

# The Spirit of Grace and Gifts of Grace

This paper is an exercise in allowing the bible to speak what it wants to say – and that is no other than what the authors (the human authors *and* the divine author, both) intended it to say. Buffs call this *exegesis*, a Greek word meaning ‘getting out’ – that is to say, ‘getting out of the text what is there in the text’, or ‘reading *from* the bible what the authors wrote *into* the bible’. Our topic is the knotty issue of what are commonly known as *spiritual gifts*, but which are better known as *grace gifts*, as I shall show. Given the wide variety of strongly held opinions on this matter, it’s doubly important that the fair and honest bible handler does *not* take *to* the bible his or her previously formed fixed opinions and intransigently held prejudices. With an eye on some simple aspects of the Greek language we shall see what is there in the bible text, and much of what follows is a trawl through scripture texts to see how God’s *grace* is the root of this much discussed area of Christian belief.

## Grace (or ‘Spiritual’) Gifts – Key Bible Passages

Romans 12 (and 1:11)

1 Corinthians 12-14 (and 1:7)

Ephesians 2:19-3:9

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 Timothy 4:11-16

2 Timothy 1:6-14

1 Peter 4:7-11

## First, the Gifts are Gifts of Grace

First we must observe that the word in the New Testament which is usually translated as ‘spiritual gift(s)’ is not a word that actually means this. Rather, it’s the Greek word **charisma** which derives from the word for ‘grace’ **charis** (from which we get our word ‘charity’). A **charisma** is essentially a thing or a matter to do with grace, and thus the word **charisma** should really be translated ‘**grace gift**’ or the like, because it’s in the very nature of grace to give freely. See for example:

*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (graciously give here is the Greek verb **charitoō**, which means ‘to grace’, or ‘to give by grace’ or ‘to lavish’).*

Romans 8:32

*We have different **gifts** {**grace gifts**, **charismata**}, according to the **grace** {**charis**} given us.*

Romans 12:6

*I became a servant of this gospel by the **gift** {**dōrea**} of God’s **grace** {**charis**} given me through the working of his power.*

Ephesians 3:7

## A Smidgeon of Greek

### Greek

**charis**

**charisma**

(plural **charismata**)

There's also a verb

related to charis,

**charizomai/charitōō**

### English

**grace** or **charity**

a **grace gift**

or **charismatic gift** (but this isn't clear)  
(**'spiritual' gift** isn't really correct)

To **give** by **grace**, or to

**'grace'** with a **gift** or

to **lavish**, or even to **pardon!**

### Grace or charis

For all its just five letters in both English and Greek, the word **grace** is the biggest word in the bible. The **grace** of God, delivered and fulfilled in Christ by his cross, is the entire theme of scripture.

**Grace** is the completely free, utterly undeserved and totally unearned gift from God of his mercy, forgiveness and cleansing, fitting us for heaven, and thus securing will full assurance our adoption as sons of God and heirs of eternal life. God chooses us for this stupendous benefit simply because he chooses us, and not because of anything in or about ourselves which we can parade before him as a human boast (because we have no such that we can parade). The Old Testament is full of **grace** (usually denoted by another short word, in the Hebrew language, translated by the likes of *loving-kindness*); and the New Testament is full of **grace**.

Any Greek word with **charis** in it signals that God's **grace** is all over that which it represents. So the word **charisma** means something given by **grace**; the translation 'charismatic gift' is just about o.k., except that it's not very helpful – it just takes us back to where we started, with the Greek word 'charis'. Let's translate it then: 'charis' means **grace**; 'charisma' means 'gift of **grace**' (given, of course, by God – and we shall see that this means given through Christ, distributed by his Spirit).

I can't say that it's definitely *wrong* to translate **charisma** as **'spiritual gift'**, because anything God does is, of course, spiritual, and the Spirit is of course fully involved in the giving. But the words 'spiritual' or 'spirit' are not part of the word 'charisma'. So I shall boldly insist that we translate **charisma** as **grace gift**, and I hope uncontroversially!

### Grace gift or charisma

The following occurrences of the word **charisma** are all about our salvation in Christ:

*But the **gift** {**charisma**} is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's **grace** {**charis**} and the **gift** {**dōrea**} that came by the **grace** {actually: **gift** by **grace**, **dōrea** en **charis**} of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*

Romans 5:15

*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of **grace** {**charis**} and of the **gift** {**dōrea**} of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.*

Romans 5:17

*For the wages of sin is death, but the **gift** {**charisma**} of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 6:23

*For it is by **grace** {**charis**} you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the **gift** {**dōron**} of God.*

Ephesians 2:8

*for God's **gifts** {**charismata**} and his call are irrevocable.*

Romans 11:29 (God's 'call' here is to be a Christian, as virtually always in the bible.)

The Greek words **dōrea** and **dōron** and (below) **domata** are just ordinary Greek words for 'gift(s)'. The following are a couple of other uses of the word **charisma**, indicating that whereas the predominant use of 'grace' and allied words in the bible denotes God's salvation, the words can also denote anything God gives to his saints:

*I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own **gift** {**grace gift, charisma**} from God; one has this [gift], another has that.*

1 Corinthians 7:7 (the 'gift' here is singleness/marriage!!)

Note that when I put a word in [square brackets], it's because the word is not actually there in the Greek text – the translator has presumed to supply it. Often this is entirely reasonable (as above), but on other occasions the extra word(s) supplied indicate that the translators have come to the text with preconceived ideas of what the **charisma** are all about – and we need carefully to take note of what is actually there in the text, and what is in fact not there in the text but is instead there in the prejudices of the translator.

*Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your **gift** {actually: 'your **grace**', **charis**} to Jerusalem.*

1 Corinthians 16:3 (this refers to *our* Christian giving!)

See also 2 Corinthians 8-9 re. the Christian's **grace** in giving. Shortly, we shall see that the bible uses the word **charisma** for gifts God gives to his church for the glorifying of God and for the building up of his church. I.e., those things commonly called 'spiritual gifts', but much better called 'grace gifts', are not for selfish use still less for exhibitionist display, but are for servant-like use in the glorifying of God and in the building up of his church (worth saying again!)

## **Secondly, God is the Sovereign Giver (The Gifts are God's Gifts)**

*But to each one of us **grace** {**charis**} has been given as Christ apportioned it {actually: according to the measure of the **gift, dōrea** of Christ} ... **he** ... **gave gifts** {**domata**} to men.*

Ephesians 4:7,8

Fan into flame the **gift {charisma} of God.**

2 Timothy 1:6

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and **he gives them to each one, just as he determines.**

1 Corinthians 12:11

And **in the church God** has appointed ...

1 Corinthians 12:27

### **Thirdly, God Gifts all Christians**

God works all of them **in all men** ... Now **to each one** the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ... All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and **he gives them to each one, just as he determines.**

1 Corinthians 12:6,7,11

But **to each one of us** grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it {or: God} says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." {Psalm 68:18}

Ephesians 4:7

### **Fourthly, God Gifts His Church – fully**

And **in the church** God has appointed ...

1 Corinthians 12:27

Therefore **you do not lack any spiritual** {should be **grace**} **gift {charisma}**.

1 Corinthians 1:7

### **... and God Gifts His Church – comprehensively**

There are **different kinds** of gifts {charismata}, but the same Spirit.

There are **different kinds** of service, but the same Lord.

There are **different kinds** of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

We have **different gifts** {charismata}, according to the grace given us.

Romans 12:6

Each one should use whatever gift {charisma} he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace **in its various forms.**

1 Peter 4:10

## **Fifthly, God's Gifts are for Glorifying God**

*If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, **so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.** Amen.*

1 Peter 4:11

*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift {charisma pneumatikon} **to make you strong.***

Romans 1:11

## **... and for Building the Church**

*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given **for the common good** ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And **in the church** God has appointed ...*

1 Corinthians 12:7,27 (and see also v.12-26)

*Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts {pneumatōn}, try to excel in gifts that **build up the church** ... All of these must be done **for the strengthening of the church.** (but see below for an alternative rendering of this verse)*

1 Corinthians 14:12,26 (and much of ch. 14, esp. 14:3-5,17)

*Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ **we who are many form one body**, and each member **belongs to all the others.***

Romans 12:4-5

*You are ... fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, **built** on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too **are being built together** to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:19-22

*Each one should use whatever gift {charisma} he has received **to serve others**, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

1 Peter 4:10

## Interlude – our Smidgeon of Greek – continued

### Greek

**charis**

**charisma**

(plural **charismata**)

(there's also the verb  
**charizomai/charitoō**)

**pneuma**

**pneumatikoi/a**

**pneumatikon charisma**

(only in Romans 1:11)

?? But ...

**pneumatikon** (on its own) =

– No! Not really – see below ...

### English

**grace** or **charity**

a **grace gift**

To **give by grace**, or  
to '**grace**' with a gift)

**Spirit/spirit**

**spiritual** (people or things)

**spiritual grace gift**

**spiritual gift** ??

## 4 x 'pneumatic' in 1 Corinthians 12-14

There are four occurrences of the word 'pneumatic' or 'spiritual' in these 1 Corinthians chapters. The point of these four occurrences of 'pneumatic' is that none of them need to be translated as 'spiritual gift' but just 'spiritual' or 'spiritual person' or 'spiritual thing', and this is a much to be preferred translation – there's no need whatsoever to confuse the two words **charisma** (a **grace gift**) and **pneumatikoi/a** (**spiritual** people/things).

Words in square brackets [thus] below are not actually in the Greek text:

*Now about spiritual [gifts] {actually: **concerning the spiritual things** or **matters** or **people**, = **'the pneumatics'** }, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.*

1 Corinthians 12:1

*Follow the way of love {actually: **pursue love**} and eagerly desire spiritual [gifts] {actually: **eagerly desire the spiritual things**, = **the 'pneumatics'**}, especially the [gift] of prophecy {actually: **in order to prophesy**}.*

1 Corinthians 14:1

*Since you are eager to have spiritual [gifts] {actually: **Since you are zealous of spiritual things**}, try to excel in [gifts] that build up the church {actually: **seek to abound to the housebuilding** – or **edification** – **of the church**}.*

1 Corinthians 14:12

The old translations AV and ASV acknowledge that 'gift' and 'gifts' are supplied by the translators in the above three verses.

*If anybody thinks he is {actually: and better, seems to be} a prophet or spiritually [gifted] {actually: **if anyone seems to be a prophet or a spiritual person = 'pneumatikos'**}, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.*

1 Corinthians 14:37 (AV and ASV omit 'gifted' – they just have 'spiritual'.)

So these four verses can each be translated more straightforwardly without any mention of the term 'gift' which is everywhere absent from these particular verses. Here they are again, in their simple, straightforward translations:

Now **concerning the spiritual things**, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

1 Corinthians 12:1

Pursue love and eagerly desire spiritual **things**, especially that you may prophesy.

1 Corinthians 14:1

Since **you are zealous of spiritual things, seek to abound to the edification of the church.**

1 Corinthians 14:12

*If **anyone seems to be a prophet or a spiritual person**, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.*

1 Corinthians 14:37

### **Sixthly, Gifts are defined by 'Glorifying God' and 'Building the Church', not by lists of them.**

There are various lists of gifts, but it shouldn't be concluded that these are necessarily exhaustive or even representative. None of these lists says it's comprehensive. We can't know for certain why each list contains the elements it does, but a reasonable guess is that the things Paul and Peter choose to mention are pertinent to some particular feature of the life of the church they are writing to (maybe, and clearly in the case of the Corinthian church, an issue or problem being faced by the church and which needs clear, perhaps stern, teaching or rebuke), and/or pertinent to the doctrinal teaching the writer has in mind.

What is certain is that any arena of giftedness in a particular Christian or group of Christians can be termed a grace gift if pursuit and use of that gift can make a contribution to the glorifying of God in the church and the building up of that church. And by 'any' we mean 'any'. It could be an area of practical giftedness (e.g. DIY skills), a matter of spiritual maturity (e.g. wisdom), or whatever. Just so long as God is glorified and the church edified in its deployment.

#### **List 1.**

*We have different gifts {charismata}, according to the grace given us ... **prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, showing mercy.***

Romans 12:6-8

#### **List 2.**

*... **apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*

Ephesians 4:11-12

### **List 3.**

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ... **message of wisdom, message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues** {or: languages}, **interpretation of tongues.**

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

### **List 4.**

... **apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, gifts of healing, those able to help others, gifts of administration, different kinds of tongues** {or: languages}.

1 Corinthians 12:28

## **Seventhly, the Word Gifts are of overriding importance.**

### **List 5.**

Each one should use whatever **gift** {charisma} he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace {charis} in its various forms. If anyone **speaks**, he should do it as one speaking **the very words of God**. If anyone **serves**, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:11

### **List 2.** (again, more fully)

It was he who gave some to be (the) **apostles**, some to be (the) **prophets**, some to be (the) **evangelists**, and some to be (the) **pastors and teachers**, to **prepare God's people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Ephesians 4:11-12

### **List 4.** (again, more fully)

And in the church God has appointed **first of all apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, **then** workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:28

It's important for us to note (see next section) that God's grace gifts are given to individuals in the church for the church's benefit – for the building up of the church and thus for the church's glorifying of Christ as she grows in godliness and mission). We are seeing in this section that it's far more important for the church to have the Word gifts – teaching gifts – in full measure. God may not give a comprehensive selection of other gifts, but he has decreed that a church shall have an adequate quota of gifted teachers. This doesn't mean that the teachers as individuals are more important than other Christians – far from it; one shudders at the thought. But the bible is adamant that teaching gifts are more important for the church to have than the non-teaching gifts, irrespective of who has them.

*If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good **teaching** that you have followed ... Command and **teach** these things ... Until I come, **devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift** {grace gift, charisma}, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands*

on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1 Timothy 4:6-16

For this reason I remind you to **fan into flame the gift** {charisma} of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God ... And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am ... What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

2 Timothy 1:6-14

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – **so that I can preach there also**. That is why I have come."

Mark 1:38 (his disciples were pressing him to continue his healing ministry)

You then, my son, be strong in the **grace** that is in Christ Jesus. And the things **you have heard me say** in the presence of many witnesses **entrust** to reliable men who will also be qualified to **teach** others.

2 Timothy 2:2

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, **in which the pure Word of God is preached**, and the sacraments be duly ministered ...

Article 19 of the Church of England

**Eighthly, God's Gifts are for Spiritual use in Humility and Love; self-effacingly; self-sacrificially; servant-like; other-person-centredly; appropriately.**

Here again are three verses from earlier, in their straightforward, uncluttered translations:

**Follow the way of love** and eagerly desire spiritual things, especially that you may prophesy.

Since you are zealous of spiritual things, try to excel in the **building up of the church**.

If anybody seems to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you **is the Lord's command**.

1 Corinthians 12:1, 14:1,12,37 (my translation)

And here are further texts concerning mutual service in the church:

Each one should use whatever **grace gift** he has received **to serve others**.

1 Peter 4:10 (my translation)

Be **completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love** ... Instead, speaking the truth **in love**, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ ... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up **in love**, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:2,15-16

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as **living sacrifices** ... **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought**, but rather **think of yourself with sober judgement** ... in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member **belongs to all the others** ... **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves** ... **Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud**, but **be willing to associate with people of low position** {or: willing to do menial work}. **Do not be conceited.**

Romans 12:1,3,5,10,16

And now I will show you **the most excellent way** {love, cf. 1 Corinthians 13}.

1 Corinthians 12:31

Above all, **love each other** deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

As **each part** does its work.

Ephesians 4:16

But everything should be done **in a fitting and orderly way.**

1 Corinthians 14:40

(and the whole of 1 Corinthians 14)

Be **devoted to one another** in brotherly love.

Romans 12:10

We have different gifts {or (much better): grace gifts, charismata}, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, **let him use it in proportion to** {or: **in a manner appropriate to**} **his faith**. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12:6-8

And see the whole of 1 Corinthians 13, with its emphasis on **love** or (older versions) **charity** !!

Point made I trust !