

one) helps a believer in his spiritual growth -- that is, toward this spiritual goal. The ministry of other gifted individuals to him may help the believer toward that goal, or the use of one's own gift ministry to others may help others to that spiritual goal of a mature and godly Christian life. Gifts are not for our own use and benefit but are to be used in service to others.

The Corinthian church is a perfect example of this. They had numerous gifts: Paul said to the Corinthians, "You do not lack (fall short) in any gift." (1 Corinthians 1:7) It is evident from chapters 12-14 that the Corinthians were very zealous and excited about certain spiritual gifts -- specifically, the gift of tongues. First Corinthians 14:12 indicates that the Corinthians were zealous in this area. The Corinthian church had numerous spiritual gifts and used them; however, this did not produce spiritual believers. The Corinthian church apparently had more problems than any other church addressed in the New Testament. The believers were described as carnal and unable to receive more than the basics of Christian truth (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). This church was full of factions and cliques (chapters 1-4); it condoned gross sin (chapter 5); they dragged each other before unbelieving judges to settle their numerous quarrels (chapter 6); they did not exercise love of the brethren, they were puffed up over their gifts and knowledge, and they misused their gifts (chapters 12-14); they had doctrinal problems (chapter 15); etc. This church is often called "the worst church in the New Testament"; and yet it is the only church in the New Testament that placed a special emphasis on spiritual gifts. Did the spiritual gifts make them carnal? No! But they did not use their gifts for ministry to others. Apparently they were proud of their gifts and exercised them to glorify themselves. The Corinthian church demonstrates that possessing gifts in general or even any specific gift, such as the gift of tongues, does not increase the spirituality or spiritual growth of the possessor. Gifts were not given for this purpose. . . .

The main emphasis in the New Testament is on the godliness and spiritual maturity of believers. This is the goal toward which all Christians are to move. God has given the Holy Spirit to each believer in order to enable each one to become godly. Christians are continually exhorted to show love, faith, holiness, sound doctrine, etc. God has given spiritual gifts so that Christians may minister to one another and help one another to reach that goal. Spiritual gifts are a means to that end. They are not the end itself but only a means. Mere possession of any gift does not enhance spirituality. There is not the slightest indication in the Bible that spiritual gifts are given to build up the possessor, nor is there any indication that they will do so. Gifts are given to perform a function within the whole body of Christ so that believers may minister to others. . . .

There is no instruction in the Bible on how to recognize one's own spiritual gift; instead, the gift becomes obvious through its exercise -- that is, when it is used in ministry. If possession of specific spiritual gifts were important in itself,