

## Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gift

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Differing views on the gifts of the Spirit, which is the subject of this morning's message, has been a point of contention and even division in the church at large. This is not new. As we will see, the views and practice of the gifts were also creating disorder and division in the ancient church of Corinth.

Today the views on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in general, like a giant pendulum, swing from one extreme to the other. Some churches are hyper focused on experiencing the Spirit but have little regard for what the scriptures teach. And because scripture is disregarded, spiritual abuses are taking place in the name of the Spirit. In some of these unbiblical churches, people bark like dogs, and laugh uncontrollably while claiming that these experiences are signs of being filled with the Spirit. As a reaction to the abuse of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, others churches seem to shy away from emphasizing the ministry of the Spirit, so as not to be associated with the abuses.

When questioned by the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, Jesus responded: *"You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29). We will not be a healthy church unless the scriptures are the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. But we will also be unable to put into practice what the scriptures teach apart from the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit. It's been said, "If you have the Spirit without the Word, you will blow up. If you have the Word without the Spirit, you will dry up. If you have the Word and the Spirit, you will grow up."

Although the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and in particular the gifts of the Spirit is, in some circles, a divisive issue, in order for the church to be built up in Christ, the gifts must be in operation.

**Main idea:** Every believer has been entrusted with gifts of the Spirit to employ in the church for the edification of the body of Christ.

This morning we are going to examine the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit and how they ought to be practiced in the church by every believer for the good of all and to the glory of Christ.

## **1. Delineating the gifts of the Spirit**

First of all, we must delineate the gifts of the Spirit in regards to their purpose, function and practice. Paul writes, “*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed*” (1 Corinthians 12:1).

Beginning in chapter seven, it appears that Paul has been answering questions that were asked in a previous letter from the Corinthians. And one of those questions, which he begins to answer in chapter 12, had to do with the gifts of the Spirit. We don't know with certainty what the questions were, but from what Paul addresses in the next few chapters, we can gather that their views on spiritual gifts were faulty and creating division.

When properly understood and embraced, the gifts of the Spirit do not create dysfunction and disorder. God is not the author of confusion. Rather the gifts enable the members of the church to work together to build up the body of Christ and fulfill His mission.

However, as was the case in the church of Corinth, the lack of spiritual maturity leads to jealousy, strife and division (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). As we saw in chapter 11, because of their unspiritual and fleshly ways, even the observance of communion was turned into a worldly party, which in humiliating ways, divided the haves from the have nots (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).

Now because of this carnality in the church, the pursuit and practice of certain gifts became a means of gaining prominence and was also viewed as evidence of being super spiritual. One of those gifts seems to be the gift of tongues. The reason for this inference is that the gift that Paul spent the most time addressing in chapter 14 was the gift of tongues. When we get into chapter 14, we will discuss the purpose of this gift. But suffice it to say, the gift of tongues involved ecstatic

utterances. In other words, it was a supernatural ability to speak or pray in an unknown language. This gift in particular seems to be the one many were pursuing and practicing in the church in ways that were bringing disorder and confusion.

In light of this, notice that as Paul begins to delineate the true purpose of the gifts of the Spirit, he reminds the Corinthians of their past pagan roots. He writes: “*You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led*” (1 Corinthians 12:2). Although the idols they worshiped as pagans had no real existence, their cult practices, which among other things, led them into sexual immorality, opened the door to the demonic (1 Corinthians 10:20). And through their cult practices, they also sought ecstatic experiences.

As Paul seems to be implying, mystical experiences are not the true test of spirituality or the reason one should desire the gifts of the Spirit. For even pagans have mystical experiences. The gifts of the Spirit are not for self-gratification or self-exaltation. Furthermore, the gifts of the Spirit are not what first qualifies a believer for ministry. At the end of chapter 12, Paul writes, “*But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way*” (1 Corinthians 12:31). And the more excellent way, Paul explains in the very next chapter, is love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

As we saw a couple of weeks ago, it was the spiritual maturity of the Acts 6:3 disciples, plus the devotion of the Acts 6:4 leaders to prayer and the ministry of the word, that led to an Acts 6:7 awakening. What first qualifies a person for ministry is not giftedness, but great likeness to Jesus.

Sadly, when searching for a Pastor or seeking to fill a ministry position, many churches focus more on the giftedness of a person and not their character. Sometimes the lack of character is also overlooked due to one’s giftedness as a speaker or administrator. And the sad result has been great hurt to the body of Christ and great reproach to the name of Jesus before a watching world.

Many professing Christians today are pursuing mystical experiences in the church or in their private devotions. But the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is not to give us a chill or a thrill, but to make the presence of Christ real in our hearts and lives. And when we truly encounter the presence of Christ, we experience more than a good feeling, we surrender to His Lordship and are transformed into His likeness. The value of the gifts of the Spirit is not in the ecstatic experience itself, but that they point us and others to the supremacy of Christ.

Now after explaining how the Corinthians were once led astray by their pagan idolatrous practices, Paul continues: *“Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:3).

What is Paul saying here? Under the influence of the demons that were behind their former pagan practices, their ecstatic utterances or mystical experiences were not bringing them or others to Christ. Rather, their demonic cult experiences were leading them away from Christ.

But when we are truly speaking or serving under the influence of the Spirit, we will not curse Christ. Instead, we will declare Him Lord, which we cannot genuinely do apart from the Spirit of God. At the heart of everything the Spirit does in the church, including the gifts that He imparts, is to glorify Christ. When Christ is glorified in the church, the saints are edified and sinners are evangelized.

Now after explaining in verses 4-6 that the various spiritual gifts, services and activities manifested in the church are the work of our triune God, Paul clarifies the purpose of the gifts in verse 7: *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”* (1 Corinthians 12:7). The gifts of the Spirit are not given for self-promotion, or self-exaltation, but for the common good of all in the church.

Furthermore, we don't receive spiritual gifts because we earned them or achieved them in some way. God generously gives the gifts so that, as He has given to us, we may give to others. As one commentator puts it, "The purpose of the gifts is for giving. The end goal of one's identity and abilities is not the building up of self but the building up of others." (Stephen Um).

Notice also that Paul describes the gifts as *manifestations of the Spirit*. In other words, whether it's apparent to others or not, when the gifts of the Spirit are in operation, the inward presence and power of the Spirit is outwardly manifested in the way we do ministry. Concerning the operation of the gifts, Sam Storms put it this way, "Gifts are God going public among His people."

Gifts of the Spirit are not spiritual tools that God gives to believers so that they can use independently of Him. Have you ever been given a gift that you didn't know how to use or you didn't even know what it was for? God doesn't give us gifts and leave us to ourselves to figure out how to use them. In fact, the gifts of the Spirit are actually God using us to minister to others.

It's been said, "Ministry is not achieved; it's received." This doesn't mean that if you have the gift of teaching that you don't have to study to teach a Sunday School class. But as you rely on Him, even in your preparations, God works to give you understanding, guidance and direction.

When the gifts are in operation, God is manifesting Himself by the Spirit for the good of others and the glory of Christ. And this manifestation of the Spirit is not just for a select few in the church. Paul said, "To every believer is given the manifestation of the Spirit..." (v.7).

No Christian has to wonder if they have been given spiritual gifts to serve the body of Christ. And certainly no believer should ever feel like they have nothing to contribute to the body of Christ and the work of His kingdom. Every believer has graciously been given a gift that is to be used to build up the church in love.

As one bible teacher explained, “Spiritual gifts are grace gifts, and anyone who has experienced the grace of God in Christ can be certain that they have received a grace gift that is intended to be used for *the common good*. That is the encouragement but here is the challenge: If Christians are not exercising and using their particular gifts, whatever they might be, for the common good, they are depriving the rest of the body. They are withholding and being stingy with their gifts. Every Christian has a responsibility to bless the rest of the community with his or her gift matrix or gift mix. Many tend to think, “I can’t bless anyone,” but Paul says, “Of course you can! Because *to each is given...*”  
Stephen Um

You may be thinking, “I understand that every believer has a gift, but I don’t know what my gifts are.” This is a sincere and common question, which brings us to our next point, namely discovering the gifts of the Spirit.

## **2. Discovering the gifts of the Spirit**

After making it clear that every believer through the Spirit has something to contribute to the body of Christ, Paul gives the following list of gifts: “*For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues*” (1 Corinthians 12:8-10).

Now it’s important to note here that this isn’t an exhaustive list of all the spiritual gifts that are given to believers. There are other gifts that are not listed here found in Romans 12:6-8; and 1 Peter 4:9-10. Because different gifts are found in these various passages of scripture, many commentators suggests that even if we put all the lists together there still may be many more gifts that God gives to build up the church that are not mentioned in scriptures. In other words, there may be many other ways that we can serve the body of Christ with the

Spirit's enabling that won't contradict scripture and is consistent with the law of love. But whether there are more gifts beyond what's listed in scripture, the main point is that God gives each believer a particular gift or gifts to serve others.

When thinking through which particular gifts listed in the scriptures have been given to you, it may be helpful to view them under the three categories of (1) Speaking gifts, (2) Serving gifts and (3) Signs gifts.

**Speaking gifts**, include the *utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, prophecy, teaching, and exhortation.*

**Serving gifts**, include *helps, leadership, administration, giving, showing mercy, discerning of spirits, faith and hospitality.*

**Sign gifts**, include *gifts of healing, working of miracles, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues*" (1 Corinthians 12:8-10).

This category of gifts seems to be where most of the controversy, which I spoke of earlier, lies. Some of the debate stems from the fact that sign gifts, or gifts that are more overtly miraculous in nature, were clearly given by God to confirm the authenticity of the messenger of God and the message they delivered from God. For example, in Hebrews 2:3-4 God word says, "*how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*"

So based on the authenticating nature of the sign gifts, some bible scholars conclude that as the books of the New Testament were written and circulated the need for the miraculous sign gifts ceased. Others would say that although there's no biblical warrant to suggests that miracles ceased, as I would, they are not as prevalent today.

"As John Stott explained, "When we seek to discover where the biblical miracles are, we find that they cluster in Scripture like stars in the

night sky. There are four main constellations. They cluster first around Moses (i.e. the plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the manna and the water, etc.), next around Elijah, Elisha and the prophets, third around the Lord Jesus himself and fourth around the apostles. Now these are the four “main epochs of revelation—the law, the prophets, the Lord and the apostles. And the major purpose of miracles was to authenticate each fresh stage of revelation...I don’t expect miracles [to be] as commonplace today, because the special revelation they were given to authenticate is complete; but of course God is sovereign and God is free, and there may well be particular situations in which he pleases to perform them.”

Now, interestingly, most of the nine gifts that Paul listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-9 fall under the category of sign gifts or gifts that are more overtly miraculous. These gifts, and in particular the gifts of tongues, appear to be the gifts that the Corinthians were overly stressing in divisive ways. “Paul, on the other hand, repeatedly states that they all come from the same Spirit. And because it is the Holy Spirit, and not individual merit, who determines who gets what gifts (v. 11), they cannot be used to mark out any one for special status within the church of Corinth.” Bloomberg

So if we would discover our gift, we should not be overly focused on the gifts that we would desire. Rather we are to trust that God in His sovereignty distributes the gifts as He wills. Let me be clear, Paul didn’t say, don’t desire spiritual gifts. On the contrary, at the end of the chapter he exhorts the Corinthians to *earnestly desire the higher gifts* (v.31a).

I believe that one of the reasons why the church is not seeing the manifest presence and power of God to a higher degree is because we are content to go without it. We are satisfied with the status quo. We have not because we ask not. And if we do ask, like the Corinthians, we ask with self-centered motives. James 4:2-3

But now, although we should earnestly desire spiritual gifts, there is a more excellent way, namely love. And when the love of God governs

our desires, we will be glad to serve others in any capacity. We will say, “Lord, not my will, but your will be done.”

According to Paul in Romans 12:1-8, we are on the path to discovering our gifts when in view of the mercies of God, we humbly present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. You discover your gift not by waiting to hear an audible voice from God telling you what it is before you start serving. Rather, you discover your gift by praying about the countless needs around you and looking for opportunities to serve.

This brings us to our final point, namely deploying the gifts of the Spirit.

### **3. Deploying the gifts of the Spirit.**

After outlining some of the gifts of the Spirit, Paul continues: “*All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills*” (1 Corinthians 12:11). As we saw already, and what Paul emphasizes again, God is the one that ultimately determines the gifts that each believer receives. And notice also that Paul says concerning the gifts, “*All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit...*” (v.11a)

It’s clear that it’s the Holy Spirit that empowers the gifts. But let me ask you, when does the Spirit empower the gift, which Paul also refers to as the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Remember, “Gifts are God going public among His people.” When does God go public through our lives? The manifestation happens while we are serving. We don’t discover our gifts sitting at home or by taking a survey. Rather gifts are discovered and deployed in service.

Concerning the discovering of our gifts, Sam Storms explains, “The next time you’re in church or in a small group, or just hanging out with other believers, pause momentarily and ask: Is anyone physically hurt or suffering from chronic pain? If so, take your hands out of your pockets, lay them on your brother or sister and pray for God’s healing power. Is anyone you know distraught or discouraged? Are some finding life too frustrating to bear? If so, take them out for a cup of

coffee and listen to their story. They just want someone who cares enough to spend a few minutes with them. Just listen to them. Then love them.

Is anyone struggling financially with few prospects to get them out of the hole? Do something courageous. Give them your last \$50 and trust God to supply your need. Do you know people who are confused about some verse of scripture they just read in their devotional time? Perhaps you're just as befuddled as they are. [Take some time to] study a bit. Then sit down with your friend(s) and put your heads (and hearts together) and pray for the Spirit to shed light on your thinking.

Is anyone struggling with sin? (Well, of course they are!). Offer to pray for them. But before you do, sit quietly together and ask the Lord to guide your thoughts and speak words of wisdom to your soul. If you sense something, or a thought comes to mind, share it with them. It might be the key that opens the door to their hearts and brings freedom from bondage.

Does the person you just prayed for report struggling with paralyzing shame, virtually bombarded on a daily basis by accusing thoughts and self-contempt? If so, speak the Word of God over him or her with authority. In the name of Jesus Christ, [pray that if any demonic spirits are at work, for God to rebuke them and set the person free]. Pray for this person to be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit.

Do you know anyone overwhelmed by the clutter in their garage and that ever-increasing mountain of dirty laundry? Offer to spend a Saturday with them, helping out, picking up, washing, drying, folding and putting away clothes.

None of this sounds especially spectacular. (Well, maybe some of it does.) So what am I getting at with these questions? Simply this: If we spend less time searching to identify our spiritual gift(s) and more time actually praying and giving and helping and teaching and serving and exhorting those around us, the likelihood greatly increases that we will walk headlong into our gifting without ever knowing what happened. God will more likely meet us with His gifts in the midst of

trying to help His children than He ever would while we're taking a spiritual gifts analysis test. So look for a need and meet it. Find a hurt and heal it. Be alert to the cry for help and answer it. Listen for the voice of God and speak it. Identify someone's weakness and overcome it. Look for what's missing and supply it. When you do, the power of God—the energizing, enabling, charismatic activity of the Holy Spirit—will equip you, perhaps only once, but possibly forever, to minister hope and encouragement to those in need. So, if you're still wondering what your gift(s) might be, act first, and ask later.”

## **Conclusion**

Remember the purpose of spiritual gifts is to selflessly give. When we selflessly give ourselves in service to others, we reflect the heart of Christ, who gave His all so that we might know the fullness of His life giving presence in this life and forevermore.

In view of His great mercies, may we surrender our lives to Him so that we might discover our gifts and deploy them in service for the common good of all and for the greater fame of Jesus.

## **A Brief Description of Spiritual Gifts**

1 Corinthians 12-8-10; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Peter 4:9-10)

### **Prophecy**

Prophecy in the New Testament builds on the background of prophetic activity in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, prophecy included both “foretelling” (predicting future events) and, more predominantly, “forthtelling” (exhorting God’s people, and occasionally his enemies, about his will for their present circumstances).

New Testament prophecy therefore included both conventional preaching, when the preacher had the sense of being gripped and convicted by the Spirit about his or her message, and more spontaneous, unpremeditated utterances. Hill captures both of these concepts in his definition: Christian prophets are “those who have

grasped the meaning of Scripture, perceived its powerful relevance to the life of the individual, the Church and society, and declare that message fearlessly. Their prophecy is not on a par with Scripture and their exercise of the gift, like that of all other spiritual gifts, is subject to error and misinterpretation (Acts 21:4 with vv. 11, 13–14). (Craig Bloomberg).

### **Service**

Service (Romans 12:7) is the word from which “deacon” is derived. You can imagine all the opportunities that exist in the church for the exercise of this gift! Ushering, nursery, children’s church, worship team, helping with the bulletins, ushering, are some ways that a person with this gift can serve in the Church.

### **Hospitality** (1 Peter 4:9-10; Romans 15:7)

The gift of hospitality is a God given ability to welcome others as Christ has welcomed us. It involves joyfully opening our homes, and giving our time and resources away to make others feel welcome. It’s living thoughtfully and generously toward others to ensure they feel accepted, included, and loved. The Greek word for hospitality is “philoxenia”, which translates, “love of strangers.” In the time that the Bible was written, it was much more common to invite a stranger into your home. Inns were scarce, and travel was long by foot. Although times have changed, the need for Christians to demonstrate the welcome of Christ, especially to strangers, is at the heart of the gospel.

### **Teaching**

Teaching (Romans 12:7) is usually associated with the explanation of the Scriptures or of other areas of the spiritual life in a clear and life-changing manner. You can use this gift in Sunday School, neighborhood Bible Studies, Awana program, and so much more.

### **Exhortation**

Exhortation (Romans 12:8) comes from the same Greek word translated “Helper,” “Counselor” and “Comforter” in John 16:7. Author Chuck Swindoll explains that the gift of exhortation is “the ability to bring encouragement, to help others see the relevance of

Scripture, to give insightful counsel, to motivate, to comfort, and to offer hope that prompts action. A Counselor, Bible teacher, Prayer Station worker, believers involved in nursing home or visitation ministry use this gift.

### **Giving** (Romans 12:8)

Every believer has an obligation to give, just as we have an obligation to exhort people in the Lord. But some have a supernatural ability to see needs, gather the financial resources, and sacrificially give to see those needs met. These people give out of a full heart devoted to the Lord and listen sensitively for financial needs in the Body of Christ.

### **Leading** (Romans 12:8)

Leading is the gift most associated with administration or leadership in the Body of Christ. This gift is evidenced by organizing and applying human and material resources to accomplish goals and objectives.

### **Mercy** (Romans 12:8)

Mercy allows those with this gift to reach out to others and counsel them and tend to them when they are in difficult straits. Mercy is characterized by compassion and love, yet a love that is focused and firm when needed.

### **Utterance of wisdom or knowledge** (1 Cor. 12:8)

These gifts are the ability to bring spiritual insight to bear in a timely, helpful fashion in a specific Christian context. If Paul intends any difference between the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, it may be that wisdom is knowledge applied, particularly in moral contexts (Bloomberg).

### **Faith**

Faith (1 Corinthians 12:9) is not the trust in Christ that all persons must have in order to be saved, but a special measure of faith that God can work miracles (again cf. 13:2) or to sustain a person when he chooses not to work them. (Bloomberg).

### **Gifts of healings**

Gifts of healings are God given abilities to minister healing to others. This healing can be God's healing power coming upon a person with a physical malady in answer to the prayer of faith (James 5:13-15). The plurals suggests that there are different gifts (manifestations of God's healing power) for different kinds of human suffering. There's no reasons to suggests the the gifts of healings are limited to physical/ bodily illness, but can include emotional and spiritual healing.

### **Working of Miracles**

This gift includes additional kinds of miracles, such as the apostles and their close associates were enabled to perform, including, most notably, exorcisms.

### **Distinguishing between spirits**

This gift can refer to the God-given ability to discern if an apparently inspired speaker is ministering by the power of the Holy Spirit or by some counterfeit power.

### **Speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10)**

The gift of tongues (glossolalia) should not be solely understood as always being identical to what happened to the disciples at Pentecost. There the audience understood what was being proclaimed in their own languages without the benefit of an interpreter (Acts 2:1-13). Therefore it may or may not be a human language (1 Corinthians 14:2).

### **Interpretation of tongues**

This gift refers to putting the otherwise unintelligible message into words which are understood by those present.