

6. Spiritual Gifts (3Q 2026 1 and 2 Corinthians)

Biblical material: 1 Corinthians 12, Eph. 4:11–13, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 Pet. 4:8–11, 1 Cor. 14:27, Amos 3:7; 1 Corinthians 14:1.

Quotes

- With a perversity as pathetic as it is impoverishing we have become preoccupied today with the sporadic extraordinary and non-universal ministries of the Spirit to the neglect of... the more general ones. *J. I. Packer*
- Spiritual giftedness does not guarantee that we hear from God rightly on every point. *Craig S. Keener*
- Does the word "let," in 1 Cor. 14:34, have a permissive or a mandatory significance? If the latter, why is it openly violated by Seventh-day Adventists each week in the year? C.R.B. If these are the apostle's words we would say that "let" was advisory, neither mandatory nor permissive. *But we are inclined to believe that the words are the words of an objector which the apostle quotes*; because (1) Paul has before told us how women ought to appear who prophesy or teach (1 Cor. 11:5), a thing which he certainly permitted them to do under proper circumstances; (2) Paul commends women who labored in a public or semi-public capacity, placing Priscilla before her husband (Acts 18:2, 26; Rom. 16:1-3); (3) the prophecy declares God would use women (Acts 2:17, 18), and history demonstrates its truth (Acts 21:8, 9). Elsewhere the apostle refers to what objectors say. See 2 Cor. 12:16-18; 10:10. *Read 1 Cor. 14:34, then, as the words of objectors:* " Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; . . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." And here is the apostle's rebuke to them: " What? was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it unto you alone?" Editor (M.C. Wilcox), *Signs of the Times*, July 18, 1906.

Questions

What are the gifts of the Spirit? Should we list them in order of perceived importance? Does our list vary from others? Who defines what is a gift of the Spirit? Are natural skills also spiritual gifts? Can we rely on receiving a gift instead of doing the work? Would truth-filled understanding be seen as a top priority?

Bible summary

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul responds to a question about spiritual gifts and also to whether women should speak in church. Ephesians 4:11–13 also deals with spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 13 speaks to the greatest Christian attribute: love. 1 Peter 4:8–11, In 1 Corinthians 14:27 Paul calls for interpretation of whatever is said in tongues. God reveals his plans to his prophets (see Amos 3:7). "Make love your most important objective! But also do your best to gain spiritual gifts, especially the ability to speak God's message." (1 Corinthians 14:1).

Comment

It is unfortunate that the lesson does not find time to examine Paul's statements about women in 1 Corinthians 14:34-36, since these have been some of the most contentious of anything he supposedly wrote.

Remember that Paul is responding to issues raised in the letter sent to him by the church in Corinth. He frequently cites their views before responding with his own. This is clear in such passages as 1:13; 6:16; 9:6, 8, 10; 11:22, with Paul beginning his comment with the participle *ē*, meaning "or"—in the sense of contrasting what is now said with what went before. It is primarily used to denote a choice or distinction between two alternatives. In other words what follows after

this participle is in opposition to what has previously been stated. This is exactly what we find in 14:36.

So why would Paul use this literary device here? He clearly wishes to make clear that he does *not* agree with the previous argument, and in fact by asking two very pointed questions that break the flow of the passage, indicates his strong opposition to it.

Paul therefore is not saying that women should keep silent in church, and he rejects the Jewish law referenced by the Corinthians in 14:34 that encourages this. In addition just three chapters earlier Paul has referred to women praying and prophesying in church.

But on to the issue of spiritual gifts that the Corinthians had also raised in their letter (12:1). Paul is at pains to explain the diversity of spiritual gifts, and that no one should disparage another's gift.

What are spiritual gifts *for*? In the 80's, I held a number of workshops that were designed to discover your spiritual gifts. The frequent problem we discovered was that many people wanted spiritual gifts for themselves, not for building up the body of Christ. But Scripture is very clear that the gifts of the Spirit are not for our own self-edification, but for the wider community. That is why some presumed manifestations (like speaking in tongues) can be problematic, since all too often they are used as a "badge of honor." Which is why Paul would rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousand in an unknown tongue. The stress is always on understanding and interpretation, not the miraculous utterance.

This reveals the truth about God who wants things done "decently and in order," and his desire is to build up the community of faith rather than any individual. As we see what the gifts are intended to do, we gain a much clearer picture of God's intent.

1 Cor. 12:8, 9 speak of the spiritual gifts of wisdom and knowledge. Such gifts of the Spirit are not usually the ones most frequently remembered or discussed! Additionally, we tend to think of these as acquired through our own study and experience. Does this mean we should give up reading and studying and just wait for the Spirit to give us these gifts?

The real issue though is that while we all desire spiritual gifts, what is the reason for seeking after what we want? We all need to ask ourselves, "which spiritual gift do I most desire, and why?" For in some cases, our desires are self-referenced, not for the building up the body of believers... God gives the gifts not to demonstrate who is favored, but to spread the good news and encourage the faithful.

Ellen White Comments

But the gifts of the Spirit are promised to every believer according to his need for the Lord's work. The promise is just as strong and trustworthy now as in the days of the apostles. "These signs shall follow them that believe." This is the privilege of God's children, and faith should lay hold on all that it is possible to have as an endorsement of faith. {DA 823}

Those who are worked by the Holy Spirit are not led by a feeling of enthusiasm, which soon goes out in darkness. The spell of Christ's influence is abiding. "Be still and know that I am God." This is a solemn abiding quietude in God. {5MR 235}

The present is our day of trust. To every person is committed some peculiar gift or talent which is to be used to advance the Redeemer's kingdom. All God's responsible agents, from the lowliest and most obscure to those in high positions in the church, are entrusted with the Lord's goods. It is not the minister alone who can work for the salvation of souls. Those who have the smallest gifts are not excused from using the very best gifts they have, and in so doing their talents will be increased. It is not safe to trifle with moral responsibilities nor to despise the day of small things. God's providence proportions His trusts according to the varied capabilities of the people. None should mourn because they cannot glorify God with talents which they never possessed and for which they are not responsible. {4T 618}.