

THE POTENTIAL DANGERS SURROUNDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 CORINTHIANS 12:01–03

DIVISION OVERVIEW (1 Cor. 12:01–14:40): Spiritual Gifts

The Corinthian church was facing several problems that were about to rip the church apart. One of the most serious problems was the issue of spiritual gifts. No gift, no ability, no endowment from God should ever be abused or cause a controversy. But the gifts of God's Spirit were being so abused by the Corinthian believers that the church was about to be torn apart. Note how critical the issue was: Paul devotes three whole chapters to the question of spiritual gifts.

A quick look at the history of spiritual gifts will help in understanding this passage.

1. The Old Testament had foretold that God would send His Spirit to earth and gift His people in a special way.

Joel 2:28-29 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.' (cp. Acts 2:17-18)

2. Jesus Christ had promised and discussed the Holy Spirit with His followers in great detail:

=> the Person of the Holy Spirit or who the Holy Spirit is (see Jn. 14:15-26).

=> the work of the Holy Spirit (see Jn. 16:7-15).

=> the very special signs and protection that the Holy Spirit would provide for them.

Mark 16:17-18 "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

=> the promise of the Spirit's *permanent baptism* and endowment of power.

Acts 1:5, 8 "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

3. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was such a phenomenal experience that it actually launched the greatest movement the world has ever known – Christianity itself. All the promises made by God in the Old Testament and by Jesus Christ concerning the Holy Spirit and His special gifts of ministry were witnessed for the very first time on the day of Pentecost.
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4. Before Christ, when God called a person for a particular work, God always provided the gifts and abilities needed to do the work. God has always equipped His people to do the work of the ministry. However, since Christ and the day of Pentecost, there is one great and remarkable difference: *every believer is called and gifted by God to minister*. That is what Pentecost was all about. God expects every believer to be a witness to the salvation of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. To be a witness is one of the primary reasons God gives the Holy Spirit to every believer, and it is certainly the reason He provides spiritual gifts. The gifts and abilities are given to be used — used in sharing Christ and in ministering to the desperate needs of the poor and suffering masses of this lost and dying world.
5. Paul discusses the Holy Spirit and His special gifts for ministry in great detail:
 - => the power and work of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:1-17).
 - => the struggle of the Holy Spirit against the flesh (sinful nature) (see Gal. 5:16-21).
 - => the fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Gal. 5:22-26).
 - => the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:7-16).
 - => the questions or problems surrounding spiritual gifts (see 1 Cor. 12:1-14:40).

In conclusion Scripture says unmistakably that there are spiritual gifts — special gifts and abilities given by the Holy Spirit to be used in the church and in the ministry to reach the world for Christ. However, as in the secular world, when a man receives a gift, he does not always use his gift wisely nor in the way it should be used; so it is in the church. Christian believers do not always use their spiritual gifts wisely nor as God wants them used. This happened to the believers in the Corinthian church, and unfortunately, it happens to multitudes of believers and churches around the world in every generation. The misuse and abuse of God's gifts are the very reasons the world has never been reached for Jesus Christ. This fact alone stresses the desperate need for a study of these chapters.

Introduction (1 Cor. 12:01–03) Spiritual Gifts

The Corinthian church was about to be torn apart because of the controversy over spiritual gifts, and unfortunately, churches down through the centuries have allowed themselves to become embroiled in the same controversy. It is unfortunate because God's power or special endowment and gifts must rest upon believers if they are going to reach the suffering masses of the world for Christ. There are four dangers surrounding spiritual gifts or the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- I. There is the danger of being ignorant about the gifts (v. 1).
- II. There is the danger of being carried away to false worship (v. 2).
- III. There is the danger of speaking false messages (v. 3).
- IV. There is the danger of speaking the truth apart from the Spirit (v. 3).

I. 1 Corinthians 12:01 Ignorance about Spiritual Gifts

There is the danger of being ignorant about spiritual gifts. Note two significant points.

1. Note the words “spiritual gifts.” There are most definitely spiritual gifts, very special gifts and abilities from God that are given to a person when he first becomes a follower of Jesus Christ. Note they are *spiritual gifts*, not the natural abilities a person has developed from birth. They are special gifts given by the Holy Spirit that enable the believer to serve Jesus Christ in the church and in the world — spiritual gifts that enable the believer to help in ministering to people and in leading them to Christ.

Mat 25:15 “To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.”

Rom 12:6-8 *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

1 Cor 12:4-10 *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.*

Eph 4:7, 11 *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.*

2. Note the exact words of Paul: “About spiritual gifts...I do not want you to be ignorant.” There are three ways that a person can be ignorant about spiritual gifts.
 - a. A person can be ignorant that there is such a thing as spiritual gifts. He can fail to know that God endows the genuine believer with very special gifts that empower and enable him to serve and live for Christ.
 - b. A person may know that God gifts His people, but he may not know what special gifts God has given him. The believer may not know what it is God wants him to do for Christ and the church.
 - c. A person may know what his gifts are, but he may not know how to properly use them. It was at this point that the Corinthian church was having so much trouble. Many of

the believers knew their spiritual gifts, but they were misusing them, failing to use them as God willed them to be used.

Thought 1. There is only one solution to ignorance: study. Believers must study the Word of God and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit...

- to learn about spiritual gifts.
- to learn what their particular calling and gifts are.

2 Tim 2:15 *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

2 Tim 3:16 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

Acts 17:11 *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

Rom 15:4 *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Col 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

1 Pet 2:2 *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*

II. **1 Corinthians 12:02 Spiritual Gifts and False Worship**

There is the danger of being carried away to false worship. Many of the believers in Corinth had been saved out of the heathen religions of that day. Note the emphasis of Paul:

- => They had been “pagans”; now they were Christians, followers of Christ, the Messiah Himself.
- => They had been worshippers of idols who were dumb or voiceless, unable to communicate and relate. But now they were worshippers of the only true and living God who could communicate and share with them.
- => They had been “influenced” and “led astray” by some force, energy or spiritual power to serve the dumb idols. But now they were under the power of God’s Spirit; therefore, they were to be led by Him.

The point is this. The religions of that day widely practiced special gifts that seemed to come from spiritual forces, gifts such as trances, tongues, ecstatic utterances and prophecies of the future. Such gifts were actually running rampant. Many of the

believers in Corinth were converts from paganism; therefore, they would have been familiar with the counterfeit gifts. Some of them would have practiced these gifts in their former religion before their conversion. Apparently some of them...

- had used a counterfeit gift to imitate the real gift.
- had misused the gift and ended up not really worshipping God, but worshipping in a meaningless way.
- had begun to feel and act super-spiritual, worshipping the gift and self rather than focusing attention upon God.

Thought 1. Think how often we see spiritual gifts counterfeited and misused, for example the gift of prophecy. How often do we see a person preaching or prophesying and it is clearly evident that he is only counterfeiting the gift and has not really been called by God? And the gift of tongues and miracles: how often do we see believers counterfeiting or using the ecstatic and miraculous gifts in a manner that does not lead to a true worship of God?

John 4:24 *“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”*

Rev 14:7 *He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”*

Psa 96:9 *Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.*

Psa 99:5 *Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.*

III. 1 Corinthians 12:03 Spiritual Gifts and False Messages

There is the danger of speaking false messages (v. 3). Some person in the Corinth church apparently spoke in tongues and distorted the great truth that “Jesus is Lord.” From all indications, the person took the truth that Paul had preached, that Christ became “a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). and he said something to the effect that “Jesus be cursed.” Paul proclaims the truth in no uncertain terms: this is not the Spirit of God.

The point is forceful: every believer must be careful not to speak or proclaim a false message. What the believer proclaims must be of God; it must be the truth of God. The world has enough false messages. It does not need any more misrepresentation and counterfeit messages, messages that leave men hopeless beyond the grave. The world needs the truth of God, the message of the glorious gospel: that He has sent His Son into the world to eternally save all men everywhere. It is time for false messages and untruths to cease flowing from lips of people who are counterfeiting the gifts of God’s Spirit.

Thought 1. The believer must guard against two deceptions when dealing with spiritual gifts and truth.

- (1) Making a statement or proclaiming a message that is not the truth of God and His Word.

John 8:32 *“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

2 Cor 12:6 *Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.*

Eph 4:25 *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body.*

Prov 12:19 *Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.*

Zec 8:16 *These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts;*

Mal 2:6 *True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.*

- (2) Either becoming or sitting under a person who counterfeits the gifts of God’s Spirit, whether he be a self-proclaimed minister or lay leader in the church.

1 John 4:1-3 *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*

2 Cor 4:13-15 *It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.*

1 Tim 4:1-2 *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.*

2 Tim 3:1-2, 5 *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,... having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

2 John 1:7 *Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.*

2 Pet 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves.

IV. 1 Corinthians 12:03 Spiritual Gifts and False Profession

There is the danger of speaking the truth apart from the Holy Spirit (v. 3). Note the word “Lord” (*kurios*). It refers to God Himself, that is, the Jehovah who is proclaimed throughout Scripture to be the Sovereign Lord of the Universe. To call Jesus “Lord” is to acknowledge His deity, that He is God Himself. The point is this: no man can please God by calling Jesus Lord apart from the Holy Spirit. Any person can speak the words that “Jesus is Lord,” but for a person to please God, he must *acknowledge* within his heart and life that Jesus is Lord. The word *acknowledge* is the key: it means to surrender one’s heart to Jesus *as the Lord of one’s life*. And no person is going to do this, not really, unless he is moved upon by the Spirit of God. However, when a person is moved upon by the Spirit to say that Jesus is Lord, the person does surrender all he is and has to serve Jesus. To summarize very simply, saying that Jesus is Lord does not mean to merely mouth the words; it means to be stirred within the heart by the Spirit of God to *confess* that one’s life belongs to Jesus *as Lord*. It means to give everything that a person is and has to Christ, acknowledging Him to be the Sovereign Majesty of the universe, the very Son of God Himself.

Apparently some in the Corinthian church were saying that Jesus is Lord, but were not truly converted. They were professing truth, but had not really committed their lives to the truth. Tragically, from the earliest days of church history churches have overflowed with counterfeit and hypocritical professions.

Thought 1. How many counterfeit the gifts of God’s Spirit and profess to know and proclaim the truth, yet they are not really led by the Spirit of God? How many preach, teach and speak in tongues; yet they are only mouthing truth, not proclaiming truth through the Spirit of God? No spiritual truth can ever be used effectively by God apart from the leadership of His Spirit.

John 14:26 “But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

John 16:13 “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”

1 John 2:27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him.

1 Cor 2:12-13 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak,

not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Thought 2. Too often envy and jealousy over the gifts of others causes a person...

- to counterfeit a gift.
- to proclaim a truth in the flesh (sinful nature) that is not led by the Spirit.

Thought 3. Tragically, from the earliest times of church history churches have overflowed with counterfeit and hypocritical professions.

Mat 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Mat 23:28 “In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Mark 7:6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

Titus 1:16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Psa 78:35-36 They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues.

Ezek 33:31-32 My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. ■