

2. Paul introduced his treatment of the Corinthians' inquiry regarding spiritual matters by establishing the foundational principle by which all of the Spirit's endowments and their manifestations and use must be measured. That foundation in place, Paul turned to the issue of spiritual endowments themselves and their general forms and functions in the Church (12:4-11). As a first consideration, Paul highlighted in this passage the fact that such endowments are *charismata*: "grace gifts" which the Spirit Himself distributes to every believer (thus Paul referred to diversities or *distributions* of gifts – 12:4-6, 11), but individually and distinctively according to His design as the divine agent of the new creation (12:4-11). This dynamic underscores several basic principles of spiritual gifts:
- As "grace gifts" – gifts bestowed as a matter of divine gracious purpose, spiritual endowments are neither earned nor dispensed by the Spirit on the basis of human considerations. Every individual Christian is gifted by the Spirit, but each one distinctively in accordance with the Spirit's own determination and design.
 - Secondly, and as an implication of the previous observation, spiritual gifts cannot be ranked in terms of superiority, importance or needfulness. To claim such distinction is to indict the Spirit's wisdom and the economy of His work. He cannot be who He is and have any of His gifts and workings be superfluous, redundant, or otherwise inferior or unnecessary. Each must be perfect in every respect: perfect in its nature, purpose and function as well as its contribution, value and necessity to the Spirit's work and accomplishment.
 - And if there is no superiority or ranking among the Spirit's manifold gifts, then there can be no ranking among the community of believers who possess them. Each individual – even as he or she is individually gifted by the Spirit – is perfectly and equally needful and of equal importance in the Church's life, well-being and progress. Each of the Spirit's endowments is distinct, but none enjoys superior distinction, and so it is with those to whom His gifts are given.
 - This crucial principle of distinction without ranking or superiority applies as well to individuals who possess the *same type* of gifts. The Spirit's gifts represent general arenas of gifting (cf. Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Peter 4:10-11), so that a given type of *charisma* will itself embrace various forms and functions. This is as true of the seemingly narrow gifts as it is of the *charismata* of exhortation, giving, serving, etc. Here as well, distinction in form and/or function doesn't indicate superiority – either of the manifestation itself or the person associated with it.
 - Finally, the quality of the Spirit's gifts – the fact that they are diverse and distinct while also equal and mutual – points to their functional role: They are given to produce a unified spiritual body comprised of individually distinct persons – a body in which all distinctions function in a shalomic relationship of mutual interdependence and service unto the mutual good and the perfection of the whole (Ephesians 4:1-16; cf. Colossians 2:1-19). The Spirit distributes and empowers His gifts in order that living stones should together become a spiritual house – the everlasting dwelling of the triune God (Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

Taken together with the foundational principle of verse 3, the above considerations highlight a further core truth respecting “pneumatika”: *The Spirit bestows His “grace gifts” individually upon each member of the believing community in order to fulfill His purpose to communicate Jesus Christ to the world of men and sum up all things in Him.*

The Spirit’s gifts and their rightful exercise accomplish that goal by forming, nurturing and perfecting the community of the new creation (the Body of Christ) – *not merely for the sake of the community and its members, but also for the sake of its truthful and faithful witness to the “good news” of new creation in Jesus Christ.*

- The Creator Spirit functions now as the Spirit of *re-creation* (cf. Genesis 1:1-5 with 2 Corinthians 4:6). And, as He did with the first creation, the Spirit is now ordering and filling the new creation that, at present, consists in the true humanity which has its first-fruits in the Last Adam. (Consider again Paul and Peter’s metaphor of the Church as God’s ultimate dwelling place constructed of living stones built upon Jesus, the Living Stone). The present work of the Re-Creator Spirit – and thus the ministration of His gifts – is unto the constituting of a new humanity: one “new man” sharing the life of the New Man (Ephesians 2:13ff).
- The Spirit forms this “new man,” but *in Himself*; He forms Christ in them by His indwelling, enlivening and transforming work. Stated differently, He is making believers one by binding them together as “spiritual men”: men of the Spirit united in the Man of the Spirit (cf. Isaiah 42:1-7, 61:1-7 with Luke 3:1-4:21 and John 14:16-26, 15:26-16:15, 20:19-23). They are thus members of one another by virtue of being co-sharers in the divine, trinitarian life.
- In Paul’s present language, they are joined together as individual members to form one organism: the Body which is joined to, enlivened by and constituted as the fullness of Christ the Head (12:12-27).

All of these metaphors and expressions point to the same fundamental truth – a truth revealed by the prophets (cf. Zechariah 4 with 6:11-15): *The Spirit is building into the spiritual house that is Christ’s Church by building up the Church.* That is, it is by the Church living out its true identity that it attests to the world the truth of the gospel of new creation in Jesus Christ – the gospel which is the power of God for salvation. As the Church authentically lives out its new-creational life in the Spirit, it serves the Spirit’s creative work of ordering and filling until the day when all things are renewed and perfected in Christ (cf. John 17:20-23 with 2 Corinthians 3:1-4:7 and Ephesians 1:9-10).

With those foundational considerations, the framework is in place to examine the specifics of Paul’s instruction regarding spiritual gifts.

- a. And Paul began his treatment in the appropriate place, with the fundamental truth that the Spirit’s endowments and their operations are characterized by the complementary qualities of *diversity* and *unity*. A couple of observations are important to make in this regard.

First, this unity/diversity pattern in the Spirit's gifts mirrors the same pattern in the *Church* itself. The above discussion highlights the fact that Christ's body consists of a diverse group of individuals bound together and unified by one thing: their shared participation in the life of the triune God. But it is the Spirit who makes the many into one, and He does so through His endowments and their operation in the body of believers. He gifts each individual, but unto the goal that the individual living stones should become one sanctuary. *Hence the nature and dynamics of Christ's body determine the nature and dynamics of the Spirit's gifts.*

Secondly, this diversity/unity pattern mirrors the *Godhead*. This should not be at all surprising, for man is divine image-bearer, created in the image and likeness of the triune God for the sake of participating in the divine life and love. The Church is the shalomic communion of individual image-sons who share in the shalomic communion which exists among the Father, Son, and Spirit. Their relationship is one of unity in diversity; how could it be otherwise with the human community which participates in the trinitarian life and communion and manifests it to the created order? Indeed, as the "fullness of Him who fills all in all," the Church is the tangible testimony in the world to the truth of God Himself; *how can it possibly fulfill that role except as it, too, exists as a common-union of individual hypostases – as the manifestation of true unity in diversity?*

Paul highlights this trinitarian correlation in the way he depicted the principle of unity in diversity: There are varieties of gifts, but the same *Spirit*; varieties of ministrations (service), but one *Lord*; varieties of effects (effectual workings), but one *God* who works all in all (ref. again 12:4-6, 11). As the one God exists in the distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit, so this God pours forth into His one Church a diverse distribution of "grace gifts" which function in a diverse manner and achieve a diversity of effects – *but all as and unto an essential, spiritual unity.*

- b. The one God exists in the distinct and diverse hypostases of Father, Son and Spirit, and yet as an essential and functional unity. Each person of the Godhead possesses the fullness of deity and all three are individually and together fully united in purpose, will and activity. The triune God works "all in all" – that is, all functions and exertions in all persons and circumstances – toward a singularly purposeful goal: the summing up of the entire creation in Christ. So it is with His diverse gifts and their operations: *Every endowment and manifestation of the Spirit is given for the "common good" (12:7).* That is to say, the Spirit distributes and empowers His gifts synergistically: Whatever the particular gift, its unique functionality in a given circumstance, and its specific effect and fruit, the Spirit's *charismata* work together to the advantage and profit of the whole – *profit being the building up of all the members of the body into Him who is the Head.*

This means first and foremost that the Spirit's gifts are for the *body*, not the individual to whom they're given. This is evident in the fact that they are spiritual endowments given to serve the cause of *love* (13:1ff); and if the cause of genuine love, then the cause of the *christiformity* of the other (cf. Colossians 1:24-29).

The Spirit gifts individuals for the good of the whole, but this doesn't mean the individual himself derives no value or profit from his own gifts. He does indeed profit from them, both *directly* and *indirectly*. As to the latter, a Christian's ministration of his gifts to others bears fruit in their growth in Christ, and their growth yields a more fruitful ministry of their gifts to the body. Thus faithful ministration of one's gifts rebounds to one's own spiritual profit. At the same time, Christians also derive direct benefit from the proper use of their gifts. This is because exercising one's giftedness is a critical aspect of "walking in the Spirit," and purposeful yieldedness to the Spirit's mind and will (i.e., to the mind of Christ) nurtures the believer's communion with and conformity to the triune God.

Empowered by the Spirit who distributes them and exercised by "spiritual ones" submitted to His mind, the *charismata* and their manifold workings and effects are symbiotic and synergistic. In every way they are perfectly comprised and fitted together to achieve the common good: the christiformity of the individual members unto the building up of the whole body.

- c. Paul emphasized the essential unity of the Spirit's endowments: They derive from the one and same Spirit and work together toward the same goal. At the same time, the Spirit's gifts are widely diverse in their nature and function. There are two reasons for this: First of all, the Spirit's work of re-creation is comprehensive and involves a wide array of distinct operations and ministrations. Secondly, the Spirit performs His work through human beings. *He* transforms and perfects Christ's people (2 Corinthians 3:18), but in such a way that "*the body causes the growth of the body*" (Ephesians 4:11-16). Thus the Holy Spirit accomplishes His all-embracing work by distributing a full complement of diverse endowments to the individual members of Christ's body (ref. again 12:4-6, 11).

Unity in diversity defines the triune God and therefore the creation that reflects and attests Him. But so it is also with the Church and its ministrations in the Spirit. Paul highlighted this diversity by rehearsing with the Corinthians a general catalog of the Spirit's gifts (12:8-10, 28-30). These gifts will be considered in detail in a later excursus, but a few general observations are in order here.

First, Paul's list proves his point about the diversity of gifts and is not intended to be comprehensive; indeed, no such list can be formed by correlating the four passages which name spiritual gifts (cf. Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11). These lists merely articulate the broad arenas of the Spirit's gifting and show how they address every facet of Christians' personal and corporate lives.

The second thing to note is the way Paul himself underscored the distinction and differences among spiritual gifts. He alternately employed the two primary Greek adjectives rendered *other* or *another* – terms which, in general, refer to another of the same sort (*allos*) versus another of a different sort (*heteros*). Examples of the former are found in Matthew 5:39, 8:9, 12:13, 13:5-8 and John 14:16, 18:15; examples of the latter in Matthew 6:24, 10:23, 11:3, 12:45, 15:30 and Mark 16:12.

Noting his use of these two adjectives, some scholars have partitioned and classified Paul's list of gifts based on them. The result is three divisions: the word of wisdom and word of knowledge (v. 8); faith, healing, miracles, prophecy and discerning of spirits (vv. 9-10a); tongues and interpretation of tongues (v. 10b). Paul's list *is* partitioned by the two adjectives, but it's difficult to find a particular quality that adequately unifies each group and distinguishes it from the others. This is especially the case with the second (and largest) group, which contains both intellectual gifts like the first group and miraculous gifts like the third.

A third observation is that Paul's present list highlights the supernatural quality of the Spirit's gifting. This is noteworthy because elsewhere Paul gives equal (or greater) emphasis to the natural aspects of spiritual gifts (ref. Romans 12:7-8 and Ephesians 4:11). Four important considerations arise from this: The first is the reason Paul chose to emphasize the supernatural here. Paul clearly intended this, and it likely was due to the sorts of questions and concerns posed by the Corinthians. The larger context indicates that spiritual manifestations were exacerbating the divisions at Corinth by being abused as instruments of personal distinction and self-exaltation. Obviously the more spectacular gifts – the gifts which openly display a supernatural quality – were most suited to this perverse purpose and so stood at the forefront of the controversy. Thus it was appropriate for Paul to focus on such gifts in providing his instruction.

The second consideration is the crucial truth that the Spirit's gifts do not exclude, deny, or in any way ignore or minimize natural human qualities. To the contrary, not only do spiritual gifts commonly manifest themselves in a manner consistent with natural human actions and activities (teaching, exhorting, giving, serving, etc.), the Spirit most often distributes His gifts consistent with a person's natural qualities. In this way the Spirit's gifting enhances and gives spiritual power and efficacy to natural endowments. This is not to say that the Spirit never distributes His *charismata* in a way that appears inconsistent with a person's natural inclinations and strengths. So, for instance, He occasionally gives leadership gifts to otherwise unassuming men and calls them to serve as shepherds in the Church – a role they would never naturally aspire to or be willing to undertake.

Thirdly, the fact that *charismata* have both natural and supernatural components highlights as well the truth that God is the author of the whole person. The apostle Paul was gifted and called as Christ's apostle in connection with his divine encounter on the Damascus road, but that event was merely the ordained culmination of a lifetime of preparation. The God who called and equipped Paul for his apostolic ministry was the same God who set him apart from his mother's womb (Galatians 1:13-16). The Spirit gave Paul the necessary natural endowments in view of and in preparation for the spiritual gifting to follow. Finally, the natural/supernatural dynamic of the Spirit's gifts points to the *compatibilistic* way divine sovereignty operates. For the most part, divine gifts operate and have their fruitful effect through natural human activities, even as the Spirit perfects the saints, but consistent with the body causing the body's growth.