

“Ministry Diversity and the Centrality of Christ
in the Local Assembly”
Issues of Diversity
Understanding Spiritual Gifting

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Title: Understanding Spiritual Gifting – Part I: The Holy Spirit works through every believer for the good of the body
Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
Theme: The body of Christ is built for community and this is no less true when addressing the issue of spiritual gifting.

Introduction: The letter to the Corinthian church is highly occasional. There were specific issues within the fellowship that demanded answers and needed to be addressed. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 7:1 (marriage), 25 (virgins), 8:1 (meat offered to idols), 12:1 (spiritual gifts), 16:1 (collections), and 16:12 (Apollos).

An area of keen interest is that of spiritual gifts. It appears from what Paul addresses in chapters 12-14 that a problem existed in this vital area of church life.

“Not only did the Corinthians have problems with the position of women and the observance of the Lord’s Supper in their public worship services, but they also had questions about the exercise of spiritual gifts in their midst.” (Robert G. Gromacki, Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians [Baker, 1977], 148)

In 12:1-3 the apostle draws a line of demarcation between the pagan spirits and that of the true God. No one who is a believer can embrace a mindset that curses Jesus Christ. It is equally true that no believer can embrace a mindset that does not acknowledge Jesus as Lord (v. 3). What follows are principles concerning spiritual gifts. How do these two ideas fit together?

In our paragraph verses 7 and 11 are pivotal. In our paragraph verses 7 and 11 are pivotal. Notice how verse 7 reads. If everyone has a gift, and if the exercising of our gifting is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and if when exercised it is for the common good of the body, then if we are not exercising our gifting, we are not manifesting the Holy Spirit to those around us and we are not benefiting the body of Christ.

“The passage teaches the unity of all believers which has been worked in them and for them by the Holy Spirit. The overall thought is of unity in diversity or diversity in unity. The Holy Spirit has been given to each believer and he is the ground of this unity.” (Alfred Martin, First Corinthians [Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1989], 111)

Notice how verse 11 reads. If we are seeking to serve in order to be seen, then we are derelict in our stewardship of grace.

These two large ideas form the basis for the entire section that runs from chapter 12 through chapter 14.

Paul begins this section with the statement, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware” (v. 1). When the apostle speaks of these gifts he uses our English word “charisma.” It is where we get the word “charismatic.” It is rooted in the word “charis.” And this is our word for grace.

What is of interest to me is our propensity toward labels. We identify those who use sign gifts as Charismatic. Yet our passage tells us that every believer is a charismatic. Each of us have received a grace-gift from God to be used for the common good of His people. Spiritual gifts are grace-gifts. This alone begins to bring clarity as to what they are, how they are to be used, and how they are acquired.

“The spiritual gifts referred to here are those supernatural, Spirit-bestowed endowments known to the early church.” (James L. Boyer, For a World Like Ours: Studies in 1 Corinthians [BMH, 1971], 111)

The word “unaware” or “ignorance” is our English word “agnostic.” It literally means “no knowledge.” Paul does not desire for his audience to be uninformed. The antidote for ignorance is not obedience, but knowledge. Yet knowledge in the absence of obedience is the frayed edge of a torn garment. The two, knowledge and obedience, are to be inseparably linked. Accurate knowledge fuels our obedience and our obedience displays our knowledge. What you believe about your personal ministry involvement, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the local church are all addressed in this section of the Bible.

The exercising of one’s spiritual gifts in the context of local church ministry falls inside of the larger discussion of Christian liberty and the proper expression of it. Paul will continue to argue that in the using of gifts in the church believers should promote the glory of God, the good of others, and the setting forth of a godly example. By selfishly demanding their personal rights they were violating corporate unity. Paul addresses this issue with the Corinthian fellowship.

“Why is it important to know your spiritual gifting?” Let me suggest six reasons.

For various reasons, many Christians do not know what their spiritual gifting is and in

the absence of this knowledge are not actively involved in their local church. Let’s begin our study of spiritual gifts by suggesting several reasons why it is imperative for every Christian to know their gift.

First is the prominence of spiritual gifts in Scripture. Spiritual gifts are found in four major portions of Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12; Ephesians 4; and 1 Peter 4. In addition to these central passages, spiritual gifts are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. The existence of spiritual gifts is presupposed.

Second is the elementary nature of spiritual gifts. All believers have a spiritual gift. Its existence is not optional and its engagement is essential.

Third, spiritual gifts contribute to the overall health of the local assembly. If every believer has a grace-gift and if each of the grace-gifts is inter-dependent, then each of the grace-gifts functions best when in the context of connectivity.

My grace-gift of teaching flourishes best when those with the other gifts are exercising their stewardship. I need each of you to steward your grace-gift so that the grace-gift of teaching can exhibit itself. The flip side is equally true. You need me to exercise my grace-gift of teaching in order that your stewarding of your grace-gift can flourish. In the absence of either one both suffers and the body suffers.

Fourth spiritual gifts are a matter of individual stewardship. When Peter spoke of spiritual gifts, he considered them a matter of personal stewardship:

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10).

Our gifting is for the purpose of mutually edifying the body of Christ. You have a gift and you are to be using that gift for the overall health of this local fellowship. Christians are built for community.

Fifth, knowing your spiritual gift(s) enables you to find your place of ministry in the local church. Since every Christian has a particular function in the body of Christ, and since your spiritual gifts equip you to carry out this function, knowing your gifts help you to plug into the ministry of a local church. Each of you has a place in the local body of Christ. You are never too big or too small to exercise your gifting in the context of a local church.

Finally, knowing your spiritual gift(s) enables you to determine your priorities. One of the most common problems we all face is having more things to do than we have time to do them. When we have too many things to do we must choose to function in the area of our spiritual gifts. You must know your spiritual gifts to set these priorities.

Our present study will assist us in our understanding of this vital area of body life.