

GOD'S GIFTED CHILDREN

1 Cor. 12:1-11

Introduction: There was nothing dull about the church at Corinth. My friend James Merritt says it is the “drama queen church of the New Testament.” However, some of the most interesting and important teachings of Christian doctrine and life is found in this book, especially chs 12-14 which deal with the important and controversial issue of spiritual gifts.

1 Cor. 12-14 must be approached with care and humility. Anthony Thiselton writes, “Hardly any statement about chapters twelve and fourteen remains uncontroversial...” (1 Cor., **NIGTC**, 902). Spiritual gifts were a hot topic at the church in Corinth. Paul gives more attention to them here than any of his other writings. One of the reasons why Paul wrote to the Corinthians in such detail was because of their ignorance of spiritual gifts. He specifically states, “Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware” (ESV, “uninformed”). It is very easy to be ignorant of spiritual gifts. Sadly, most Christians are.

In fact, the word for “uninformed” is the Greek word that gives us the English word “agnostic.” Unfortunately, when it comes to spiritual gifts in the church, there are many spiritual agnostics. They know very little, if anything, about them. And, what you don’t know can hurt you when it comes to your exercising your spiritual gift(s). It can hinder your service to our Savior. When it comes to spiritual

gifts, ignorance is not bliss. Now, before we walk thru these verses, there is one spiritual truth we must keep in mind. Exercising a spiritual gift is no guarantee of spiritual maturity. The filling of the Spirit (Eph 5:18) and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) are far more accurate barometers of where you are spiritually. The Corinthian Church proves you can exercise your spiritual gifts in the flesh. At Corinth, spiritual gifts unfortunately were not uniting the church; they were dividing the church (v. 25). It was obvious that some of the Corinthians were placing such an inordinate emphasis on showy displays of spirituality, particularly speaking in tongues, that it was disrupting the church's worship, dividing the church's fellowship, and demeaning the witness of the gospel. (Hayes, I Cor., 206) This church was exercising the gifts of the Spirit, but they were not exhibiting the fruit of the spirit! The tragic result was division not unity; pride not humility.

I. God does not want us to be uninformed about spiritual gifts 12:1-3

Not knowing the Bible is dangerous. This is so true when it comes to spiritual gifts. We need to let God's Word be our guide. Paul begins with words of warning and admonition.

1) Don't be like you were when you did not know God 12:1-2

"Now concerning spiritual gifts..." (12:1; cf 7:1) The word "gifts" actually is not in the original language. The word is *pneumatikon* and means "the spirituals" or "the things of the Spirit." There is a debated among scholars as

to whether the term refers to “spiritual things,” “spiritual people,” or “spiritual gifts.” Schreiner is probably right who states, “A reference to spiritual gifts is most likely given the ensuing discussion... does not discuss spiritual things or people, but spiritual gifts.” (Schreiner, 1 Corinthians, TNTC, 253). Paul tells the Church he does not want them to be unaware or uninformed. This is how they were in spiritual matters before they were saved. They were, as pagans, as unbelievers “enticed and led astray by mute idols,” non-gods who could not speak like the one true God. They were phony god’s with no life and no voice. Since you met Jesus, you are not like that anymore.

2) Confess Jesus as Lord and trust the Holy Spirit 12:3

Verse 3 is both striking and surprising. Its difficulty is pointed out by Thiselton who list 12 different interpretations (*1 Cor.*, 918-24). The immediate context, I believe, is a big help here. The lost, those led astray by idols and the demons behind them (1 Cor. 10:20-22), reject Christ. In essence they say “Jesus be damned.” A crucified Jewish Messiah as Savior of the world? What a joke! In contrast, those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and delivered from sin (1 Cor. 6:9-11) joyfully confess, “Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10:9-10). The Spirit in them moves them to gladly

confess what brings glory to God the Father (Phil 2:11). Paul has set the table for the discussion of spiritual gifts that now follows.

II. God distributes spiritual gifts variously and intentionally 12:4-10

Spiritual gifts are actually trinitarian in nature. God the Father has given us the gift of God the Son for our salvation. God the Son has given us God the Holy Spirit for our sanctification. God the Holy Spirit has given us spiritual gifts for our service. One point we will see is these are not material gifts. These are spiritual gifts. They are gifts of and from our triune God.

1) There is a unity of source in the Trinity 12:4-6

This passage is “Trinitarian” in both a theological and a homiletical way.

“Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God who works (ESV, “empowers”) all of them in each person.” We see all three persons of the Trinity mentioned. The parallelisms are hard to miss. And, there are three differentiations:

of different *gifts*, (χαρισμάτων, charismatōn) but the same *Spirit*;

of different *ministries*, (διακονιῶν, diakoniōn) but the same *Lord*;

of different *activities*, (ἐνεργημάτων, energēmatōn) but the same *God*.

Thiselton notes “While the trinitarian stance is implicit in 2 Cor. 13:13 and Eph. 4:4-6, here we encounter the earliest ‘clear’ trinitarian language.”

(Thiselton, Corinthians, **NIGCT**, 934) (1 Cor. 2:10). The point is that the work God was doing among the Corinthians through spiritual gifts was a triune work and was not limited only to the Holy Spirit. (Schrenier, *I Corinthians*, **TNTC**, 255). But, Paul is looking at the gifts from three different angles. Bruce is correct in saying they are not distinct categories. (Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, **TNCBC**, 118). Yet, Thiselton is surely right when he says, “That more than a difference of aspect is entailed, on the part of the subject or the reader’s observation.” (Thiselton, I Cor., **NIGCNT**, 933).

A) The distribution of the gifts is from the Spirit 12:4

“*Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit.*” (12:4). The word for “gifts” here is different from the word used for “spiritual gifts” in verse one. The word is *chrismata*. The root word is *charis* which literally means “grace.” These gifts are grace gifts. They are gifts of the Spirit and gifts of grace. They are distributed by the Holy Spirit to each believer as a grace gift. Spiritual gifts are supernatural gifts by the grace of God. They are not just glorified natural abilities. They are not something you gain by going to school or practicing or inheriting. They are literally charismatic gifts which means if you are a Christian, you are a charismatic Christian by default. Spiritual gifts simply put are supernatural endowments which enable us to

carry out God's work in God's way. They are provided by the grace of God and they are powered by the Spirit of God. They truly are supernatural gifts.

B) The ministration of the gifts is from the Son 12:5

Verse five tells us, "There are different ministries" or "varieties of service, but the same Lord." The word ministries or service is *diakonion*, from which we get our word "deacon." This is not "ministry" in a technical or formal sense. This is putting any gift to work in serving the church (Thiselton, 1 Cor., NIGTC, 931). Gifts show up in different ways in different ministries. Even though two Christians may have the same basic gift, that gift may be manifested and applied in different ways. For example, someone with the gift of teaching may be especially gifted in teaching young children, teenagers or adults. The truth is all ministry and service is done and should be done through the exercise of spiritual gifts and all spiritual gifts are to be displayed in service for the building up and edification of others (12:7;14:3,12,17,26).

C) The operation of the gifts is from the Father 12:6

Verse six speaks of "*different activities*," but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone." The Greek word for activities is *energēmatōn* which gives us the word "energy." We exercise these gifts

not only by the grace of God, but through the power of God. It is his power that fires the engine and leads us to exercise these gifts in an effective way. Merritt says, “you might say that the first category represents the essence of the gifts (they are grace gifts). The second category represents the expression of the gifts (they are to be used for service). The third category represents the effects of the gifts. The result is a display of the power of God through his people.”

2) There is a diversity in service for the body 12:7-10

Spiritual gifts are listed 4 times in the Bible as the following chart shows:

1 COR. 12:8-11	1 COR. 12:28	ROM. 12:6-8	EPH. 4:11	1 PET. 4:11
word of wisdom	apostles	prophecy	apostles	speaking
word of knowledge	prophets	service	prophets	service
faith	teachers	teaching	evangelists	
gifts of healings	workers of miracles	exhortation	pastors	
working of miracles	helps	giving	teachers	
prophecy	administration	leadership		
distinguishing of spirits	kinds of tongues	showing of mercy		
interpretation of tongues				

We should also note in 1 Cor. 7:7 Paul speaks of being gifted for marriage and singleness. It is important that we understand no list is meant to be

exhaustive. Further, no 2 lists are identical. I would be hesitant to call something a gift that is not clearly said to be one in the Bible (ex. singing). But, there may be other supernatural enablements that God sovereignly chooses to give. Regardless, verse 7 makes a critical important point: “the gifts and their operation are not for self-edification. They are “for the common good,” the body as a whole. While 20 or so gifts are listed in the Bible, 9 are listed here, and 8 are listed in verses 28-29 with some overlap. The following chart helps us note quickly what we discover in verses 8-10. The use and repetition of “same Spirit” and “one Spirit” is not accidental.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS CHART (1 COR. 12:7-10)

GIFT	GREEK TERM	TRANSLATION	PURPOSE	MANIFESTATION	REFERENCE
WORD OF WISDOM	<i>LOGOS SOPHIOS</i>	WORD OF WISDOM	REVELATION TEACHING	CLARITY IN STATING TRUTH AND APPLICATION	1 COR. 12:8
WORD OF KNOWLEDGE	<i>LOGOS GNOSEOS</i>	WORD OF KNOWLEDGE	UNDERSTANDING	APPLICATION OF SPIRITUAL TRUTH TO LIFE EXPERIENCE	1 COR. 12:8
FAITH	<i>PISTIS</i>	CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN GOD'S WORD AND PROMISES	ENABLEMENT	ENCOURAGEMENT TO TRUST GOD AND FAITH IN GOD TO KEEP HIS WORD.	1 COR. 12:9
HEALINGS	<i>HIAMATON</i>	HEALING	PHYSICAL RELIEF	HEALING BROUGHT BY GOD'S POWER	1 COR. 12:9
MIRACLES	<i>ENERGEMATA</i>	OPERATIONS OF POWER	INTERVENTION	MIRACLES OF GOD THRU A HUMAN INSTRUMENT	1 COR. 12:10
PROPHECY	<i>PROPHETEIA</i>	PROCLAMATION (SOMETIMES WITH REFERENCE TO THE FUTURE)	PROCLAMATION OF DIVINE REVELATION	PREACHING THE WORD WITH DIVINE POWER	1 COR. 12:10
DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS	<i>DIAKRISEIS PNEUMATON</i>	JUDGEMENT OF SPIRITS	PROTECTION	GIVEN BY THE SPIRIT TO DISTINGUISH WHAT IS FROM HIM AND WHAT IS DECEPTION	1 COR. 12:10
TONGUES	<i>ETEROGENE GLOSSON</i>	DIFFERENT KINDS OF TONGUES	COMMUNICATION	DIRECT MIRACLE OF (HUMAN) SPEECH	1 COR. 12:10
INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES	<i>HERMENEIA</i>	INTERPRETATION	EXPLANATION OF TONGUES	DIRECT MIRACLE OF UNDERSTANDING	1 COR. 12:10

III. God empowers spiritual gifts by the Spirit

12:11

Spiritual gifts are not to be stored; they are to be shared for the good of others. They are “for the common good” (v.7). That expression can be literally rendered “with a view to profiting.” (Carson, *Showing*, 35) Spiritual gifts are given to every believer to bless the church, build up the body of Christ and to edify believers. But if a spiritual gift does not in some way edify the church it is no longer a *used* gift; it is an *abused* gift. Pastor Adrian Rogers used to say, “Spiritual gifts are not given for your enjoyment, but for his employment.” They are not toys for playing; they are tools for building.

1) The Spirit gives gifts individually

Verse eleven says, “*One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he will.*” (12:11) Spiritual gifts are distributed “to each person.” Every Christian has received at least one spiritual gift. No one Christian has every gift, but every Christian has at least one spiritual gift.

Paul said to the Christians in Rome, “*There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God produces each gift in each person.*” (12:5-6). Every Christian has received the grace of God which is the essence of being a Christian. Every Christian has received a spiritual gift. (See also 1 Peter 4:10). You may not have

graduated first in your class. You may not be very athletic, be an introvert and shy, but if you are a follower of Jesus, you are a gifted child! You have a gift that God wants you to use in service and ministry in his church, and that service will not be done unless you do it. No Christian should ever say, “God can’t use me,” or “This church doesn’t need me.” Every Christian is a minister and every Christian has a ministry. The ministry of the church is to be carried out as followers of Jesus exercise their spiritual gifts in ministering to each other. And note the promise: “they are empowered by the Spirit!”

2) The Spirit gives gifts sovereignly

Verse eleven also reminds us that these gifts are given “... to each person as he (the Spirit) wills.” The Holy Spirit decides the gift or gifts you are going to have. You can’t determine your spiritual gift any more than your birthplace or the color of your eyes. The Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes these gifts as He wills, not as we will, because he knows what is best for the body.

This should remind us that no believer should ever be jealous of another believer who may have a different gift. All of us have been gifted differently, but all of us have been gifted perfectly. The Holy Spirit in his divine wisdom and sovereignty has given to each of us precisely the gift,

or gifts, that will enable us to function most effectively in the body of Christ.

Conclusion: Spiritual gifts and their proper exercise are essential to the health and vibrancy of the church. And yet, these grace gifts, given to us at conversion, are susceptible to the ever-lurking sin of pride. So, as we conclude, lets summarize a healthy foundation for the spiritual graces (gifts) God has given His body (see vv. 12-27!)

Biblical Principles Concerning SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. The proof of the Spirit's fulness is His fruit and filling, not His gifts.

**“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”
(Gal. 5:22-23)**

2. Spiritual gifts are not for show (as proof) but for service (1 Cor. 12:7).
3. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. No one gift is for everyone.

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Pet. 4:10)

4. The Triune God is the source of these gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-6).
5. The gifts are not natural abilities. They are supernatural

enablements.

6. The gifts, when rightly exercised, have the promise of divine energy (1 Cor. 12:4-7, 11).
7. You can have gift and not be using it. You can also have a gift and not be using it well. (1Tim. 4:14).
8. Spiritual gifts are sovereignly given by God. It is God's choice not ours. (1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 24).
9. Some gifts are more helpful to the body, but all the gifts are needed and necessary (1 Cor. 12:18, 25-26, 31).

*Sections of this message draws from Dr. James Merritt's contribution to 1 Cor. in the CCE series.