

# THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:04–11

### *Introduction*

A terrible controversy was raging in the Corinthian church over spiritual gifts. All kinds of questions were being bantered about:

- => Which gifts were essential?
- => Which gifts were the most valid and true?
- => Which gifts were the most important?
- => Which gifts were the most useful and needful?
- => Which gifts were to have precedence?
- => Which gifts were to be desired and coveted?
- => Which gifts were the most honourable?
- => Which gifts were more acceptable?

God had blessed the Corinthian believers with an abundance of spiritual gifts so they could effectively minister to the citizens of pagan Corinth. However, the believers never came close to launching the ministry God had intended for the church. Why? Because many of the believers had misunderstood and were misusing and abusing the spiritual gifts which God had given them.

- => Some began to feel their gifts were more important than the gifts of others, that they were more blessed than other believers. Therefore, all kinds of sins began to swell up in the hearts of these people: a sense of pride, arrogance, super-spirituality and of self-importance.
- => Others began to feel they had to have the same gifts as others, so they became envious, and began to seek their gifts. The result was a terrible abuse of the gifts. Some persons began to counterfeit some of the gifts, and their abuse brought disorder and disruption to the church.

There was argument and debate, strife and division over the spiritual gifts of God. God had given spiritual gifts to equip His people for ministry; but instead of using the gifts for ministry, they were arguing over what gifts were essential, valid, important, needful, honourable and desirable.

The present passage deals with these problems, and to the open and honest heart it answers many of the questions about spiritual gifts.

- I. The unity of the gifts (vv. 4-6).
  - II. The purpose of spiritual gifts (v. 7).
  - III. The list of the different gifts (vv. 8-10).
  - IV. The unity of the gifts re-stressed (v. 11).
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## I. *1 Corinthians 12:04–06 Unity of the Spiritual Gifts*

The unity of the spiritual gifts. Pointedly, Paul says there should be absolutely no pride, controversy or division over spiritual gifts. Three simple, yet profound reasons show why.

1. There are different gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. The Spirit determines what gift to give to a believer. The choice is entirely the Holy Spirit's; it is not the believer's choice. No man earns, merits or deserves a spiritual gift. The gift is given freely by the Spirit as He wills. He and He alone is the Source of the gift. Therefore, there is nothing about a gift for a man to feel prideful and important about. He did not earn it, and he certainly does not deserve it.

Note another fact as well, a matter that always needs to be remembered by genuine believers: there is nothing controversial about spiritual gifts. *They are all* — every one of them — gifts of the Spirit. He can give whatever spiritual gift and grace He wills to whomever He wills. Even if He needed and willed to give a new grace or gift to a person for meeting a special need in the church or in the world, what could anyone say against it? If He willed it, He could do it. He is the Spirit of God. What is there to argue about?

**Thought 1.** Believers need to do as Paul is soon to say, love — for love is the greatest gift — and get on about the task of reaching our desperate world for Christ.

2. There are different ministries or ways of serving, but they are all done by the authority of the same Lord. It is the Lord Jesus who gives the believer the right and authority to minister *in His name*. No believer earns, merits or deserves the right to be looked upon by the Lord, much less represent the Lord. Therefore, when the Lord gives the believer the right to minister in His name, it is an occasion for humble brokenness and thankful service, not for self-importance, super-spirituality and arrogant service.
3. There are different activities and operations in carrying out the various ministries, but it is the same God who works and gives the power to do it all. No man has a greater God or a greater claim to God than anyone else. It is the very same God who equips and empowers every believer to do the daily activities of his ministry.

No man, therefore, has a greater claim to boast or to feel super-spiritual over other believers. And there is nothing controversial about the matter. God can do whatever He wills, just as He pleases, for it is *God who works all things in all believers*. Therefore, believers need to humbly thank God for His presence and power and be faithful to the daily activities demanded by their ministry. They certainly have no reason for feeling superior and self-important; neither do they have the right to stand against other believers because God is *working different things in them*.

**Thought 1.** Both the church and believers must always remember *there are differences* among believers. And it is God who has made the differences. Look at what Scripture has just said: there are...

- *Different* gifts                      ...*given* by the same Spirit (v. 4)
- *Different* ministries                ...*given* by the same Lord (v. 5)
- *Different* activities                ...*given* by the same God (v. 6)

The point to see is forceful: no matter the gifts, ministries and activities, they are all *given* — given by the Spirit, the Lord, and God. The gifts are not and could not be worked up by believers, not genuine gifts. Neither are they earned, merited or deserved. Therefore, all feelings of self-importance and all controversy needs to be stopped, and the face of God needs to be sought in repentance. For God is the One who has given and distributed as He willed. He alone knows best how to reach the people of this desperate and dying world. Therefore, He alone knows what gifts and graces are needed...

- in the generations and times
- by the races and countries of the world
- for the minds and emotions of all people
- for the conversion and growth of all people

**Rom 12:3** *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

**Rom 12:6** *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.*

**Phil 2:3-4** *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

**1 Cor 4:7** *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

## II. 1 Corinthians 12:07 Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

The purpose of spiritual gifts is to *enable* believers to do the ministry, the work to which God has called them. The phrase “common good” (sumpheron) means edification, advantage, benefit. Believers are equipped with spiritual gifts primarily for the *benefit and edification of others*, not for themselves. The gifts are not given to believers for their own gratification or for them to revel in a sense of self-importance and super-spirituality. The believer does, of course, profit and benefit from the gift given him, but he is gifted primarily to edify and help others. This is seen in the word “manifestation.” It means to be openly and publicly seen. The gifts of the Spirit are to be openly and publicly used; they are...

- to be manifested to the church, that is, used to edify the church.
- to be manifested to the world, that is, used to benefit the world (reaching the lost).

Note a crucial fact that is not always understood. The gifts of the Spirit are given to each person. They are not given only to the educated and outstanding. Every single believer is given some spiritual gift by the Spirit of God, and it is given because it is needed within the church and the world, needed to help in ministering to people and in reaching the lost for Christ.

**John 15:16** “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

**Eph 4:11-12** *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*

### III. *1 Corinthians 12:08–10 The Different Spiritual Gifts*

The list of the different gifts is given to show just how diverse the gifts of the Spirit really are. He can gift a person as He wills, and His gifts are many and varied. This list is only partial; other gifts are mentioned in other passages (see Rom. 12:6-8; Eph.4:11).

1. There is the gift of the *message of wisdom* (sophia). Wisdom means the wisdom of God; this is made clear by 1 Cor. 2:7. The wisdom of God is the truth which God has now revealed to man; it is the whole system of truth revealed by God — the truth about God and man and the world. Therefore, the word of wisdom is the gift to share the wisdom and truth of God with men — to share the truth in simple and understandable language.

**Rom 11:33** *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*

**James 3:17** *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

**Dan 2:20** *And said: “Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.”*

2. There is the gift of the *message of knowledge* (gnosis). This is practical knowledge. It is knowing what to do in the day-to-day situations that arise. It is knowing how to apply the wisdom that one has to daily living. It is being able to make practical application of truth to life. It does no good to know truth unless a person knows how to use the truth.

The *message of knowledge* is the gift to share with others how they should live; the ability to apply truth to their lives in day-to-day living; the ability to make practical application of truth to life.

**John 7:16-17** *Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”*

**John 8:31-32** *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

**Prov 2:3-5** *And if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.*

**Prov 3:13** *Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding.*

3. There is the *gift of faith*. This is not the usual faith that we mean when we speak about saving faith. It is a very special gift of faith: a mustard seed faith, a strong faith, a powerful faith, a wonder-working faith, a special gift of faith that enables a believer to do great things for God and His people.

**Mat 17:20** *He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”*

**Mark 9:23** *“If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”*

**Luke 17:5** *The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”*

**John 14:12** *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”*

4. There is the *gifts of healing*. This is a gift that has been minimized and deemphasized for generations because of the charlatans and the abuses that too often surrounded it. All kinds of theories and doctrinal positions were held saying that the gift was only for the early church. However, as William Barclay so openly points out, it is a gift that is being rediscovered by the church. It is a gift that is definitely experienced and demonstrated in the lives of multitudes all over the world today (*The Letters to the Corinthians*. p. 122f).

**Mat 10:1** *He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.*

**Mark 3:14-15** *He appointed twelve — designating them apostles — that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.*

**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.”*

**1 Cor 12:9** *To another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit.*

5. There is the gift of *miraculous powers*. This would refer to miracles other than that of healing which has just been discussed. There are times when circumstances and situations arise, and believers need a miraculous deliverance of some sort. Apparently, this is what the gift is. When it is in God's will for a storm to cease — for an enemy to be temporarily blinded, for a fire to be turned or put out, or for an innumerable number of threats against believers to be altered — God raises up some believer and gifts him to work the needed miracle. Examples of this gift would be Christ stilling the storm; Paul smiting Elymas with blindness (Acts 13:11); and Paul being delivered from a poisonous snakebite (Acts 28:5).
6. There is the *gift of prophecy*. This is the gift of speaking under the inspiration of God's Spirit. It includes both prediction and proclamation, and neither one should be minimized despite the abuse of the gift.

There is no question, the gift to predict events has been abused to the point of the ridiculous. However, the abuse of a gift does not eliminate the fact that the Spirit of God sometimes gives believers a glimpse into coming events in order to prepare and strengthen them to face the events.

However, the major function of prophecy is clearly stated by Scripture, and the fact should be learned by all believers:

**1 Cor.14:3** *But every one who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.*

7. There is the gift of *discerning or distinguishing of spirits*. This is a gift that is desperately needed by believers in every generation, for there are always false prophets and teachers in their midst. In reality, some measure of the gift is needed by every believer in order to keep from being led astray.

**1 John 4:1** *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.*

**2 Cor 11:13-15** *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

**1 Th 5:20-21** *Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good.*

**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 3:5** *[Men] having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

8. There is the *gift of tongues*. This is the gift of an ecstatic or deeply emotional speech. It has always been greatly coveted by people familiar with the gift because it brings a person into a deep sense of God's presence. What is the language spoken?

=> Some say it is in no known language.

=> Others say it is in some foreign language unknown to the speaker.

=> Still others say it is a heavenly language.

This is an illustration of how the Holy Spirit gifts people differently in order to meet the needs of the person and local situation.

Again, this is a gift that has been abused so drastically and tragically that much of Christendom has shied away from the gift. However, the gift is dramatically sweeping the world just as the gift of healing is. It should be noted that it is the gift that was being so abused and causing so much havoc in the Corinthian church. (See 1 Cor. 14:1-40.)

9. There is the gift of the *interpretation of tongues*. This is simply what it says: the Spirit of God gifts some believers to interpret the tongue.

#### **IV. 1 Corinthians 12:11 Unity of the Spiritual Gifts**

The unity of the gifts is re-stressed. The point is critical for the church to learn and practice; therefore, it is repeated.

1. All the gifts just covered are given by one and the same Spirit. God's gifts do not come from any other source. True spiritual gifts cannot be earned, merited or worked up by men. No man deserves the gift of the grace of God. Therefore, there is no room for self-importance and super-spirituality nor for controversy. One believer has one gift and another believer has another gift, but both have come from the Spirit of God.
2. The Spirit of God endows the gifts to every man exactly as He wills. He knows what gifts are needed and where they are needed all over the world. He knows what gifts will edify the church most and what gifts can be most effective to reach the world and to minister to the desperate needs of all mankind. Therefore, he meets the needs of all believers in their respective calls and localities. ■