

Scary!

Many who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and so have received the Gifts of the Spirit, choose to stay in their comfort zone and not use the Gifts. This is often because they are fearful of stepping out from the natural into the supernatural. No matter how strong our faith, it can be quite scary to allow God to do what He wants to do instead of keeping control over things ourselves. There seems to be dozens of questions to which we would like answers. 'How do I know it is God and not my own thoughts? Am I sure that this is the Gift that God has given to me? Is now the right time or should I wait a few weeks and see if I still feel the same? What if I get it wrong, will folk laugh at me or be critical of my efforts? Should I leave it to someone else who has had previous experience?' It is OK if we make a mistake. It is OK if we do not do things quite right. It is OK if we do not choose the right time. We will learn by our mistakes and God will strengthen us each time we step out into His supernatural realm. We need to support and encourage each other in this God-given task.

Stepping out

The only way to learn how to operate in the Gifts is to use them. God wants us to grow stronger spiritually and to get out of our comfort zone by stepping out in faith. As our relationship with God grows stronger we will be enabled to move into deeper levels as He equips us to use the Gifts. We have natural minds but the Holy Spirit works within us in a supernatural way when we operate in the Gifts. It is God's idea to give us these Gifts because He wants the Church to benefit by their use.

Hindrances

A Church where everyone is in unity will be strong and effective. There should be no division because of who is operating which Gift and no individual taking credit for what any Gift achieves. Some say that using the Gifts can cause envy and pride, but that should not happen if there is unity within the Church where everyone is supportive and encourages each other. The flow of the Spiritual Gifts can be quenched in a critical atmosphere. The desired alternative, as a united Church, should be to give encouragement to any who may be afraid to step out or have maybe 'fluffed' their effort, by showing them love, being patient and available to listen to them.

Earnestly desire

Paul sees the use of the Gifts as non-optional as he tells us to '**earnestly desire**' them. **(1 Cor. 12: 31)** It is God's will for all believers to operate in the Gifts. Are we being disobedient to God when we decide not to step out in faith as Paul encourages us to do? When folk decide not to use a Gift that God has given to them, they miss out as individuals and also others in the Church miss out. They are designed to be a routine part of our Christian walk that help to bond us together and build up God's Church.

Services

Part of our desire to keep control of our spiritual lives and remain in our comfort zones can sometimes affect our services. We prefer to stay in the same routine where we feel safe and the use of a Gift can be a disturbance to that safety. We can be afraid to 'Rock the boat'! This can often be because we may

be unsure about things. We can have a Bible Study about the Gifts, but it is quite a different matter when God actually calls on us to use them! We tend to look at what is socially acceptable, which usually means that we do nothing outside of the normal routine. It can also be difficult for the person leading the service to judge the level of what is acceptable and what is not and to be prepared for the unexpected. We sometimes have to set aside our traditions and set orders of service in order to allow God to function as He wishes.

Individuals

God gives different Gifts but it is the same Spirit. We do not have to be like other people. The same Gift may operate in different ways in the lives of different individuals. In fact, there are times when God seems to enjoy doing things in a completely different way! He knows that we do not all function in exactly the same way. The purpose of the Gifts has not changed in the past 2,000 years; that is, to build up the Church by making individuals spiritually stronger, which in turn has the ultimate purpose of glorifying God. Peter writes, ***'As each has received a Gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God, whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.'*** (1 Peter 4: 10 – 11)

Outside Church

Jesus did not function as God when He was on the earth, but as fully man. We can often read of His use of many of the Spiritual Gifts. The interesting thing too is that when He operated in the Gifts, it was not in a church service but outside of the church situation. Now there is a challenge for each one of us! We need to function outside of the church building if we are to reach non-Christians for Jesus. The Holy Spirit can work just as well in a community centre, place of work or in our homes as He can within a church building. God is unlimited in what He can do and how He can work in the lives of individuals if we allow Him to use us in whatever way He chooses.

Equipped and ready

Jesus saw the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to be necessary for Christians to be witnesses outside of the church services. Before He returned to Heaven He told His followers, ***'Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'*** (Luke 24: 49) The Gifts of the Holy Spirit would equip the people to go into other villages, towns and cities in order to spread the gospel and glorify God. It would be the signs and wonders of the Gifts of the Spirit that would cause people to become believers. Things have not changed today. It can be very challenging for us to think of operating in the Gifts **inside** the church building in the fellowship of other Christians, but even more so for us to use those Gifts **outside** of church services. We will not change the world for Jesus by putting limits on where and when God can show His divinity and power. He has already equipped us and provided us with what is necessary and He will also be with us, help us and use us in every situation and opportunity that arises.

Growing Strong – 6. The Gift of Prophecy