

The Role of Spiritual Gifts in the Church

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Abstract

The study focused on the role of spiritual gifts in the church. My motivation for this research is to put into the right perspective of the role of spiritual gifts in the church and specifically show how they can promote the life and work of the church. The paper has four main parts: the first covers understanding spiritual spirits where I discuss what spiritual gifts are and their purposes. The second part covers the Biblical basis of spiritual gifts and their nature. The third part looks into in-depth analysis of the spiritual gifts and fourth part covers their application in church and the contemporary use in Kenyan churches. Finally, there is a conclusion together with my personal reflection. In conclusion, there are many spiritual gifts bestowed on the church today and the proper use of these gifts in the power of the Spirit is essential to fulfilling the work of God in and through His church. All gifts are equal and the best gifts will always be those that express most love and do best to most people. I support my thesis that the Spiritual Gifts should be used to manifest the work of God in believers' life and to edify the church.

Keywords: *Spiritual Gifts, Speaking Gifts, Service Gifts, Sign Gifts*

1.0 Introduction

The Pentecostal Movement is responsible for the form of Christianity that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer. As a result, there is a special emphasis of spiritual gifts in the church today, especially the gifts of tongues and healing over other gifts. There is proliferation of churches with special emphasis on healing ministries and what may inform such a church is emphasis the gift of healing. On average there is a lot of ignorance on spiritual gifts and their use resulting to abuse.

2.0 Understanding Spiritual Gifts

What are Spiritual gifts?

There are number different words which are used to speak about spiritual gifts in the New Testament: Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:7-16, and 1 Peter 4:10-11. Paul stressed the importance of understanding the nature of gifts, in 1 Cor. 12:1 he stated that "concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant". Hence the importance of knowing what Spiritual gifts is is paramount. Flynn describes spiritual gifts as a 'special qualification granted by the Spirit to every believer to empower him to serve within the framework of the body of Christ'. Another definition describes them as 'extraordinary endowments bestowed by the Holy Spirit sovereignly and undeservedly on believers as instruments for Christian service and church edification' (Flynn 1974, 20-21).

According to Wiebe, spiritual gifts are endowments or abilities given by the Spirit so that we can function as members of the body of Christ, contribute to the life and growth of the body, and through the body serve the world (Wiebe 1980). Several aspects of this definition are noteworthy because they give a better understanding of spiritual gifts and remove the misconception that spiritual gifts are human abilities. First gifts are not only spiritual but also undeserved. They are grace gifts bestowed at conversion. Second, they are not singular, they are many not just one. Gifts are not talents; non-believers have talents through common grace present from birth. Talents have to do with techniques and methods, gifts have to do with spiritual abilities. Gifts are not offices; gifts relate to the endowments given the person by the spirit so the person with an office should have the gift corresponding to the office. Gifts are not ministries; gifts need to be exercised and the area in which a gift is exercised constitutes a ministry. Thus, a ministry is not a gift but an outlet for the employment of a gift. Finally, gifts are not fruit; gifts have to do service while fruit is the result of what we do in God's power like the development of character traits, new converts, or praise given to God. Spiritual gifts therefore have more to do with the process of ministry whereas spiritual fruit is the product of ministry (Baxter 1983, 37–46).

2.1 The purpose of the spiritual gifts

Spiritual gifts are not meant for the personal use or an elitist pursuit of a higher spiritual or social status. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 -14 clearly spells out the purpose of all gifts. The spiritual gifts are for:

Exaltation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ: Paul links the diversity of gifts to same spirit with the Lordship of Jesus Christ. So, all supernatural manifestations, forms of inspired speech and mighty works must be judged by whether or not their practice exalts Jesus Christ as Lord and reinforces his Lordship because the Spirit is effectively at work when the gifts are point to the Lordship of Christ or his Christlikeness (Schatzmann 2002).

Building up the Church: Paul repeatedly states that the functioning of the gifts is for the purpose of the building up, common good and edification of the body of Christ, the church. They are for the communal purpose. In his analogy of human body to emphasize the principle of "the common good" and "the building up of the church" in 1 Cor. 12:14-26, it shows that every believer is a member of the body of Christ, which is the church. Every member of the church has a ministry to serve in the church. Every member of the body needs every other member and every member has at least one spiritual gift (Gangel 1983, 112–113).

Gifts are for **manifestations of the Holy Spirit** (1 Cor. 12:4-11), given to build up the church (12:7, 14:4) and the individuals within it. It is through Christ, by learning and responding to Him that anyone is edified. Therefore, gifts communicate his reality through word or action in service of God to fellow believers and non-Christians too (Packer 2003).

2.2 Biblical Basis of Spiritual Gifts

The Bible does not give a formal definition of spiritual gifts but there is enough Bible teaching regarding their nature and function but in a general sense, all blessings that come from God may be called gifts. According to Stitzinger, the New Testament uses many Greek words to speak of "gifts." There are three terms used interchangeably or explicitly in Scripture to identify spiritual gifts:

Gifts are Ta Charismata

Charisma is the word most frequently used for spiritual gifts in the New Testament, and it always refers to gifts of divine grace. *Charisma* comes from the Greek verb *charizomai*, "I

show favor", which is derived from the noun χάρις (*charts*, "grace"). *Charizomai*, means simply "to say or do something agreeable" or "to give graciously or cheerfully." Therefore Charisma, means 'to give,' with special reference to the grace, favor and kindness which inspire and accompany the gift." In the NT *charisma* is used exclusively by Paul except for Peter's reference to gifts in 1 Pet 4:10. In Rom 5:15, 16 and 6:23, it is translated "gift," referring to the gift of eternal life. *Charisma* also occurs in 1 Cor. 7:7, referring to the state of celibacy as a special grace from God. Paul was the first to give the term this meaning; it is from Paul that *charisma* first takes on the sense of God's gifts of grace in Scripture. So, the word *charisma* means a free and undeserved gift, an unmerited gift from God's grace or spiritual graces and endowments (Stitzinger 2003).

Gifts are Ta Pneumatika

Gifts are Pneumatika means "*pertaining to the Spirit, spiritual. . . caused by or filled with the Spirit.*" The term occurs in the NT and almost always refers to the divine πνεύμα (*pneuma*, "Spirit"), "caused by or filled with the Spirit, pertaining or corresponding to the Spirit." It could best be translated "spiritual." It is used to speak of spiritual persons, in 1 Corinthians 2:15 and 3:1, and of spiritual things, in 1 Corinthians 9:11. It is used of as spiritual gifts only in 1 Corinthians 12:1 and 14:1. The word *pneumatika*, therefore, does not apply only to the extraordinary gifts, but to all spiritual gifts. They are a manifestation of the Spirit and are to be exercised for the common good (Stitzinger 2003).

Gifts are Ta Dorea

The word *dorea* means "*a gift.*" In the New Testament it is used of a gift of God or Christ, implying that the gift is the result of God's grace. In Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11; 17, '*dorea*' refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 4:7, Paul uses the word to teach that the first and foundational gift is the Holy Spirit himself. He is the personal embodiment of God's grace, and spiritual gifts are particular manifestations of the Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 in the midst of an emphasis on spiritual gifts, Paul says, all believers are baptized into one body by one Spirit and were all made to drink of one Spirit. This word study teaches us that the first gift given to believers is the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit has entered into the innermost being of the believer and is at work in us, we are assured of the possession of spiritual gifts, the grace and power to exercise them. These gifts are endowments or abilities given by the Spirit so that we can function as members of the body of Christ, contribute to the life and growth of the body, and through the body serve the world (Wiebe 1980).

2.3 Nature of Spiritual gifts

There are general principles regarding the Spiritual gifts as shown in the Scriptures. According to Kinghorn, the Scriptures reveal that:

- God imparts spiritual gifts according to his divine grace; they cannot be earned through human merit;
- God gives spiritual gifts according to his own discretion; he is not bound by man's wishes. God takes the initiative in his dealings with man;
- God wills that every Christian exercise spiritual gift; these divine enabling is not limited to a few believers. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not exclusively for ordained clergy they belong to every member of body of Christ;

- God provides gifts for the purpose of ministry and service; they are not given in order to draw attention to man or satisfy his ego. The bond between gifts and service shows that God blesses us not to be self-serving but so that we can become a blessing to others;
- God intends that the ministry of the Church be accomplished through spiritual gifts; human talents are not adequate for spiritual ministry (Kinghorn 1981, 20–30).

3.0 In-Depth Analysis of Spiritual Gifts

I Corinthians 12 -14, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4, outline how the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit supports and sustains the life and work of the Christian community. According to Wiebe, the gifts are many and when listed they look alike which suggests that they are not exhaustive but they are representative. The following classification is suggestive and the brief statements are meant to help our understanding of the way the Spirit works in the churches (Wiebe 1980).

3.1 Gifts to the Church

The gifts to the church are associated with the officers of the church and whose task is to enable the Christian community to serve and to minister. These gifts are found in Ephesians 4:11-12, they build up the church and prepare the body of Christ for ministry and service. They are: *apostleship* uniquely applied to the 12 disciples whom Jesus chose and a few others who had laid the foundations of the church, today the gift of apostleship can be understood in terms of missionary work or church-planting ministries. *Prophecy* is the ability to proclaim God's Word authoritatively and bring the truths of God to bear on the lives of people. *Evangelism*, the grace to share the gospel so that men respond freely to it, applies to mass, small group, or personal evangelism. The gift to care for others, or to shepherd them is needed not only by the *Pastor-teacher* but also by all those who assist the pastor in the shepherding work of the church (Kinghorn 1976, 43–59).

3.2 Speaking gifts

To the *teacher* is given the ability to present God's Word clearly so that it will be understandable and applicable to daily life. *Exhortations* is the gift of seeing the needs of others and speaking words to help, correct, comfort and encourage as they to move forward in their walk by faith. The utterances of *wisdom* and of *knowledge* grant a comprehension of truth in its larger dimensions and the ability to express it and to apply it to a given situation. *Distinguishing between spirits* is the ability to discern between truth and error (Wiebe 1980).

3.3 Service gifts

New Testament regards all Christians as ministers and servants and each is given spiritual gifts so that they can contribute to the body of Christ in a special ministry. So service gifts if properly understood and faithfully exercised can add a new dimension to the Christian church. *Service* is a special ability given to identify the unmet needs involved in a task related to God's work, and to make use of available resources to meet those needs and help accomplish the desired goals especially those involved in caring for the poor, the suffering and the depressed. *Helps* refers to the gifts of those who invest use the talents they have in the life and ministry of other members of the church, thus enabling them to increase their effectiveness in their spiritual gifts. *Acts of mercy* are ministries to the sick, the aged, orphans, widows and the disabled. The grace to trust God for what most believers think to be impossible as well as the gift of vision which sees beyond the ordinary limits is the gift of *faith*. Those with the gift of *giving* share freely, far beyond the average, of their material goods. *Leadership and administration* are abilities to lead others and to manage the affairs of the church (Wiebe 1980).

3.4 Sign gifts

Healing is the ability to heal the sick, physically, spiritually, emotionally and restore health apart from the use of natural means. *Miracles*, is a special ability to serve as human intermediaries through whom God uses to perform powerful acts that are perceived by observers to have altered the ordinary course of nature. *Speaking in tongues*, special ability to speak to God in a language they have never learned and/or to receive and communicate an immediate message from God to His people through a divinely anointed utterance in a language they have never learned. The *gift of interpretation of tongues* is a special ability to make known in the vernacular the message of one who speaks in tongues (Wiebe 1980).

3.5 Other gifts

There are gifts of the craftsman, music, leading worship, hospitality, prayer and intercession, art, writer, technicians, the linguist all contribute so tremendously to the life and work of the church today. Creativity of the Holy Spirit makes available these gifts needed by the church in any age and stage.

4.0 Application

Utilization of Spiritual gifts in the church

The gifts of the **Spirit should not operate independently but as supporting body of Christian believers**. Although believers are converted individually by Christ, conversion always relates intimately to every person who is a disciple of Christ. Outside the regulative setting of the Christian community, believers become vulnerable to imbalance, division and heresy. But with the fellowship of the institutional church, believers are able to have historic continuity with the past and become an heir of sound doctrine. Therefore, spiritual gifts should flow naturally out of union with Jesus and used in the body of Christ.

The gifts are given **to edify others and help them grow as Christ's disciples**. They are to be unselfish, spiritual, morally sound, and encouraging. Paul says that the gifts given by the Holy Spirit and should be developed for the greater good of all within the local church.

Spiritual gifts should **draw Christians together in unity**. Christian unity is one of the most powerful assets of the church and Spiritual gifts rightly understood can aid in unifying Christian believers. If gifts are used well, they can lead to greater appreciation of one another and a more allegiance to Christ.

Spiritual gifts should receive **a balanced emphasis in the church**. Too much or little emphasis on any aspect of Christian experience can lead to imbalance. Too much can lead to confusion and too little can lead into dry ineffective Christian life so a balance should be struck (Kinghorn 1976, 117–124).

New realities of the use of the Spiritual gifts in Churches in Kenya

In the Pentecostal Churches in Kenya, there is strong emphasis of use of **speaking in tongues**. Wrong use of speaking in tongues, just like in the days of the apostles, was caused by ignorance, spiritual immaturity or even willful abuse so it is today. We witness strong hunger for the Christians to speak in tongues; some people go an extent of training themselves and practice so that they can have a sense of superiority. There is a perception that if one is not speaking in tongues, one is not spirit filled. This is a negative notion which needs to be corrected with proper teachings.

Proper teachings and understanding of the gifts are all equal should be taught from the pulpit and proper theology taught. Then there should clear teaching on the main purpose of speaking in tongues. It was a sign, to the unbelievers to signify the presence and power of God Acts 2 and 1 Cor. 14:22. It is also for edification of the church if the tongue was interpreted 1 Cor. 14: 5, 26 and was used in prayer 1 Cor. 14:2. These Scriptures shows that if tongues exercised in a proper way they are beneficial to the church (Gangel 1983, 50).

My suggestion is that there should be more emphasis on teaching of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24) because this is the natural outcome of the Spirit's presence in a believer. More emphasis should also be on the need for proclaiming the Word in understandable speech. Kenyan Christians should not be moved to the extreme need for speaking in tongues but rather examine all teachings and all practices by the scripture and find out if they have other gifts and use them in the church.

In Kenya, the medical care is very expensive and out of reach for majority of the population. In the recent past we have seen high incidences of terminal diseases like cancer, diabetes, TB and HIV. Many people cannot afford medical care in Government and Private hospitals, making the sick and their families desperate for healing. Out of need for treatment, we are witnessing a rise in self-styled healer running **healing ministries**. There is a tendency to those with the gifts to take advantage of the believers' vulnerability and sell the 'healing' at a fee.

I think there is need to educate on how the gift of healing works because it is clear that healing is from God and cannot be commanded. The gift does not heal every illness nor does the healing depend on the faith of the sick, so the ministers of the word should teach that the gift of healing requires God's power and not human effort (Gangel 1983, 109–110). Brown envisions, healing in the world today as mobilizing a power potent enough to cure physical diseases as well as social and political maladies such as unemployment, alcoholism, domestic strife, depression, and racial hatred. He believes that God is sufficiently powerful to transform the physical world by working with, or through modern medicine - by helping surgeons, medication, or psychological counseling to function optimally (Brown, 2014).

We have also seen trend in search for prophesy and miracles. Many Christians are preoccupied with miracles and prophesy. People are looking for pastors who have double gift of prophesy and miracles. Prophesy involves the proclamation and exposition of the truths revealed in the Bible. The church is a prophetic institution established to teach the world by its preaching ordinances. The New Testament teachings consistently teach that Christian prophesies should be orderly, positive in orientation and edifying to the church. True prophets are not arrogant; they give valid prophesies which are consistent with the scriptures (Kinghorn 1976, 49–50).

Unfortunately, people want prophets / pastors who can to tell them what they want to hear and they are preoccupied with miracles of financial breakthrough. No wonder we have many pastors who ask their congregation for 'seed money' in order to get financial breakthrough. Miracles have become one of the biggest 'thing' in the church and if there are no miracle the congregation moves. This shows slowly there is a move towards miracles instead of the Word of God. This is a sample of many abuses of spiritual gifts and Christians should avail themselves of the revelation of Scripture and also find a workable base for solving their problems. The basic truth is that spiritual gifts are bestowed on the church today for purposes of fulfilling the work of God in and through His church but not for personal gain.

Lastly **many believers do not know that they have gifts.** This is evident because there are many Christian services which remain undone. No one can grasp the full scope of the Christian

life at the very onset of commitment to Christ. Along together with other of Christian experiences, spiritual gifts are usually discovered as one matures in Christian discipleship. Sometimes spiritual gifts lie undiscovered and unused for years and so there is need to be alert and respond positively to any call of service in church. Being open to God that you can be used as a channel is the first step; then the believer can examine their aspirations for Christian service and ministry and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and be ready to obey.

5.0 Conclusion

On reflection and after researching on this topic of spiritual gifts I am delighted to know that every believer has a spiritual gift. I have discovered that I have a gift of administration, teaching and mercy. I learnt about them by carrying out a spiritual gift survey and I think every Christian should identify their gifts and be able to support the church. How can Christians identify their own gift or gifts? By trying themselves out in paths of service that attract them, or asking close people to them what they think their gifts are. The presence or absence of a gift will quickly become apparent.

In conclusion, there are many spiritual gifts bestowed on the church today and the proper use of these gifts in the power of the Spirit is essential to fulfilling the work of God in and through His church. All gifts are equal and the best gifts will always be those that express most love and do best to most people. I support my thesis that the Spiritual Gifts should be used to manifest the work of God in believers' life and to edify the church.

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