

## **Spiritual Gifts: Service and Helps** **A Series on Spiritual Gifts: Part 9**

The spiritual gifts of service (Rom 12:7) and helps (1 Cor 12:28) are not clearly defined in the Bible, and in English, the words “service” and “helps” are very similar in meaning. Yet they appear as distinctly different spiritual gifts. What do their Greek terms reveal, and how are the two gifts different?

### **Service**

The spiritual gift of service is found in Romans 12:7. The same Greek noun “diakonia,” translated as “service,” is also found in 1 Corinthians 12:5.

If service, in his serving (**diakonia**); or he who teaches, in his teaching; (Rom 12:7)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries (**diakonia**), and the same Lord. (1 Cor 12:4-5)

This illustrates the confusion in understanding what the spiritual gift of service is. Romans 12 indicates that service is a spiritual gift just as teaching is yet in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks of service in a general sense though apart from spiritual gifts. There are several instances where “diakonia” is used in this general sense:

Service within the context of unity of the body

And there are varieties of ministries (**diakonia**), and the same Lord. (1 Cor 12:5 [other examples: 1 Cor 16:15; Eph 4:12])

Service as one of the twelve disciples

For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry (**diakonia**). (Acts 1:17)

Service as one of the apostles

to occupy this ministry (**diakonia**) and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place. (Acts 1:25 [other examples: Acts 6:4])

Service in proclaiming the word

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission (**diakonia**), taking along with them John, who was also called Mark. (Acts 12:25 [other examples: Acts 20:24; 21:19; Rom 11:13; 15:31; 2 Cor 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 11:8; Col 4:17; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 4:5, 11; Rev 2:19])

Service of the Holy Spirit abounds in glory

how will the ministry (**diakonia**) of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry (**diakonia**) of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry (**diakonia**) of righteousness abound in glory. (2 Cor 3:8-9)

Service by angels

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service (**diakonia**) for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? (Heb 1:14)

Service through making a collection

And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief (**diakonia**) of the brethren living in Judea. (Acts 11:29 [other examples: 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12-13])

While this general sense of service is not the same as the spiritual gift of service, examples like the above can cause one to misunderstand the spiritual gift of service to mean serving in general.

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Paul does not elaborate on what the spiritual gift of service is. In first century Greek society, the verb form of “diakonia,” “diakoneō” meant “to wait at table.” The noun form “diakonia” expressed the occupation implied by the verb; thus, “a server” or “waiter.” Typical to the first century church was fellowship of the common meal, which required serving at the table.

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food (**diakonia**). So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. (Acts 6:1-3)

But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving (**diakonia**) alone? Then tell her to help me.” (Luke 10:40)

Commemorating His atonement, Jesus introduced the Last Supper (Luke 22:17-20) which instituted Christian fellowship with food. Recognizing this and respecting the most common meaning of the Greek term “diakonia,” it is likely that the spiritual gift of serving is about a person who serves the church body around food.

Contemporaneously this may be seen in those who are led to host Bible studies at their home with dinners or potlucks or who are involved with food preparation or serving at church functions involving the church body.

A distinction should be made here between the general sense of serving and the spiritual gift of serving. Take for example a person who nobly serves by feeding the homeless. The Holy Spirit provides spiritual gifts expressly for the edification of the church body. Thus, if the person feeding the homeless also serves the church body in a similar fashion, he would be perceived as one who has the spiritual gift of service.

## **Helps**

Because the Greek noun for helps, “antilēmpsis,” is found only once in the Bible, and Paul does not elaborate upon it, this spiritual gift is very difficult to define.

And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps (**antilēmpsis**), administrations, various kinds of tongues. (1 Cor 12:28)

While this is not always accurate, one method that can be used to provide clarity to a Greek term is to examine its component parts.

**Anti** – This Greek preposition is used to convey the sense of “opposite, over against,” or “instead of.”

**Lēmpsis** – This Greek noun means “taking hold” or “acceptance,” and its use can be seen from this biblical passage:

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving (**lēmpsis**) but you alone; (Phil 4:15)

During the first century, the common use of the Greek noun “lēmpsis,” taking hold or acceptance, was in the context of remuneration or money paid for work or service.

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Combining these two meanings together, “antilēmpsis” is the opposite of taking hold or acceptance. In view of the common use of Greek noun “lēmpsis,” the opposite would be “gift” or “donation” where goods and services are provided without any remuneration.

During the first century, the people who were in need of a gift were those who were poor and unable to work, which in Greek society were comprised of the elderly, widow, physically disabled (blind, lame / crippled, etc) and sick. In this light, the spiritual gift of helps is about edifying those in the church body who need financial and material assistance.

References:

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