

## Fruits versus gifts

*1 Corinthians 12:31 – Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.*

From a distance, spiritual gifts can really catch the eye. Great ministries in the field of evangelization, fighting poverty or pastorship, can make you really enthusiastic.

Working with your spiritual gifts can also be very inspiring. Isn't it great when people are converted during evangelization actions or when other believers are build up because of your ability to give great sermons?

Still, spiritual gifts are not the most import characteristic of a Christian. Jesus mentions something else as the most important characteristic: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35)

Love is the first and most important spiritual fruit.

And in other places, Jesus also makes clear, that just spiritual gifts are not enough:

"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. (...) Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:16-23)

The congregation in Corinth was facing the same problem; many thought that spiritual gifts were more important and more impressive than spiritual fruits. Paul corrects this problem in the first letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 12 and 13, he explains that love is the most important and that it exceeds spiritual gifts.

Problems that can arise when a Christian is mostly occupied with his spiritual gifts and not enough with bearing spiritual fruit:

1. Pride and vanity. Without noticing, you can start to think you're awesome because of all the results of your spiritual gifts.

2. Gifts projection. You think that all Christians should do what you're doing and you're convinced that there are no excuses when fellow Christians don't do that.
3. Flying solo. Unfortunately it happens a lot that Christians with very visible gifts start their own ministry and disconnect themselves from their local congregation. By doing so, they isolate themselves and that makes them vulnerable for more pride, gifts projection, attacks from the outside and temptation to do all sorts of sin.
4. Damage to the ministry, themselves and fellow Christians through spiritual immaturity and undefeated sin.
5. Hindering of the effectiveness of fellow Christians, by a lack of cooperation, or by having a discouraging/insecure making effect on them.
6. Openness to temptation and sin. Great, isolated ministries sometimes are ruined by for example adultery, fights or financial mismanagement.

How do you prevent this from happening?

1. Always stay part of a local congregation, that is in return a part of a bigger whole (denomination or cooperation between multiple congregations)
2. Make the development of spiritual fruits (love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, faithfulness, self-control etc.) a higher priority than your spiritual gifts.
3. Realise that you need the local congregation to develop in a balanced way and that your brothers and sisters can see your weaknesses and blind spots and help you defeat them.
4. Realise that cooperation and unity in the congregation have a higher priority to God than the execution of your spiritual gifts. Sometimes you just have to go slower or do less, so that you can keep traveling together.
5. Learn to understand that the Lord has made us all differently and that we're all needed. We need each other to complement each other. There are all kinds of different spiritual gifts and we need them all.

Having said all this, it is important that we don't forget, that spiritual gifts are given by God to build up the body of God and are therefore needed and important.

Because of all the problems that sometimes arise, congregations can become a little hesitant towards the topic of spiritual gifts. But when the

gifts and the fruits are both developed in our congregations, you get good, stable and dynamic congregations.

We're encouraged to strive for spiritual gifts, discover which ones we have received, learn to work with them and develop them. We can be enthusiastic, joyful and thankful for the spiritual gifts that God is giving us and recognise and confirm each other's gifts.

We may give each other space to gain experience, to learn and to grow in using our spiritual gifts.

All this is possible in local congregations, where the development of spiritual fruits has a high priority and the development of the gifts is embedded in this.