

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Title: Each One Gifted

Truth: The one God gives a variety of gifts for the benefit of the church.

Date/Location: Sunday December 6, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

We continue our study of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 12, we cement our understanding that there are many members of the unified church, but there is a diversity of gifts.

I. One God, Many Gifts, v. 4-6

A. The structure of the text is very neat and tidy:

⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit

⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And

⁶ There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God...

B. The parallelism of the three lines helps us understand that gifts, ministries, and activities are essentially synonymous. We could make a fine distinction between them—such as that gifts are the abilities given by the Spirit, the ministries are the areas in which those gifts are exercised in service, and the activities are the effects, results, or outcome of those ministries. But I think it is better to treat these as a package deal of God’s work—including what He gives us and how He expects us to use it in the church for a positive outcome.

C. The second phrase of each parallel line lists out for us the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, though in reverse order. The Spirit gives the gifts, the Lord Jesus enables their use, and the Father oversees their result in the church. But again, a hard and fast distinction in function between the members of the Godhead should not be pressed too far. All of them share in some sense in the operations of the other persons of the Godhead. When the Father works, the Son works (John 5:17, 14:10).

D. The verse also highlights an important principle that has been hijacked for other purposes in our secular age. The principle is “diversity in unity” or some variation thereof. The one Triune God

gives different gifts to the saved people of the church. We will learn more about this in the upcoming verses. It is an easy concept in one sense. It means that if we consider one gift, *not everyone* in the church has that gift—if even *any* have it in a particular local assembly. Some have it, and some do not. But this does not matter because it is the same Lord who is working.

- E. In fact, the last phrase of verse 6 says that God “works all in all.” That means that He works all these gifts in all the different people. The idea is that He “produces/empowers all of them in everyone.”

II. The Gifts are Expressions of the Holy Spirit, v. 7

- A. The “manifestation” of the Holy Spirit is basically another word for the gift/ministry/activity of the Spirit. It is the evidence of His presence and work in a person. The gift is not produced by the person, but it is produced by the Spirit. Yet, it is exercised under the control of the person and is executed with more or less diligence as the person applies himself or fails to do so. The presence of the manifestation is an evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- B. Such “disclosures” of the Spirit are given to each person in the church. The phrase is “given to each one.” Do not gloss over that. If you are born again, you have a specific “thing” that God has planned for you to be doing. Remember Ephesians 2:10—that God has foreordained good works for you to do. Not only that, but He has given you particular abilities to carry those out. In harmony or cooperation or collaboration with the rest of the church, you will be most effective in carrying out that ministry to which God has called you.
- C. Why are such gifts given? Verse 7 explains: “for the profit of all.” It is for the help, benefit, profit, utility, and good of all in the church. *You* can and should influence the entire church with your gift. Whatever it is that you have been enabled to do, do it with all your might. Wait for the eternal profit to become clear over the course of time. It is very rare that it becomes evident immediately. If it did, our pride would quickly enter the operation of the gift and it would be ruined.

III. The Various Gifts, v. 8-10

In each case in the following verses, a gift is given “to one” and “through the Spirit.” The thing that differs is the ability; the part that is the same in every case is the Spirit giving the ability. This list is not exhaustive, but it is representative and covers a wide range of the gifts. Nine gifts are listed.

The following gifts can be divided into two groups: gifts of communication and gifts of service. You have to “talk” to participate in sharing wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Less “verbal” but no less important gifts include faith, healing, miracles, and discerning of spirits.

Note that some of these gifts may have had a revelatory or miraculous aspect in the very early church, but after the completion of the New Testament and the passing of the apostles, no more gifts of that character have been given by the Spirit (1 Cor. 13:8). So, there is another twofold division of the gifts, concerning which ones are available today and which ones are not.

A. Word of wisdom. *Wisdom* is the skillful application of God’s revelation to life circumstances. It is taking Biblical “theory” and accurately and reverently putting it into practice. For examples, God has told us to make disciples and honor our parents and work hard and think on things above and many other things. But how do we make disciples during COVID and honor our parents if we are not physically close to them or work hard if we do not have a job and engage the battle against worried or impure thoughts? The Bible can guide us about those and a thousand other questions.

The *word* of wisdom is the ability to discern and then explain to others how to live Biblically in various circumstances. The one gifted with such ability examines the situation from God’s viewpoint and can explain how to reach lost people who are isolated away from us, and how to interact with our far-off parents how to apply the principle of leading a quiet life and working with our hands, and how we can rely on God and fill our minds with Scripture to think on things above.

B. Word of knowledge. This is insight into the interconnected system of truth in Scripture. It is an ability to put the parts together into a whole, grasp and understand them, and be able to explain it to others. Again, it is a *word* of knowledge, not just knowledge itself, which can be possessed, but if only inside one's mind and unable to be shared coherently, does not offer any profit to the church.

A word of knowledge is not a word of imagination in which a pastor gets an idea that there is someone in the audience who has a specific problem and needs a word of encouragement from the Lord and then he expresses something to help that person. This notion is that God miraculously gives the pastor information he could not otherwise have.

C. Faith. Every believer exercises faith in Christ, and that is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 1:29). The believer continues to possess this faith all his life (remember we walk *by faith*?) But saving faith is not this special gift of faith. This gift is observable by others in the recipient in that he or she has an unusually strong and operative trust in God, probably amid difficult circumstances. You as an observer might marvel at how that person can trust the Lord so thoroughly despite hardship.

This raises a point that we should bear in mind: sometimes, especially when you are young or immature in the faith, you cannot "see" your own gift. Others might be able to discern it better than you can. Listen to others' evaluation of your gift, observe how you can encourage and "profit" them. That is a good indication of your gift.

D. Gifts of healings. This is no longer given by the Spirit. Jesus and the apostles could at times heal people from all kinds of diseases and demonic possession. The purpose of the gift was to authenticate them as messengers of the true God and serve as signs of the coming kingdom of Christ (Matt. 11:3-5, Isaiah 35:5-6). It ultimately served as a way to persuade people of the truth of God. We can still ask God to heal someone who is sick. We just cannot heal that person with a word or touch.

E. Working of miracles. This is no longer given by the Spirit either. It was the ability to work some miracle, again possessed by Jesus and

the apostles. Feeding many people with very little food or casting a temporary darkness over someone's eyes are two examples of this (Matt. 14:17-21, Acts 13:11). The design was to glorify God as Lord over nature and convince people to believe. Today, we have the Scriptures, and that is sufficient to persuade a person to believe (Luke 16:31).

- F. Prophecy. Most modern readers immediately think of prophecy as “predicting the future.” The idea of prophecy is not primarily that, however. It is the idea of proclamation. In the early church, which did not have any New Testament or only portions thereof, the gift sometimes included new revelation. Many times, even during that age, and exclusively today, prophecy is a fancy word for speaking the Word of God. It is preaching!

There is no miraculous aspect to preaching unless we were to include in it the convicting and life-giving and illuminating work of the Spirit in the hearer to bring them to faith. That is a sovereign move of God directly on the soul of the person hearing; it is not a gift in the speaker. Even with that tremendous work of regeneration, most preaching to believers has no mystical or miraculous element. It uses the normal means of human discourse to inform and persuade the mind of the hearer. The life given previously by God to the believer allows them to understand and be convicted by what they hear.

- G. Discerning of spirits. Discernment cuts through the deception and distraction that are layered on top of reality by the world, the devil, and the flesh, and allows the person to see the situation for what it really is. The situation could be something going on in the world scene; it could be a false doctrinal system; it could be a person who has been influenced by a lying or demonic spirit. A believer with this ability can see through all that and get to the core of the matter. Without this, the church could begin to follow any new wind of doctrine that blows into town.

Note that this is not a miraculous “spiritual vision” that can see a spirit inside of a person or a sixth sense of “creepy crawly-ness” when near a demonic spirit. You will know them—not by a weird feeling—but by their fruits (Matt 7:16)!

H. Tongues. This is also no longer given by the Spirit of God. Active in the early church and especially in Acts 2, this gift was one in which the Spirit of God gave people the ability to immediately know and be able to use a foreign language. It is a gift of them being able to speak the language in a coherent, meaningful, fluent way. It is a gift of speaking, not a miraculous transmutation of the sound waves as they travel from a speaker, converting the language before it reaches the hearer. Nor is it a gift of hearing where a person can hear English spoken but interprets it in Spanish. The speaker would have the gift. Again, it was given for the profit of the church and the glory of God.

I. Interpretation of tongues. The ability to understand and explain something spoken in another language. Since the gift of tongues is not given today, neither is this one. Yet some people do have a natural ability to learn language more quickly than others. Their brains are “wired” that way.

We must emphasize that those gifts operational today can only be properly exercised, fueled, informed, and guided by Scripture. You cannot have wisdom or knowledge or faith or prophecy (proclamation) or discerning of Spirits without a deep understanding of the Word of God. You might have all the ability in the world, but if it is misdirected, it will not profit anyone.

Other “gift lists” are found in Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11.

IV. Gifts According to the Will of God, v. 11

A. Reiterating ground already covered, Paul explains that one and the same Spirit works all these things. The omni-able Spirit produces a bit of ability in each believer corresponding to what the Spirit can do through us.

Therefore no “spiritual” gift can result in someone cursing Christ (12:3). The Spirit working in a believer would never do that, because He is duty-bound to honor Christ and produce honor in us for Christ. He does not have the ability to do that, so He does not produce in any person the ability to do that.

B. The Spirit distributes to each one individually as He wills. The matter of spiritual gifts is one of sovereign distribution. God gives

to each one what He sees fit. One person has one ability, and another a different one. The will of God should satisfy us, no matter what God has given, no matter how much or little the world or other believers may make of our abilities.

Conclusion

Three main takeaways: (1) **the one God** gives (2) a **variety of gifts** for the (3) **benefit of the church**. Therefore, our activity in the church should be (1) unified as we all carry out (2) our various assignments to the (3) temporal and eternal blessing of the church.

No Christian has the gift of nothing. If you are not applying yourself somehow in the life of the church, you need to figure out what is going on and fix it.

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