

### The Proper Use of Spiritual Gifts

#### 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

1 Corinthians 12:1-11: *“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: 2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. 4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: 8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”*

#### Background Notes

Four key passages in the New Testament deal with spiritual gifts. It has often been pointed out that they're easy to remember because of two twelve's and two four's: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul began a three-chapter exhortation on the proper use of spiritual gifts in the Church. In the first eleven verses Paul taught that there are a variety of spiritual gifts, and all are given for the edification of the Church, the body of Christ.

Paul was very concerned that the Corinthian believers be informed about spiritual gifts, and about the proper use and function of spiritual gifts (v1). In 1 Corinthians 1:7 he had told the Corinthian Christians that they were not lacking in any spiritual gifts: *“You come short in no gift.”* That was the good news. The bad news was that the Corinthians were misusing their spiritual gifts by claiming spiritual superiority because they had certain “sign” gifts, and placing more emphasis on these gifts.

Furthermore, because of their pagan background and the spiritual manifestations that they had witnessed and experienced in association with the evil spirit world, some of the Corinthian believers were confused as to what spiritual manifestations were of God and what spiritual manifestations were not of God (v2).

This confusion was further exacerbated by the fact that false teaching about the Person of Christ was already circulating in the 1st century. The false idea that the Son of God did not become fully human was gaining ground, and the realm of demonic spirits would certainly have supported this heresy. That's why Paul said that the true test of whether a spiritual manifestation is from God or not is the "test of Jesus" (v3). No one who is speaking by the Holy Spirit will deny that Jesus is fully Man and fully God (Lord): *"Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."*

The apostle John said essentially the same thing when refuting false teachers about thirty-five years later. 1 John 4:2-3: *"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God."*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Spiritual gifts are given in diversity by the one triune God.

There is unity and diversity in spiritual gifts (v4-6). There are diversities (a wide variety) of gifts, but the same Spirit (v4). Nine different spiritual gifts are mentioned in verses 8-10, and other spiritual gifts are mentioned later in this chapter and in the other gift passages of the New Testament.

No Christian has all the spiritual gifts but every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. 1 Peter 4:10 says, *"As each one as received a spiritual gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."* So if you're a believer, you have a spiritual gift! Now at this point some of you might be saying that you know you have a spiritual gift, but you don't know what it is. How can you find out? Stay tuned...we'll talk more about this in the second half of chapter 12.

There are not only diversities of gifts, but there are diversities of ministries as well. Verse 5: *"There are differences of ministries but the same Lord."* For example, if you have the gift of "helps" ("helping others"), your gift can be used in many different areas of ministries. My friend Frank's gift of "helping" was certainly evident during my recent surgery. By the way, did you know that "helping others" is a spiritual gift? It's listed in verse 28.

The point here is that there are different gifts and different ministries, and your spiritual gifts maybe used in all kinds of areas and in different ministries.

There are not only diversities of gifts and ministries, but also diversities of working or activity, or the effects of the spiritual gifts when they're being properly used (v6). For example, when you use your gift of teaching, some believers will be comforted, some may be convicted, some may be motivated to serve the Lord more. Your gift of teaching may even result in unbelievers getting saved. Sometimes all these great results can come from one sermon or teaching session!

So there are diversities of gifts and ministries and effects, but there is unity in all of this diversity because it is all of God! Notice that each Person of the Trinity is mentioned in these verses: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Diversity of gifts but the same Spirit (v4), diversity of ministries but the same Lord (v5), and diversities of activities but the same God (v6). Spiritual gifts are given in diversity by the one triune God.

## 2. Spiritual gifts are given for edification by the sovereign will of God.

Verse 7: *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.”* Spiritual gifts are not given for self-gratification or prideful display! No! They are given for the **common good** of the body of Christ. They are given for edification – for building up the body.

In verses 8-10, a number of spiritual gifts are listed. All the spiritual gifts are not listed here, as we’ve mentioned, but nine spiritual gifts are given:

- a. The word of wisdom (v8): insight into divine truth.
- b. The word of knowledge (v8): the ability to communicate divine truth.
- c. The gift of faith (v9): an *unusual* measure of trust in the Lord’s ability to answer prayer, and to remove obstacles to the ministry, and to provide for the needs of God’s people. George Muller is a classic example of a Christian who had the gift of faith, depending on God alone to provide for the needs of his orphanages over many years.
- d. The gift of healing (v9): the miraculous power to heal diseases and restore to health.
- e. The gift of miracles (v10): the ability to exercise power temporarily over natural laws, and even over spiritual powers, such as casting out demons.
- f. The gift of prophecy (v10): the ability to receive and communicate a message from God for His people.
- g. The gift of discerning of spirits (v10): special sensitivity to false teaching and false teachers.
- h. The gift of tongues (v10): the ability to speak the things of God in unlearned foreign languages.
- i. The gift of interpretation of tongues (v10): the ability to translate the languages of the gift of tongues.

So there are many different spiritual gifts, and all are given for the edification of the body.

Notice verse 11: *“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”*

God is sovereign. **He** decides who gets which spiritual gifts! And notice that it is on an individual basis. So there really should not be pride on the one hand, nor discontent on the other. There will be no pride or discontent when we realize that our sovereign God, in His infinite wisdom, chooses what gifts we as individuals should and do receive. Spiritual gifts are given for edification by the sovereign will of God.

## **Practical Application**

### **“Split your church” rather than split your church!**

What’s that title all about, anyway? As you know, “split” can mean “separate from” or it can mean “divide.” So our practical application is - sometimes it’s better to separate from your church rather than divide your church. And your view of spiritual gifts may be such a case.

Christians differ as to their view of spiritual gifts. Some Christians believe that there were certain “sign” gifts from God that were given especially for the early Church period, and for that time only. They believe that some of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are not available or bestowed today. Other Christians disagree on this point, and there is room for disagreement.

If your church sees it differently than you do, don’t “rock the boat”! Don’t start arguments and create dissension, and possibly even cause your church to split. Leave! “Split” from your church, and find a good church that sees it your way.

So - “Split your church” rather than split your church!