

# Mark Stibbe – Know your Spiritual Gifts

---

Zondervan 2004 (1<sup>st</sup> published 1997)

Notes by Alison Morgan, May 2009

*Excellent discussion of spiritual gifts, with examples, well researched, with bibliographical notes. Sometimes controversial, and he tends to offer several definitions for each of the gifts, but it's a good and helpful book.*

## Introduction

*Charismata* is best translated 'grace gift'. Our task is to practise the presents of God – to find which presents have our name on them, to unwrap them, and enjoy using them in bringing pleasure to the Father.

Much of our understanding of spiritual gifts has been dictated by experience rather than exegesis – book aims to fill this gap, to provide bridge between recent scholarship and the Church.

There is a recent tendency to refer to behaviours such as falling, laughing, weeping as 'manifestations' of the spirit – but in 1 Cor this word is used to describe the *charismata* which follow. The behaviours are human emotional reactions to the power of the Spirit – not the thing itself. The book aims to correct this too.

### The nature of the gifts

Father, Son and Spirit (1 Cor 12.4-6). By using the word *charismata* for the gifts of the Spirit, Paul is emphasizing they do not come from natural abilities. Before Paul the word *charismata* is used only twice in the Septuagint, in Ecclesiasticus 7.33 and 38.30, where it's used to denote a 'lovely work'. Paul uses the word 16 times, Peter once. Paul uses it in two senses, general and particular: Rom 6.23 the free gift of God is eternal life; and 1 Cor 7.7, each man has his own grace gift from God.

*Charismata*: Romans 1.11, 12.6; 1 Cor 1.7; 7.7; 12.4/9/28/30/31

The other words Paul uses to describe the spiritual gifts are works of service (*diakonai*) and workings (*energemata*).

Works of service – the term highlights why they are given.

- *Charismata* – their origin
- *Diakonai* – their purpose
- *Energemata* – their power. They are 'manifestations' of the Spirit – like lights powered by an electric current.

### The purpose of the gifts

1 Cor 12.7 'for the common good'. By using the body image he talks about the gifts in a corporate, not individualistic, way. Gifts are received not for the benefit of the individual but of the body of the Church.

### The employment of the gifts

Through love. 1 Cor 12 and 14 are about the gifts; 13 is about love.

### The pursuit of the gifts

How do we receive them? By being initiated into the kingdom of God – repentance, faith, baptism in water and in the HS. All the gifts are available today – Paul says they will cease 'when perfection comes', and the word he uses is *teleios*, usually used to refer to end times. Until then, in the not yet, their use is essential.

Irenaeus:

- For some drive out demons with certainty and truth, so that often those who have themselves been cleansed from evil spirits believe and are in the Church, and some have foreknowledge of things to be, and visions and prophetic speech, and others cure the sick by the laying on of hands and make them whole, and even we have said, the dead have been raised and remain with us for many years. And why should I say more? it is not possible to tell the number of the gifts which the Church throughout the whole world, having received them from God in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, uses each day for the benefit of the heathen, deceiving none, and making profit from none. For as it receives freely from God, it ministers also freely.

### The extent of the gifts

The NT lists are not exhaustive, and there is overlap and addition (eg 1 Cor 7.7 celibacy).

1 Cor 12 – 'to one.. to another'... 'do all...?' – it is not God's intention for a Christian to be 'omnicharismatic'! Paul wishes us all to have the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 14.31) and desires that all should speak in tongues. It seems we may additionally have a primary gift (eg teaching) which may be accompanied by other related gifts (eg faith, wisdom, knowledge).

- Gifts of teaching – wisdom and knowledge
- Gifts of power – faith, healing, miracles

- Gifts of revelation – prophecy and discernment
- Gifts of adoration – tongues, interpretation

(p58)

## The Word of Wisdom

In popular charismatic teaching it's understood to be an inspired application of a word of knowledge, which in turn is defined as a supernatural insight into hidden facets of a person or situation. Eg Wagner – wisdom is the application of knowledge into specific situations. But it's a word of wisdom. MS offers a two part definition:

- *The gift of being able to understand and to express something of God's wisdom, in such a way that the Church is built up and strengthened*

But there's a deeper/broader aspect too. If we look at 1 Cor 2 we see that wisdom is concerned with salvation history, not just with God's purposes in the life of a church/individual. The gift of wisdom helps us to understand something of God's wisdom in giving us his son.

So a further definition is:

- *A charismatic revelation into God's secret, redemptive purposes in history*

### Wisdom is therefore of 2 kinds, theological and practical.

Jesus offered practical wisdom all the time – eg Mk2, answering the question about eating with tax collectors/sinners; Mk 3 answering the accusation that he drives out demons by demonic power; Mk 7 answering the question about purity laws; Mk 12 answering the question about taxes.. The response: 'where does he get such wisdom from?' Mt 13.54; and the answer, 'from the Spirit'. This is not erudition, it's a charismatic insight in particular situations into the will of God. The best eg is the woman taken in adultery, and the word of wisdom is, 'if any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her'. Is he praying while writing on the sand?

Given this practical wisdom of Jesus, it seems likely Paul understood wisdom in both a theological and a practical sense. The story of Joseph and Pharaoh's dream illustrates wisdom; Joseph is said to be 'full of the Spirit'. The Spirit of God reveals the hidden things of God – see the wisdom literature in the OT, eg Prov 3, Eccl 3. Isaiah 11.2 specifically says that the Messiah will have the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him, bringing wisdom, understanding etc. This happens at his baptism, John 1.

Paul describes Jesus as the wisdom and power of God – 1 Cor 1.24. He is Wisdom in person...

The word of Wisdom – 'a charismatic disclosure of divine truth'. The Spirit reveals theological insight (relates to belief) and practical insight (relates to behaviour). The first kind is usually ministered in the context of teaching – relates to what P teaches about God's wisdom in 1 Cor 1-2. The second kind is usually ministered in difficult life circumstances – wisdom for right living.

- Acts 15 and the issue of circumcision
- 1 Cor 14 – Paul's insight into the use of grace gifts

### Evaluation of wisdom

The Corinthians had turned it into a special spiritual category, and saw it as initiation into the secrets of the heavenly realm – for Paul wisdom is not cosmological but christological. Inauthentic wisdom is kept secret and used to divide one sort of spiritual person into another. True wisdom will be consistent with scripture and will encourage behaviour consistent with kingdom ethics.

For Paul, the word of wisdom was *the articulation of an insight into God's purposes, either general (ie to do with God's plan of redemption) or specific (ie to do with God's plan for a church or for an individual).*

Like the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom is primarily a teaching gift – the ability to speak inspirationally of God's purposes at the global, local or individual level [?? prophecy?]

## 2. The Word of Knowledge

Popular understanding is 'a supernatural insight into the secrets of a person's heart or situation'. The standard example is Wimber seeing 'adultery' on someone's forehead on a plane. MS thinks this mistaken – it must be an insight not into a person's thoughts but into God's thoughts. He offers: *an inspired insight into the mind of Christ which is then expressed in words given by the HS. As such, it is a revelatory gift through which the body of Christ is edified.* To be sure, it's not just natural talent sanctified; it's revealed knowledge imparted by grace.

This gift is best understood not by refs in other biblical writers to insights gained into a person's heart/mind/circs (eg Jesus and the woman at the well) but in the context of Paul's own writing. He talks about knowledge in 1 Cor 2.12-13:

'we have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words'. He uses similar language in 1 Cor 12.

Definition: *a special anointing in which a believer is given an insight into the unfathomable depths of God's grace – an insight which he or she then articulates in words taught by the HS.*

Content – as with wisdom, both theological and practical. In the theological sense a word of knowledge is 'the anointed description of one of the many treasures associated with God's gracious gift of his Son'. In the practical sense it's 'an anointed description of the work of grace available to the church of Jesus Christ' – ie it's some understanding of the relationship of God to the believer.

So instead of seeing a word of knowledge as a revelation of a person's secrets, we now see it as an inspired utterance concerning God's works of grace. As such it's a tool for those called to teach in the Church. An example is Paul's prayer in Eph 1.

'The word of knowledge is therefore that special ability to know and to articulate the things which God has freely given to us'. The practical aspect is 'the inspired ability to understand the nature and the function of the gifts of the HS' [!?!]. The info in chapters 12-14 came through the gift of wisdom (how to use the gifts) and knowledge (what they are). The differences between knowledge and wisdom are not clear. Wisdom seems to be connected with the ability to understand God's secret purposes, knowledge seems to refer to the nature of the gifts. So wisdom is how, and knowledge is what. The common view that knowledge is charismatic understanding into the hidden facts about a person's life needs revising – this is prophecy not knowledge. See 1 Cor 14.24-25, which describes an unbeliever being told things about himself which cause him to believe. The woman at the well responded 'I can see that you are a prophet'. So it seems Grudem is right in saying what many today call a word of wisdom/knowledge is more accurately seen as prophecy.

### 3. The gift of faith

Eg Zerubbabel 's faith in rebuilding the temple, Zech 4.

The only other ref to faith in 1 Cor 12-14 is where Paul says 'if I have a faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing'. The gift of faith is *an unshakeable confidence that God can move any obstacle, however great or small.* It's the same faith Jesus talks about in Mark 11.22-25.

James Dunn in Williams): 'P presumably has in mind that mysterious surge of confidence which sometimes arises within a man in a particular situation of need or challenge and which gives him an otherly certainty that God is about to act through a word or through an action (such as laying hands on someone sick)'.

To sum up: *the gift of faith is a supernatural certainty given by the HS to some members of the Body of Christ. This certainty is an unshakeable confidence that God is about to resolve a seemingly impossible situation, for the edification of the Church.*

Charismatic faith is to be distinguished from conversion faith (eg Eph 2.8-9) in Jesus, and continuing faith (eg John 20.31) – as defined in Heb 11.1-2. This kind of faith is about believing, obeying, persevering, trusting.

The Faith Movement confuses charismatic faith with continuing faith – we aren't meant to operate all the time in mountain-moving faith, only when given it. It's continuing faith we are meant to operate in all the time, whatever we feel like.

Eg of charismatic faith – George Muller

### 4. The gifts of healing

Plural – means a person charismatically endowed with healing gifts will have a varied ministry.

- 
- Healing gifts are not given to all. Do all have it – no. We know leaders are encouraged to pray for the sick; but some members of the body are given this ability to minister healing.
- Healing gifts are not a temporary endowment but an ongoing anointing. 'Like all the gifts, 'healings' are .. supposed to be understood as a long-term rather than an occasional enabling in the believer's life'.. If you receive this gift you should expect to minister in this way on a consistent basis (it says people *have* gifts of healings, in the present continuous – and the same applies to the other gifts).
- P doesn't speak of 'healers'; it's a gift not an office, like apostles, prophets, teachers – see 1 Cor 12.28
- P saw it as a spiritual anointing, not a natural talent/skill – it's not to do with medicine
- Some say Jesus' healings and ours are only for psychosomatic disorders – but Matt says Jesus healed *every* disease
- The use of these gifts should not be seen as restricted to the Church's worship. Healing is witness to believers and unbelievers of the power of the Resurrection to offset the moral and physical consequences of individual and communal sin
- Human sickness is a consequence of human sin – it's the result of the Fall. Only some sicknesses are directly due to sins committed by the sick individual!
- The individual receives the gift of healing as a permanent thing, but the Church only until the return of Christ.

*The healing gifts are best understood as the special, charismatic ability to heal illnesses in the power of the HS, and through faith in Jesus Christ. This ability is given to some people in the Body of Christ, and they are expected to use this gift faithfully and continuously until the Lord Jesus returns and does away with sickness for ever.*

Three other spiritual gifts are needed to exercise the gift of healings – faith (Acts 3.16) which makes it possible for Jesus to heal (Lk 5.17). Jesus looked for faith in those he ministered to. In Nazareth there was none so there were few healings. Luke says the power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal the sick – which implies that sometimes it's not. Healing gifts also require prophecy – insight into people's hearts. God may give a revelation concerning a person's heart or their sins or their symptoms. Sometimes those praying feel the same pain. Example from Wimber. The third gift needed is discernment – Jesus dealt with 2 cases of deafness in different ways, Mk 7 and Mk 9 – one healing, one deliverance.

When God does not heal. Problems on our side – lack of faith (Mk 6), hidden sin (James 5), wrong theology (healing can occur through medical treatment eg Hezekiah's boil, 2 Kings 20). Problems on God's side – he is sovereign, and we need to respect his will for a person. He has a different understanding of suffering from us. Catholics teach that any suffering which prevents a believer from living a fully human Christian life can and should be healed, but some suffering is positive, developing character and enabling love and growth. Michael Butley said, 'the problem is not that there is suffering in the world but that we waste it so foolishly'. Finally, lack of healing can be because the kingdom of God is now but also not yet; only with the Second coming will the works of Satan be finally and totally eradicated; they include sin, sickness, suffering and death.

## 5. The gift of miraculous works

The word *energemata* carries the notion of energy/power. *Energemata* denotations are workings of powers, mighty acts. The gift of miracles is *the special ability to perform acts of extraordinary supernatural power. these actions are performed through the power of the HS in the name of Jesus Christ, and they evoke wonder in many, and faith in some.* It's a public demonstration of extraordinary, charismatic power, which can take a number of forms:

- Resurrection miracles
- Nature miracles
- Healing miracles

Not all healings are miracles – there's the healing of salvation, relational healing, gradual healing during a period of prayer, psychological healing, spiritual healing, communal healing, social healing. So the difference between healings and miracles can be understood in terms of degrees of charismatic power – healings are often gradual and less visible, miracles are always immediate and often public. For both the gift of faith is essential.

Do miracles occur today? The liberal view says they never did occur; the conservative view says they did then but they don't now; the pentecostal view says they did then and they do now. Paul Thigpen proves that miracles occurred consistently in all ages up to our own. He quotes from Justin Martyr, Hermas, Irenaeus, Tertullina, Eusebius, Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, Martin of Tours, Epiphanius of Salamis, Augustine, Severus, Benedict, Gregory the Great, Gregory of Tours, Aidan, Cuthbert, Joseph Hazzaya of Syria, Ulrich of Augsburg, Anselm, William of Malmesbury, Hugh of Lincoln, Bernard, Francis, Catherine of Siena, et al; then fewer during the Reformation but again in George Fox, Wesley, Von Zinzendorf, Edward Irving, Charles Cullis, Maria Woodworth-Etter, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina et al. Sometimes he includes hagiographical as well as historical writing, but it's an impressive list.

Today – e.g. from Mahesh Chavda, *Only Love can make a miracle*. Includes a resurrection (with death certificate); and a meeting in Zaire where sorcerers and witchdoctors gave their lives to Christ.

The key which seems to unlock the door for miracles in our own day seems to be: faith, fasting, compassion.

All are evident in Acts 9, where Peter raises Tabitha from the dead – need, faith, discipleship (Peter did exactly what he'd seen Jesus do with Jairus's daughter), compassion, looking to God (Peter prays to God before he does anything else including looking at Tabitha).

## 6. The gift of prophecy

Its use is on the increase. But there is misunderstanding. Some define it solely as predicting the future. Some limit it to forthtelling God's word in the present, and identify it with preaching – but this is a reductionist definition. Paul distinguishes between teaching and prophecy. Teaching is a charismatic exegesis, a fresh understanding of the written Word (for Paul, that meant the OT). Prophecy, however, is an inspired utterance of a word which God gives directly to the believer; 'the speaking forth of words given by the Spirit in a particular situation'. The difference between teaching and prophecy is that teaching has a conservative function and prophecy has a creative function.

Mark Cartledge says there are 3 ways of viewing the prophetic experience:

- A message received some time before it's shared
- A part of a message being received, and the rest as the person receiving begins to speak
- An impulse to prophesy, but without any words, which come as the person starts to speak

Words of prophecy can be directed to unbelievers, and contain hidden facts (1 Cor 14.24-25). Prophecy is a revelation and declaration of the secrets of an unbeliever's heart.

Words of prophecy can be directed to the church assembly, to edify, exhort, comfort (1 Cor 14.3). the most common form is a message of exhortation beginning with words like 'my children' and expressed as a word from God in the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular.

Grudem defines it as 'telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind'. If it's in the form of a conscious reflection on scripture, it's teaching. If it comes suddenly, it's prophecy. It's a fallible gift, and its authority is linked to its general content and not to every word:

- Scripture is universal in application, a prophecy is contingent
- Scripture doesn't need testing, prophecy does
- Scripture possesses authority, the authority of a prophet needs to be established
- Scripture is eternal, prophecy temporary.

Principles:

- Delivery - Humility, Love, Submissiveness, Self control
- Administration – welcome it, teach about it, encourage people to desire it, weigh it, don't allow it to dominate, help people to listen, keep sense of humour, keep perspective.

Margery Kempe, C14th, practised spiritual gifts.

Problems with prophecy today – first, we should be aware it may concern sin. Second, we should beware individualism – we tend to direct prophecy towards individuals or the local church, whereas OT prophecy offered a radical protest against the dominant ethos in society (see Brueggemann). Maybe it's time to break out of our individualism in the realm of the spiritual gifts, and particularly in the realm of prophecy.

## 7. Discernings of spirits

The word spirit (pneuma) is used 379 times in the NT. It refers to the spirit within human beings; to the Spirit of God; to supernatural beings which can be either angelic or demonic.

Discernment is *the special ability to discern whether the human spirit, the HS, or a supernatural spirit (good or bad) is at work behind a particular phenomenon.*

Eg Jesus and Nathaniel John 1. It's to be exercised when we gather together and when assessing a person. Paul urges us to test spirits and prophecies – eg 1 Cor 14.29, 1 Thess 5.19.

It's possible to discern the presence of God or of his angels.

Criteria for discernment:

- Conviction – Jesus was troubled in spirit when he confronted evil, eg John 11.33, 13.21
- Community – weighing prophetic words
- Consistency - with the Spirit of Jesus, the scriptures, the way God has worked in the past
- Christology – any spiritual experience should draw people's hearts towards Jesus
- Character – does it come from and promote love?
- Consequence – by their fruit you will know prophets

## 8. Kinds of tongues

Inspired speech; and the source of the controversy. *Glossa* means language – so it's a gift that enables us to speak unlearned languages. Poythress defines it 'the production of connected sequences of speech sounds, not identified by the speaker as a language known to him, lexically opaque to him, not capable of being repeated by him (except in very small snatches), and which sounds to an average hearer like an unknown language'.

So it's *a charismatic anointing in which a person speaks an unlearned and unintelligible language.*

But it's also *the spontaneous utterance of seemingly random speech sounds which represent the language of the angels.*

- Xenolalia – speaking an actual language, eg Acts 2.8
- Angelolalia – speaking in an angelic tongue, eg 1 Cor 14.2, it needs translation

1 Cor 13, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels... The Testament of Job gives an example of Job's daughters speaking in the tongues of angels when they are given his sash.

It's used devotionally (edifies the believer); and if used in public it will usually be an utterance of adoration (edifies the gathering). Limitations – Paul lists it last, not first; he warns of the danger of creating ridicule through excessive use; says it's of no use without an interpretation; remarks that the mind is unfruitful when it's being used; warns of disorder and of confusion. It seems the Delphi Oracle involved a priestess speaking in tongues in a state of frenzy (it was interpreted by a male priest); Paul warns against this.

Carlyle May has researched glossolalia in many parts of the world and cultures – not all Christian.

Advantages – speaking in the language of angels offers a foretaste of heaven; its private use is edifying because it brings intimacy with God; it allows deeper expression of thanks and praise; it releases a greater sense of the Spirit's presence in our lives; it expresses deep joy; it gives a sense of continuity with the early church; it helps us yield more to the Spirit by relinquishing control.

Tongues for all? The primary indication that a person has been filled with the HS is inspired speech – which can be prophecy, praise, tongues, witness etc. MS thinks not every Christian receives the gift of tongues when filled by the HS – which is why Paul asks, 'do all speak in tongues?'

## 9. The interpretation of tongues

The most neglected of all the gifts – because it's the only one which doesn't stand on its own.

Eg of a woman who saw and wrote down a para of NT Greek (which she didn't know) – which turned out to contain scriptural quotes and an exhortation to welcome and not despise the writer.

Definition: *the special, charismatic ability to translate a public utterance of glossolalia into the vernacular of the congregation.*

A common assumption is that tongues + interpretation = prophecy. There is no scriptural support for this – P says tongues is directed towards God not man (1 Cor 14.2).

Singing in tongues – P talks about singing with one's spirit in 1 Cor 14.15-16.

## Conclusion

The gifts P mentions in 1 Cor 12 are ones which veer towards the sensational end of the charismatic spectrum. In reality there's a range of gifts from the ordinary (helping, mercy) to the extraordinary (miracles, prophecy). Paul spoke of the gifts as acts of service as well as acts of power.

1 Cor 12 – helpful deeds – the special ability to help others who are in need (eg the men who brought their paralysed friend to Jesus; somehow they are never mentioned in examination of the story)

Rom 12.8 – mercy: 'the special, God-given ability to show acts of mercy to those in need, and to do it with unbridled joy and enthusiasm)

Romans 12.7 – teaching: 'the ability to expound the scriptures in an inspirational, dynamic and sound way'

The charismata are essential for both worship and mission.

For more book summaries by Alison Morgan click [here](#)

For Alison Morgan's home page click [here](#)

To read online articles from ReSource magazine on matters of faith click [here](#)