

Grace Gifts from God

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Introduction

The topic of spiritual gifts has caused much division and been very divisive in the church of Jesus Christ. Frequently this has come about because of either extreme dogmatism or an uninformed view of theology. Historically this has caused the church to splinter between those who focus more on the rational and logical as opposed to those who focus more on emotional and existential. As in most things, the answer is in the middle, the *via media*. Our goal this morning is to search the Scriptures and understand not only what they mean, but how we are to apply them in our life.

- I. The diversity of spiritual gifts are all given by the same Spirit in order to build up the body of believers 12:1-11
 - A. Spiritual gifts are tested as to origin by whether or not they exalt Jesus Lord 12:1-3
 - B. Spiritual gifts though manifested in diversity are unified in their source in the triune God through the Spirit 12:4-11
 1. The relationship of unity demonstrated through diversity :4-7
 - a. Unity through diversity in the Godhead (formation of God)
 - b. Diversity with unity in the body (function of the body)
 2. The reality and role of diversity and unity in spiritual gifts :8-11
 - a. Definition
 - (1) What it is – Gift:
Precisely stated, a spiritual gift is a divine, supernatural ability given by God to enable a Christian to serve and to minister. More simply put, a spiritual gift is a special tool for ministry. (Kinghorn, *Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts: A Personal Inventory Method*, p. 8.)

A spiritual gift is a supernatural gift of grace that is measured and given out by God to each true Christian as stewards for serving the Church of Jesus Christ. Each gift is in the form of a specific spiritual ability for service. With it, the believer is to help build up the church and honor God. (Blanchard, *A Practical Guide to Finding Your Spiritual Gifts*, p. 14.)

... they are enrichments received from Christ...Spiritual gifts must be defined in terms of Christ, as actualized powers of expressing, celebrating, displaying, and so communicating Christ in one way or another, either by word or deed. They would not be edifying otherwise. (Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit*, pp. 82-82.)

- (2) What it is not – Talent/Ability
- (3) Why and how do we get them? (1 Cor. 12:4-7, 1 Pet. 4:10)

b. Duration

The question of duration of certain gifts has always been at the heart of the Charismatic debate. The question is as follows: Do some of the gifts have a time limitation or a duration for their usefulness, or do all gifts continue throughout the age of the Church? It's clear that in Ephesians 2:20 the idea of limited duration, in terms of spiritual gifted men, is evident. Ephesians 2:20 says, "...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone...." This seems to indicate that the apostles and prophets had a foundational role. As in any building, once the foundation is laid, you build upon it, but you do not lay the foundation again. Also, most people would agree that the office and role of apostles and prophets have ceased. (NAR?) Therefore, at least theoretically, it is possible that certain gifts and offices can have a limited duration. If it is possible for this to be in one area, it may be possible in another. This is especially true if the gift involved revelatory information from the Lord.

c. Description

- (1) Biblical Evidence
 - a. Rom. 12:6-8
 - b. 1 Cor. 12: 7-11, 27-31
 - c. Eph. 4:11
 - d. 1 Pet. 4:10-11

(2) Theological Categories

<u>Speaking</u>	<u>Ministering/Serving</u>	<u>Signifying</u>
Apostleship	Ministration (Helps)	Miracles
Prophecy	--hospitality	Healing
Evangelism	Giving	Tongues
Pastoring	Government (Ruling)	Interpretation
Teaching	Showing Mercy	
Exhorting	Faith	
Word of Wisdom	Discernment	
Word of Knowledge	Miracles	
Tongues	Healing	
Interpretation		

- (3) Theological Description (The gifts mentioned here were those that lent themselves to schism because their supernatural nature was

most conspicuous. The divisive Corinthians appear to have craved these because of their obsession with the personal attention they attracted.) One of the key issues in many of the gift listed in 1 Corinthians 12 has to do with their duration or limitation of usefulness. Part of this has to do with the fact that many of these gifts are revelatory in nature. This means that these gifts actually provided new revelation from God to the local church. It is obvious that not all of the information and revelation that was given by God to the local church has been enscripturated -- much of it has not. However, the question that must be answered is: Once the New Testament was complete, and new revelation from God was not needed, would that imply that certain gifts had finished their course and were no longer needed for the church?

(a) Word of wisdom

The ability to deliver a spoken word of particular spiritual wisdom and immediate application of the body of Christ by the Spirit of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-13, Paul described himself in connection with other apostolic and missionary teachers such as Apollos and Cephas (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6). As divine mouthpieces they spoke "God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:7). It seems that Paul had this gift, and it was his way of speaking forth divine revelation. Peter seems to affirm this in 2 Peter 3:15 where he speaks, "...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you..." Paul seems to be speaking both wisdom and mystery that were given to him from God as revelation. The question is, does this gift, the word of wisdom, have a limitation which ends at the completion of the New Testament?

(b) Word of knowledge

The ability to deliver a spoken word of particular insight into the doctrinal truth about Christ and the purpose of God in him. This appears to be also revelatory in nature, and therefore this manifestation may, in all likelihood, be unique to the first century. It is difficult to make a distinction between the word of wisdom and word of knowledge. It may be that while the word of wisdom brought direct revelation, the word of knowledge was the ability to grasp that objective revelatory data and, by inspiration, apply it in various connections.

(c) Faith

The ability to have a settled confidence and insight into what miraculous activity God would perform. This faith seems to

be unique, beyond simple “saving faith” or the faith with which most Christians function each day. It seems this faith was “mountain moving,” not that it could itself move anything, but that it had assurance of a particular, divine working. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:2 said, “and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” The idea of removing mountains, of course, goes back to the teaching of the Lord (Matt. 17:20) where he promised his immediate followers this special ability after he had demonstrated the removal of an obstacle by casting a demon from a child. Clearly all of Christians have faith, that is what allows them to become believers (Eph. 2:8-9). However, this gifts seems to be the added ability to have confidence in God in light of impossible situations (Heb. 11).

(d) Healing

The ability to encounter people with sicknesses and disabilities, so as to be used by God to bring complete restoration. Some have argued for a wide definition of this healing ability (to include things like “emotional” healing, due to plural word “gifts”). My conviction is that this ability is defined by the Scripture itself; namely, the miraculous and full recoveries of physically sick or distorted individuals. This gift is seen repeatedly in the book of Acts with a crippled man (Acts 3:6-8), sick people healed (Acts 5:15-16), paralyzed and lame people healed (Acts 8:7), blind receiving their sight. See Acts 9:17-18, 33-35; 19:12; 28:8 for healing from physical difficulties. None of these instances had anything to do with medical power, but they were result of the supernatural spiritual power of God. It appears that gifts of healing were part of the miracles, wonders, and signs that God granted through Jesus (Acts 2:22) and his disciples (Acts 2:43; 4:35; 12:6; 8:13; 14:3; 15:12). These miraculous healings served to confirm the gospel in a day when there is no written verification until the writing of the New Testament. It is clear that even during the apostolic age, as well as the first century church, that not all people were healed either by the apostles or by others with this gift. In fact, in the book of Acts and in many of the letters, the use of the gift of healing seems sporadic at best, and far from systematic.

(e) Working miracles

The ability to do “works of power.” This must mean a broadly defined ministry of being used by God to see things done contrary to natural physical laws and expectations. The

blinding of Elymas, Acts 13:8-12, may be one such type of incident. Although this gift may not be empowered today, it does not in any way mean that God does not do miracles today. This is simply referring to the specific gift that was given to certain individuals during the early church for the ministry of the body.

- (f) **Prophecy**
The ability to deliver a specific message about the future, or bring a specific, urgent word from the Lord for the body of believers, or even the church as a whole. See the above description under “Motivation/Ministry Gifts” in Romans 12. This gift will be dealt with specifically in a few weeks, since it has created much theological interest as of late.
- (g) **Distinguishing Spirits**
The ability to test and identify the source of a spiritual message and the motivation behind the messenger. Spiritual teachers of varying source (i.e., God or Satan), would seek an audience with religious groups. Corinth had a particular problem with this, spurring Paul’s letter of II Corinthians. Behind every teacher is a “spirit” (or “Spirit”) providing and empowering the message.
- (h) **Speaking with Tongues**
The ability to speak, without previous learning, in a translatable language. This “manifestation” was judgmental and signatory in nature (cf. 1 Cor. 14:20-22), providing evidence that God had turned away from the unbelieving generation of Israel in the first century, and that they would hear the word of God, through a miraculous medium, from the church. This gift, as well as the one following it, will be dealt with in much detail when we get to chapter 14, in which we will discuss the purpose of tongues and the place of tongues in the local church.
- (i) **Interpretation of Tongues**
The ability to understand and translate the spoken language of one speaking in a foreign tongue, so as to bring a message of judgment for unbelievers (primarily) and benefit for the church (secondarily). Once again, viewing this as revelatory and judgmental (most likely for the first century) this gift, along with tongues, as temporary.

Summary

This list of gifts by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians is a sample, and is not exhaustive. They seem to represent primarily supernatural revelatory gifts that caused the Corinthians to swell with pride and arrogance. Part of this is because they brought into the church perspectives from their culture. This is always a danger in any age.

The Apostle Paul summarizes his teaching of the diversity of gifts by the unifying giver of the gifts: the Holy Spirit.

“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). It is the Spirit’s ministry to give gifts to whom he desires.

Application

1. Do you know what your spiritual gift is?
2. Are you using your spiritual gift?