

SPIRITUAL GIFTS & FRUIT

PART 5

GOD'S PROVISIONS FOR TODAY; FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT & NATURAL TALENTS

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”
Gal. 5:22-23 NKJV



Review of Study 21

The topic of spiritual gifts is fully explained in the Bible. Aside from minor exceptions, the gifts began to be given to mankind at the Ascension of Christ, and continued to be given at Pentecost and to the early Church. The purpose of the gifts was to act as a sign to the unbelievers in Israel of the need to repent and to believe in Jesus, and to empower the believers so they could go into all the world and preach the gospel. Later, in the early Church, the gifts were given to equip the saints for the work of the ministry and to edify the body of Christ. The gifts were said to be *in part*, meaning they had a limited ministry in what they could accomplish (most likely because God was working through human intermediaries). The spiritual gifts were described as *dim*, *in part*, and *childish* because there was a more excellent way. Paul notes that there was a specific time limitation for the gifts, and when that time limitation had been reached, the gifts would fail, cease, and vanish away. The time limitation mentioned was *until* there was unity in the early Church, and when the *perfect* Word of God was completed (the Word for our Age). The unity Paul spoke about existed by 64-66 AD, and the Word of God was completed in the same period; thus, the time limitation for gifts was over. There is ample biblical proof the gifts did pass away, just as predicted, in the mid-first century. Today we are thoroughly equipped for the work of the ministry, by means of

INTRODUCTION

We have stated that all the spiritual gifts, as mentioned in the biblical lists of gifts, have passed away. To most people, this is a controversial, radical, and an extreme viewpoint. In religious circles, extremism is the kiss of death (unless you want to be considered a cult), and this teaching seems well into the extreme category. Before you consider this teaching to be "too far out," please consider that *Grace 4 You Ministries* does not need to

support any particular denominational viewpoint, does not have to adhere to the writing of founding fathers, and is not compelled by religious organizations to follow their beliefs on this topic. In our personal studies, the alternative viewpoints and writings on this topic have been carefully considered. These studies on spiritual gifts and fruit are unfettered, that is, not constrained by others. We have a distinct advantage because we can

freely teach the truth of God's Word without constraint or fear of censure.

What is presented here, on spiritual gifts, is scriptural and based upon sound exegesis. However, some people will say something like, "We knew a group who believed much like you teach, and they caused nothing but problems in the local church." That may well be true, and it is unfortunate. Knowing the truth should not make a person contentious or cause them to create factions in a church. Those who did create problems in the Church are not being led by the spirit, which we will discuss in this study. Knowing the truth sets you free to understand the Word and its Author. However, knowing the truth requires great care in expressing it so there is no needless offense.

This study will help clarify many things that may be troubling you. For example, even if the gifts of being a pastor or teacher have passed, does that mean it is wrong to have a pastor or teacher today? As stated in the

previous study, the office or function of pastors and teachers still exists, but *how* a person fills that office or function is the issue. Today, a person does not instantaneously fill the position by a direct gift from God, but through other means. Those who understand the gifts issue correctly, but do not understand that certain offices and positions still exist, have caused problems in local churches. Some of those who have come to see all the gifts have passed, have assumed there are no such offices today; thus, they believe there is no need for pastors, teachers, and evangelists. You can see this would cause great animus and contention in a church. This study will help establish the balance needed so we, per Paul's instructions, can endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Discuss: Nothing in these studies suggests there should not be pastors, teachers, or evangelists today. We believe the need for these offices exists today, but it is important to know how a person becomes qualified to fill such an office.

WHAT GOD GIVES US TODAY

God works in our lives to renew our minds and transform our lives. As He transforms us, the Spirit produces within us something far superior to spiritual gifts. The Spirit produces His fruit within us. In addition to the fruit of the Spirit, we all have natural talents, skills, and abilities which, when properly developed, offer some of the functions formerly provided by gifts. Natural talents and abilities are God-given endowments to all humans. We can further develop our natural talents and abilities through study and preparation. Our natural endowments, coupled with the fruit of the Spirit, can enable a person to fill an office or position for the Lord's work today. However, God will not instantaneously gift a person to fill that office; the person must study, prepare, and have the character traits required. There was no time for developing into a position in the first century, which is why people had to receive an instantaneous gift. The

Spirit and His fruit provide the character traits and value systems necessary for any ministry; they also provide an internal guidance system, a necessity for any Christian endeavor to succeed.

The Age of Grace stands in distinct contrast to Pentecost. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came *upon* the believer (an external presence); accordingly, they were blessed with external, temporary, sign gifts (gifts that can be sensed or experienced). In the early Church, the Spirit came *within* the believer and gave a mixture of sign and ministerial gifts. When our Age was fully revealed, the Spirit continued to indwell believers, but the spiritual gifts faded away. Clearly, what God is doing today is not the same thing as at Pentecost. With the Spirit within us, we have a more intimate relationship with the Lord;

accordingly, we are given something *internal*, unseen, permanent, and special from the Lord.

When the Holy Spirit takes residence within us, He works from our interior to transform our lives. His work has a beneficial outcome, that is, it bears results, which the Bible calls the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit manifests His presence within the believer by the production of His fruit. **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law"** (Gal. 5:22-23). The fruit² of the Spirit (or spiritual fruit) is the result of the Spirit's action and influence upon us. The nine items listed are traits, virtues, and attributes, developed within us; thus, we become more like Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit.

The list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 is not intended to be a complete account of all the possible fruit. The list is meant to provide, in brief form, a representative sample of what constitutes spiritual fruit. Nine fruit are listed in Galatians 5, but it is very likely that each of the fruit in Galatians 5 refers to a broad category, and within that broad category are many subcategories of fruit.³ The Bible also mentions the fruit of righteousness and holiness, that is, righteousness and

² In Galatians 5:22-23, the word *fruit* is a singular noun, requiring a singular verb. In these verses, fruit is used in a metaphorical sense, referring to the outcome of the Spirit's work within us. His work is fruitful, that is, it produces a beneficial outcome. Since *fruit* refers to the outcome, it is singular. Nine items are listed as the outcome of His work: love, joy, peace.... The nine items can be called virtues, character traits, attributes, manifestations of the Spirit's work, and so on. However, in common terminology, we sometimes speak of the "fruit of the Spirit" in the sense of the nine items themselves being fruit. In this latter case, the word fruit is considered a collective singular (like team, herd, or group); based upon the context, a singular or plural verb may be required.

³ For example, under the broad category of kindness, the following subcategories could apply: compassion, mercy, empathy, open-heartedness, tenderness, and carefulness. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, love (a fruit in Galatians 5) is used as a broad category and defined using many terms that are consistent with other known fruit of the Spirit, such as longsuffering, kindness, self-controlled, patience.... In 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, many attributes of a Christian are shown, and those attributes, such as contentment, truthful, not puffed up, non-judgmental, sincere... are consistent with fruit of the Spirit. So, it seems there are many fruit of the Spirit, far too many for Paul to list in one passage without distracting the reader.

holiness bear good results in our lives (Phil. 1:11, Rom. 6:22, 7:4; Heb. 12:11). Righteousness and holiness are given to us upon Salvation, and the Holy Spirit works in our lives to enable us have lives that are holy and righteous. Thus, there seem to be many more fruit than those listed in Galatians 5.

After Paul gave the list of gifted people to the early Church (1 Cor. 12:28-30), he told the Church saints it was proper to desire the best gifts, presumably meaning the most useful for their specific situation (1 Cor. 14:1-6). **"But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way"** (1 Cor. 12:31). However, the spiritual gifts were only going to be active for a few more years, then they would pass away when the perfect Word of God was completed (1 Cor. 13:8). The main emphasis of Paul was on the fact there was a more excellent way of administering the grace of God than by the use of spiritual gifts. While the gifts would pass away, something would remain, **"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love"** (1 Cor. 13:13). The three abiding items are not spiritual gifts, but are fruit of the Spirit; love and faith(fullness) are specifically mentioned as fruit in Galatians 5:22. The more excellent way was based upon that which would endure the entire age, not on that which would fade away.

The fruit of the Spirit becomes an integral part of who we are deep inside. Paul says there is no law against spiritual fruit because it works for good, in contrast to the works of the flesh, which run counter to civil and moral laws. The fruit of the Spirit is what we should desire, since the attributes of the Spirit change our internal character and conform us to Christ. The believers in Corinth were told to desire spiritual gifts while they were still active, but there was a more excellent way coming. The gifts were in part, childish, and did not thoroughly equip the believers for the Lord's work. The more excellent way is based upon that which would endure the entire Age of Grace, that is, *the completed Word of God and spiritual fruit produced within the believer.*

Examining the Fruit

The list of fruit in Galatians 5 implies three groups (as was the case for the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12). No original language requirement states there are three groups, but a logical grouping is presented. If there are three groups, the first three (love, joy, and peace) would relate to *basic spiritual attributes* that would be effective in any venue of life. The next three (longsuffering, kindness, and goodness) would belong to the second group, relating to our *social interactions* with others. The final three (faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) would relate to *our personal relationships*: with God (faithfulness), individual people (gentleness), and one's self (self-control). A true Christian is faithful to God, gentle to his or her neighbor, and has his or her self under control at all times. All the fruit come from the Holy Spirit, but He will only work in our lives as we allow Him; thus, we have to make sure we cooperate with the Lord in every aspect of our lives so that He can produce this fruit within us.

The fruit of the Spirit is specifically designed for the believer's spiritual life, not for ministering to a group. The fruit of the Spirit primarily changes the individual, and in a secondary manner, benefits flow outwardly, affecting social and personal relationships. Through the Spirit's fruit, we experience personal growth in Christ, that is, we are conformed more and more to a measure of His likeness. In contrast, the gifts were given to individuals, for the purpose of ministering to a group and to glorify God. Gifts were less likely to provide an internal, personal benefit.

Your Thoughts: Gifts were not complete but "in part," and for childhood; consider how much better it is to have the adult characteristics provided by the Spirit's fruit.

Oddly, little interest exists in surveys for "discovering your spiritual fruit." Such surveys would be most appropriate for the Age of Grace. If a person lacks a certain spiritual fruit, that would be a matter for prayer and commitment. A person lacking in one area would then want to allow the Spirit to work in his or her life to

produce whatever fruit is lacking. The fruit a person does possess should be used consistently in a person's life. (Although spiritual fruit is personal, other people benefit from the fruit's presence in your life.)

Our understanding of spiritual fruit is often lacking because the spiritual gifts are thought to be superior. The sign gifts were experiential (could be sensed in some way), making them seem more exciting and "glitzy" than fruit. Spiritual fruit may not seem as desirable because fruit is not experiential and does not grab the attention of others. However, if we recognize God's more excellent way, we will not be fooled by glitz, but rather rejoice in His better plan for us today. God's purpose for gifts has been completed, and the gifts have passed away. Even if the gifts existed, they would be inferior to the fruit of the Spirit. *Gifts were in part, childish, and incomplete*; they could not change a person on the inside. The quest for gifts has a "Pharisee connection," that is, the Pharisees loved to stand on the street corner and pray so they could be seen; the same is often true for those seeking gifts. Always remember, we are to walk by faith, not by sight or experience. External and visible evidences of power, which others can see and that supposedly prove a person is special, are what many people want today. What God wants is to produce His fruit in us, thereby changing us from within.

Only Christians have the fruit of the Spirit. Unbelievers may have a form of fruit that seems similar. You know many unbelievers with this form of fruit, and these people can sometimes be more loving and kind than some believers. One difference between the believer and unbeliever is the Spirit produces true fruit in the believer, while the unbeliever has fruit of a human origin. Another difference between a believer and an unbeliever is the believer can have all the fruit, perfectly formed, and without worms (bad within the good). What the Spirit produces is the real, lasting thing. The good fruit the Spirit produces is not counterfeit or offset by some adverse character traits (worms), as can often happen with unbelievers.

When a person becomes saved, he or she receives the Holy Spirit and His fruit is produced in the person's life. The believer is not more intelligent, better looking, more athletic, or any such thing, than the unbeliever. The difference between the two is Salvation, the indwelling Spirit, and spiritual fruit. The indwelling Spirit becomes the believer's *internal guidance system*, empowering him or her to have godly values, judgments, character traits, perspectives, frame of reference, and so forth. This guidance system is of more worth than anything this world can offer. But, be careful! Just because a person has the Spirit's guidance does not mean the unsaved will value it, or that a person may not mistakenly express personal desires over His. Some religious people (whether saved or not) may be jealous of the fruit in your life, and work against you. Thus, with great wisdom comes great care and understanding.

Discuss: Can you give examples of the difference between true spiritual fruit and human fruit?

Natural Talents, Skills, and Abilities

Spiritual gifts and fruit of the Spirit do not define our entire human experience. Neither one explains why some people (including unbelievers) are great artists, musicians, poets, scientists, engineers, mathematicians, physicians, craftsman, athletes, philosophers, and so on. If not gifts or fruit, what is the source? The types of people just listed, and there are countless more, are blessed with natural talents and abilities from God. God gives these natural talents, skills, and abilities⁴ to all humans, and always has. A person can further develop these natural talents by hard study, work, and perseverance. The existence of these talents and abilities can enable a person to easily grasp the most complex mathematics, while the same person may struggle with common tasks due to a lack of everyday skills. Because of these natural gifts, some people can excel easily in one area, but not another. God endows each person with such natural abilities; the abilities may also come from our

⁴ The terms talents, skills, and abilities are used as examples of natural endowments each person has from God. These three terms will not always be used; even the use of one term is sufficient as an example.

nurture (how we are reared) and from our genetic makeup.

Oftentimes you will hear a Christian say something like, "Oh my, that person has such a great singing voice; it certainly is a gift from God." However, the problem is you can always find an unbeliever with an equally good voice, or better; but God does not gift unbelievers. God does give each human (believers and unbelievers) natural endowments (talents, skills, and abilities); He also enables us to develop new ones. However, He is not instantaneously gifting people to be great singers, or anything similar. Again, people have special talents in a certain areas, natural advantages due to their nurture, special skills and abilities due to their genetics, or may have the knack to develop a talent exceptionally well. However, do not confuse such abilities with a biblical gift from God. We all have talents, abilities, and special strengths; these are God's endowments to all mankind, but not gifts in the biblical sense.

If spiritual gifts (which have passed away) and natural talents and abilities (here today) are to be clearly understood, some examples are necessary. One primary difference between a spiritual gift and a natural endowment from God is *how* one acquires the gift or talent. When a person received the gift of tongues at Pentecost, it was instantaneous and complete (ready to use). Today, a person can attend language school and by using natural abilities can learn how to speak a foreign language (tongue). The results of a spiritual gift and the use of a talent/ability are much the same; both individuals can go and teach other people in a foreign language (the goal is not to babble nonsense in a church in an attempt to appear spiritual). A major difference between a gift and talent/ability is how they are attained; another difference is *the need* for that ability today. The gift of discernment was desperately needed in the first century, so it was given rapidly. Discernment is often needed today, but godly discernment is gained through years of experience and walking with the Lord. Incidentally, the unsaved have natural discernment, part of God's endowments for all people, so we can live in a

civil manner. There has been, and is, a continuing need for people with talents, skills, and abilities, so God has assured them to the human race.

Discuss: The human experience is what we experience in life upon this earth. That experience, even for unbelievers, is heavily influenced by God. What do you consider to be natural endowments from God?

CONCLUSIONS

Spiritual gifts, fruit of the Spirit, and natural endowments are summarized below. These three items come from the Lord, in one way or another. Knowing these three items, using your God-given common sense, and following the Spirit's guidance, you will be able to better understand the human experience.⁵ Understanding these three items enables you to know what to expect, what not to expect, and to value what God is doing for you today.

1. Spiritual gifts were given quickly and only to believers. The gifted person could immediately accomplish miraculous things. The gifts were designed to provide signs and to provide for the ministry; they did not change the person on the inside. They vanished away in the first century.

2. Fruit of the Spirit is developed inside the believer, through the renewal of the mind by the Holy Spirit. Mind renewal and the production of fruit are processes that take considerable time. Only believers have the fruit of the Spirit (unbelievers can have something that seems similar, but is of human origin and prone to failure). The Spirit's fruit is internal and apparently permanent. His fruit changes our innermost soul (mind), changes the essence of who we are, and enables us to be the person

⁵ The human experience refers to all we have as a result of our relationship with God. The three items we have discussed are only the start, since that experience includes: salvation, transformation, glorification, blessings,

God wants us to be. The fruit of the Spirit is the manifestation of the Spirit in our lives, producing His attributes in us. His fruit enables us to mature into the likeness of our Lord and makes our endeavors pleasing to God.

3. Talents, skills, and abilities enable people today to perform and accomplish great things. Talents, skills, and abilities are natural endowments from God. These endowments often exist early in life, and they are given to all people (nurture and genetics may be involved). These endowments enable people to make great strides in the arts, literature, and science; provide help in daily life; enable individuals and families to prosper; help build civilizations; assure the development of great institutions; promote the creation of extraordinary things; and lead to marvelous discoveries. The unsaved also have this endowment from the Lord, so they, too, can do great things. Natural endowments help us occupationally and professionally; thus, they can help a person fill the office of pastor, teacher, evangelist, and so on. However, natural endowments by themselves do not enable us to do great things; we must also study, prepare, and persevere. In addition, for ministry-related ventures and interpersonal relationships, a Christian's success is very much a function of the fruit of the Spirit.

GOSPEL

The gift of Salvation remains in effect today. If you believe you are a sinner and that Christ died for your sins, God will give you Salvation as a free gift. That gift is an act of God's kindness and grace. Salvation is immediate and complete (you get it all when you believe). You do not have to do anything to receive Salvation; in fact, anything you do will not be accepted by God. Doing something is contrary to grace. Faith in Christ is not doing something, it is believing something. The matter of not doing something confuses people because in the Bible doing something was required as evidence of a person's faith in previous ages. For example, Mark 16:16 says a person has to believe *and* be baptized to be saved. Peter confirmed this in Acts 2:38. Yes, in past ages a believer did have to believe and do

something in order to be saved; but, such requirements were for people subject to the Law. In the Age of Grace, God only asks for faith in Jesus Christ. **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..."** (Rom. 1:16a). Once you are saved, the Spirit of God will begin ministering to your heart and begin the transformation process, which produces the fruit of the Spirit within you. God made Salvation as simple as can be for us. When you become saved, you will not be given visible or experiential signs as proof you are saved. However, the Spirit of God will assure you of His presence in quiet and comforting ways.

Author: Stephen F. Shober