

THE CHURCH AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
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Let's Begin

The great Biblical expositor, G. Campbell Morgan, rightly noted Paul addressed two main audiences in 1 Corinthians—carnal people and spiritual people. In fact, through the entire book Paul deals with problems in the Corinthian church. Just before he signed the letter at the end, he felt compelled to offer a final warning, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (16:22).

Last week we discovered the Apostle’s concern about Christian attire. Today, he faces head-on Christian activity in public worship. He begins by affirming spiritual gifts, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (v. 1). The Corinthians had spiritual gifts; Paul offers no denial (cp. 1:7). Their problem was carnality. In other words, they had spiritual gifts but were not spiritual themselves! Possessing one or even all of the spiritual gifts offers no authentic evidence of Biblical spirituality.

What, then, is the church to make of spiritual gifts? How are spiritual gifts useful? As we address these and other questions, let’s follow the outline below:

- I. Explaining the Spiritual Gifts (vv. 1-7)**
- II. Exploring the Spiritual Gifts (vv. 8-11)**
- III. Exercising the Spiritual Gifts (vv. 12-31)**

I. Explaining the Spiritual Gifts (vv. 1-7)

Paul begins by *explaining* the spiritual gifts. He writes, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and *that* no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Cor. 12:1-3).

As he explains, he lays the *foundation* of spiritual gifts. On the one hand, believers are not “carried away unto these dumb idols.” Indeed following satanic idols was the way of the old life, the life of an unbelieving Gentile. In some cases, demons worked idolaters up into an emotional frenzy, carried away by a power even stronger than they.

When the Corinthians came to Christ, however, they came under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit (v. 3). Spirit-controlled worship is never frenzied or disorderly. In fact, Paul makes clear God never oversees confusion (cp. 11:34; 14:40). Nor will the Spirit ever lead one to dishonor Christ, not to mention “call Jesus accursed” (cp. John 15:26). Whatever the Corinthians thought they were doing by using such language baffles one’s intelligence. In addition, Paul plainly affirms that a person cannot “say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” Unless the Spirit of God works His work in the human heart, no conversion will ever take place. Hence, it remains vitally important to respond immediately to the urge to follow Christ. Procrastinating regarding one’s commitment to the Lord Jesus is a spiritual game of Russian roulette.

Indicative of the Holy Spirit’s control are two important truths. First, if one is Spirit-controlled, the will is absolutely yielded to the authority of Jesus Christ in His Word. Second, if one is Spirit-controlled, much emphasis is always placed upon Jesus Christ. The Spirit will not speak of Himself. Instead He speaks about Jesus (cp. John 15:26; 16:13-14).

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Reflection Connection

Explain the difference between spiritual gifts and natural talents? Is it possible for natural talents to be spiritual gifts? Why or why not?

Paul not only explains the *foundation* of spiritual gifts, but also the *variation* of spiritual gifts. Hear the Apostle's words, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." (1 Cor. 12:4-6). The key word is "diversities" (v. 4). There is not a general spiritual gift given to every believer. Instead there are many spiritual gifts, gifts given at the sole discretion of the Holy Spirit (v. 11b).

As we think about spiritual gifts, it is helpful to remember a three-fold distinction. First, there is the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 10:45; Rom. 8:9). Second, there are the gifts of the Holy Spirit (v. 4). Third, there are the graces of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). God's Spirit enters us, regenerating us and indwelling us. As He comes into our life, He gives us gifts—spiritually empowered abilities—to serve Him in Kingdom work. Not only so, He also forms the character of Jesus in us.

Observing the three-fold distinction makes it easier to understand the *origin* of the spiritual gifts (God the Holy Spirit). Furthermore, since He is the sovereign God, He gives as He wishes (v. 11). Hence, there is a diversity of gifts but the same Spirit (v. 6).

Finally, Paul notes the *operation* of the spiritual gifts. In essence, spiritual gifts are spiritual capacities endowed by the Holy Spirit to all believers. Thus, while gifts are talents, they are more. Gifts are endowments of which the exclusive source is the Spirit.

The gifts' operation leads to Paul's explanation of how the gifts are manifested. Gifts are for the "common good" (v. 7). Gifts are neither for our play or others' entertainment. Instead, gifts build up the body of Christ, edifying other believers.

In essence, spiritual gifts are spiritual capacities endowed by the Holy Spirit to all believers.

II. Exploring the Spiritual Gifts (vv. 8-11)

Again, the Apostle Paul writes, "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:8-10).

Paul begins with the *particularity* of the gifts. The list Paul offers is not intended to be exhaustive; instead it is representative. Other lists of gifts are recorded in the New Testament none of which are identical (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:7-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Gifts may change in every age as the needs of the church change.

In addition, as we indicated earlier, no believer has all the gifts (cp. vv. 29-30). Therefore, it is foolish to feel superiority to another Christian because of



Reflection Connection

Are you able to identify your spiritual gift? Arrange for enough discussion to allow others to identify their spiritual gifts. Also, make plans with the Pastor to offer assistance to those who struggle to understand the spiritual gift God has given them.

a particular gift one might possess. Why? Simply because other believers are endowed in ways you are not!

Paul not only speaks of the *particularity* of the gifts but also the *presentation* of the gifts. He writes, “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (v. 11). We cannot emphasize enough: the Holy Spirit is completely sovereign in the dispensation of the gifts. He gives unilaterally according to His own discretion.

In the list Paul gives in this chapter, he mentions nine in number:

- ✦ *Wisdom*: not the ordinary wisdom we find elsewhere (James 1:5). Instead Paul is speaking of deep insight into truth. The gift of wisdom allows a person to plumb the depths of God’s truth (cp. Acts 6:1-6).
- ✦ *Knowledge*: unusual insight into some particular truth. Knowledge comes from His Word.
- ✦ *Faith*: faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit is not saving faith (cp. Eph. 2:9). Instead the spiritual gift of faith is to be able to move mountains, to do great things for God. The British Christian George Mueller raised millions of dollars for orphanages without ever asking a dime from anybody!
- ✦ *Healing*: ability to make sick people well. Today’s so-called “faith-healers” strike one more as charlatans than Christian healers. The apostles did not advertise or have “healing-lines.” Jesus healed wherever He went.
- ✦ *Working of miracles*: dynamic powers to do the supernatural. Paul and Peter made the blind see. Though miracles are not given to individuals today, we still have miracles nonetheless (e.g. conversion of the human heart).
- ✦ *Prophecy*: speaking God’s Word. Instead of *foretelling* the future, it’s *forth-telling* God’s Word in Scripture.
- ✦ *Discerning of spirits*: allows one to put one’s finger on the heart of a situation. The ability to easily detect between true and false. It acts almost like a spiritual radar (cp. 1 John 4:1).
- ✦ *Tongues*: ability to speak in a language never known. The Greek term *glōssa* means “the tongue,” “a language.”
- ✦ *Interpretation of tongues*: ability to translate foreign languages into the native tongue.

III. Exercising the Spiritual Gifts (vv. 12-31)

As spiritual gifts are explored and identified, spiritual gifts must be exercised and implemented into church life. Paul gives three principles to properly exercise the spiritual gifts.

The first principle is the unity of the body of Christ. Paul writes, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:12-13).



Paul places emphasis upon oneness of the church. He uses “one body” four times. Hence, every believer has oneness in his or her *functional* relation to Jesus Christ. We are the body of Christ on earth. At salvation, the believer is placed into vital union with Jesus. This means the church is a living organism, not a stale organization.

Also, we have a *spiritual* relation with Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of being “baptized into one body” (v. 13). It is important we understand this is not the so-called “baptism of the Holy Spirit” we hear from some groups, the baptism by which they say we are given a new power manifested by speaking in tongues. Instead, the Bible teaches the baptism of the Holy Spirit is completely invisible to us as He places us into the mystical body of Christ.

The second principle is the diversity of the body of Christ. Paul writes, “For the body is not one member, but many... If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body?” (1 Cor. 12:14-19). The analogy Paul employs fits perfectly the truth he desires to communicate pertaining to both unity and diversity within the church. Jealousy is out of place. No church member can do all functions within the church anymore than one physical member of the physical body can do all the functions of the body. Corinth continued to experience disruptions and divisions because of disunity. The church must understand that God makes no duplicates, only originals. Hence, we are dependent upon one another.

What does harmony include?

The third principle is the harmony of the body of Christ (vv. 20-27). If every member is functioning properly, harmony will be the result. What does harmony include? How may we judge if harmony exists in Christ’s body, the church? According to Paul, we may judge whether harmony exists in the body of Christ by two clear measurements.

First, we must determine if there is *cooperation* with one another. Note the way Paul puts it, “But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.” (1 Cor. 12:20-24).

The key phrase is “no need of thee.” We must never discount the gifts of another believer. Even if the gift does not appeal to us personally, no spiritual gift is to be rejected by the body of Christ. Paul even says those who are the most “feeble” among us nevertheless serve God’s purpose. Heaven is full of unsung heroes of the faith, those who did not make it into the history books. Every member is needed and must not be disparaged.

Second, we must determine if there is *concern* for one another. Paul writes, “That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have

Reflection Connection

Do you think the church implements the gifts the Holy Spirit gives in a fair and equitable way? Why or why not? Are you using your spiritual gift? Explain.



the same care one for another... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (vv. 25-27). Whether feeble or solid, highly-gifted or hardly-gifted our treatment toward each other must reflect the same caring attitude our Savior offers toward us.

Paul sums the chapter up by mentioning the gifts of the Spirit once again, followed by a series of rhetorical questions to drive the point home once again that all are gifted but gifted differently. Therefore we must strive for harmony (vv.28-30). In the end, however, Paul ends this section anticipating a way to guarantee the glory of God is honored. While gifts of the Spirit are good, Paul says, “and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way” (v. 31b).

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul speaks of the “the manifestation of the Spirit” being “given to every man” for the profit of all (v. 7). The term translated “manifestation” is the Greek word *phanerōsis* which comes from a root meaning “a lantern,” “to shine.” God’s Spirit places a light in every believer to shine for the spiritual profit of everyone else. We often refer to these “lights” as “spiritual gifts.” God’s presence is revealed in a person’s life through the Spirit as He shines His light on Jesus for all to see.

Wrap Up

After we get a handle on what spiritual gifts are, we must make sure we are taking actions to integrate the gifts into the life of the church. Furthermore, we must make sure jealousies are laid to rest in the body of Christ concerning spiritual gifts. Divisions must cease. Christ’s glory depends on harmony and unity in the body of Christ.

