

The operation of spiritual gifts in the Church today

Contributed by Pastor Seth Asante

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 14: 1-40 CENTRAL TRUTH: Spiritual gifts were never intended to be mysterious; God wants us to understand and use them.

MEMORY VERSE: "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

1 Peter 4:10-11 NKJV INTRODUCTION: The gifts of the Holy Spirit are both relevant and necessary for the Body of Christ to fulfill the work of God in the world today. Paul inspired by the Spirit of God said "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant;" 1 Corinthians 12:1 NKJV If the Spirit of God, through Paul, said He didn't want the Corinthian Church to be ignorant of spiritual gifts, certainly God does not want the Church today to be ignorant. According to Paul there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 1 Cor 12:4-7 KJV There are 3 categories of gifts here in 1 Corinthians 12 8-10:

- 3 of them do something (gifts of power) these are gift of faith, working of miracles, gifts of healing;
- 3 of them reveal something (gifts of revelation) they are: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge and the discerning of spirits;
- 3 of them say something (gifts of utterance/inspiration) these are: Prophecy, divers kinds of tongues and interpretation of tongues. We will concern ourselves with the operations of the last 3 (gifts of utterance) in the Church today. But first let us consider.
- What is the purpose of the distribution of spiritual gifts in the body? The Apostle Paul indicated that the gifts of the Spirit are equally valid. In dealing with this matter, Paul used the analogy of the human body. All members of the body have functions, Paul declared, even though some may be recognized as less honorable than others (1 Corinthians 12:12-26) they are still needed in the church. The service of each Christian should be in proportion to the gifts which he/she possesses (1 Corinthians 12-14). All believers, as members of the body of Christ, must be serving together in order for the body to be fully-functional.

- Since the gifts of the Spirit are gifts of grace, their use must be controlled by the rule of love. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. 1 Cor 12:7 NLT.

- But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. Vs 4 "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church"; 1 Cor 14:3-5 NKJV. And God confirmed the message by giving signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit whenever he chose Heb 2:4 NLT. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established Rom 1:11 NKJV

- The 'inspirational' gifts of 'tongues', 'interpretation' and 'prophecy': These are congregational gifts. Through them God sends his message of edification, encouragement and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3)

- Tongues' chief value when used privately (devotional use without interpretation) 1 Corinthians 14: 4 is to recharge one's spiritual batteries - it 'edifies'. Its use in prayer could very well explain the meaning of Romans 8:26-27 ('...for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered...') and 1 Cor. 14:14-15 ('For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.') Paul spoke regularly in tongues (vs.18), but in church only did so sparingly (vs. 19). He even discourages others from doing so if they cannot interpret (vs. 28).

- Tongues can also be used publicly, provided there is interpretation (1 Cor.14:5), So there is an aspect of tongues that benefits the congregation Concerning 'interpretation' it must be borne in mind that it is not 'translation'. That is, it expresses the thought and gist of what the Lord may be saying. Therefore the length of the interpretation may differ considerably from that of the utterance in tongues. (interpretation), and another aspect that edifies the individual (devotional). Putting two and two together, we see that there is a devotional tongues that believers can use to build up themselves in their personal prayer lives.

- Paul admonishes us to use a tongue when interpretation is available. Presumably some will be known to be able to exercise that gift. If not, says Paul, the user of public tongues "should pray that he may interpret" (1 Cor.14:13). Tongues and interpretation are almost equivalent to prophecy.

- What is prophecy? What is the gift of prophecy? What is its role in the church today? Prophecy is speaking the word or message of God for a particular circumstance or time. It is a supernatural utterance in a known language. In Biblical times prophets foretold the future, condemned unrighteous acts, gave encouragement, recommended courses of action to rulers or to priests and warned of judgment. Only a small portion of the work of a prophet involves predicting the future, and even the predictions are designed either to teach or to correct.

- What is the gift of prophecy? The gift of prophecy is the gift of receiving messages from the Lord to speak forth to God's people. These messages can come at any time or place and are often not under the conscious control of the person who speaks them so that the person speaking does not choose whether to utter the message. (If the gift of prophecy is true, the message will always be from God, of course.) The gift of prophecy is one of the information types of gifts given by the Holy Spirit.

- Prophecy must be tested to determine whether it is of God or not (14:29). True prophecy is always doctrinally accurate though not a law. 2 examples of NT prophecy are given, both by Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10, 11). Both

were exhortations based on future predictions. Both were accurate, and came to pass. However it was not demanding on believers in the same way that scripture is demanding on them. Paul chose not to heed one of Agabus's prophecies (Acts 21:13). A person with the gift of prophecy may receive messages in various ways, including visions (Ezekiel 1), dreams (Daniel 7), words of knowledge or wisdom, discernment and the operation of another spiritual gift such as teaching. It may even be in the form of a strong emotional impression.

- The gift of prophecy is different from the office of the prophet.

- The purpose of prophecy is (I Cor. 14:3) building up, bucking up, and cheering up! For those who may be apprehensive as to the use of the gift, perhaps I should say we must be very cautious about receiving directive prophecy. Misuse, by uncritical acceptance of such has led to troubles. God can and does sometimes so direct. But it would be carefully evaluated in the light of who gave it, and whether there were at least several other independent factors also provided by the Lord. (I Cor:14:29). Secondly, although prophecy is inspirational, we should not equate it with Scripture which is infallible and inerrant. CONCLUSION: The operation of spiritual gifts in the assembly is not to be forbidden or despised. It is not to be neglected. I Timothy 4:14. The gifts are given to us not for ourselves but for the edification of the body. The gifts are to be desired. If we "are zealous of spiritual gifts," we must be sure that our motive is right. I Corinthians 14:39 "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues." I Thessalonians 5:20; I Corinthians 14:12 "... as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church." I Corinthians 12:31 "But covet earnestly the best gifts..." I Corinthians 14:1, 12, 39 "... desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. Forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. ... Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy ..." However, God is to receive all the glory for their operation in the assembly. I Peter 4:11 "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified ..."