

# Chapter 12

## The Gifts of the Spirit (12:1-11)

### The Source of Spiritual Gifts Is God the Holy Spirit

#### The Holy Spirit Honors Jesus Christ

**Verse 1**—Now we turn to a major new division and topic, *now concerning spiritual gifts* (πνευματικῶν that belonging to spirit or spiritual things) *brethren*, similar to other division markers in 1 Corinthians 1:10; 7:1; 8:1; 15:1; and 16:1. What follows is instruction the Corinthians needed to hear, *I do not want you to be unaware*, and of which they must not be ignorant.

**Verse 2**—Many of the Corinthians were Gentiles who, *when you were pagans*, had been influenced by pagan society and had been *led astray* (ἀπαγόμενοι to carry away to lead away) *to the mute* (ἄφωνα dumb and voiceless) *idols*. This was in contrast to the living God, who had spoken and did so through revelation to the apostle. Various influences had led them away from worship of the true God and into idolatry, *however you were led*. The Corinthians had listened to the apostle's revelation and no longer were being led by paganism as they were before Paul's ministry.

#### Application

Idolatry is a great sin because it is a direct sin against the character of God. Many sins hurt other people, but idolatry is a violation of God's character and directly against God, making it worse and a great sin. (Exodus 32:21 *what did this people do to you, that you have brought such **great sin** upon them?* and 2 Kings 17:21 *then Jeroboam drove Israel away from following the LORD and made them commit a **great sin**.)* The severity of sin can only be determined by what God says about the sin. Those called *greater sin*, those God says He *hates*, those that are called an *abomination*, those in the Mosaic Law requiring the death penalty, those we are told to *flee from*, and anything resembling the tolerance of other gods, should be a warning that we are approaching a *great sin*.

**Verse 3**—Paul wants to make a declaration, *therefore I make known to you* objective Biblical revelation on this matter. Namely, *that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed."* What a person said about Jesus Christ was especially important. No one the Holy Spirit motivated would curse Jesus Christ. Apparently, a test of spirituality is one's view of Jesus. To say *"Jesus is accursed"* is equivalent to believing Jesus was justly condemned to death. At the same time, *no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* To say that *"Jesus is Lord"* is to say that He is God. Since it is the role of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ (John 16:13-14), it's the Holy Spirit who is the instrument through which one declares Christ is Lord. Due to the Corinthians' faith in Christ, they would no longer be led astray by pagan idol worship, calling Christ accursed, but instead would now glorify Christ by the Holy Spirit. So the difference between the influence of demons and the influence of the Holy Spirit is what is said about Jesus Christ. This then serves as the test as to the origin of the spiritual gifts.

#### The Holy Spirit Distributes and Energizes Spiritual Gifts

**Verse 4**—Although there is only one Holy Spirit, He gives many different abilities to different people. *now there are varieties of gifts* (χαρισμάτων a spiritual endowment or spiritual enablement), *but the same Spirit*. God distributes spiritual gifts in many varieties. No one gets all the gifts, for there are different kinds for different people. The *same Spirit* is the Holy Spirit who is the source of all the gifts. We do not manufacture our gifts, nor do we choose them. They are endowed by the Holy Spirit.

**Verse 5**—As there is a diversity of gifts, so, too, *there are varieties of ministries* (διακονιῶν service or ministering) or opportunities for service that come from *the same Lord* as these spiritual gifts operate. The Holy Spirit gives a variety of gifts so that individuals can serve the people of God in various ways. It is possible for many to possess the same gift but have a different ministry. Ministry is serving with one's eternal welfare in mind or with an eternal perspective. Spiritual gifts enable us to facilitate service that supplies eternal benefit to or involves the spiritual benefit of another.

**Verse 6**—Furthermore, *there are varieties of effects* or workings or manifestations of the Spirit's power at work, which are from *the same God who works all things in all persons*. Just as the source of the gifts, and the diversity of ministries in the use of those gifts, so, too, are the effects of those ministries governed by the same God. The *same Spirit, same Lord, and same God* are each involved in all aspects of the spiritual gifts. God sovereignly engineers the software which services the needs of His people. So, the Trinity is engaged in the operation of spiritual gifts just as they are in the work of creation, redemption, and Jesus' resurrection. Additionally, we are responsible for creating ministry and service in which to use our spiritual gifts. God is in charge of the effect and outcome of our gifts. He manages its fruit. We should never take charge of the effect of our ministries. That is God's business.

## **The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts Is Serving the Common Good**

**Verse 7**—The Spirit manifests Himself in a great variety of ways, *but to each one is given the manifestation* (φανέρωσις exhibition or expression) *of the Spirit*. Each believer makes a unique contribution to the benefit of God's household, *for the common good*, not just for certain believers. God did not design gifts for selfish use but for the good or profit of the entire church.

**Verse 8**—Paul catalogues nine gifts as a representative, rather than an exhaustive, list of spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit to believers.

(1) *For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit* which is the spiritual ability or skill to think, speak, and understand the things of life from God's point of view and communicate that to others.  
(2) *And to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit*, which is the spiritual ability to be enlightened with the correct meaning of what is taking place within the church, especially before the New Testament addressed itself to these.

**Verse 9**—(3) *To another faith by the same Spirit*, which is the spiritual ability to rely on God with a pledge of confidence and trust that God will perform what He has promised, along with the willingness to defer to God about how and when He will fulfill it.

(4) *And to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit*, which is the spiritual ability to bring about a soothing recovery to a problem or provide a remedy to an ailment which could be physical, emotional, personal, or moral in scope.

**Verse 10**—(5) *And to another the effecting of miracles*, which is the spiritual ability to use powerful spiritual capacities in carrying out activities of the body of Christ. This is the common word for 'power' from which we get the word 'dynamite.' Presumably, all healings are demonstrations of miraculous powers, but not all miraculous powers are healings. They may include exorcisms, nature miracles, and other displays of divine energy. It is a gift which would make a person who evangelizes into a Billy Graham, or a person with the powerful ability of writing into a C. S. Lewis.

(6) *And to another prophecy*, which is the spiritual ability to proclaim new divine revelation from God, such as the apostles and prophets of the New and Old Testaments. The Bible testifies that their revelation came from the Holy Spirit, *for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God* (2 Peter 1:21).

(7) *And to another the distinguishing of spirits*, which is the spiritual discerning ability to differentiate and correctly judge between the things of God and the things of Satan. To dichotomize between what is truth and what is falsehood.

- (8) *To another various kinds of tongues*, which is the spiritual ability to speak in one or more languages the speaker had not learned, which were neither intelligible nor beneficial without interpretation.
- (9) *And to another the interpretation of tongues*, which is the spiritual ability to discern, translate, and proclaim the meaning of the words, used when a gift of tongues was operative so others may understand.

**Verse 11**—Here is another reminder that though these manifestations of the Spirit vary, they all indicate the presence and working of the Spirit of God, *but one and the same Spirit works all these things*. This is true of *all these things*, that is, these nine gifts enumerated and many others that this list represents. It is the Holy Spirit *distributing to each one individually* who sovereignly oversees the administration of spiritual gifts. The Corinthians should not try to manipulate the Spirit by deciding which gifts they want or believe are more prominent. The Spirit doles them out *just as He wills*. The Corinthians should accept the Spirit's work in this matter and submit to His oversight of the gifts.

### **Here are some things to know about spiritual gifts:**

- (1) They are for serving others. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability for service. In the Old Testament, service was primarily by official positions like kings, prophets, priests, and so on. But for the church, Jesus changed all of that. The apostles gave us the new platform for service, which was spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10).
- (2) They are God-given, not achieved by human effort. They must be developed by effort, but no one can get the gift of teaching just because they worked hard to get it.
- (3) They are spiritual, not natural talents. A talent like music is connected to our personality. We are born with ability that encourages such talents. They are from God who created us but come by natural birth.
- (4) No one has all the gifts, but every believer has some. Each of us will wrap our natural talents and personalities around our spiritual gifts in such a way that our gifts will all be developed differently.
- (5) You discover your gifts as you serve people. Ministry is serving people with their eternal value in mind. So the way to discover your gifts is probably not by taking a written test or class. The best way to discover how the Holy Spirit has gifted you is to begin serving people in various ways.

### **Here are questions you can ask yourself to discern your gift:**

- (1) In what areas or ways does God seem to be using me?
- (2) What do I enjoy doing—what brings joy and contentment?
- (3) What draws me closer to God as I do it?

## **Unity and Diversity in Christ's Body (12:12-31)**

### **Our Unity Results from Our Baptism into Christ's Spiritual Body**

**Verse 12**—Here is an introduction to rest of chapter:

- (1) *For even as the body is one* (verses 12-13), God's household functions as a unit
- (2) *And yet has many members* (verses 14-20), with a diversity in its members
- (3) *And all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body* (verses 21-31), working together as one, mutually dependent upon one another.

Paul draws the body-like unity comparison of Christ's spiritual body, *so also is Christ*, to highlight the diversity of parts functioning together within the church. Each member in this analogy has a precise place and purpose, yet there is one body.

**Verse 13**—The Holy Spirit is the means by which believers are placed into the body of Christ, *for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*. The word *all* means that there is no such thing as a Christian who is not baptized (immerse in or to place) by means of the Spirit into the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the instrument Christ uses to baptize. Salvation is the time when the Holy Spirit does four things. The new believer is regenerated, indwelled, baptized, and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

- **Regeneration** by the Spirit, which is the new life God gives us because of the washing or renewing work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).
- **Indwelling** of the Spirit, which is the special presence of the Holy Spirit in you, resulting in your body being *a temple of the Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 6:19; see also 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 1 Peter 2:9).
- **Baptism** of the Spirit, which is membership into the universal church, the *one body* of all believers (1 Corinthians 12:13; see also Romans 6:3).
- **Sealing**, which is the preserving of the believer with *the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption* (Ephesians 4:30).

This is true *whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free* because racial or social distinctions do not matter anymore. The idea behind the Spirit baptism is that the church is one body *and we were all made to drink of one Spirit*. There are no people on the way to becoming a Christian. Either we are Christians or we are not. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer fully at salvation. God does not parcel Himself out to the believer in installments.

## The Human Body Is an Analogy of Christ's Universal Church

### You Are Not Insignificant (verses 14-20)

**Verse 14**—Both bodies, the physical human body and the spiritual body of Christ, consist of many members, *for the body is not one member, but many*. There is great diversity in the body of Jesus Christ, both in appearance and function, yet each member has a common root and a common goal. There are a variety of gifts for a diversity of people within the church.

**Verse 15**—Paul puts the question in the mouth of the one who feels excluded from the body, *if the foot says, "because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,"* to argue that every individual is significant. Since they cannot stand alone, *it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body*. Every member in this analogy needs each other.

**Verse 16**—Carrying on with the analogy, *and if the ear says, "because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,"* the ear feels inferior to the eye. The eye is out front, whereas the ear is on the side. No one ever talks about the ears. Lovers do look into each other's eyes, they do not look into each other's ears! *It is not for this reason any the less a part of the body* is addressing how some may have felt if they could not have prominence among believers.

**Verse 17**—Different functions, as well as different members, are necessary in the body. *If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?* Not only is this diversity in the universal church acceptable, it is essential. A body with just an ear would not be able to smell. *If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?* The body must have different parts and gifts, or it would not work together effectively as a body. There is no hierarchy in diversity.

**Verse 18**—Paul stressed God's sovereignty in placing each member in the body as He has chosen, *but now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body*. This was not a haphazard effort but one strategically engineered by the Holy Spirit, who here is equated with what God has done. This strategic placement within Christ's spiritual body was *just as He desired*. So the hand can take no "pride" in being a hand, and the foot can take no "shame" in being a foot. Each serves the pleasure of the Designer. The Corinthians should concentrate on using their spiritual abilities given to them rather than desiring another or attempting to do what they were not gifted to do by God.

**Verse 19**—If all the members of the human body were the same, it would not be able to function as a body *if they were all one member, where would the body be?* There is no justification for feelings of insignificance in the body of Christ. God placed the gifts exactly where they belong otherwise the body would be unable to function.

**Verse 20**—As the human body is one organism, so is the universal church an integrated organism of many parts mutually dependent *but now there are many members, but one body.* A body has a variety of members, but it is one unified organism. Different parts are needed if the body is to properly function and exist. Don't assume because you are different that you are insignificant. No believer should think of himself or his gift as inferior, and then desire another member's gifts.

### **You Are Not Independent (verses 21-26)**

**Verse 21**—Paul addressed those tempted to pride and a sense of superiority because of their gifts or place in the body. *And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you."* The eye cannot get along without the hand. Likewise, *the head [cannot say] to the feet, "I have no need of you,"* using the top and bottom of the body analogy as if to say, 'from head-to-toe,' every member who belongs to Christ is indispensable.

**Verse 22**—*On the contrary (ἀλλὰ πολλῶ μᾶλλον, nevertheless much greater),* polar opposites to the idea that there are a hierarchy of gifts, is the truth that *those members that seem to be weaker are essential.* The hand or the eye may *seem* to be more important, and may have more prestige in its position, but it is not more necessary or significant than other parts of the body in terms of its functionality.

**Verse 23**—*Those members of the body which we deem less honorable,* because they may be weaker or unglamorous, *we bestow more abundant honor,* because they are more essential to life than the others. This way *our less presentable members become much more presentable* by recognizing less-respected gifts and those who possess them, instead of making prejudiced distinctions that are unfounded.

**Verse 24**—On the other hand, the more honorable parts, such as our faces, do not require special covering, *whereas our more presentable members have no need of it.* The point is that we take special pains to honor our less esteemed physical members, and we should do the same in the church rather than neglecting or despising them. *But God has so composed (συνεκέρασεν to commingle, combine or assimilate) the body,* both human and spiritual, so the different members can care for one another. God can do that by *giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,* not ignoring any member, and finding a place for them in gifted service.

**Verse 25**—The purpose for mutual giftedness for each member was *so that there may be no division (σχίσμα to split, divide, schism) in the body.* This rivalry and factious activity had been a significant problem amongst the Corinthian believers. God does not want dissension amongst believers but rather, *that the members may have the same care (μεριμνῶσιν to look out for, provide, take thought—which is the exact opposite of schism) for one another.* The Corinthian Christians should care for the personal and spiritual well-being of one another because they are each part of the same body.

**Verse 26**—So much so, in fact, *if one member suffers, all the members suffer (συμπάσχει suffer or feel pain together) with it.* This is the way believers are to care for one another mentioned previously. Additionally, *if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it,* genuinely interested in the well-being of all believers, no matter their place in Christ's spiritual family. Rivalry must cease and sincere constructive efforts to sympathize and care for each other's interests must prevail. Our giftedness is not meant to divide but to unite in mutual ministry and care and support.

## The Church Has Both Diversity and Mutual Dependence

**Verse 27**—The Corinthian Christians are in view, but what Paul said of them applied to all groups of Christians *now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it*. The word *you* is emphatic indicating that the Corinthians definitely belonged to *Christ's body*. Together we make up the universal church, and each of us is an individual member in it. We should not view the universal church as a community where individuals become engulfed within a group mass, but as a collection of individuals, each maintaining their distinctive within the collective.

**Verse 28**—Paul now listed eight kinds of members, each with special functions. *It was God [who] has appointed (ἔθετο placed or set down) [these members] in the church*. God placed them there officially. Eighteen times, since verse 12, *the body* was used as an analogy for the church, to describe its diversity and unity. Now, Paul leaves the analogy and directly addresses *the church* which the analogy of the body had pictured.

(1) God appointed *apostles* who give given spiritual ability to be sent out to establish believers in places where the gospel had not yet gone.

(2) Were *prophets* who were given the spiritual ability to be channels through whom God provided revelation to His people.

(3) Were *teachers* who who were given spiritual ability to instruct people in the truth of God's revelation in the Scriptures.

Each of the first three gifted members are assigned ordinal numbers to possibly highlight their importance due to being relegated in some way in Corinth. The ranking may also have emphasized the order of importance of these gifts as the church was being established or possibly due to the nature of these gifts serving the whole church collectively.

(4) *Then miracles* (δυνάμεις powerful ability) which gave spectacular evidence and dramatic proof that the power of God was working in the church.

(5) *Then gifts of healing* to provide special remedy in times of acute need.

(6) *Helps* is the ability to render assistance or support that addresses a specific need at an opportune moment.

(7) *Administrations* is the ability to manage or direct situations related to service and ministry.

(8) *Kinds of tongues* is the ability to speak languages previously unknown as a sign that God was working.

**Verse 29**—All seven questions in verse 29-30 are rhetorical and expect a negative answer. The point in both verses is that it would be ridiculous for every believer to possess the same gift. *All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?* Of course not. God intended for there to be a variety of gifts given to God's people, which are essential to address a plethora of needs.

**Verse 30**—*All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?* Of course not. All believers in the Corinthian church had been baptized by the Holy Spirit, but not all of them had all of these gifts, including the gift of *healings, speak[ing] with tongues and interpretation*. Since tongues was included here, it's obvious that tongues were not a sign one

possessed the Holy Spirit, nor that one was saved. Tongues, then, are not a preferential gift since some in the church did not possess the gift and was not a greater one.

**Verse 31**—Paul advised the Corinthians to seek some gifts more than others because some are more significant in the functioning of the body than others. The alternative was *but earnestly desire* (ζηλοῦτε to be zealous, to exert) *the greater* (μείζονα weightier, esteemed) *gifts* which indicated a ranking or hierarchy of the gifts due to their extensive value to the universal church. However, Paul wants to show the Corinthians an even *more excellent* (ὑπερβολήν superior, or pre-eminence) *way* than just possessing a spiritual gift. This excellent way is not one more gift among many spiritual gifts, but a way beyond all this. It is the manner of life, preeminently characterized by love in the use of the gifts.

## Questions about Spiritual Gifts

- **Where are the gifts listed in the New Testament?**

There are similar lists in 1 Corinthians 6 and Romans 12. Those gifts are called *charismata* and refer to spiritual abilities for service. The list in Ephesians 4:7-11 are called *domata* and refer to people, positions, or duties given to the church for equipping the saints.
- **Does every believer have at least one spiritual gift?**

Every believer has been given a spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit *as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God* (1 Peter 4:10). It is possible that a believer may possess more than one spiritual gift, but no believer possesses all of them.
- **Are there additional gifts not listed in the Bible?**

Since the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 6, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4 are not all the same, though there is some overlap, it is reasonable to conclude that these lists are selective and not exhaustive.
- **How should one determine his or her spiritual gift?**

It is popular to determine one's spiritual gift by taking a written test or inventory. However, the best way to determine your spiritual gift is to be involved in various kinds of ministries and observe where it is God seems to be using you effectively in the lives of other believers.
- **Should our ministry to others always be centered around our gifts?**

This may be ideal, but it is usually not possible. Our ministry is dictated by many things, including life circumstances, the specific needs around us, and our personal limitations and desires. Our life calling is a blend of gifts, desires, and life situations. These often dictate where and what we do in ministry.
- **Are there apostles today?**

The evidence seems to be against there being apostles today for the following reasons:  
(1) Apostles could do miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12). People doing New Testament miracles are not observable in the church today.  
(2) Apostles were appointed directly by God (John 17:17; Acts 1:23-26; 9:3ff).  
(3) Paul seemed to claim to be the last of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:5-10).
- **Are there prophets today?**

Prophets gave new revelation from God. John indicated that his apocalypse was the last revelation given (Revelation 22:18). Also, the apostles and prophets were people singled out to be foundational, not necessarily continual gifts to the church (Ephesians 2:20).
- **Can we conclude there are no gifts of prophecy, tongues, or knowledge today?**

In 1 Corinthians 13:8, the gift of prophecy and knowledge are in the passive voice in Greek, meaning they will be terminated by God, though the passage does not specify a time. The gift of tongues is in the middle voice in Greek, meaning this gift will cease of itself or peter out on its own. It seems that church history testifies that this is what happened to the gift of tongues shortly after the apostles. Those gifts will pass away *when the perfect comes* (1 Corinthians 13:10). The word *perfect* is *teleon* a common word for complete or mature. Since these gifts are singled out from the others and because all mention of these gifts end around A.D. 60, halfway through the New Testament era

(from the mid-30s to the mid-90s), it seems like they ended. However, some say they did not end. If one believes this then

(1) test the spirits to be sure they can declare Jesus Christ as Lord while speaking or prophesying and  
(2) follow the rules outlined in 1 Corinthians 14.

- **Is the Pastor/teacher in Ephesians 4:11 one gift?**

It does not seem to be since there are many teachers mentioned in various ways in the New Testament who are not pastors (Romans 12:6-8; James 3:1; Hebrews 5:12). Also, pastoring is shepherding, a very different sort of ability from teaching. We all know of men and women who are very good at shepherding the sick, the needy, orphans, widows and others in acute need, who are not gifted teachers—and don't need to be.

- **Is a spiritual gift the same as a natural talent?**

A talent, say, in music, art, public speaking, sales, learning languages, math, or human relations are talents connected to our personalities. We are born with a genetic structure which encourages such talents. To be sure, they are also from God, but they come via natural birth, whereas spiritual gifts come via spiritual rebirth at salvation.