

# *“Spiritual Gifts: Varieties”*

1 CORINTHIANS 12

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This morning I would like for us to start a series of three lessons on the spiritual gifts that were given to the early Christians. Most people in the religious world believe that Jesus and the apostles and the early Christians had the power to do some amazing things, and yet there is certainly much debate concerning exactly what they were able to do, concerning who had those special abilities, and concerning how long those miraculous powers were intended to last. As we try to answer some of these questions, I would like for us to focus our thoughts on three chapters in the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians.

Most of us know that the church in Corinth had some serious issues. They were divided as a congregation, they were constantly arguing among themselves, one of their members was living in sexual sin with his own step-mother (and the church was proud of it—they were proud of how accepting they were), members of the congregation were suing each other—they were taking each other into secular court over spiritual matters. They had some serious concerns over marriage, they had questions about eating meat that had been sacrificed to pagan idols, they had concerns over the Lord’s Supper—some members were filling up on it as if it were a common meal, and others were going home hungry, not even having had a chance to partake of it. And then near the end of the book, we find that some members of the congregation were apparently having doubts about the resurrection of Jesus. And we think we have our issues from time to time! Nevertheless, the church in Corinth was having some serious problems.

Well, the church in Corinth was established by the apostle Paul as he passed through that area in 51 AD, on his Second Missionary Journey. According to Acts 18, Paul established the church and settled in Corinth for a year and a half. Well, after Paul left, these issues started coming up, and the church apparently wrote Paul a letter and asked for his advice. That letter was apparently a long series of questions, a series of issues, and in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul appears to go down that list. Over and over again in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul says, **“Now concerning...,”** and then he gives an answer to one of their questions.

This morning, therefore, we come to 1 Corinthians 12 as Paul starts to address a series of concerns over the issue of spiritual gifts. As we get into this, I want to say “thank you” to brother Alan Highers who presented a series of lessons from 1 Corinthians at the Freed-Hardeman University Bible Lectures back in February 2010. Brother Highers suggested a three-point outline for Chapters 12, 13, and 14. We will be following that basic outline for our studies this morning and over the next two weeks.

- In Chapter 12, Paul addresses what the gifts are as he briefly outlines and describes the variety of gifts that were available.
- In Chapter 13, Paul addresses the question of how long the gifts would last, or the duration of the gifts.
- And then in Chapter 14, Paul addresses the issue of how the gifts should be used, or the regulation of the gifts.

This morning, then, I would like for us to start with 1 Corinthians 12 as we begin with a brief overview of the variety of the spiritual gifts that were available to those Christians who were members of the First Century church in Corinth. In our pew Bibles, the passage starts on page 1796. I would encourage all of us to look at this passage together, keeping our Bibles open as we study.

I. **And as we begin, I would like for us to start with Paul's very firm admonition that THE CHRISTIANS IN CORINTH NEED TO BE INFORMED ON THIS VERY IMPORTANT SUBJECT.**

Please notice what Paul says in the first three verses,

***<sup>1</sup> Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. <sup>2</sup> You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. <sup>3</sup> Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.***

And so when it comes to spiritual gifts, Paul says, ***"I do not want you to be unaware."*** In other words, they were to be aware, they were to be informed. He talks about the Christians in Corinth coming out of a life of worshiping idols, and he is making a contrast, he is saying that the Christian faith is different. The Christian faith is not mysterious, the Christian faith is not chaotic, the Christian faith is not based on ignorance; but instead, the Christian faith is based on knowledge, and he wanted them to be informed!

And here we are nearly 2,000 years later, and many of us may need a refresher course on what a spiritual gift is, what their purpose was, and how they were passed along. In verse 1, when Paul refers to ***"spiritual gifts,"*** he was referring to miraculous powers that were passed along through the laying on of the apostles' hands, miraculous powers with the purpose of communicating and confirming God's truth in those days before the Bible was completed.

We know that the church was established in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in 30 AD. We also know that the first books of the Bible were not written until the mid to late 40's AD. Many people believe that the books of James and Galatians were perhaps the first books to be written, perhaps as early as the year 44. Most of Paul's books were not written until the 50's and the 60's. Hebrews was perhaps written at some point just before 70. Some of John's letters were not written until the 80's or even 90's. Well, we have a problem. At best, we have at least a 14 year gap between the church being established and the writing of the first book of the New Testament (the gap between 30-44 AD). And on the upper end, we have a gap of up to perhaps 65 years before the New Testament is completed. So, what if you are living in those early years, what if you are living in that period between 30-95 AD, and what if you have a question about baptism? What if you have a question about marriage? What if you have a question about the Lord's Supper? What if you have a question about the Lord's return? Well, today, we would simply open the Bible, but back then, there was no Bible! The New Testament had not been written yet. And so to fill that gap, God provided miraculous abilities to teach and confirm His word.

Jesus promised this back in Mark 16:15-20. In the closing verses of the book of Mark, Jesus said,

***<sup>15</sup> "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. <sup>16</sup> "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. <sup>17</sup> "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." <sup>19</sup> So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup> And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.***

Did you notice that, that the word was confirmed by the signs? The purpose of the signs was to confirm the word of God. Just a few weeks later (on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2), the apostles start speaking in languages they had never studied, and in their defense (in Acts 2:16-18), Peter said,

***<sup>16</sup> but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; <sup>18</sup> EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT and they shall prophesy.***

Prophecy is one of the spiritual gifts outlined by Paul a little later in 1 Corinthians 12 (we will get back to that in just a moment). But the point is, the miraculous gifts were given to communicate and confirm God's word in those years before the word was written down.

A year or so ago, we studied the book of John. Please remember the key passage in the book of John, John 20:30-31, where John writes (in roughly 85 AD), ***"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."*** So, the signs Jesus performed were written down so that we could believe, but until those signs were written down, the signs were actually repeated by many of those in the early church as confirmation of the word of God.

Remember how I mentioned that the book of Hebrews was written shortly before 70 AD? That book was written not by an apostle, but by a second-generation Christian, by someone who had perhaps known the apostles, and in Hebrews 2:1-4, the writer of that book says,

***<sup>1</sup> For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, <sup>3</sup> how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.***

You see, for those who perhaps had not known the Lord personally, His word was confirmed ***"both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit."*** We have an interesting example of this in Acts 14 as Paul and Barnabas are on the Second Missionary Journey, ***"In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both***

*of Jews and of Greeks. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.*" You see, God was "testifying" that the words Paul and Barnabas spoke were true by confirming those words with "signs and wonders." So many questions we have on this subject can be answered simply by understanding the purpose of the spiritual gifts. These things were not done just so certain people could look cool, they were not done to entertain, and they were certainly not given so that the early Christians could impress their friends, but the spiritual gifts were given in order to teach and confirm the word of God before that word was written down.

Well, how did people get these powers? We have an interesting passage in Acts 8 where the preacher Philip was teaching in the city of Samaria. In Acts 8, the Bible says that, "***The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. So there was much rejoicing in that city***" (verses 6-8). Well, that got the attention of a former magician by the name of Simon. Simon wanted the power to pass along those gifts for a fee. According to verse 13, Simon saw that "***great miracles***" were taking place, and he was "***constantly amazed.***" The Bible goes on to say (in verses 14-19),

***<sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, <sup>15</sup> who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup> For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."***

We don't have time to get into the response of the Apostles to Simon's request, but the point is, it was very clear that the miraculous power could only be passed along through the laying on of the apostles' hands. In other words, this is something that Philip was not able to do. Philip had the miraculous power, but he was unable to pass it on. But rather, it could only be passed on through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

We have confirmation of this a little later in Acts 19 when Paul went to Ephesus to re-baptize the twelve men who had been baptized incorrectly the first time. The Bible says that when these men heard Paul's message, "***...they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying***" (Acts 19:5-6). You see, the gifts did not automatically come with baptism, but Paul (an apostle) had to lay his hands on them.

So, we learn in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 12 that we are not to be uniformed on the very important subject of spiritual gifts. We are talking about miracles that were performed in order to confirm the word of God, and the ability to perform those miracles was passed along through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

II. **With all of this in mind, let's go on and look at verses 4-11 as Paul outlines NINE OF THE VARIOUS SPIRITUAL GIFTS.**

*<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. <sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*

As we just briefly outline the various gifts among the members in Corinth, we mainly need to notice the variety—many different gifts, but (according to verse 7), they were all given **“for the common good.”** This is something the people in Corinth had apparently forgotten—that all of the gifts came from one Spirit.

**1. First of all, though, we have (in verse 8) the gift of WISDOM.**

And here we are not talking simply about book knowledge or the kind of wisdom that comes with experience or learning, but we are talking about some level of miraculous wisdom. In other words, this is wisdom that God gave to people directly and in a miraculous way. I know some very wise people, but this is a miraculous level of wisdom—a gift from God that would prove His word to be true.

**2. Secondly, we also read (in verse 8) about the WORD OF KNOWLEDGE.**

And here again, this is not book-knowledge, but this is knowledge that comes directly from God in a miraculous way, information that comes directly from God. Of course, we have this kind of knowledge now through the Bible; but remember, they did not have the Bible, and so this is the word of knowledge that comes from God.

**3. In verse 9, we read about the gift of FAITH.**

And here also, this is not the kind of faith that comes from hearing the word of Christ in the Scriptures (as we read about in Romans 10:17), but since we are talking about a time before the New Testament was written, we are talking here about miraculous faith, the kind of faith that is able to **“move mountains,”** a common figure of speech referring to the ability to do some amazing things. The miraculous ability to have the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.

**4. In verse 9, we also read about GIFTS OF HEALING.**

We are not talking about someone who goes to medical school and trains for many years, but we are talking here about members of the congregation who had been given the miraculous ability to heal. We think of Peter and John healing the lame man in Acts 3, and all of the other healing that was done by Jesus and the others.

**5. In verse 10, we read about the EFFECTING OF MIRACLES.**

Of course, all of these things we’ve been talking about are miraculous, but these are miracles that perhaps do not fit into the other categories; basically, we are talking here about stuff that is not on this list. I am thinking

of those things listed back at the end of Mark—casting out demons, being bitten by venomous snakes and surviving, drinking deadly poison without being harmed.

When brother Highers spoke on this passage, he referred to a debate he had held many years ago down in Ripley, Mississippi. He was debating a man who believed in the power to do miracles in modern times, and without letting anybody know, brother Highers went to a friend of his on the police department in Memphis who collected snakes, and brother Highers actually borrowed a rattlesnake for a week. And so at one point in the debate, brother Highers actually brought out the snake in a box on the stage and invited the denominational minister to put his hand in the cage. And not only did the man decline the offer, but brother Highers pointed out that he actually walked far around the cage when it was his turn to come up on the stage! In other words, the denominational minister believed in Mark 16 in theory, but in practice the man's beliefs were actually quite different!

#### **6. In verse 10 we read about the gift of PROPHECY.**

We are talking here about someone who has the miraculous ability to speak on God's behalf. I think of prophecy as someone who has a hotline to God. Today we go to the Bible, but back there in the middle of the First Century, there was not yet a Bible to go to, and so some people had the ability to speak on God's behalf. We are talking here about inspired teaching, similar to what was done by the Old Testament prophets like Samuel and Elijah and the others.

#### **7. In verse 10 we also read about the gift of DISTINGUISHING THE SPIRITS.**

Back then, just as we have today, there were false teachers who would travel around teaching various false doctrines. Today, we refute false teachers by turning to the word of God, but without the written word, some members of the church had the miraculous ability to say, "Wait a minute! What you are saying is not true!"

#### **8-9. Also in verse 10, we read about the gift of VARIOUS KINDS OF TONGUES as well as the gift of the INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES.**

We are talking here about the ability to speak in a foreign language without any previous knowledge or study of it. We are talking about the ability to understand and interpret various foreign languages. We will get more into this in Chapter 14, but it would be similar to what Peter and the other apostles did on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2—people were visiting from all over the world, but they were all able to hear the good news in their own language. Today, if we want to speak in a foreign language, we take a class or we read a book, and then we practice. Several years ago, I purchased the book *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Learning Spanish on Your Own*. Apparently, I am not yet up to the level of "idiot," because I never quite made it through the first chapter. But the gift of tongues gave people the ability to instantly speak in another language without any kind of special training.

So, these are the nine spiritual gifts that were present among the members of the church in Corinth...

#### **III. ...but as you can imagine, THERE WAS TROUBLE.**

People wanted the gifts that were really cool. In fact, there seems to be yet another division forming within the congregation. Some members seem to have had an inferiority complex. Maybe one guy had the gift of knowledge, and he's thinking, "I'm left out here! My gift isn't flashy! I'm not able to speak in tongues, and so I

might as well just quit!" And then on the other hand there were apparently those on the other side who had the very obvious gifts, and they were starting to look down on the other members of the congregation. With that in mind, let's look at what Paul says in verses 12-31 as he tries to encourage the church to work together,

*<sup>12</sup> For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. <sup>19</sup> If they were all one member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> But now there are many members, but one body. <sup>21</sup> And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, <sup>24</sup> whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, <sup>25</sup> so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> 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? <sup>30</sup> All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? <sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.*

Paul's message, therefore, is that regardless of a person's spiritual gift, each person was valuable to the health and strength of the congregation in Corinth. Paul was saying that the church would be in chaos if we all did the same thing! And so he brings it back to the fact that the church is the body of Christ—in verse 27, ***"Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it."*** We are members of the body of Christ, and Christ (as the head) is responsible for all of us working together. Paul is basically saying then, "It's not about you! It's about the Lord!" And so (on one hand) if some people in Corinth were all discouraged that their particular gift wasn't special enough, then they had missed the point. And (on the other hand) if some people were bragging about their own gift and telling other people they weren't needed, then they had also missed the point. The point is: It is not about the gifts—it is about the Lord! And so in the very last verse, Paul is able to say, ***"And I show you a still more excellent way."*** And that statement leads perfectly into our study next week, a study of love in 1 Corinthians 13. I would encourage you to come prepared for that study next Sunday morning.

### **Conclusion:**

I am thankful for our time together. If you have not yet obeyed the good news, the good news is that Jesus died in our place so that our sins can be forgiven. We respond to that sacrifice by changing the way we live and by allowing ourselves to be briefly buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any

questions, please ask, but if you are ready to do whatever it takes to give God control of your life right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)