

Spiritual gifts are the source for divine administration and service in the royal family. There are seven permanent spiritual gifts functional in the post-canon period of the Church Age: (1) pastor-teacher, (2) evangelist, (3) administrative leadership, (4) service, (5) helps, (6) showing mercy, and (7) giving.

These gifts have the greatest impact when they are present in the members of the local body. In our technological age, there is an abundance of electronic contrivances that allow believers to study the Word of God away from the church assembly.

These gifts learn how to function best within the assembled body. Opportunities for their function are more available there than in front of the Roku.

Although there are some good reasons for absences, for example, illness, work responsibilities, military service, or incidental circumstances, convenience is not one of them. The pastor's gift is designed to communicate face-to-face with the flock.

I can personally attest after years of teaching to an ever-shrinking congregation that the gift of pastor-teacher functions far more effectively with sheep in the corral rather than out to pasture.

**Hebrews 10:25** ... not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the Rapture drawing near. (NET)

This country desperately needs an enlarging Pivot that is on the advance. Those who are on the sidelines, take heed.

**James 1:18** In the exercise of His will [ βούλομαι (*boúlomai*) ] He brought us forth [ ἀποκυέω (*apokuéō*) ] by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. (NASB)

Here is the expanded translation for as far as we have gone.

**James 1:18a** Having been decreed in eternity past, He regenerated us by a spiritual birth by the word of truth, namely the gospel ... (EXT)

1. The KJV and NASB translate the verb *boúlomai* with the word, “will,” but the better and more precise translation is “divine decree” or “decreed” to indicate its occurrence in eternity past.
2. The phrase “brought us forth,” is the NASB’s translation of the verb *apokuéō* which refers to our “spiritual birth” accomplished by the “word of truth” or the gospel.
3. This entire process results in:  

Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–8). The Bible conceives salvation as the redemptive renewal of man on the basis of a restored relationship with God in Christ, and presents it as involving “a radical and complete transformation wrought in the soul (Romans 12:2); Ephesians 4:23) by God the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 4:24).<sup>1</sup>
4. The Agent in the process of regeneration is the Holy Spirit. An unbeliever is incapable of processing divine thought. The idea that a substitutionary sacrifice by a “man” could produce salvation and eternal life is abstruse and profound.
5. In the process of evangelizing an unbeliever, the Holy Spirit provides two ministries: (1) common grace and (2) efficacious grace.
6. **Common Grace** is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in making the gospel lucid, perspicuous, and understandable to the person who is spiritually dead.
7. **Efficacious grace** is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in making the faith of the spiritually dead person effective for eternal salvation.
8. The Holy Spirit is the sovereign executive of the gospel. The works of a person who is spiritually dead have no place in evangelism.
9. Therefore, both hearing the gospel and believing in Jesus Christ are totally non-meritorious and compatible with the grace of God.
10. Some principles and guidelines on evangelism are expressed by Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer in his *Systematic Theology*:

(End JAS1-39. See JAS1-40 for continuation of study at tp. 391.)

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<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, “Regeneration,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 924.

Inattentive or uninstructed evangelists and zealous soul-winners too often go forth assuming that all persons anywhere and everywhere are able at any time to comply with the terms of the gospel, whereas the Scriptures teach that no man is able to make an intelligent decision for Christ apart from the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit. Evangelists and preachers are called upon to face, if they will, a supernatural factor in this program of winning the lost. Because of failure to understand this factor or because of unwillingness to be restricted thus to the sovereign working of the Spirit, men invent methods which prescribe human action as the terms upon which a soul may be saved, not recognizing the truth that the lost are to be saved, not when they do some prescribed action, but only when they believe on Christ as Savior. The evangelist's problem is not one of coaxing individuals to make some public demonstration; it is rather that of creating a clear conception of the saving grace of God. No individual is capable in himself of believing on Christ to the saving of his soul, apart from the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit by which he receives the vision of Christ as Savior and is inclined to receive Him by faith. It becomes disconcerting to the evangelist's program of methods in soul winning to confront an arbitrary supernatural situation over which he or the unsaved to whom he appeals has not the slightest control. The work of the Spirit in this particular sphere of influence is sovereign. It is the point where divine election is exercised and where it makes its demonstration. It is true that only the elect will be saved. It is true, also, that God may indict within the Christian that prayer which shall be an essential factor in the great work of inclining the lost to accept the Savior; but prayer does not determine the election of men: rather, prayer will itself be subject to the same sovereign Spirit, if prayed in the will of God. There can be no salvation apart from a preliminary, preparatory enlightenment of the unsaved by the Holy Spirit. That such a work by the Spirit is required becomes evident from certain Scriptures which set forth the inability of the unsaved.<sup>1</sup>

**1 Corinthians 2:14** But the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to Him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (NASB)

**2 Corinthians 4:3** Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The One Who Convicts the Unsaved," in *Systematic Theology: Pneumatology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 6:88–89.

v. 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (NASB)

11. James expresses these principles by his statement in verse 18, “He regenerated us by a spiritual birth by the word of truth, namely the gospel.”
12. This is followed by a purpose clause introduced by the preposition **εἰς (eis)**: “so that.” It indicates that God has a plan for these Jews’ lives and their lives have a purpose.
13. For hundreds of years, over 700 of the Diaspora from the Northern Kingdom and over 500 from the Diaspora of the Southern Kingdom, Jews were preserved for a purpose.
14. That purpose has to do with their chart pedigree. Their Jewish forefathers were among those taken into Assyria and Chaldea where they survived, had children, and ultimately their progeny were alive at the beginning of the Church Age.
15. That purpose is indicated by the present active infinitive of **εἶμί (eimí)**, the verb “to be.” As an infinitive it can function as a noun and a verb and translated, “of being.”
16. It is followed by the singular noun **ἀπαρχή (aparchē)**: “a first fruit.” This phrase’s translation reads, “for the purpose of being a first fruit.”
17. The verse concludes with the prepositional phrase, “of His creatures.” This noun is the plural of **κτίσμα (ktísma)**. It refers to things that are created and in this case it refers to things God has created.
18. The key to understanding this context is to examine the meaning of “first fruit” first by definition: “**ἀπαρχή (aparchē)**: Acknowledgement of the fact that the land and all its products were the gift of Jehovah to Israel, and in thanksgiving to Him, after which the Israelite was at liberty to use the rest.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Paul Levertoff, “First-Fruits,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 2:1114.

19. In Scripture there are several applications of the term “first fruit” and they must be addressed individually:

One of Israel's feasts appointed by Jehovah was the feast of first-fruits. The feast centered about the waving of a sheaf<sup>3</sup> of first-fruits which was waved before Jehovah at the time of harvest. It was a representative sheaf and contemplated all the sheaves of the whole harvest, since unto Jehovah must thanks be given for the increase which sowing and reaping secured. The term *first-fruits* is used variously in the Bible and each one of several applications should be considered:

CHRIST. Twice is Christ said to be First-Fruits and that in His resurrection. Christ as one glorified in His resurrection human body is the Antitype of the Old Testament wave sheaf.

**1 Corinthians 15:20** Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

**v. 23** But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that, those who are Christ's at His coming. (p. 153)

BLESSINGS. A foretaste of what awaits the child of God in glory, the blessings which are now realized by the believer because of the presence of the Spirit constitutes what is called first-fruits. These blessings are referred to as “having the first-fruits of the Spirit” in Romans 8:23.

FIRST BELIEVERS IN A LOCALITY. When the gospel is first preached in a locality there are those who believe and become the first-fruits of that locality.

**1 Corinthians 16:15** Now I urge you brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints).

ISRAEL. Jeremiah stated: “Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 2:3a).

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<sup>3</sup> “Sheaf (עֶמֶר, used as a unit of measurement of grain). The reaper with his sickle goes ahead and cuts the grain; then it is gathered into bundles by workers who follow, and the bundles are tied into sheaves. Such sheaves were used as a form of offering in the Levitical system of sacrifices (cf. Leviticus 23:10–12). Probably they were sheaves of barley, the first crop to be harvested each year in Palestine. They were used as the thank offering for the first fruits of the harvest” (J. H. Paterson, “Sheaf,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976], 5:378).