

1 Corinthians Chapter 12

The section running from (12:1 to 14:40), focuses on spiritual gifts in the church, dealing with a vital, but controversial Subject. The false religion situation in Corinth caused counterfeit spiritual manifestations that had to be confronted. The church was being informed on this subject by Paul and its behavior would be regulated by the truth and the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:1 "Now concerning spiritual [gifts], brethren, I would not have you ignorant."

We see that the early church had much confusion about the gifts of the Spirit. There is more to Christianity than just the salvation experience. We find that many churches stop with the salvation experience, and believe that these other gifts went out with the apostles. This is primarily because of spiritual ignorance on these points. We tend to believe in only the things that have happened to us personally. This being a young church here at Corinth, they possibly had not gotten deep enough into Bible study to make them aware that there was more than salvation available to those who desired it. Another way of saying this is "gifts of the Spirit". When a person becomes a new creature in Christ, they are a babe at first. As they study the Word of God and the Holy Spirit reveals truth to them they grow into mature Christians.

Spiritual gifts are divine enablement's for ministry that the Holy Spirit gives in some measure to all believers and that are to be completely under His control and used for the building of the church to Christ's glory.

These had to be distinguished from the mystical experiences call "ecstasy" (meaning supernatural, sensuous communion with a deity), and "enthusiasm" (divination, dreams, revelations, visions), that were found in the pagan religions of Corinth.

1 Corinthians 12:2 "Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led."

The situation in Corinth, before Paul established the church there, had been idol worship and heavy involvement with the false religion of Aphrodite. "Gentiles" here, is speaking of people before they became Christians. Christians are spiritual Israel after they become a Christian. They are no longer Gentiles, they are Israelites. The Hebrew people were natural Israelites. Christians are spiritual Israelites. Idol worship had been very prevalent here in Corinth prior to Paul.

Incredibly, some church members were mimicking certain dramatic and bizarre practices of the mystery religions in which they had been formerly involved. The practice of ecstasy, considered to be the highest expression of religious experience, involved supposed supernatural interaction with a deity, induced through frenzied hypnotic chants and ceremonies. The practice frequently included drunkenness and sexual orgies, to which the devotees willfully yielded themselves to be led into gross sin.

“Dumb idols”: The pagan worship at Corinth involved a pagan exercise of “tongues”. The practice of “ecstatic utterances” was common in the cults and in the worship of various Greek gods and goddesses.

1 Corinthians 12:3 "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."

To denounce Jesus as God in the flesh, was what this was speaking of that caused them to be accursed. Notice, what those who are speaking by the Holy Ghost call Jesus. They call Him Lord. It is one thing to know Jesus as your Savior, but it is an entirely different thing to know Him as your Lord. When He is your Lord, you have turned your will over to His will. It is the Holy Ghost within that calls Jesus Lord. To know Him as Lord, means that you have totally submitted your will to Him.

Some of the Corinthians were fleshly and given over to ecstasies that were controlled by demons. In that condition, they claimed to be prophesying or teaching in the Spirit while demonically blaspheming the name of the Lord whom they were supposed to be worshipping. They had been judging the use of gifts based on experience and not content.

What a person says and believes about Jesus Christ is the test of whether he speaks from the Holy Spirit. He always leads people to Christ’s lordship.

1 Corinthians 12:4 "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."

"Diversities" here, means distinction, variety, difference. Then this is saying, there are many different gifts, but all gifts come by the same Spirit.

James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

The differences in the gifts are as wide as the people receiving the gifts.

These “diversities of gifts” or categories of giftedness are not natural talents, skill, or abilities, such as are possessed by believers and unbelievers alike. They are sovereignty and supernaturally bestowed by the Holy Spirit on all believers (verses 7 and 11), enabling them to spiritually edify each other effectively and thus honor the Lord. The varieties of gifts fall into two general types, speaking and serving (see verses 8 and 10).

The speaking or verbal gifts, (prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, teaching and exhortation), and the serving, non-verbal gifts (leadership, helps, giving, mercy, faith and discernment), are all permanent gifts that will operate throughout the church age. Their purpose is to edify the church and glorify God.

The list here and (in Romans 12:3-8), is best seen as representative of categories of giftedness which the Holy Spirit draws from to give each believer whatever kind or combination of kinds He chooses (verse 11).

Some believers may be gifted categorically, similar to others but are personally unique as the Spirit suits each grace gift to the individual. Miracles, healing, languages and the interpretation of languages were temporary sign gifts limited to the apostolic age and have therefore, ceased. Their purpose was to authenticate the apostles and their message as the true Word of God, until God's written Word was completed and became self-authenticating.

1 Corinthians 12:5 "And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord."

This, based on an individual, means that a person administers the gift God has given them in his own unique way. I believe this goes even further than individuals and is speaking of different denominations, who might not "cross every T and dot every I", the way another denomination does. But is still administering the gifts the Holy Spirit has given them to the best of their ability. One may call themselves Methodist and another call themselves Baptist, but they are serving the same Lord. I could have used any other protestant church, but everyone is very familiar with these two. No harm was intended.

Bottom line is that the Lord gives believers unique ministry arenas in which to fulfill their giftedness and provides varieties of power to energize and accomplish them.

1 Corinthians 12:6 "And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

I always say, it is alright to be a Baptist, if you are a Christian Baptist, not a Baptist Christian. Or a Methodist, or an Assembly of God, or a Pentecostal, etc. We are all worshipping the same God. We may be taking a little different route to get to heaven, but we all have the same destination. Read (Ephesians chapter 4), to understand better. Why do we Christians fight each other about denomination, when we should be banning together fighting the atheist and those who do not look to Jesus as their Savior?

1 Corinthians 12:7 "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."

It is not for God's profit for us to have the gifts of the Spirit. It is to help us be more effective ministers. How would you like to build a house without a hammer? The gifts of the Spirit are the tools that we build with. They are our very present help. Manifestation is something that is made real. The world cannot see God with their physical eyes. They see the followers of Jesus. We must be so full of the Lord Jesus that when they look at us, they will not see us, but will see Christ in us. A very good friend of mine explains Jesus in us, this way. He says, we are the glove, and Jesus is the Hand in the glove. We Christians are a kingdom in exile. Our King is in exile, as well. He is Jesus Christ. We will be in exile, until Jesus comes back to this earth and sets up His Kingdom. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. We are better workers, if we have the Holy Spirit inside of us guiding us and teaching us as we minister.

“Manifestation of the Spirit: No matter what the gift, ministry or effect, all spiritual gifts are from the Holy Spirit. They make Him known, understood and evident in the church and in the world, by spiritually profiting all who receive their ministry.

1 Corinthians 12:8 "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;"

"Wisdom" is an understanding that is a gift from God. "Knowledge" is accumulated learning. In this case, there would be a supernatural ability to accumulate learning through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is from above and knowledge is from within. I know many of older people who never went past the second grade in school who have great wisdom. Many of them can understand the Bible better than some of the highly educated people. Wisdom is a gift from God. You do not earn it, or accumulate it. Knowledge is accumulated learning. The gift of knowledge could be explained by someone who studies his Bible regularly and the Holy Spirit helps him understand what it is saying.

In the New Testament, “wisdom” is most often used of the ability to understand God’s Word and His will, and to skillfully apply that understanding to life.

“Word of knowledge”: This gift may have been revelatory in the first century, but it is today the ability to understand and speak God’s truth, with insight into the mysteries of His Word, that cannot be known apart from God’s revelation. Knowledge majors on grasping the meaning of the truth; wisdom emphasizes the practical conviction and conduct that applies it.

1 Corinthians 12:9 "To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;"

Everyone has their measure of faith. This is not speaking of that, but a supernatural knowing and trusting in God. This is the faith that moves mountains. We read in (John 14:12 on), that all believers can heal the sick with the power of Christ working in them. This is speaking of something more. Some have been anointed of God to pray for healing. This, again, is a supernatural ability to heal, such as Paul had. Peter had so much of this gift operating in him, that his shadow falling on people healed them.

Faith: Distinct from saving faith or persevering faith, both of which all believers possess, this gift is exercised in persistent prayer and endurance in intercession, along with a strong trust in God in the midst of difficult circumstances (Matt. 17:20).

“Healings”: A temporary sign gift used by Christ (Matt. 8:16-17), the apostles (Matt. 10:1), the seventy (Luke 10:1), and a few associates of the apostles, such as Philip (Acts 8:5-7). This ability was identified as a gift belonging to the apostles (2 Cor. 2:12).

Although Christians today do not have the gifts of healings, God certainly still hears and answers the faithful prayers of His children (James 5:13-16). Some people feel that healing should be common and expected in every era, but this is not the case. Physical healings are very rare throughout the Old Testament record. Only a few are recorded. There was never a time before

the coming of Christ when healings were common. Only in His lifetime and that of His apostles was there a veritable explosion of healing. This was due to the unique need to accredit the Messiah and to authenticate the first miracles of the gospel. Jesus and His apostle temporarily banished disease from Palestine, but that was the most monumental era of redemptive history and called for such authentication.

To normalize healing would be to normalized the arrival of the Savior. This gift belonged to the sign gifts for that era only. The gifts of healings were never used solely for bringing people physical health. Paul was sick but never healed himself or asked another human to heal him. His friend Epaphroditus was near death (Phil. 2:27), and Paul did not heal him. God intervened. When Timothy was sick, Paul did not heal him but told him to take some wine (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul left Trophimus "sick at Miletus" (2 Tim. 4:20).

Healings were not the everyday norm in Paul's ministry, but did occur when he entered a new region, i.e. Malta, where the gospel and its preacher needed authentication (see Acts 28:8-9). That healing was the first mention of healing since the lame man was healed in Lystra (Acts 14:9), in connection with the arrival of Paul and the gospel there. Prior to that, the nearest healing was by Peter (in Acts 9:34), and the resurrection of Tabitha (in 9:41), so that people would believe the gospel Peter preached (9:42).

1 Corinthians 12:10 "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:"

You would think at a glance that working of miracles would be the same as healing, but it is not. This is speaking of things like the water turning to blood on Moses command. It would also, be things like the Red Sea parting. We know from reading the Old Testament, that there were people who had the gift of telling of things in the future. That is what a prophet is. God reveals things to them that will happen in the future. Discerning of spirits is a very important gift to have. We can be deceived into thinking that someone is of God, when they are not, if we do not have this gift. We are told to try the spirits and see whether they are of God or not. All believers in Christ are to do that, but this means that a person filled with this Spirit can determine right off whether they be of God or not.

Not all believers in Christ speak with tongues, but it is a manifestation of the Spirit of God. This just means, if your native language is English, you might speak in Hebrew or French, or some other language foreign to you. This is true, because the Bible says that every man heard them in his own language.

Acts 2:6-10 "Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language." "And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?" "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia," "Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,"

We see also, why it would be important for someone in a congregation to be able to interpret for everyone, if the message from God was to be understood by all. Even in the natural world, an interpreter is very useful to men of different languages who want to communicate with each other.

In (chapter 14), we will again discuss “tongues” in much more detail, which the Corinthians seemed to have abused so greatly.

1 Corinthians 12:11 "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."

We must notice from this, that we are not limited to receiving just one of these gifts from God by the Holy Spirit. We can have as many of these gifts as we desire, if we will be willing to use them fully to minister with. Notice “severally, as he will”. Several means more than one. These are free gifts from God by the Holy Spirit of God. We must show a desire to receive them, and then we must use them for God's purposes and not our own.

“One and the selfsame Spirit”: While stressing the diversity of gifts (verses 4-11), Paul also stressed the singular source in the Spirit. This is the fifth mention, in this chapter, of the source of gifts being the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes that gifts are not something to seek, but to be received from the Spirit “as He will”. It is He alone who “works” or energizes (verse 6), all gifts as He chooses.

1 Corinthians Chapter 12 Questions

1. The early church had much confusion about the _____ of the _____.
2. What do many churches in our day stop with?
3. When does most churches believe these gifts stopped?
4. What do all of us have a tendency to believe?
5. When a person first comes to Christ, they are a _____.
6. When were they Gentiles?
7. What false religion had there been in Corinth before Paul came?
8. All believers in Christ are _____ Israel.
9. No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus _____.
10. No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the _____.

11. What caused them to be accursed?
12. What is the difference in knowing Jesus as your Savior and knowing Him as your Lord?
13. Now there are _____ of gifts, but the same Spirit.
14. "Diversities" in verse 4, means what?
15. There are differences of _____, but the same Lord.
16. What does the author believe verse 5 is speaking of?
17. We may be each taking a different road to heaven, but we all have the same _____.
18. Instead of other denominations, who should we ban together and fight?
19. Whose profit are the gifts for, us or God?
20. What is a manifestation?
21. We Christians are actually a _____ in exile.
22. Explain Jesus in us.
23. What is the difference in wisdom and knowledge?
24. Everyone has their measure of _____.
25. Who had so much of the gift of healing operating in his life that his shadow healed people?
26. Name some of the workings of miracles that were different from healing.
27. Name some of the prophets.
28. Explain discerning of spirits.
29. Explain the need for an interpreter.
30. What is meant by, severally as he will?