

Challenges Christians Face

Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

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December 4, 2011

Spiritual Gifts

Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of spiritual gifts. Let's learn about more about that in a message I am calling, "Spiritual Gifts."

Let's read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11:

¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

Introduction

I would like you to imagine that the Tampa Bay Buccaneers somehow make it to this year's playoffs. I know that is wildly im-

aginative, but work with me on this! Suppose that somehow the Buccaneers even make it to the Super Bowl! Now you are really wondering where I am going with this! But imagine—I know this is just make-believe—that the Buccaneers win the Super Bowl, and that Josh Freeman is named the Most Valuable Player of the Super Bowl. During the interview he is asked, “What do you think about winning the Super Bowl and winning the MVP?”

Josh Freeman responds, “It is great! I can’t describe the feeling! After all, I pretty much single-handedly managed to turn the team around back in December. I was able to win games because of my superior gifts. I deserve to be the Super Bowl MVP because there is no question that I am by far the most valuable player in this entire organization. If it were not for me, the entire team would be sitting at home and watching the Super Bowl with all the other losers out there!”

What would you think if Freeman actually said that? You would think that he is incredibly arrogant, even delusional, because you know that it takes an entire team to win games.

Well, this hypothetical situation was actually what was going on in the church at Corinth. The Corinthians had a very skewed view of their spiritual gifts. They took personal pride in their spiritual gifts as if they had earned them or deserved credit for them. They were much more interested in using their gifts for personal fulfillment than for the good of the church body. They failed to realize the importance of the smallest gifts. They also failed to recognize the importance of those people whose gifts were least visible.

Sadly, the same thing can often be said about today’s church. We respect and honor those who do most for the ministry. We act as if they do God’s work by their own human abilities and not by God’s grace. We fail to see the importance of every member of the church, focusing instead on those whom God is using most visibly at the moment. Like the Corinthians, when we exercise our spiritual gifts, we frequently do so because it gives us a sense of personal fulfillment and enjoyment—not for the good of the church body.

Lesson

In our lesson today, we learn that God has given a variety of spiritual gifts for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.

We learn about this as follows:

1. The Importance of Spiritual Gifts (12:1)
2. The Source of Counterfeit Gifts (12:2)
3. The Test of Spiritual Gifts (12:3)
4. The Source of Spiritual Gifts (12:4-6)
5. The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts (12:7)
6. The Variety of Spiritual Gifts (12:8-10)
7. The Giver of Spiritual Gifts (12:11)

I. The Importance of Spiritual Gifts (12:1)

First, notice the importance of spiritual gifts.

Paul said in verse 1: **“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.”**

Paul began in verse 1a by saying: **“Now concerning. . . .”**

This is now the fourth time in his letter that Paul used that phrase. In fact, Paul used it a total of six times in his letter (7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; and 16:12). Each time Paul used it to answer a question or an issue raised in the letter he had received from the Corinthians.

Paul now addressed the issue of **spiritual gifts**. He did not reveal their precise concerns, but stated emphatically that he did **not want them to be uninformed** about **spiritual gifts**.

It was an important issue for Paul to address because of the abuses by the Corinthian Christians. And it is still an important issue for us today. So, let us learn more about spiritual gifts.

II. The Source of Counterfeit Gifts (12:2)

Second, let's look at the source of counterfeit gifts.

Paul said in verse 2: **“You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.”**

Many of the Corinthian Christians were **pagans** prior to their conversion to Christ. Although they may not have been aware of it at the time, they were in fact **led astray to mute idols** in their unconverted state. The word for **“led astray”** (*apago*) was used of prisoners being taken under armed guard to prison or execution (cf. Mark 14:44; 15:16).

Before a person becomes a Christian he is a captive of Satan and of sin. He is spiritually blind and weak, and cannot help being led into idolatry. Non-Christians think that they are free to do whatever they want to do. But, in fact, just the opposite is true. They are prisoners of Satan and of sin.

Paul wanted people to know that Satan is the source of counterfeit gifts. Every gift that is not from God is in fact from Satan.

We see that more clearly in the next verse.

III. The Test of Spiritual Gifts (12:3)

Third, let’s look at the test of spiritual gifts.

John MacArthur makes the following startling comment in his commentary on this verse. He says, “Satan spends a lot of time in church.”¹ When I first read that statement, I was taken aback. However, as I pondered the statement, I realized that it really is true. We are engaged in an all-out war for the souls of men and women, and Satan will do whatever he can to keep us from bringing people to Jesus Christ. Satan manages to get us off task, disorganized, unfocused, and redirected.

Paul rebuked the Corinthian Church for becoming so undiscerning about what is from God and what is from Satan.

He gave two tests, one negative and one positive, for testing the validity of spiritual gifts and their use. It is the first of several tests that Paul mentioned in chapters 12-14.

¹ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 284.

A. *The Negative Test (12:3a)*

First, notice the negative test of spiritual gifts.

Paul said in verse 3a: **“Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’”**

Apparently, there were some in the Corinthian Church who were saying, **“Jesus is accursed!”** while claiming to be **speaking in the Spirit of God**. To say that **“Jesus is accursed!”** is to condemn his nature, his character, and his work—not to mention his holiness and his glory.

Paul told the Corinthians that no such blasphemous statement could ever possibly be uttered by **the Spirit of God**. The role of **the Spirit of God** is to exalt and honor the Lord Jesus Christ. He could never and will never blaspheme the Second Person of the Trinity.

B. *The Positive Test (12:3b)*

And second, notice the positive test of spiritual gifts.

Paul said in verse 3b: **“. . . and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”**

Obviously, any person can easily say the words, **“Jesus is Lord.”** But, in Paul’s day it was not so easy, especially for Jews. You remember that Jews were—and still are—taught that there is only one Person who is God. So, when Jesus came along and claimed to be the Second Person of the Godhead, the Jews were extremely upset because Jesus was considered to be making a blasphemous claim. And so, when people became Christians, one of the core tenets of the faith was an affirmation that Jesus really was God. And so Christians affirmed that **“Jesus is Lord.”**

You might understand some of the difficulty if you consider what is involved in becoming a Muslim. Do you know what you have to do to convert to Islam and become a Muslim? According to

the *Converting to Islam* website, “Recitation with understanding of true meaning of the phrase—There is no God except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah—is all that is required for converting to Islam.”² I have always felt really awkward saying the statement, “There is no God except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,” because in no way at all do I ever want to give the impression that I am a Muslim.

Well, in a similar way it was a big deal for a person to convert to Christ. However, Paul assured them—and us—that **no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.**

So, Paul was affirming that the Holy Spirit empowers those who proclaim that **Jesus is Lord.**

IV. The Source of Spiritual Gifts (12:4-6)

Fourth, notice the source of spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts come from the Triune God. Each person of the Godhead is active in giving gifts to believers.

A. The Holy Spirit Gives Varieties of Gifts (12:4)

First, notice that the Holy Spirit gives varieties of gifts.

Paul said in verse 4: **“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.”**

The **Spirit** is the one who gives **gifts**. But he does not give one gift. He gives **varieties of gifts**. In fact, there are nine gifts mentioned in verses 8-10. There are several other places in the New Testament where spiritual gifts are mentioned: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:11. Most scholars believe that these lists are not meant to be exhaustive. Instead, they are merely representative of the **varieties of spiritual gifts** that the **Spirit** gives to believers.

² See <http://www.convertingtislam.com/mylife.html>.

B. Jesus Gives Varieties of Service (12:5)

Second, Jesus gives varieties of service.

Paul said in verse 5: “. . . **and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord.**”

Jesus gives **varieties of service**. **Service** derives from terminology that Paul frequently used to describe a variety of ministries occurring within the church body.

C. God the Father Gives Varieties of Activities (12:6)

And third, God the Father gives varieties of activities.

Paul said in verse 6: “. . . **and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.**”

God the Father is also involved in giving **varieties of activities**.

Notice that each Person of the Godhead is active in the distribution of spiritual gifts.

Furthermore, the three terms—**gifts, service, and activities**—relate closely to one another, but they are not synonymous. Each item is the source of the one that follows it. Thus, **gifts** enable **service**, and **service** enables **activities**. Basically, Paul is saying that gifts enable a person to serve in a particular ministry activity. And notice that although Christians perform the ministry **activities**, ultimately it is only God who brings about the results of the **gifts** that are used in his **service**.

So, then, why are spiritual gifts given?

V. The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts (12:7)

Fifth, notice the purpose of spiritual gifts.

Paul said in verse 7: “**To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**”

The Greek word for **manifestation** (*phanerosis*) has the basic

idea of making known, clear, or evident. That is what spiritual gifts do: they make the Holy Spirit known, clear, and evident in the church and in the world. Spiritual gifts manifest the Spirit. Spiritual gifts are never given to be hidden or to be used privately. They are given to manifest the Holy Spirit, to put him and his work on display.

Spiritual gifts are therefore given **for the common good**. Spiritual gifts are meant to be used to build up the church body. They are never intended for private or personal use.

Imagine that Johnny has the gift of teaching. And so he just goes and stands in front of the mirror and teaches himself. “That’s ludicrous,” you say. And you would be right. Johnny’s teaching gift is meant to be used **for the common good** of the church body.

VI. The Variety of Spiritual Gifts (12:8-10)

Sixth, let’s look at the variety of spiritual gifts.

As I mentioned earlier, these are just a sampling of spiritual gifts. Paul did not mean to give an exhaustive list. For the sake of time, I will simply briefly mention each spiritual gift.

A. *Wisdom (12:8a)*

First, look at the spiritual gift of wisdom.

Paul said in verse 8a: **“For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom.”**

You may recall that the Corinthians exalted **wisdom**. However, Paul rejected worldly wisdom as folly. True wisdom is found in the gospel. The spiritual gift of **wisdom** is the ability to understand God’s will and apply it obediently (cf. Matthew 11:19).

B. *Knowledge (12:8b)*

Second, look at the spiritual gift of knowledge.

Paul said in verse 8b: **“. . . and to another the utterance of**

knowledge according to the same Spirit.”

The spiritual gift of **knowledge** refers to perceiving and understanding the truths of God’s Word.

C. Faith (12:9a)

Third, look at the spiritual gift of faith.

Paul said in verse 9a: “. . . **to another faith by the same Spirit.”**

This is not saving faith because this is a spiritual gift that is given only to some believers. The spiritual gift of **faith** is the ability to trust God in the face in overwhelming obstacles and human impossibilities.

D. Healing (12:9b)

Fourth, look at the spiritual gift of healing.

Paul said in verse 9b: “**to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.”**

The spiritual gift of **healing** is the first of the temporary sign gifts that Paul mentioned in this passage. I will address questions related to permanent and temporary supernatural sign gifts in a future sermon. However, since the temporary sign gifts were still in operation at the time that Paul wrote this letter, the temporary sign gifts were not placed in a separate category. In fact, by its very placement in this list, Paul does not seem to be singling it out.

God still heals directly and miraculously today. He heals sovereignly as he chooses, and it is often in response to the faithful prayers of his children. However, no Christian today has the spiritual gift of healing.

E. Miracles (12:10a)

Fifth, look at the spiritual gift of miracles.

Paul said in verse 10a: “. . . **to another the working of mir-**

acles.”

The **working of miracles** was also a temporary sign gift. A miracle can be defined as “a supernatural intrusion into the natural world and its natural laws, explainable only by divine intervention.”³ Miraculous signs were a mark of apostleship, authenticating the apostles’ message and work as coming from God. Since the canon of Scripture is closed, there is also no longer any need for miracles to authenticate the person as having been sent by God.

No one today exercises the spiritual gift of the **working of miracles**. Again, I shall say more about that in a future sermon.

F. Prophecy (12:10b)

Sixth, look at the spiritual gift of prophecy.

Paul said in verse 10b: “. . . **to another prophecy.**”

The Greek word for **prophecy** (*propheteuo*) simply means “to speak forth, to proclaim.” Basically, the prophet is one who speaks for God to people. A prophet basically functions as God’s spokesman. John MacArthur states that “the connotation of prediction was added sometime in the Middle Ages.”⁴

The spiritual gift of **prophecy** is simply the powerful and clear proclamation of God’s truth to people. Paul defined the function of prophecy very well in 1 Corinthians 14:3, where he said, “The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.”

G. Discernment (12:10c)

Seventh, look at the spiritual gift of discernment.

Paul said in verse 10c: “. . . **to another the ability to distinguish between spirits.**”

The basic meaning of **distinguish** (*diakrisis*) has to do with separating out for examination and judgment in order to determine

³ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 301.

⁴ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 303.

what is genuine and what is false. Those to whom God has given the spiritual gift of discernment have an ability to recognize spiritual error.

H. Tongues (12:10d)

Eighth, look at the spiritual gift of tongues.

Paul said in verse 10d: “. . . **to another various kinds of tongues.**”

The spiritual gift of **tongues** is at least as controversial today as it was in Paul’s day. It is likely, however, that this spiritual gift was the one that was really being exalted in Corinth (as we shall later in Paul’s letter). The spiritual gift of tongues will be examined in detail in chapter 14. Suffice it to say that it is a temporary sign gift that is no longer needed today because the canon of Scripture is closed.

I. Interpretation of Tongues (12:10e)

And ninth, look at the spiritual gift of interpretation of tongues.

Paul said in verse 10e: “. . . **to another the interpretation of tongues.**”

Paul gave an explicit instruction that when **tongues** were used in the worship service, there was to be **the interpretation of tongues** (14:27). However, since **the interpretation of tongues** was also a temporary sign gift, we will look at it more closely later.

VII. The Giver of Spiritual Gifts (12:11)

And finally, let’s look at the giver of spiritual gifts.

Paul said in verse 11: “**All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.**”

Paul again reminds his readers that **all** spiritual gifts **are em-**

powered by one and the same Spirit. He gives them to the church body for the common good.

Moreover, he **apportions** spiritual gifts **to each one individually as he wills.** You may look at a brother or sister in Christ, and wish that you had his or her gift. I charge you to remember that the Spirit has given you exactly the gift that you have because that is the gift that he wants you to use in his service.

Conclusion

Let me summarize a few principles that we learn from this portion of Paul's letter.

A. Spiritual Gifts Can Be Counterfeited

First, spiritual gifts can be counterfeited.

We may not like to think that it is possible, but it is in fact true that spiritual gifts can be counterfeited by Satan. For example, throughout history and in many different places, there are people who make no profession of faith in Jesus Christ whatsoever who speak in tongues. Just because a person speaks in tongues is no evidence that he is exercising a spiritual gift.

B. Spiritual Gifts Are Primarily for Building up the Church

Second, spiritual gifts are primarily for building up the church.

Spiritual gifts were never meant for private or personal use. They have always been intended to build up the church.

C. Spiritual Gifts Are Given by God's Sovereign Grace and Not According to Our Merit or Ability.

Third, spiritual gifts are given by God's sovereign grace and not according to our merit or ability.

Challenges Christians Face

God determines who receives what spiritual gifts. And since Jesus is building his church, he decides where he wants those spiritual gifts deployed in the expansion of his church.

D. Not to Use Our Spiritual Gifts is a Sin

And finally, not to use our spiritual gifts is a sin.

Every believer receives at least one spiritual gift at conversion. Most Christians probably receive a number of spiritual gifts.

The problem is that far too many Christians simply sit on the sidelines. They only attend worship services and, often, rarely at that. They are not using their spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. And they themselves are not being built up either.

It is imperative that if you are a Christian, you should use your spiritual gift for the common good. For if you do not, you are sinning.

Well, may God bless you as you use your spiritual gifts for the common good of building up the church of Christ. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Challenges Christians Face

PRAAYER:

O Triune God, you have given spiritual gifts to your church. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. Help each one of us to use the spiritual gift you have given to us for the common good of building up the church of Jesus Christ.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and use the spiritual gifts that God has given you for the common good!