

Spiritual Gifts for the Gospel

Look around – not only are the fields white and ready for harvest, there are already many laborers in the fields. The main problem is, they aren't all laboring! The work of harvesting is not reserved for the ordained ministers alone – all members are encouraged to participate in the harvest. Many already are, but we need to expand the role of the members.

Jesus commands us to make disciples. He commands us to teach and to help each Christian mature in the faith. Therefore, we want to help our members grow in grace and knowledge, and to recognize and use the gifts that the Holy Spirit is giving them. God places members in the body as it pleases him, and he gives them gifts for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-27). Therefore, for the maximum growth and health of the church, we want each member to use his or her gifts, working together, being led by Jesus Christ to build the church up (Ephesians 4:11-16).

There is much that we could say about spiritual gifts. Right now we can highlight a few simple facts:

- The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to each member (1 Cor. 12:11).
- These gifts are for the common good (verse 7).
- There are many types of gifts (verses 8-11).
- All gifts help the body of Christ function (verses 12-18).
- No one should envy another member's gifts (verses 15-17).
- No one should despise another member's gifts (verses 21-23).
- Therefore, the members should have concern for one another (verse 25).
- Gifts should be used, not hidden under a basket (Matthew 5:15-16).
- Ministers should prepare members for works of service (Eph. 4:11-12).
- Works of service build up the body of Christ (verse 12).
- Our goal is unity in the faith and knowledge of Christ (verse 13).
- Christ is the full measure of Christian maturity (verse 13).
- Only in that maturity will we have doctrinal stability (verse 14).
- Our goal is to grow up into our Head, Jesus Christ (verse 15).
- From Christ, we build ourselves up in love (verse 16).
- We grow as each member does his or her work (verse 16).

Therefore, we encourage members to do the work God has called them to do. We want them to use the gifts God has given. This mutual service is what builds the church internally, helps it function in its mission and helps it grow by attracting and incorporating new members. Every member has a role in ministering to others. But each member must perform that role in such a way that it builds up the whole body, not tears down the body. We do not all serve in the same way,

evangelize in the same way, show compassion in the same way, etc. Everyone cannot be forced into the same pattern or mold, but we are to work together in our diverse approaches.

This is part of the great commission. Jesus told his disciples to make disciples and teach them to obey everything he commanded them (Matthew 28:19-20). It is to be an endless cycle: The disciples become disciplers. Those who are taught become teachers. We all do this in different ways, of course, according to the gifts God supplies, but we all have a part to play in the work of the body of Christ. Each member should serve. Each member should minister (which simply means "to give aid or service") to others. Each member has a ministry, that is, a way in which God has gifted him or her to serve in the kingdom work of the church. Each member is a minister of Jesus Christ. The church is a royal priesthood, Peter wrote (1 Peter 2:9), and each member has a priestly role, interceding in prayer for others, serving one another's needs, bearing one another's burdens and sharing in the work of the gospel.

We want all members to grow and participate in the work. We do not have the money to hire every worker, of course, nor should we want to. The Bible presents a picture of every member doing some work. Church pastors serve in the role of administrative leadership, facilitating the work of Christ's loved ones — casting the joyous vision of their calling to Christ's kingdom, praying for them, training them, developing them, empowering them, encouraging them, advising them, supporting them — and, of course, preaching the word — all supervised by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures.

We have much to do — so much that it usually seems overwhelming. That's because we often only see with physical eyes. But when we look with the eyes of faith, we are assured of Jesus' promise: He has unlimited power, and he is with us always (verses 18, 20). He will turn our trials into good, our tears into joy. We are thankful for that, and thankful to be called into the work of the King of kings. Like the Samaritan leper, we fall on our knees before Jesus and praise the Lord for what he has done for us! We have been cleansed, and like Isaiah, we say: "Here I am, O Lord. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:5-8).