

WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS? Part 1

TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

1. First Corinthians chapter 12 begins with these words: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.”
2. But unfortunately, many Christians are ignorant concerning spiritual gifts.
3. (Sadly, many Christians are ignorant of just about everything.)
4. There is much confusion over spiritual gifts, largely due to the growth of the charismatic movement, with their emphasis on signs and wonders, tongues, healings, and miracles.
5. But the Bible does have quite a bit to say about this subject and we need to be able to differentiate truth from error.
6. A spiritual gift is a certain qualification given by the Holy Spirit to each individual believer to enable him to serve within the framework of the local church (cf. I Cor. 12:7, 11).
7. The main passages describing the spiritual gifts are Romans 12, and I Corinthians 12-14.
8. The spiritual gifts identified in Romans 12 are prophesying, ministering (serving), teaching, exhorting (encouraging), giving, ruling (leadership in the local church), and mercy.
9. The list here in I Corinthians 12 includes the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues (12:8-10).
10. Further down in chapter 12, verse 28 we see miracles, healings, helps, governments (church administration), and diversities of tongues.

1. IGNORANCE OF THE GIFTS

2. DIVERSITIES OF GIFTS

3. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE GIFTS

I. IGNORANCE OF THE GIFTS (12:1-3)

1. The apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 12:1, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.”
2. Ignorance of spiritual gifts often leads to false doctrine, emotionalism, and all sorts of mischief. There are many false prophets among the

Pentecostals. These wolves in sheep's clothing thrive because most of the people following them are ignorant of the Bible.

3. In verse 2, Paul says, "Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led." Many of the Christians in Corinth had been saved out of paganism. Behind their "dumb idols" were evil spirits, and there was much demonism in their idolatrous, pagan worship.
4. Adam Clarke says, "Previously to your conversion to the Christian faith; ye were heathens, carried away, not guided by reason or truth, but hurried by your passions into a senseless worship, the chief part of which was calculated only to excite and gratify animal propensities."
5. In Philippi, a demon-possessed slave girl followed Paul and Silas around (Acts 16). When Paul cast the devil out, "her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone," and had Paul and Silas arrested and put in jail.
6. If this demon-possessed girl walked into many churches today she'd be welcome. Remember, she followed Paul and Silas around saying, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17).
7. Demonism manifests itself in various ways – tongues and ecstatic utterances, wild, emotional screaming and dancing, weird prophecies, miracles, etc. Sadly, this describes many Pentecostal meetings.
8. Conrad Mbewe is a Baptist pastor in the African country of Zambia. He has said that the Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Africa have merged Christianity with demonism and witchcraft.
9. "I think that one reason why the Charismatic movement in Africa has been like a wild bushfire is because it has not challenged the African religious worldview but has instead adopted it. It has simply baptized it with Bible verses and Christian words that previously meant something totally different...In the African Charismatic circles, the 'man of God' (pastor) has replaced the witch-doctor" (<https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B130724>).
10. There are many articles about this syncretism on the Internet.
11. First Corinthians 12:3 is a test (cf. I John 4:1-4). Regarding I Corinthians 12:3, John Phillips says, "Now it is quite evident that unsaved people can say both these things...so there must be more to this statement than appears on the surface. The subject of the chapter is spiritual gifts and their use, especially the speaking gifts of tongues, interpretation, and prophecy. These were supernatural gifts, made operational by the Holy Spirit, who controlled the speaker at the time the specific utterance was being made. However, they were capable of being imitated by evil spirits. Hence the warning. The test was in the context of what was said while the speaker was evidently under the control of a supernatural power" (*Exploring 1 Corinthians*).

II. DIVERSITIES OF GIFTS

1. All Christians have gifts, but not all Christians have the same gift (12:4). “Diversities” (12:4, 6) means “variety, difference.”
2. *Thayer’s Lexicon* says this means, “a distinction arising from a different distribution to different persons.”
3. The Holy Spirit distributes these various gifts — “the same Spirit...the same Lord...the same God which worketh all in all” (12:4-6; cf. vs. 11).
4. That is, the same God which worketh all in all believers (12:4-6).
5. The *Scofield Study Bible* says, “To each believer is given a spiritual enablement and capacity for specific service. No believer is destitute of such gift (vss. 7, 11, 27), but in their distribution the Spirit acts in free sovereignty (12:11). There is no room for self-choosing, and Christian service is simply the ministry of such gift as the individual may have received (cf. Romans 12:4-8). The gifts are diverse (vss. 6, 8-10, 28-30), but all are equally honourable because bestowed by the same Spirit, administered under the same Lord, and energized by the same God.”
6. Scofield refers to the distinction between spiritual gifts and gifted men. “The Spirit gives gifts for service to men, Christ gives the gifted men to the churches” (cf. Ephesians 4:8, 11, 12; I Corinthians 12:28).
7. Albert Barnes said, “There are different endowments conferred on Christians...The design for which he refers to these various endowments is evidently to show those whom he addressed, that since they are all produced by the same Holy Spirit, have all the same Divine origin, and are all intended to answer some important purpose and end in the Christian church, that therefore none are to be despised; nor is one man to regard himself as authorized to treat another with contempt. The Spirit has divided and conferred those gifts according to his sovereign will; and his arrangements should be regarded with submission, and the favors which he confers should be received with thankfulness” (*Barnes’ Notes*).
8. “Administrations” (12:5) means “ministry.” Acts 6:4 says, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”
9. Acts 12:25 says, “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry.”
10. “Operations” (12:6) means “workings” (Scofield margin).
11. Each Christian has a function to perform in the local church (12:7, 11).

III. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE GIFTS

1. Verse 7 says, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every (saved) man to profit withal.” That is, for the profit of everyone in the church.
2. Albert Barnes says the gifts “are to be used for the common good of the church,” and that is how verse 7 is translated in some of the modern versions.
3. Verse 8 refers to both “the word of wisdom,” and “the word of knowledge.” At this time, the New Testament was incomplete. John Phillips wrote, “This gift (of wisdom) gave the early church access to New Testament truth even though some of it had not yet been formally given by means of the written Word” (*Exploring 1 Corinthians*). James had already written his epistle, and Paul had already written I and II Thessalonians, and Galatians.
4. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark were in circulation, but not Luke and John.
5. Today all Christians can claim James 1:5 – “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” But this is not the same thing as “the word of wisdom” (12:8).
6. A similar gift of the Spirit was “the word of knowledge” (12:8b). The gifts of wisdom and the word of knowledge were practiced by the early apostles and prophets (cf. 12:28).
7. Ephesians 2:20 says the church is built upon the “foundation of the apostles and prophets.” That foundation was laid a long time ago.
8. The knowledge referred to in verse 8 is a supernatural knowledge. In I Corinthians 13:8, we are told that knowledge “shall vanish away.”
9. Therefore, this knowledge has to mean supernatural or special knowledge from God because knowledge in a general sense will never “vanish away.”

CONCLUSION:

One hundred and fifty years ago, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said this: Before men had the complete New Testament, they needed those who had special knowledge from God so they would know about God and know what they were to do and not to do. Today we can study the Bible to know what God has to say. I have heard many fanatical persons say the Holy Spirit revealed this and that to them. Now that is very generally revealed nonsense. The Holy Ghost does not reveal anything fresh now. He brings old things to our remembrance. ‘He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have

told you,' (John 14:26). The canon of revelation is closed; there is no more to be added. God does not give a fresh revelation, but he rivets the old one. When it has been forgotten, and laid in the dusty chamber of our memory, he fetches it out and cleans the picture, but does not paint a new one. There are no new doctrines, but the old ones are often revived. It is not, I say, by any new revelation that the Spirit comforts. He does so by telling us old things over again; he brings a fresh lamp to manifest the treasures hidden in Scripture; he unlocks the strong chests in which the truth had long lain, and he points to secret chambers filled with untold riches; but he coins no more, for enough is done.

Believer! There is enough in the Bible for thee to live upon forever. If thou shouldst outnumber the years of Methusaleh, there would be no need for a fresh revelation; if thou shouldst live till Christ should come upon the earth, there would be no necessity for the addition of a single word; if thou shouldst go down as deep as Jonah, or even descend as David said he did, into the belly of hell, still there would be enough in the Bible to comfort thee without a supplementary sentence.