



## BIBLICAL TRAINING CENTER

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### Essentials and Non-Essentials

Church Government, Baptism, Spiritual Gifts

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### Introduction

Today, I am going to present topics that have been the subjects in many church splits, particularly when well-meaning Christians turn minors into majors.

### Church Government

Taken in part from Got Questions Ministries: "What are the different forms of church polity?" in [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org), February 14, 2019.

Church polity (church government) refers to how a church's leadership is structured. While there are many variations within our churches in US and abroad, there are three foundational forms of government: Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational. Don't confuse these terms with denominations by the same words. Basically every church is either independent with no higher authority outside of that local church, or it is part of a larger group or denomination with leaders who exert control from outside the church.

**Episcopal.** The word *episcopal* is from the Greek word *episkopos*, which is often translated in English as "bishop" or "overseer." In this type of government is led by a single leader (Bishop). The Roman Catholic Church is probably the best-known episcopal-type church. The Pope is also the Bishop of Rome. Below him are other bishops who are in turn responsible for other bishops down to the parish priest. The Anglican Church, Episcopal Church, and Greek Orthodox Church also have this form of government. One priest or bishop answers to another, who answers to another, until "at the top" there is one bishop (often called the archbishop) who has final authority.

Any church that has one person with ultimate authority exercises an episcopalian form of government. This person is often called a "strong pastor." Some multi-site churches may have single pastor at each location but one "head pastor" who is the final authority over all of the sites.

**Presbyterian.** The word *presbyterian* is from the Greek word *presbuteros*, which is usually translated “elder.” In this form of government, authority rests with the body of elders or presbyters. In denominational churches, the local board of elders answers to a higher board of elders, which is made up of select elders to represent each church. Ultimately, the final board of elders (sometimes called the general assembly) has authority on matters in that denomination. In independent or autonomous churches, final authority rests with the local board of elders. In some churches with elder rule, the elders are elected or ratified by the congregation. However, once the elders are ratified, the congregation does not have power to remove them or overturn their decisions.

**Congregational.** In congregational churches, the final authority rests with the congregation. This polity takes various forms. In some churches, there are almost no designated leaders (or, as some might say, except the Holy Spirit), and the congregation is involved in virtually every decision that has to be made—from the color of the carpet to the support of missionaries. In other churches, the congregation elects the primary office holders (pastor, elder, deacons) who will then make decisions, only consulting the congregation on major issues such as incurring debt to build a new building or calling a new pastor. However, in congregational churches, if a majority of the congregation objects to any of the decisions or believes that a leader should be removed from office, they have the authority to take action. Most churches with congregational rule are also independent, as they believe strongly that final authority resides with the local congregation. (For instance, Baptist churches may be part of a denomination—Southern, American, etc., but the “denomination” has no authority over the decisions of those local churches. The strongest action that could be taken by the denomination is that the individual church would no longer be received in fellowship; likewise, any individual church can withdraw at any time. In this case, the denomination is more of a voluntary, cooperative fellowship.)

Now there are plenty of variations and exceptions to the rules. Even denominations that have episcopalian or presbyterian forms of government often have to adjust their positions due to congregational pressure and popular opinion. There are evangelical, Bible-believing churches that utilize each of the forms of church government mentioned above. The form of church government is not a major doctrinal issue. The most important issue is that those who are in leadership positions must submit to the authority of Christ and obediently follow His lead as revealed in Scripture (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). Christ is the Head of the Church, and if any system, board, individual leader, or congregation begins to displace Christ and the Word with their own beliefs and desires, then that leadership is no longer legitimate.

## Baptism

Taken in part from Juli Camarin, author of [jcblog.net](http://jcblog.net): What is the Difference between Sprinkling and Immersion? September 16, 2011, and from Beaucoup (<https://www.beau-coup.com/party-planning/baptism-christening-ceremony-rituals.htm>), Poli Liu, Founder.

Baptism carries the weight of a number of traditions, some of which are man-made and some, of course, have Scriptural backing. I would like to focus on one of these traditions, sprinkling versus immersion.

- Sprinkling
  - There is a form of baptism performed on infants, also called Christening. It is a rite of admission in to the Christian Church through the use of water. In some churches/denominations, baptism is practiced with the understanding a person will be saved after death, even cleansing the person from original sin.
  - Another view is that sprinkling came about due to a lack of water or merely for convenience sake, which has become popular in many liturgical churches.
  - Still there are circumstances that dictate this form of baptism exercised in any given situation. For example, a person who desires to be baptized cannot get fully wet due to physical issues. In cases like this, sprinkling becomes the only option.
- Affusion <https://www.definitions.net/definition/affusion>
  - A method of baptism where water is poured over the head of the person being baptized. The word "affusion" comes from the Latin *affusio*, meaning "to pour on".
  - Christian denominations, which baptize by affusion, do not deny the legitimacy of baptizing by submersion or immersion; rather, they consider that affusion is a sufficient, if not a necessarily preferable method of baptism mostly due to the practical difficulties of totally immersing an infant or some adults underwater.
- Immersion
  - To begin, the word for baptism comes from the Greek word 'Baptisma' which actually means "to make fully wet, to cover wholly with fluid, hence to dip". This is why in every example in the New Testament you will see that the person being baptized was fully immersed in a body of water.

- Baptism symbolizes our death, burial and resurrection to new life in Christ ( Romans 6:14, II Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 2:11-12 ). The act of baptism helps us to visualize the change that has taken place inside. It only makes sense with full immersion into a body of water and offers a more complete picture of what Christ has done for us.
- *For further study on baptism please look at these passages: Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:36-41, Acts 8:5;12;14-15, Acts 8:35-38, Acts 9:3-6; 17-18, Acts 10:43-48, Acts 16:14-15, Acts 16:30-34, Acts 19:1-6, Acts 22:12-16.*

Quote from CRI: Is Baptism by Immersion the Only Correct Way to Be Baptized?

Apr 6, 2009 (<https://www.equip.org/article/is-baptism-by-immersion-the-only-correct-way-to-be-baptized/>)

The better approach is to realize that it is the general form of the act and the intention of those involved that matter, not the precise amount of water used. The issue is: Shall we obey the command of Christ as He intended or shall we obey the command in a way that pleases us?

## Spiritual Gifts

Job 10:8a - "Your hands shaped me and made me."

Psalms 139:14-16 - (14) "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (15) My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, (16) Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be."

Ephesians 2:10 - "For we are God's masterpiece (or workmanship). He created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do good things He planned for us long ago."

Romans 9:20-21 - (20) "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, 'Why did You make me like this?' (21) Does not the Potter have the right to make out of a lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"

Who created YOU?

God! The fundamental truth of Scripture is that God has created you and me in His image (Gen.1:26-28; Ps.33:15). The same God whose mind and power fashioned the universe has carefully, intentionally, and individually crafted you and me.

So, do you come as a surprise?

No! Of course not! You are not a collection of molecules thrown together by random chance. The Lord of the universe called you into being.

What do you think He created you for?

God created you both to live with Him and for Him. We were created for His purposes, which means we have a responsibility to our Creator, for as Romans 14:7-8 says, we ultimately belong to Him. Therefore our lives need to be centered on Him. Amen!

Gifted for Greatness

Is there anything more fun than watching children open Christmas presents? My wife, Judy, and I have four kids, and I don't know about you, but I take such great pleasure in watching each one enjoy the moment. My heart is filled with love as their eyes brighten with the excitement of discovery. I actually like it when they ask me to show them how to use the gifts, and I become very satisfied as I watch them begin to actually play with the gifts Judy and I specifically picked out for each of them.

Now picture this same wonderful scene, only with spiritual gifts. When God planned the masterpiece he would make of your life, He decided to give you certain gifts that would enable you to effectively share His love and make your own unique contribution to His kingdom. He placed these spiritual abilities within you and waits eagerly for you to discover them. And I am sure He is thrilled as He watches you discover and use your spiritual gifts He has given you.

In his book, "19 Gifts of the Spirit," Leslie B. Flynn writes: "You are a gifted child of God. Since you are also given an outlet for your gift, you are a minister too. For every gift He bestows, the Spirit has planned a sphere of service. Thus, no child of God should have an inferiority complex. Rather, awareness that he is a gifted child with an area of ministry should meet every child of God's psychological need to feel wanted and to possess a sense of worth."

### III. Understanding Spiritual Gifts

As I have said, God has given us wonderful gifts, and He doesn't make it difficult to discover and use them.

Read 1 Cor. 12:1 - *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.*

The word, ignorant, here does not mean unintelligent or naïve. Rather, Paul is telling us that if we are uninformed, we will miss out on the wonderful gifts God has given us.

So to first understand spiritual gifts, let's think about what they are not:

1. Gifts are not the same as personal traits.

Yes, your personality will complement your spiritual gifts. For example, if you are an outgoing person, most likely your gifts will work best as you actively engage other people. If you are more reserved by nature, your personality will complement your giftedness.

2. Gifts are not the same as natural talents or abilities.

A spiritual gift is a spiritual ability that has been given to believers, at the moment they received Christ, by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit empowers the believer to use that gift(s) for the good of the body and for helping the body function.

On the other hand, you may have one or more talents/capacities you were born with which you later discovered and developed. Musical ability, computer skills, public speaking, cooking are examples of talents.

Notice that there is both a relationship and a difference in the way talents and gifts may be used. A spiritual gift can be used only as the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to use it to edify the body or for the work of the body.

Talents can be related to gifts when they become the means by which you express a spiritual gift. Say, for example, that you have a musical talent. You may use that talent to express a variety of spiritual gifts, such as, *creative communication, evangelism, faith, leadership, and more*, and those gifts can be used for God's glory. On the other hand, any person may have any number of talents and may use those talents any way he/she chooses—for selfish purposes, or even for evil purposes, but hopefully for the benefit of others.

Simply remember gifts and talents, especially gifts, have a value only if the believer is letting Christ's love flow through them.

### 3. Gifts are not the same as fruit of the Spirit.

| Fruit of the Spirit                   | Gifts of the Spirit               |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Develops the character of a Christian | Shapes the service of a Christian |
| Same for every Christian              | Different for every Christian     |
| Evidence of maturity                  | Evidence of faithfulness          |
| Indicate who we should be             | Indicate what we do               |

Fruit shows my *maturity* These are inward characteristics of the believer's heart, revealed in their purity and holiness as that person grows and manifests grace. They indicate what we should be.

Gifts show my *ministry*. They are task-oriented functions or roles that God has called and equipped each believer to perform. They indicate what we do.

#### IV. What are Spiritual Gifts?

Spiritual gifts are special abilities distributed by the Holy Spirit to every believer according to God 's design and grace, for the common good of the body of Christ. (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; I Peter 4:10 & More)

#### **Six Truths About Spiritual Gifts**

1. Every Christian has at least **one** gift.
2. No one receives **all** the gifts. **We are to be interdependent**
3. The **Holy Spirit** decides what gifts I get.
4. I am **to develop** the gifts God gives me, to help it grow
5. It is a sin **to waste** the gifts God gave me. God designed you! Honor Him.
6. Using my gifts **glorifies** God and helps me **grow**.

| Romans<br>12:6-8     | I Corinthians<br>12:8-10; 27-30 | Ephesians<br>4:11-12 | I Peter 4:7-11  | Misc. References  |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---|
| Exhortation          | Administration                  | <i>Apostleship</i>   | Hospitality     | Creative Communication<br>Ex.31:3; 35:31-35 and more      |
| Giving               | Apostleship                     | Evangelism           | <i>Prophecy</i> | Craftsmanship<br>Psalm 150:3-5; 2 Samuel 6:14-15 and more |
| Leadership           | Discernment                     | Pastor/Shepherding   | <i>Service</i>  | Intercession<br>Romans 8:26-27; John 17:9-26 and more     |
| Mercy                | Faith                           | <i>Prophecy</i>      |                 | Missions/Missionary<br>Acts 14:21-28; I Cor. 9:19-23      |
| Prophecy             | Healing                         | <i>Teaching</i>      |                 |   |
| Service              | Helps                           |                      |                 |   |
| Teaching/Exhortation | Knowledge                       |                      |                 |   |
|                      | Miracles                        |                      |                 |   |
|                      | <i>Prophecy</i>                 |                      |                 |   |
|                      | <i>Teaching</i>                 |                      |                 |   |
|                      | Wisdom                          |                      |                 |   |
|                      |                                 |                      |                 |   |

### **Why does God give Spiritual Gifts?**

I Cor. 12:7 - The spiritual gifts God gives you are neither for you or about you. They weren't given to boost your self-image or to serve as some kind of special reward from God. They were not given to raise you up to some level of worldly greatness or success. They are yours for the express purpose of blessing the body of Christ - The church. Discovering your spiritual gifts is not the ultimate goal - using them to bless others is.



## **Does everyone get a gift?**

The bible assures us that every believer receives gifts from God: (I Cor. 7:7b) You may not feel tremendously gifted, but God says that you are. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. There are no special qualifications needed, no special level of maturity required, not even a particular time span needed in your journey with Jesus. You may not have discovered the gifts you have or begun to use them yet, but you definitely have them. And, how many gifts you have is not nearly as important as discovering and developing the gifts you do have.

Remember, when we use what God has graced us with, people are blessed, He is honored, and we are fulfilled. Please keep in mind that no one receives all the gifts, because we are to love and depend on each other.

Purposes of spiritual gifts include:

To bring glory to God, (Col.3:23; John 5:30). This one purpose must be at the forefront every time we use exercise our gift(s).

To confirm God's Word. The use of spiritual gifts will never contradict God's Word and its truth, only confirm it further.

To build up others, not yourself, (Mt.20:28). We're are to not only bring glory to God but to bring glory to God by serving others, (I Peter 4:10).

To empower you to supernatural works. The Holy Spirit chooses to move in your life and supernatural things happen, (Acts 1:8).

To partner with the Holy Spirit. We are here to accomplish His purpose; He is not here to assist us in accomplishing our purpose, John 14:16-17).

To build up your local church. The local church is still God's instrument for bringing hope to the world, and spiritual gifts are to be used to build up the local church, the body of Christ, (I Cor. 12:7).

To bring freedom to the bound. As you move forward in your purpose, you will be consistently confronted with an enemy who is like a roaring lion seeking to devour you and others. But in Christ, you, being part of the church, have the power to fulfill that which God intended, namely to rule over principalities and powers of darkness.

To comfort the afflicted and afflict the prideful. If you ask the Holy Spirit, He will help you in difficult circumstances to give you words or wisdom and discernment to change the course of others' lives.

To bring the Good News. Your responsibility is to extend God's Kingdom, sharing the Good News of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness with others. The exciting thing is that God has given you everything you need (spiritual gifts) to succeed. Remember, apart from God you can do nothing. Only when we realize that He has equipped us with divine tools, focusing on what He can do through us, will we be able to affect the nations, (John 20:30-31).

### **How do I discover my gift(s)?**

- a. Explore the Word (Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:8-10, 28; Eph. 4:11; I Peter 4:9-10)  
Before you begin reading these passages, ask the spirit to speak to you about your giftedness. Don't worry about it if you are unsure of the definition of a particular gift.
- b. Exhibit the fruits of the Spirit above gifts - Our goal should always be to pursue Christlikeness first and foremost.
- c. Engage in a spiritual gifts inventory, but remember this should never take the place of experimenting and involvement in serving. If you need a resource on this, please email Jim Doyle at jim@northcoastcalvary.org.
- d. Experiment with your gift(s) - Identify needs of people around you; place ministry below God and family; become available for ministry; try exercising the gift(s) you think you have for at least 3 to 6 months.
- e. Evaluate your effectiveness - ask others around you what they have observed.
- f. Expect results. God will use you no matter what. But you will probably have a deeper sense of fulfillment when you are serving with your strength (Spiritual Giftedness).

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