

Being Part of the Church

Lesson 3: Spiritual Gifts

Notes for the leader: This is the third in a series of lessons about "Being Part of the Church." Everyone involved in prison ministry realizes that the most important thing a Christian ex-inmate can do is to become an accountable member of a solid Christian fellowship in his community. What should he be looking for? This lesson focuses on how every Christian needs to recognize and use his spiritual gifts for God's Kingdom.

Introduction

In previous lessons in this series, we learned that the church is an important part of God's plan of salvation. He **calls us out of sin** and **calls us to commitment to Him**. He **calls us together** as a church and **sanctifies us – He makes us holy**. "Holy" means **"set apart" for God's purpose**. His purpose in calling us together as a church is that we can **support each other by using the spiritual gifts he has given us** to help **strengthen his church** and **build his kingdom**.

We have all known men (or women) who were able to follow Jesus faithfully while in prison, but just couldn't stay straight on the outside. And we have all asked ourselves "Why?" The answer often turns out to be that they try to be "lone ranger" Christians. They aren't willing to submit themselves to the **discipline** and **accountability** – and the **support** – that a local church is intended to provide. **A Christian needs to be an accountable member of an active Christian community**. God doesn't expect us to succeed all by ourselves. **We need His help and the support of our local church**.

In previous lessons, we emphasized some of the main things you should be looking for in a church – a **community** where the leaders and members

- **teach sound doctrine**, based on the Bible, God's Word,
- **demonstrate God's love**, both inside their own fellowship and by reaching out to others,
- and **work together as a unified body**, with each member **using the spiritual gifts** that God has given him or her for the good of the body.

In this lesson, we'll focus on **spiritual gifts** and how each of us is responsible for **understanding** and **using** our spiritual gifts.

First, we need to recognize the difference between **natural talents**, **fruit of the spirit**, and **spiritual gifts**.

Everyone, Christians and non-Christians, **has natural talents**. God holds us responsible for what we do with our talents. In the **Parable of the Talents** (*Matthew 25:14-30*), Jesus tells the story of *"a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey."*

In Bible times, a "talent" was actually an amount of money, worth somewhere around a thousand dollars today. Today we use the word "talent" to mean a natural ability that someone has. When we do, we are actually quoting this parable.

Jesus continued: *"The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them."* To the men who had put their talents to work, the Master said, *"Well done, good and faithful servant!*

You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" But when he came to the man who had hidden his talent, the Master said, "throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

That parable is about **natural abilities**. Natural abilities include such things as being able to sing well, being good at sports, being able to run a business, and so forth.

Spiritual gifts are **different** from natural abilities. Spiritual gifts are **supernatural** abilities, which come from the **Holy Spirit**, and which **enable us to help other people grow spiritually** as members of God's Kingdom. A Christian usually receives a **special spiritual gift**, which reflects the **specific "mission" God is giving him** or her as a member of the Church.

Before studying spiritual gifts, we need to mention briefly the **"fruit of the spirit."** These are listed in Galatians 5:22-23.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

God wants **every Christian** to experience **all** of the **fruit of the spirit** in his or her life. How we "grow" this fruit is the subject of another lesson. This lesson is about spiritual gifts. **If you are a Christian, God has given you a spiritual gift** for you to use in his service.

The first passage in the Bible about spiritual gifts is Romans, Chapter 12. Paul begins by saying

Romans 12:1-2

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God —this is your spiritual act of worship.
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Paul is saying that when **God has rescued us** from our sins, **our lives should be changed**, and we should **respond by being willing to serve him**.

The Bible says that **when we accept Christ as our Lord**, he plants his Holy Spirit inside us, and the **Holy Spirit** begins to work to **clean up the effects of our sin in our lives** -- to **change** us -- and to help us to begin following God's "good, pleasing, and perfect will." The Holy Spirit will "**transform our minds**", so that we can begin to see things from God's point of view, and not just according to our old, sinful nature.

Make no mistake, however -- **our old, sinful nature is still there**, tempting us to do things **our** way, not **God's** way. The struggle between our new nature and our old nature is something that we must deal with every day. We need God's help to win this struggle. That's what Paul means when he says, "be **transformed** [that is, **changed**] by the renewing of your mind."

Then Paul goes on to paint a picture of how this this process should work within the church:

Romans 12:4-5

*Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,
so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

Paul says that **the church is like a human body** -- there are **many different kinds of parts** and **many different kinds of people**, and **every one has a job to play** in keeping the **body** strong and healthy, and in keeping the **church** strong and healthy. And that includes **you!**

The Bible says that **when the Holy Spirit comes into you**, he gives you a "**spiritual gift.**" You are responsible for using this gift (as well as your natural talents) to serve God and his church.

Romans 12:6-8

*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.
If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;
if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully..*

There are other spiritual gifts mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. This is not a complete list, but it illustrates the point that Paul is trying to make: a healthy church is one in which the members of the church are using the spiritual gifts that God has given them to serve each other.

The discussion questions focus on this passage. One of the most important questions to discuss is how a person **learns** what his **spiritual gift** is, and how he or she **learns to use this gift** effectively for the good of the church.

Notes for the leader: Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.

Follow-up Discussion

***Notes for the leader:** The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers.*

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. (vv. 1-2) How does Paul tell us we should worship God? What do you think he means by this?

Paul is saying that when God **rescues us from our sins**, our response should be **to be willing to serve him**. When we accept Christ as our Lord, He places his Holy Spirit inside us, and **the Spirit works to clean up the effects of our sin**. He begins to **change the way we think** – "**transforming our minds**", so that we can see things from **God's point of view**, and not according to our old, sinful nature, which wants to keep conforming to our old, sinful ways.

2. (vv. 4-5) What does Paul say that a church is like? Do you think this is a good comparison?

Paul says that the church can be compared to a human body, which has many parts with many different functions. Our bodies are healthy only when all of our parts are doing their different jobs. In the same way, a church is healthy only when all of its members are **using the gifts God gave them** to serve Him and to serve each other.

3. (vv. 6-8) What are some examples of the "gifts" that God gives to different people to use within the church?

Some of these gifts are for "up front" jobs in the church, such as **preaching** and **teaching**. Others are for "behind the scenes" jobs, such as **showing mercy** to those need help, and **encouraging** other people to understand and use their own spiritual gifts. All of us have at least one gift, and **God expects us to use our spiritual gifts for the good of His church**.

4. How should a Christian figure out what his spiritual gift is?

Pray about it – **ask God to help you find your spiritual gift**. **Be willing to try new ministries**. Listen to more mature Christians when they tell you that you have a particular gift – especially those who have the gifts of **discernment** and **encouragement**. One of the main responsibilities of the pastor and leaders of a local church is to help people **discover** and **learn to use their spiritual gifts**. This will be a main topic of the next lesson.

***Notes for the leader:** Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!*

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gift *(Romans 12:1-8)*

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Take-home Thoughts About ...

Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gift

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he says *"I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as **living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God —this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not **conform** any longer to the pattern of this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind. (Romans 12:1-2)*

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Paul says that God gives each of us a **spiritual gift**, which he wants us to use to serve him as a member of his church. (*See Romans 12:6-8*) Paul says that the church can be compared to a human body (*Romans 12:4-5*), which has many parts with many different functions. Our bodies are healthy only when all of our parts are doing their different jobs. In the same way, a church is healthy only when all of its members are **using the gifts God gave them** to serve Him and to serve each other.

Some of these gifts are for "up front" jobs in the church, such as **preaching** and **teaching**. Others are for "behind the scenes" jobs, such as **showing mercy** to those need help, and **encouraging** other people to understand and use their own spritual gifts. But all of us have at least one gift, and **God expects us to use our spiritual gifts for the good of His church**. Ask God to help you find your spiritual gift. Be willing to **try new ministries**. Listen to your pastor and the leaders of your church as they help you find your spiritual gift and learn to use it.

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