



Week 8: Spiritual Gifting

Part I
1 Corinthians
May 17, 2009

Paul now moves to the next issue: spiritual gifts and in particular, speaking in tongues. Evidently, the Corinthians had come to believe that the best spiritual gift was speaking in tongues, and that the exhibition of this gift demonstrated a

superior spirituality. The Corinthians had turned what was supposed to be a gift for the benefit of the body of Christ and made it a litmus test for spiritual achievement.

The Source of Spiritual Gifts (12:1-11)

Every Believer Has the Spirit (12:1-3)

In 10:20-21 Paul reminds us that false religion is equivalent to worshipping demons. So before the Corinthians were believers, however they were led into idol worship, it was not the leading of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, no one who has the Holy Spirit would ever say that Jesus is cursed.

Likewise only people who have the Holy Spirit can say that Jesus is Lord. In other words, everyone who believes in Jesus has the Spirit of God within them. That is, every believer is indwelt in the Holy Spirit, for it is impossible to confess Jesus as Lord without the Holy Spirit.

This means, if you are a believer, you have the Holy Spirit. There is no post conversion experience whereby one receives the Holy Spirit. The evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is your confession of faith.

If, then every believer has the Spirit, then it follows that the Spirit has given every believer a manifestation of the Spirit (12:7), known commonly as a "spiritual gift." There are no exceptions. Everyone who is a Christian has been given a spiritual gift, or supernatural ability, which is intended to be used to help the church.

Spiritual Gifts are the Basis of Unity (12:4-6)

That does not mean everyone has the same gift. There are a variety of gifts, service and activities. But there is only one God who empowers believers for this gifting. Therefore,

while there are varieties of gifts, there is a unity that comes from sharing our gifts with one another.

Paul phrases this with some very careful theological language so as to give us a living example of unity from variety. Namely, the example of the Trinity. Note the structure of these verses.

- Variety of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- Variety of service, but the same Lord.
- Variety of activity, but the same God.

The Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit. The Lord refers to Jesus, the Son of God (12:3). God refers to the Father. Within the Trinity there are three different varieties of service, activity, and persons. Yet there is only one God.

So then the church can also have a variety of gifting, ministries and activities, but still be one unified church.

All Spiritual Gifts are from the Spirit (12:7-11)

Each believer is given a spiritual gift. This gift, however, is not a natural ability or a learned skill. It is a manifestation of the Spirit. It comes through, according to and by the Spirit.

Paul then lists some of the gifts which are given by the Spirit. This is not an exhaustive list of all the possible gifts, as there are other lists of gifts found in other passages which do not match up

completely with this list (see 1 Corinthians 12:28ff, Romans 12:6ff).

In each of these passages Paul is not intending to delineate a complete list of gifts along with definitions and assessment tests for determining our gifting. Unfortunately there has been a lot of extra biblical teaching on spiritual gifts which tries to define and codify the gifts. Most of this teaching, however, is based on conjecture and psychological personality testing

rather than the scripture. Paul lists some gifts here not to provide us with a detailed understanding of each gift, but to emphasize three things:

- There is a variety of gifts.
- All the gifts come through the empowerment of the Spirit.
- The Spirit gives gifts according to His will, not according to our efforts (12:11).

The Diversity and Unity of Spiritual Gifts (12:12-30)

Baptized into One Body (12:12-13)

While we have different gifts, and we are all individual members, we are all part of the same body of Christ. Before Christ our differences divided us: Jew and Greek, slave and free. But now, because we have all been baptized into one body in one Spirit, we are one. The old divisions are gone, and we are the unified body of Christ.

The Necessity of Diversity (12:14-20)

Paul uses the analogy of the human body to make his point that there must be a diversity of gifts in order for the body to function properly.

In the human body the foot is no less part of the body because it is not a hand. Nor is the ear not part of the body because it is not an eye. The body needs feet, hands, ears and eyes. If every member was a foot, then the body could not function.

The same is true of the body of Christ. There are many parts, which God has arranged and chosen. Each member is no less part of the body because it is not like another member. There must be diversity for the body to function.

The Weak are More Important (12:21-26)

Therefore, just as the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you," so no member of the church can say to another that they do need them. Furthermore, every part is critical to the proper functioning of the body, even roles which are not glamorous.

Just as there are parts of the human body which seem weak and undistinguished, the body cannot function without them. A few years ago I broke a bone in my big toe. Here was a weak and undistinguished part of my body. But when I couldn't use it, the whole body didn't function well. So it is with the so called lesser roles and gifts within the body of Christ.

There are also parts of the human body which we keep covered because it is not proper to expose them in public. So also there are members of the church who labor behind the scenes doing jobs which are messy and seemingly undignified. These aren't just the people who change diapers in the church nursery or clean the toilets. These are the people who clean up the mess of people's lives. People who get dirty as they labor and care for the disadvantaged, the unloved and the rejected.

While the people up front, the teachers, the musicians, the elders stand in front and receive the accolades, Paul tells us that it is actually the behind the scenes people who actually get the greater honor from God.

The Hierarchy of Gifts (12:27-30)

The Corinthians had their priorities out of order. They believed that the measure of true spirituality lay in the speaking of tongues, and that all believers should strive for and achieve speaking in tongues. Paul refutes this belief with two arguments.

First, not all members of the church are apostles. Therefore, why should we assume that

all members of the church will be gifted in tongues? There are a variety of gifts and tongues are just one of many manifestations of the Spirit. People who do not speak in tongues or perform miracles are not lesser members of the body. Furthermore, it does not mean that they do not have the Spirit of God indwelling them.

Secondly, if you were going to rank the spiritual gifts, then the apostles and the prophets would be more important than speaking in tongues anyway. If you want to be envious of a gifting, desire apostleship or prophecy, not speaking in tongues. Paul will deal more with this issue in chapter 14.

The Necessity of Love for Spiritual Gifts (12:31-13:13)

Ministry Motivated by Love (13:1-3)

Paul uses a series of hyperboles or exaggerations in 13:1-3 to drive home his point: if love is not the motivation, than the ministry has no purpose, doesn't do anyone any good, and is of no value whatsoever. It doesn't matter how exciting or excellent your gift, it doesn't matter the power of your ministry, it doesn't matter the depth of sacrifice you make. Without love, your ministry, your service to the church, has no value.

Motivated by Love, Not Performance (13:1)

Often ministry is motivated more by performance than by love. We seek the public gifts because we can show off our talents. Our motivation is for affirmation from others rather than to love. But Paul tells us that even if we have perfect performances, without love we are a clanging gong.

Motivated by Love, Not Power (13:2)

Often we are more concerned about maintaining my authority than we are about the people we serve. We find fulfillment from seeing our ideas get carried out rather than from seeing people growing closer to God. But Paul tells us even if we have enough power in our ministry to move mountains, without love we are nothing.

Motivated by Love, Not Power (13:3)

Often when we give, even sacrificially, there is there really some self serving reason behind your sacrifice. Do we hope someone will notice our generosity? Do we give because it makes us feel good about yourself when you give? But Paul tells us even if we give away all we own or sacrifice our very lives, without love, we gain nothing.

The Character of Love (13:4-7)

Paul then provides a list that describes the character of love in 13:4-7. These character qualities are not so much a definition of love as it is a picture of what love looks like. We run a danger in methodically analyze each of these character qualities, for as the preacher Ray Stedman says, analyzing these beautifully poetic words is "almost like taking a beautiful flower and tearing it apart" (Stedman). Instead we should see the big picture and ask ourselves if our ministry is characterized by love or by selfish motivations?

- Is my ministry characterized by gentleness, or is it characterized by impatience, sarcasm and rudeness? Love is patient and kind (13:4).
- Is my ministry characterized by selflessness, or am I jealous when someone else is more successful than I am? Love is not jealous or boastful or proud and demand its own way (13:4b-5a).
- Is my ministry characterized by forgiveness, or do we keep lists of offenses? Love keeps no record of when it has been wronged (13:5b-7).

Love Endures. Spiritual Gifts Do Not (13:8-13)

Paul tells us here that the spiritual gifts are going to disappear (13:8-10). There is considerable debate among bible scholars as to when these gifts will disappear or even if they maybe already have. Most all biblical scholars would agree that after the return of Christ, when we will dwell with him in a new heaven and new earth, we will not have the need for spiritual gifts anymore. On this earth there are many things we don't understand,

and we need supernatural gifting to help. But then, "we will see everything with perfect clarity," so these gifts will not be necessary anymore (13:12).

Like the Corinthians, it is easy to glamorize our ministry. It is easy to let ministry become an end unto itself. We become focused on keeping a program alive, keeping a tradition going. Instead

of asking, how we can love people more effectively, we hang onto the same old strategies. But programs will die. Strategies will become ineffective. Spiritual gifts will disappear. If we base our service to God on programs, strategies, and spiritual gifts, they will not endure. But if we base our ministry on faith, hope and love, our ministry will last forever

Appendix: Lists of Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:8-10	1 Corinthians 12:28	Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:11
Wisdom			
Knowledge			
Faith			
Healing	Healing		
Miracles	Miracles		
Prophecy	Prophets	Prophecy	Prophets
Discernment			
Tongues	Tongues		
Interpretation of tongues			
	Apostles		Apostles
	Teachers	Teaching	Teachers
	Helping	Service	
	Administration	Leading	
		Exhortation	
		Generosity	
		Mercy	
			Evangelist
			Shepherds