gift or ability. Any gift from God is a precious possession. So without harming the intent of the passage, I believe we could paraphrase it this way: “Charge them that have abilities [talents] in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain talents, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to share their talents; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

We all need to search our roster of abilities and ascertain what we have that we can employ in service to God, and, of course, service to God often means service to others. We can’t really help God in any way; He doesn’t need our assistance or comfort or encouragement. What He does “need” is for us to reach out and touch those creatures He has made in His image. They need assistance, comfort and encouragement.

You shouldn’t think that, by withholding anything from God, you can hurt Him. Hear this: God is complete without you or me. He needs nothing for Himself and asks nothing for Himself. Even His love for us is not predicated on some gain to Himself. His love for us is rooted in Himself and He is the

personification of love. His love reaches out without expectation of reward. He loves us because He is God and because He made us in His image. Satan flawed that image, but the love of God remains constant and stretches out its loving arms, pleading with us to turn away from our sins and give our all to Him. Why? It is for our own good: God wants so very much to save us from eternal damnation. He yearned for it enough to die for us.

Our love for God should produce a like sort of reaching out and make us want to be all that God wants us to be. This is not another human that we love; it is God our Creator, God our Savior. To *BE* what God wants includes going, saying, doing in strict accordance with His will.

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain, or plain, or sea.
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord;
I'll BE what you want me to be.

Being all that God wants you to be has to start within you, in your mind/heart (what you think) and work outward to your very appearance and behavior. Being what God wants necessarily involves your whole self. It involves your total **being**. The dedicated child of God must become saturated with God's spirit so that the Spirit's sweet permeating effect goes into every pore of his being.

The true child of God should try his utmost to do the full will of God. Should we then expect God to miraculously remake us into super beings with genius intellects, heading unswervingly toward the full accomplishment of His will? No, no, no. God does not work that way.

He lets us muddle and make mistakes – learning by experience. That's life in this body of flesh and no believer can avoid it. But God oversees our uncertain moves that would ordinarily lead only to frustration, and in some way He leads us to the goal of complete immersion in, submission to, and fulfillment of His will. He sees our intense desire.

But we must get off our couch of do-nothing and get to work for God. We can't afford to wait. Now is the day of opportunity. Tomorrow is not assured to us.

Gifts of the Spirit Can Never Save You

“Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.” (Jonah 1.1-3)

We see immediately, in the book of Jonah, that the gifts God bestows on a person do not make him or her a good person. Nor does simply hearing the voice of God accomplish the task. Jonah heard from God and Jonah was evidently a prophet of God, but he was a mean-spirited man who was unlike the other prophets in the Bible. When Jonah prophesied at the commandment of God, Jonah wanted his word to be vindicated. Never mind that those prophesied to might repent of their evil ways, which is always what God prefers (Eze 18.32); Jonah wanted destructive results.

Jonah’s petulant attitude toward those to whom he predicted death was somewhat similar to that of James and John when the Samaritan city had refused to accept Jesus. They wanted to call fire down on them as Elijah did in 2 Kings 1.9, 10. But Jesus rebuked them, saying, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” And even though Elijah was not a gentle man and was of a different time in God’s schedule of events, he could graciously extend mercy where God was pleased to do so (2 Kings 1.13-15). It is interesting what Adam Clarke says of Jonah:

“Many persons suppose that the gifts of prophecy and working miracles are the highest that can be conferred on man; but they are widely mistaken, for the gifts change not the heart. Jonah had the gift of prophecy, but had not received that grace which destroys the old man and creates the soul anew in Christ Jesus.” (Adam Clarke’s Commentary)

In this modern era of Christianity we tend to overestimate the significance that certain spectacular gifts of the Spirit have on a person's spiritual status. Before we go too far into that erroneous line of thinking, we should recall the lamentable spiritual state that Jonah, a prophet and one who heard from God, was in. Nor should we forget that Judas, who evidently was one of the twelve (Mat. 10.5, 6; Mark 6.7; Luke 9.1, 2) and the seventy (Luke 10.1) that Jesus sent out to preach the Gospel and to work miracles, committed the basest of evils: he betrayed his Lord into the hands of the ones who killed Him! Judas' gifts and talent meant nothing as a means to salvation.

The gifts and calling of God are doubtless very important to the individual and to the Church at large, but they cannot make up for a personal lack of intimacy with God. They can never substitute for walking with and striving to be like our Lord. "...these ought ye to have done [using your God-given gifts], and not to leave the other undone."

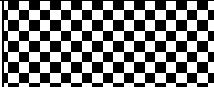
We have talents and abilities that we must use: let's use them to the glory of God. We have a mandate to be like Jesus; let's not fail to press for that goal just as urgently. Remember, favor with God comes not in our own efforts either to work for Him or to be like Him. These efforts are effective only as they arise from our love for Him.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." (1Co13.1-3)

The Holy Spirit Comes Bearing Gifts

When the Holy Spirit comes into your being He brings all of His "baggage" with Him. (this is not bad!) He does not come

as some ragtag wayfarer: He is a King, so treat Him as such! The Spirit comes into your modest dwelling accompanied by all that He is, including His omnipotence and omniscience and other divine items. Just as God requires that we bring a gift with us when we come before Him (“...No one is to appear before me empty-handed.” – Ex. 23:15b NIV), this King also comes to us bearing gifts, namely, the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12.1-31). These are not gifts given only at Christmastime or to celebrate a birthday: If you have the Spirit within, you have the gifts throughout the year. Every day should be a joyous Christmas to you. You may not be aware of the gift(s) you have; that is why we have written this essay. In the chart below we have named the gifts of the Spirit as the Bible lists them. Please print this chart as you may need to refer to it from time to time.

Gifts of the Spirit <i>to the Individual</i> (1 Cor. 12.8-10; ref., Rom. 12.4-8)		
Word of Wisdom	Word of Knowledge	Faith
Healing	Miracles	Prophecy
Discerning of Spirits	Tongues	Interpretation of Tongues
Gifts of the Spirit <i>to the Church</i> (1 Cor. 12.28-30, Eph. 4.11, 12)		
1 st Apostles	2 nd Prophets	3 rd Teachers
After the above eminent gifts in 1 Cor. 12.28-30, there are these -		
Miracles	Healings	Helps
Governments (administrations)	Diversities of Tongues	

A Brief Description of the Gifts of the Spirit

Word of Wisdom

There are numerous words in the Hebrew and Greek that have been translated “wisdom” in the Bible. We are told that in the present instance the Greek word is *Sophia*, meaning wisdom (as we know the word today) of either a worldly or spiritual kind. Of course, in this place, we know it is a spiritual wisdom. But again, what does wisdom mean here?

There are hundreds of places in Scripture where the word wisdom appears. After reading the comments of reputable theologians on the matter, and after my own humble thoughts and prayer about the issue, I have concluded that in many places, and especially here, we can define wisdom as “the knowledge of, and personal involvement in, the fulfilling of the will of God.” As sons and daughters of God, we all have some wisdom; those who have the gift have a greater measure of wisdom than others who also belong to God.

Word of Knowledge

The word of knowing. Having a knowledge of spiritual truth. Some say it includes the divinely given knowledge of the affairs of others.

Faith

In the New Testament it always refers to an assurance or belief in spiritual things. Here it seems to denote an unusual assurance or belief in God despite the obstacles of man and the fury of hell.

Healing

This requires little explanation. It is the supernatural ability to heal the afflicted. All of the apostles had the gift and it remains among us today although it has been widely mishandled and, at times, falsely claimed. Those who have the gift should pray for wisdom in how to use it.

Miracles

Related to the gift of healing, which is a miracle in itself, but this particular gift includes other types of supernatural works.

Prophecy

“...the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God.” (*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W.E. Vine) This gift is a required faculty for any preacher of the Word of God. It is also bestowed on others, including lay persons. Paul marks prophecy as one of the highest gifts of the Spirit. He exhorts the Corinthians, “Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but rather that ye may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14.1), and then in the 3rd verse of the chapter he informs them, “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” Prophecy is a highly important gift.

Discerning of Spirits

The ability to gauge the intents and motivations of another person.

Tongues

This bestows on the recipient the ability to speak in tongues unknown to the speaker. Paul claimed of “speaking in tongues more than ye all” (1 Cor. 14.18), but he quickly added (vs. 19), “Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.” Study Paul’s writings on the gifts of the Spirit. You will find that in no instance is the gift of tongues given the importance some of us give the gift today. Paul made his position clear on the matter:

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the

spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” (1 Cor. 14.1-3)

Interpretation of Tongues

The ability to interpret what one is saying who is speaking in tongues.

The gifts we have dealt with above are listed in 1Cor. 12.8-10. Now we will look at the gifts of the Spirit as enumerated in verses 28-30 of the same chapter.

(Please continue “Gifts of the Spirit and Individual Personalities,” Part II, on following page.)

Apostles

The word of itself means, “one sent forth” and has been used in the Bible to denote the various evangelists and helpers who aided in proclaiming the Gospel. But Jesus used it in a narrower sense that referred only to the twelve disciples who were closest to Him. It is clear that the word is used in that way when Paul includes it in the gifts of the Spirit. Only an apostle (as Jesus used the term) had the gift of apostleship. There are no more of that select group today.

Prophets

Those who have the gift of prophecy as described in the first list above. In listing this gift again, as a special gift to the Church, Paul underscores its importance to the well-being of that great organization.

Teachers

An instructor in the Way of Holiness. One who takes those who are already saved and reveals to them the way of Truth more perfectly. This is another important position that is needed in the Church for its spiritual growth. A teacher can also instruct persons who do not know Christ, but want to learn more about Him before they give Him their all.

The rest of the list reverts to the gifts the Spirit gives to individuals:

Miracles/Healings

These have been sufficiently described at the very beginning of the list of gifts.

Helps

Please see this gift described more fully under A Little-Known Gift Covering a Broad Area below.

Governments

Administrations. This refers to those who have the competence and skill to govern others under them in whatever endeavor they engage in for Christ.

Diversities of Tongues

The same as the gift of tongues described in the first list.

Now that we have gone through both lists of the gifts of the Spirit as given in 1 Cor. 12.5-10 and 28-30 and Ephesians 4.11, 12, we can focus on the gift of “Helps,” – a vague word – and see what seems to be implicit in the term:

A Little-Known Gift Covering a Broad Area

Not all of the gifts of the Spirit are specifically named. For instance, under the listing of “helps” (1 Cor. 12.28) Paul implies there are a variety of other abilities within that one word. One of these various abilities could be the capacity some people have for adeptly dealing with other people. With those who have this capacity there are no strangers. They are natural-born mixers who enjoy social interaction. There are several ways in which they can utilize this “factor of friendliness”:

- They could use this outstanding talent by welcoming visitors who come to the church. Make the visitors want to come back to such a friendly place.

- They can also be a tremendous help to new converts who need someone with whom they can relate. New members, even if they themselves are social mixers, need someone to help orient them in the unfamiliar land they have entered. They perhaps have never seen you before and some may not have ever opened a Bible before they came to God.

Or...

- These warm, outgoing individuals can befriend and draw out the inner warmth of someone who has been saved for a number of years, but who has trouble mingling with others. No one can survive alone and unaided – not even those who appear to need no one else.

Mr. or Ms. “Friendly,” who relates well to all people and would be desolated without someone to glad hand and talk to, could work in any one or all of the above ways. If you have the “heart of a servant,” you can find little tasks that are waiting for you to perform them. The Spirit should not always have to tell us what to do when the need is so obvious and we have the ability to fill it.

The Spirit has all of the gifts of the Spirit within Himself, but this does not mean that you have all of these gifts at your immediate disposal simply because your divine House Guest has all wealth and all power. You have only the gift or gifts your Guest (rather, your permanent Resident!) chooses to give you after you have first given your all to Him. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the Spirit takes for His own use the natural abilities that you already have. He then gives these traits back to you as “gifts” of the Spirit and uses them as He deems appropriate. Of course, since the abilities are *usually* a native part of you, God uses them within the confines of your natural makeup. But He is by no means limited to how He works through someone who is yielded to Him. We will deal with this thought shortly.

God Works As His Will Dictates

God gave all of us whatever ability we have whether we belong to Him or not. We can truthfully say as Job did, “Naked I came into this world and naked I will leave it,” but within that naked physical being are abilities for doing or being various things. These temperaments and traits, which figure prominently in how God uses us, do not always come to us unalloyed from God. Sin has succeeded in twisting and perverting some of them so that at times they are positively demonic. But when we turn to God we are giving all that we have to Him, including unsightly warts and blemishes and whatever abilities we have. The Spirit will then repress the bad characteristics and give the potentially good ones (traits/gifts) back to us and refine them by experience and/or purging. He will then use them, through us, in various aspects of Kingdom work. The extent to which He uses them will be in direct ratio to the degree in which we sanctify ourselves (consecrate or set ourselves apart for God.)

As we know, the Holy Spirit has no shortage of ability and power. Consequently He may at times use one of the many gifts of the Spirit outside of the natural ability of the person in whom He resides. It is not a matter then of refining or sharpening native skills; it is God doing a new thing without respect to native bent or ability. He will work through the yielded person whatever it is that God pleases.

The Spirit of God can move upon one who doesn't have a flair for writing and anoint him so that his pen will be a veritable geyser of words carrying the message of God to whomever the Spirit has targeted. A person who has trouble giving a five-sentence speech can, at the prompting of the Spirit, deliver a full-length sermon. It may be the only time in his life in which he will do this: it is possible only at God's direction. In these peremptory moves God is showing us that He is not at all limited by our inadequacies and limitations: He is God Almighty who does what He pleases, as He pleases and when He pleases.

But we can be sure that God will not work in this way with just anyone. He will work in this fashion only through those who consecrate themselves to Him. But if He uses you in a signal fashion outside of your natural ability, don't discard that one small talent you have as an inborn gift. Don't despise it, no matter what it is or how small in your sight. Always remember there is a caveat or warning that comes with any spiritual gift. Even though you may possess a gift of the Spirit, you still need the Spirit Himself to help you to operate the gift fruitfully. All of us have at least one spiritual gift and it will never be taken from us:

“For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance [are irrevocable - NRSV].” (Rom 11:29)

God has plans for you if you will only break through the shell of carnality encapsulating you (we all have it) and get down to the serious business of seeking your God. Seek Him often and persistently – He is not likely to budge from where He is just for a lackadaisical “Lord, help me!” Get real with God. I would even say, “pester” Him. He responds to such an attitude.

We cannot use the gift profitably without the Spirit's aid.

If you want to take the one gift “that is death to hide” and use it to the fullest extent possible...

If you want to be all that you can be...

If you seriously want God to use you wherever and whenever He pleases...

then fall on your face in entreaty before your resident Holy Spirit long and earnestly. He wants to use you; He's just waiting to hear your “effectual, fervent prayer.” It will definitely “avail much.” (Jas. 5.16b)

Don't hold back any of your miserable, miserly self. Give all you are and all you have to Him. If the Holy Spirit has thought enough of you to give you a gift, you should be seeking Him for the ability to use it to the max. We are not talking now about a friend or relative giving you a Christmas present; you

can do with a human-donated gift whatever you please. A gift of the Spirit is another matter. We are dealing here with the Spirit of the living God. He gave you a precious gift and it was solely by the grace of God. But with the gracious gift comes responsibility: God has the right to demand a return from the gift He gave you.

Using the Gift Unprofitably

Some people have the gift of speaking in other tongues. I know indirectly of at least one person who left the Lord, but was still able to speak at will. Yet his use of the gift profited no one, not those who heard him nor himself. When he spoke in tongues it seemed to be the genuine thing, but it also had a hollow ring. His use of the gift was a mockery of the gift. It was like a circus sideshow act: freakish. I am sure God was not pleased. The hard fact is that he could have unknowingly been speaking condemnation against himself as he spoke in tongues! Scary.

This wayward son was like the old prophet in 1 Kings 13. You have to read the full account to see what I mean, but below is a brief summary:

The old prophet, who lived in Bethel, lied to another prophet whom the Scripture designates only as “a man of God.” God had given the man of God specific directions to go to Bethel and prophesy against the altar there and not to eat or drink while he was there. He was also to return home by a route different than the one he took to Bethel. The younger man complied and was the center of a mighty act of God. The Scriptures do not say why God did not use the old prophet, who was already in Bethel, for the work. It is likely that he had grown old and lackadaisical in his worship of and service for God. His spiritual hearing had flown south and he couldn’t hear the voice of God very clearly.

When the old prophet heard of what had happened and that the younger man had departed for home, he saddled his donkey and went to find the man of God to persuade him to come home with him. He was glad to see someone of the same profession as

he. But the younger man told him what God had commanded about not eating at Bethel. Not willing to give up on a bit of socializing with a colleague, the older man lied to the man of God.

“He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him.” (1 Ki 13:18)

The younger man went back with the old prophet. But as they were eating and drinking, the Lord suddenly spoke through the old prophet, pronouncing judgment on the younger man. This was a sudden turnaround in the young prophet’s fortunes. He had just been a part of a mighty work of the Lord – and now a fellow prophet who had lied to him foretells his (the younger man’s) own death! Unfortunately the prophecy came to pass. After the young man had departed for home, a lion attacked him and killed him.

There are two things we should learn from this tragic story:

- If God tells us something, we should never believe anyone who tries to tell us differently. I believe that if God gives us a command directly from Him, without an intermediary, then we should not accept any change of the divine mind. Why would God change His mind? He foresees any possible happenings and doesn’t have to rethink His method of operations and then, to save face, have to send someone else to tell us.
- God does not take away the gift He has given you. You may lie on Him, as the old prophet did, but the gift remains.

According to our limited way of thinking, the old man should have been the object of judgment. He lied on God; he

dissuaded another prophet from doing what God had told him to do, and it was all selfishly motivated: He wanted the company of a fellow prophet. How self-centered, to seek for the fulfillment of his own social life by causing the downfall of someone else cast in the same prophetic mold as he! If we had been God, we would have turned the fate of the younger man back upon the sinning pate of the old prophet.

But God does not see as we do, and His way is the only way for those who trust in Him. Additionally, the era of the Mosaic Law was not as generously sprinkled with grace as our day, which is the day of the “law of liberty”. The younger prophet had disobeyed God and He had to be judged. Furthermore, the things that happened in those days were brought down to us today as lessons of encouragement or warning. This incident happened to be a warning not to play with God. We have to take His commands seriously.

What about the older prophet who lied in the name of the Lord? We’ll have to leave that in the hands of the Lord. But we shouldn’t be like him. He was motivated by selfish reasons and he brazenly lied, in effect putting words in the Lord’s mouth in order to get the younger prophet to stay and eat and drink with him. Such characteristics would scarcely become us who follow Christ today. It is, without question, a different world now.

Repent and Use Your Gift Profitably

Yet, in today’s world of Christendom, there are people who, like the old prophet, seem to have drifted as far away from the Lord as possible. And, like the old prophet who lied in the name of the Lord, they still have the gift or gifts that God once gave them. And, again like the old prophet, they rarely have the chance to use the gift, but if they will return to God and give Him their all, He will once again use that ability through them. It all depends on the totality of submission to God. We don’t have to follow a biblical character in his sinful ways. That is why God

gives us these shameful examples: that we might avoid the same trap.

“Would you walk with the Lord in the light of His word,
And have peace and contentment always?
You must do His sweet will to be free from all ill,
On the altar your all you must lay.”

“O we never can know what the Lord will bestow
Of the blessings for which we have prayed
Till our body and soul He doth fully control,
And our all on the altar is laid.”

If you are any sort of Christian, even a lukewarm one, you want God to use you. But your tears and beseeching the Lord to use you will be effective only to the extent that you yield your all to Him, That means giving the gift or gifts of the Spirit back to Him by zealously using them. Then, when you have done that, if you are wise, you will not attempt to go “outside the box,” or try to use your gift in the way someone else uses an identical gift. That would be going outside of the way God intends to use you. Remember: God wants to use you, not James, Sue or Mabel. The following illustrations will show what I mean:

Various Modes by Which God Talked with Men

- God appeared to Moses and talked to him out of a flaming bush (Ex. 3.1-4).
- He called Samuel with a natural voice (1 Sam. 3.1-10).
- Abraham saw God talking to him in a vision (Gen. 15.1) and as a natural man (Gen. 18.1-33).
- Elijah heard God in his inner consciousness (1 Kings 19.9, 12-13), without there being a physical sound or sight.

Various Temperaments of Men of God

Now let's consider the various temperaments of men to whom God talked. Peter was a very impulsive man given to direct action; no subtleties with him. John was more introversive and reserved. Paul was a zealous energetic type, and James the Lord's brother was an austere, no-nonsense person. God spoke and was close to all of them in spite of the fact that not one of them conformed to the temperament of any one of the others.

The interesting fact is that many of them had the same spiritual gifts in common. All of the leaders of the Early Church more than likely had an abundance of the gifts of the Spirit. I believe the apostles in particular were endowed with a plurality of gifts. I have no direct scriptural basis for this, so you may accept it or not. But for the work that was required of these men of God, more than one or two abilities would have been needed. Look again at the list in the chart and consider how each gift might have been necessary for an apostle to have. Nevertheless, in personalities they were widely divergent one from another.

What do we get out of this? That God is not limited to one mode of action in dealing with men nor is He limited to one type of person with whom He interacts and through whom He works. The main thing that men of God have had in common through the centuries was their faith and their submissiveness to God. We have the same faith and submissiveness today and there is no reason why God cannot speak to us and work in and through us. And He certainly does.

Stay Within the Sphere Allotted to You

God is not looking for a clone of Moses or Elijah. He does not want you or me to become another Paul. Why should He when He has such a wide variety of personalities in the Church that are available to Him? God does not need anyone today to be like anyone in the past – except in faith and submissiveness. Nor does God want anyone today to be like any other of His servants who are living today. His other servants are doing what

He wants them to do. What God wants and needs right now is YOU, doing exactly what He wants you to do.

You may be a man in Peoria, Illinois who is very reserved and quite inhibited, not given to much show. God wants to use you. Or you are a woman in Hamburg, Germany and you have the kind of temperament that God can use to give you significant dreams and visions (but not the kind of dreams that come from a busy day or a disoriented mind). God wants to use you. You may be a young person in Timbuktu, Mali in Africa and you are assertive and outgoing. Come along: God can use you too.

Don't try to change your temperament. Changing your temperament or personality is not required for serving God. If you try to do so, it could be a hindrance to God's working through you. He uses His servants according to the personality and character traits with which they were born. Apostle Peter's boldness was not taken away from him by the refining process through which he went; it was merely brought under control. Paul's zeal and fierce loyalty to what he considered a worthy cause were not eliminated; they were only directed aright.

What if Peter had decided he wanted to be like John, or Paul like Daniel? Do you think either one of those what-ifs would have been a good combination? In either case there would have been a misshapen personality whose effectiveness would have been sharply curtailed. God used the features of character that were unique respectively to Peter and Paul for the furtherance of His Kingdom. He by no means wants a hybrid personality composed of two personalities artificially merged into one.

But God in His wisdom used the individual facets of personality of Paul and Peter to spread the Gospel. No doubt He can do the same with your temperament and characteristics if you will only get out of His way and quit trying to be like someone else. When you are trying so much to be like, say, your father or some well-known public figure, you are bending your personality out of shape. You will then end up with a synthetic personality that God will have difficulty using. It will not be a

lack of power on God's part; it will be your failure to discern what God wants of you.

You realize of course that with all this talk about being yourself we do not mean that you should be your carnal self. The carnal unrebored self is what we are daily trying to kill. That fellow is always in conflict with God. We exhort you to be your rebored self as it fits neatly into the framework of God's will. Do all things according to the will, and for the glory of God.

Quit trying to be like someone else whom God made quite different from you. The human race is not just a vast mob of mindless clones spread over the face of the globe. It is far from that. Everyone who has ever slogged through this morass known as life-on-earth is unique. Each person's self is made up of a distinct temperament, intellect, personality and specific experiences that no other human has known or ever will know. Whereas there is only one God and He never changes, there have been trillions of individuals and each one is different from every other one.

Different Temperaments, Different Experiences

All of God's children have a certain commonality of experience with Him. In a general sense they were all stamped by the same cookie cutter. All were saved by the same means (their faith in Christ) and all have some type of communion with Him, even if the degree of closeness varies by the choice of the individual. Scripture also tells us that no one has a temptation that none of his brothers and sisters experiences, but this does not get into the varying subtle ways the temptation confronts each person and the different ways the individuals may deal with their testing.

For example, John Jones and Joe Green may both be, separately and falsely, charged with a crime and threatened with imprisonment. But the prosecutor charging John may be a fair minded man who doesn't go after his victim and hang on to him like a pit bull, while Joe's prosecutor will be just the opposite, looking for the kill, justly or unjustly. In addition and without

regard to what seem to be favorable circumstances, John will moan and bewail his fate and be frightened out of his wits. Joe, meanwhile, although he realizes the seriousness of his predicament, is calmer and more inclined to leave the matter in the hands of the Lord. This doesn't mean he experiences no stress; he just doesn't undergo the same stress that John does – whose case is much more likely to end in an acquittal.

That is an example of differences in experiences that are caused by how the respective persons go through the experiences. If John had exercised his faith more and followed scriptural admonition more closely, he could have had less anxiety despite his natural inclination to be a worrier. The God was the same in both instances; the individuals were different in spiritual depth and in innate temperaments. Some persons are naturally less inclined to get into a frenzy when they suffer severe testing. But they have the same God as their less distraught brother, a God who can, if they get close enough to Him, calm their anxieties and soothe their fears. Therefore, it comes down to this basic fact: A believer in Christ does not worry because of his natural temperament but because of his lack of faith. Natural characteristics are a definite factor in every person's life, but they do not have to control him – if God does.

Let's take another and different example of differences of experiences from the Scriptures. The Prophet Elisha worked many miracles and God delivered him at times from perilous situations. Jeremiah, on the other hand, worked no miracles, he was vilified, smitten and once he was cast into a slimy dungeon from which God did not choose to deliver him by a miracle. He had to suffer a while in his dark hellhole until a servant of the king persuaded the king to have him rescued by means of ropes let down to him. These differences in experiences were not controlled by the individuals, but by the God of whom we say that He never changes.

But, granting that God never changes, why does He treat individual believers differently? First, know this: God acts toward each person just as He knew He would from an eternity

ago. So He is not changing in His basic nature, characteristics or set plans of action. There are reasons for these varying ways in which God treats His individual children. Some we know, some we don't. The reasons we know are as follows:

- Some temperaments require their own individual treatment just as one child may require different treatment from his parents than his brothers and sisters.
- God may want to glorify Himself through one person in a different way than through his spiritual brothers and sisters.
- Finally, there is the sovereign will of God Himself to take into account. He decides how to treat each individual for whatever reason and who can say Him nay?

But He never loves one person more or less than another. He simply does what He wants with whom He wants and when He wants. Are we going to argue with Him or stomp off in a huff and refuse to serve Him because of this? That would be sheer stupidity. Where would we go?

You may not only go through the waters of adversity; you may have to be deluged with the flood. Or you may require refining in the fire of purging or being tried with great sorrow. Your stroke may seem more than you can bear. But be assured, my brother, my sister: God is the Master Refiner. He closely checks everything that goes on in the lives of His children. What is right He will do. What is needed He will do. What is His will, He will do in every instance if we will let Him have full sway in our lives.

“Some through the water, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood.
Some through great sorrow, But God gives a song
In the night season and all the day long.”

So, if you wonder why God allows certain things to happen to you that don't seem to befall your brethren, just calmly accept it. He has His own way of doing things and that way is always for your good and the glory of God.

The Process by Which We Are Refined

Let's deal now with the process of refinement we all have to go through for God's perfect will to be done in us and through us. Whatever gift or gifts of the Spirit you may have, you have to go through the refining process to make you fit to use the gift optimally. There is no need for me to recite a long list of biblical figures who had to endure testing of various sorts before they could do what God wanted them to do. You know all this. You should know by now that the fire of adversity is the only means by which this refining is accomplished. A true story will impact this concept in your mind:

There was once a well-known naturalist who had taken a cocoon out of the wild and kept it in his home. He wanted to observe the pupa inside the cocoon as it emerged from its confinement. What made the experiment more interesting was that the lowly pupa was destined to become a strikingly beautiful emperor moth. One day he noticed the cocoon begin to shake. As the naturalist watched, the insect within made a small hole in the cocoon and began trying to squeeze its body through the very small hole.

The observer waited expectantly as the moth struggled valiantly to free itself from what was fast becoming its tomb. He felt a twinge of empathy and thought he would help this insect in its efforts to live and become a thing of beauty. Gently he took a penknife and enlarged the opening, thus permitting the moth to escape. What happened then was a big disappointment to the moth's would-be benefactor.

The moth didn't look at all like the lovely creature the naturalist had expected. It was a bulbous ungainly insect with wings too small for its body. The unfortunate insect never

became beautiful or delicate and capable of flight. As it crawled awkwardly about, weakly fanning its tiny wings, a hard truth struck the naturalist. He realized – too late – that the struggles the insect had to go through to escape its entombment were vitally necessary for its becoming the exquisite creature that God meant for it to be. The intense struggle was intended to slim it and dehydrate it as it pushed its way to freedom. The naturalist's help was woefully misguided and fatal.

There is certainly a lesson here. There are certain adversities in life that we have to go through in order to develop and become the thing of beauty God wants us to be. If a friend or brother mistakenly frees us from our struggles, it will severely hinder our growth and development. After our release we will lie there, misshapen and ungainly, awkwardly trying to fly as the divine will has always meant for us to do. But, by being prematurely released from our prison, we will have stumbled badly in our press for excellence.

Trouble, adversity, affliction — we greatly need these ingredients for our spiritual health and perfection. Let's not try to evade them, let's not refuse our cross. If we glory in the cross, the glory of the resurrected Christ will rest upon us.

A Brief Recap

You are obligated to use whatever ability you have that can glorify God. Make full use of your gift, first, as the Spirit leads you and, second, as you see a need anywhere that your ability can fill. The Spirit should not always have to tell you to fill a need that clearly cries out for your ability. For example, if an accident victim is dying as his lifeblood gushes out of a wound with every beat of his heart, you don't have to ask God if you should apply pressure to the wound to stop the flow. You have two arms and two hands: you simply do what is required. Stanch the flow of your fellow creature's lifeblood. So it is with your abilities. Use them where they are needed. You of course will pray, as you go about your business of daily following God,

that God's will might be wrought through you. And who can tell... It may be that you will not by chance come upon the need of the accident victim, but that God will lead you there. Think about it.

Don't force a certain use of your ability that ill suits you. Use it in a way that is in line with what God wants and that is comfortable to you. You don't always have to be uncomfortable (this is not to say never) in doing God's work and following His will. Don't think that every step you take has to be a step of pain.

Dedicate every ability you possess to God; rededicate your whole self with its traits of character and temperament and be yourself; then stand back and see the hand of God working in your life and the lives of others you contact!

This is all God is asking of you.

Aaron J. Smith

