

the Bible would certainly give some information on how to recognize one's gift. The fact that gifts are given by God's sovereign will and not due to an individual's "seeking" also shows that gifts are not given to individuals because they are spiritual. Each Christian has all that he needs to become spiritual. This includes the Holy Spirit within him and the various gifted individuals within the Church who can minister to him. Spiritual gifts are very important to the Church as a whole, since gifted individuals are necessary to minister to the body of Christ, the Church. This is what gifts are for: to minister to others. However, the individual gift as such is not important to the possessor of it as far as his own spirituality is concerned. It is not given because one is spiritual nor does it enhance one's own spirituality. It is only a means to an end.

Some feel that the user benefits by the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is using him. Not only is this dubious as to real benefit except in some mystical sense, but it would apply to any way or time in which an individual is used by God regardless of whether a gift is used. The idea that such a "feeling" edifies the believer is alien to the New Testament. Gifts are not intended for the possessor's benefit except in an indirect way. The thinking that "I benefit when I teach by being taught by the Spirit" places a mystical aspect on the gift of teaching. If someone teaches more than he already knows, which such a view requires, then he is teaching apart from his understanding. Paul disparages this in 1 Corinthians 14. If such thinking implies that the teacher learns by preparing to teach, this is a different matter entirely and is true. However, it does not involve the gift of teaching but depends on the individual's ability to study Scripture. The gift of teaching concerns the ability to communicate the material; it does not insure that there is some miraculous ability to gain the material apart from preparation.

The concern over gifts to be exercised in ministry is proper. The emphasis on gifts as a mark of spirituality or as existing for the benefit or prestige of the one possessing the gift is false. There is need to be careful today concerning one's emphasis. Why be concerned about spiritual gifts? If it is to build up one's prestige, this is wrong. If it is to make the user more spiritual, this is also incorrect. Only if the concern for gifts is to make one's ministry to others more effective is the attitude correct. In other words, if someone is zealous for spiritual gifts so that he may use his gift to serve the Lord by ministering to other people, then he has the correct outlook. Any other zeal for gifts is improper; any other use for gifts is improper. There is no place in the Bible where believers are instructed to use their spiritual gifts in order to enhance their own spirituality or for their own benefit. Gifts are always used for the benefit of others. Gifts are important for this use; for the benefit of the possessor they are relatively unimportant.