

The Gifts of the Spirit: Distributing, Differing, Desiring

1 Corinthians 12:1-12, 27-31

1. The gifts of the Spirit are Sovereignly distributed (1 Corinthians 12:11)

God decides what particular gift to give to each particular Christian. 1 Corinthians 12:11, 18

Under this same heading the Apostle makes it clear that while the Spirit uniquely gifts each individual in the church, the individual gift is for the benefit of the whole church and its exercise is ineffective apart from its relationship to the other gifts at work within the body. 1 Corinthians 12:7

God has dealt to every man the measure of faith (Romans 12:3b). God gives the gifts. We do not choose the gifts. We must think of ourselves as parts of the church. We are not isolated individuals merely added together. While each of us as individuals have gifts of the Spirit, these gifts are not meant to be used apart from our place within the unity of the body of Christ.

2. The gifts of the Spirit “differ;” there are diversities of gifts (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4)

Between Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, there are 16 separate and distinct spiritual gifts. Every believer has at least one of these gifts. No one believer has all of these gifts.

1. Prophecy (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10)
2. Ministry (Romans 12:7)
3. Teaching (Romans 12:7)
4. Exhortation (Romans 12:8)
5. Giving (Romans 12:8)
6. Ruling (Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 12:28 - *governments*)
7. Mercy (Romans 12:8)
8. The Word of Wisdom (1 Corinthians 12:8)
9. The Word of Knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8)
10. Faith (1 Corinthians 12:9)
11. Healing (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28)
12. Working of Miracles (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28)
13. Discerning of Spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10)
14. Divers Tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28)
15. Interpretation of Tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10)
16. Helps (1 Corinthians 12:28)

The gift that we have is always *according to the grace that is given to us* (Romans 12:6). These gifts are not to be confused with natural talents. These are spiritual gifts that are given to those who belong to the body, those who are truly Christian. These gifts are meant to be exercised within the church for the benefit of the whole church and through the church to those who are outside.

1 Peter 4:10-11 seems to divide the gifts into two groups:

1. The Speaking Gifts: *“if any man speak”*

- a. Prophecy
- b. Teaching
- c. Exhortation
- d. The Word of Wisdom
- e. The Word of Knowledge
- f. Tongues
- g. The Interpretation of Tongues

2. The Serving Gifts: *“if any man minister”*

- a. Ministry
- b. Giving
- c. Ruling, Governments
- d. Mercy
- e. Faith
- f. Healing
- g. Miracles
- h. Discerning of Spirits
- i. Helps

3. The gifts of the Spirit are to be desired (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1)

Is there a contradiction between the doctrine that the Spirit sovereignly distributes the gifts and the injunction here to “covet earnestly” and to “desire spiritual gifts”?

How do we reconcile these two statements?

1. The first thing to say is that Paul is not comparing the spiritual gifts to love, or charity. He is not saying that the gifts don't matter; he is not saying that what really matters above all is that we just have love within the church. He's not saying that.
2. The way to read 1 Corinthians 12:31 is like this: “Yet show I unto you a way according to excellence - a way of excellence. I will show you the way par excellence to obtain these better gifts.” Covet these gifts earnestly in terms of love.

The best way of all of coveting these better gifts is to follow after love. To make certain that you are filled with a spirit of love. The best gifts are at work in the church when - in a spirit of love - I give way to the gifts of others (1 Corinthians 12:15-26)

We demonstrate that we are following the more excellent way of love when we humbly bestow more abundant honor on each part of the body no matter the gift that part of the body is exercising (1 Corinthians 12:24-25).

By the spirit of love we are able to overcome the human propensity to self-promotion and give way to the Spirit empowered ability to put others and their gifts before ourselves and our gifts (Romans 12:9-10, 16).

While you covet earnestly the better gifts, always be content with the gift that is given to you.

3. Remember also that we are never to think of the gifts in individualistic terms, but rather in terms of their use within the context of the entire body of Christ. Therefore what Paul may be saying is not that I as an individual would covet a particular gift, but rather that the church as a whole would earnestly desire that the best gifts are being used in the power of the Spirit regardless of the individual who is exercising the best gift.

When Paul says to “covet earnestly” and “desire,” He May be speaking not in terms of **obtaining** the gifts, but rather in terms of **the operation** of the gifts within the whole church.

What are the best gifts? **1 Corinthians 14:1-5** Those that profit the body. Not in terms of your personal enjoyment but in terms of the benefit and edification of the church.

General Principles

1. You must never speak in terms of claiming a gift.
2. All are obviously and clearly not meant to have any one particular gift. (1 Corinthians 12:29-30) There are those who say that all who are baptized with the Spirit should have one particular gift, namely speaking in tongues. It is true of the church of Corinth that they all didn't have this one spiritual gift.
3. It is not in the province of any man to give a gift to another. That is the province and the prerogative of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul could not give to a person the gift of speaking in tongues: 1 Corinthians 14:5.
4. You and I must never do anything in any way to try to produce this gift either in ourselves or in anybody else. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. We can desire. We can not produce. You are exposing yourself first to psychological influences, secondly even to the influences of evil spirits. Paul could not gift this gift to the people in Corinth. There is not a word of instruction anywhere in Scripture to people to tell them what to do in order to get the gift.
5. We are all given some particular gift. Every member of the body has his gift and his part and his place and his function. Some have more than one gift.
6. These gifts differ. We are not all meant to have the same gift. We are not all meant to be the same.