

1 Corinthians 12 • Spiritual Gifts

Introduction

We really need to put Paul's teaching into the proper context. One of the biggest problems in the church at Corinth was division. (See 1:10-16; 6:1-8; 11:18-22) They had devolved into groups who followed their chosen human leader, selfishly exercised their spiritual gifts, and seemed to care little if anything for the health or ministry of the body as a whole. Although the Christians at Corinth had received an abundance of spiritual gifts (see 1:4-7), they were exceedingly lacking in spiritual graces – the kind of Christian character that the Holy Spirit longed for in them. We need to understand that spiritual gifts are not necessarily a mark of Christian character or spiritual maturity. In the Corinthians' case, these believers were carnal even though they exercised wonderful and miraculous gifts. The foremost lesson **WE** want to derive from this is the proper application of the gifts in the course of not just our ministry, but our relationships.

¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: To what religious ritual of the time is Paul probably referring to?

A: At this time a citizen of the Roman Empire was required once a year to place a pinch of incense on the altar and declare, "Caesar is Lord!" This was a definite test of whether or not a person of these times was saved. It is only by the Spirit that we can confess Christ as Lord.

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Romans 10:9-10

Point: *We all share the same confession.*

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

[Read v.4-6]

Q: What are the two repeated words in these verses which teach about the biblical nature of unity?

A: "Varieties" ("gifts", "ministries", and "effects") and "same" ("Spirit", "Lord", and "God").

Q: How is there diversity in the unity of the spiritual body of the church?

- We possess various gifts from the same Holy Spirit (v.4)
- We partake in various services for the same Lord Jesus Christ (v.5)
- We share in the various workings of the same Father (v.6)

Point: *We all serve the same God.*

⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things,

[Read v.7-11]

Q: So from the outset, what does Paul establish as the primary purpose of the spiritual gifts?

A: That they are given for the benefit of the whole church – "for the common good" – not for private enjoyment of individuals.

Q: There are 4 types of spiritual things which Paul in his teachings distinguishes between. What are they and how do they differ from each other?

1. **THE** Spiritual Gift. (See Eph. 1:13-14.) The Spirit Himself is received by every believer at the point of salvation.
2. Spiritual Gifts. These are ministries to the church through the Spirit, not just natural talents or abilities.

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distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

3. Spiritual Offices. (See 1 Pe. 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:28; Rom 12:4.) These are positions of trust in the local church.
4. Spiritual Graces. This is also called the fruit of the Spirit. (See Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Cor. 13:4-7.) This is the core of Christian conduct revealing not just a changed, individual behavior, but changes in one's personal relationships.

Point: Paul makes it clear that every Christian has **THE** gift of the Holy Spirit (12:3) and at least one spiritual gift (12:7). However, not every Christian has a spiritual office, but all Christians should manifest the graces of the Spirit which are far more important than miraculous gifts because they're the proof of love building up the body.

Q: Does Paul state that all the gifts have to be present in a church? What can we infer from v.11 about how the gifts might operate differently for the church of Corinth then than for our own church today?

A: The gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit as He sees fit. They may not all be present because they are not all needed in a particular church or at a particular time.

Q: So what is probably at the root of the problem of someone actively seeking specific spiritual gifts?

A: They may not be seeking the will of the Holy Spirit but instead seeking to satisfy their own will. The Holy Spirit will provide what is necessary, even if it means manifesting a supernatural gift. But it's not something we can invoke by our own will.

Point: We all seek to build the same body.

¹²For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

[Read v.12-13]

Q: What does Paul remind us where the greater work of the Holy Spirit is concerned?

A: The work of the Holy Spirit did not begin in each believer's life as a spiritual gift, but initially as our baptism. Just as Holy Spirit baptizes us into one body, so the goal of all subsequent work of the Holy Spirit such as spiritual gifts is the building up together into one body.

Point: We all share the same baptism.

¹⁴For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰But now there are many members, but one body.

[Read v.14-20]

Q: So how does Paul characterize what happens to us when we are baptized by the Spirit?

A: At the moment of conversion we were specifically placed as members of the body of Christ.

Q: How is it determined where each person is placed and what role they are given?

A: They Holy Spirit places each believer in the body as He sees fit, but each part has an important ministry to perform.

Q: What is another form of foolishness where seeking gifts is concerned?

A: Again, it's pursuing one's own desires rather than the Spirit's desire for the greater good of the overall body. Rather than seeking something that we **DON'T** have, we're to maximize what He **HAS** given, trusting the Spirit's selection.

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Point: We are individual members but of the same body of Christ.

Overall Application

Many churches, denominations, and movements are emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit today, and we need to clearly know what God has to say on this subject. However, this chapter has to be clearly studied in the context of the problems in the Corinthian church which Paul has been addressing to this point: division, immorality, stunted spiritual growth, and confusion in their assembly. The gifts of the Spirit in and of themselves are not the solution to all of these problems, only their proper application for the building up of the unity of the body of Christ in our common confession of faith (v.1-3), our common service of God (v.4-6), seeking to build the same body (v.7-11), our common baptism in the Spirit (v.12-13), and clearly understanding how our individuality contributes to the body as a whole. It's not about what "I have" but rather how "I contribute" where the gifts are concerned.

Overall Point: We belong to each other.

²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²²On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, ²⁴whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, ²⁵so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

[Read v.21-26]

Q: What is the precise meaning of "division in the body"? How might this alternatively be translated?

A: It can also be translated as "schism", the point at which believers literally divide a church and leave each other. Paul is talking about something much deeper than a mere difference of opinion.

Q: What is the relationship problem Paul is alluding to here among the Corinthians?

A: Those believers possessing spectacular gifts were apparently looking down on those they believed to possess less important gifts.

Q: But what is the reality within the context of Paul's teaching wherein all gifts belong to a single body?

A: No one can say, "I don't need you." In reality everyone is interdependent on each other. In fact, no single entity can properly function without the support of the whole. The inference is that spiritual gifts don't work properly, if at all, when isolated unto themselves.

Q: Knowing that an individual member's suffering affects everyone else, what motivation from this should we personally derive?

A: To be the strongest member possible so as to be of the most benefit to the body possible. Every part of the body makes some kind of contribution toward the growth of the church.

*from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to **the proper working of each individual part**, causes the growth of the body **for the building up of itself in love.***

Ephesians 4:16

Point: We need each other.

²⁷Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? ³⁰All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? ³¹But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

[Read v.27-31]

Q: Based on Paul's teaching to this point, what is the common goal of each of the positions within the body of Christ?

A: To strengthen the body as a whole, not the individual parts.

Q: So what is the greater goal implied here?

A: To seek to use our spiritual assignments for the greater good rather than our individual self.

Point: *We affect each other.*

Overall Application

Paul's overall, greater teaching concerning the work of the Holy Spirit is:

- *We belong to each other. (v.1-20)*
- *We need each other. (v.21-26)*
- *We affect each other. (v.27-31)*

Taken altogether, how does this set up the proper context for the transition to the next chapter's teaching on love based on Paul's ending statement, "And I show you a still more excellent way"? [Answer: When the gifts are properly applied and working, they produce biblical love.]

Discuss with the group your agreement/disagreement with the following application: "There can be unity without uniformity."

*"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, **that they may be perfected in unity**, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*

John 17:20-23