

“Gifted By the Spirit” (part 2)

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

I once heard a story about a small town orchestra that was known for its beautiful performances. Every musician had a unique role to play—violins, cellos, flutes, trumpets, and percussion. One night, they were preparing to perform a grand symphony. But as the conductor raised his baton, he noticed that several of the chairs were empty. Why? The flutist had decided that she wasn't important enough and stayed home. The fellow on the bass drum thought his part was too loud and disruptive, so he quit. A couple of violinists were so busy competing for the first chair that they forgot their music, so they weren't there. A trombone player felt he was so important that he tried to play a solo the entire time. The result was chaos. The music wasn't what it ought to have been.

In an orchestra, there are violins, cellos, trumpets, flutes, drums, and many more. Each instrument is different—some loud, some soft, some leading, others supporting—but none is unnecessary. Each musician has practices to play their part, not to outshine the others, but to contribute to the beauty of the whole. At the center is a musical score and conductor who guides the musicians in tempo, volume, and unity so that everyone is on the same page.

In a similar way, the church is God's living symphony. And each believer has been given a spiritual gift—some teach, some serve, some encourage, some lead. No member of the body is greater or lesser in God's sight, the same way no instrument is more important than any of the others in an orchestra. When each believer plays their 'part' in love, under the direction of the Lord Jesus, the result is harmony to the glory of God. But when one refuses to play, or tries to play someone else's part, the music suffers. The Master Conductor calls us not

to compete but to cooperate. When we do, the church doesn't just function—it makes music!

Let's turn in our Bibles this morning to 1 Corinthians 12, to a passage that explains the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts. We began looking at what the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts last week, and we considered the background and importance of this passage as it related to what Paul is explaining to a very confused, chaotic church. The church in Corinth was the most immature and carnal of any church mentioned in the New Testament. Much of that is centered around the fact that they had only been Christians for about three years. The culture they lived in was deeply pagan. It affected the way that these believers approached life and ministry within the church. Rather than serving God in the flesh, we must serve Him in the Spirit and according to the truth. Each and every member of the body has been gifted by the Holy Spirit in some way in order to serve and build up the body. (Read)

A spiritual gift is a supernatural ability or skill that Christ gives us which enables us to perform a function in the body of Christ with effectiveness and ease. Some have more than one gift. These are supernaturally provided abilities which enable us to serve the church. They are given by the Lord, are spiritual in nature, and flow from the life of a person who is in Christ. There are four places where the gifts are listed in the New Testament—1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:7-16. Each of these passages have something to say about spiritual gifts, but the most extensive treatment of the subject is the one we are looking at here in 1 Corinthians. From these verses, we are able to see how these gifts are defined, how they are designed by God to function, as well as how they are individually distributed.

1—How they are DEFINED (12:1-3)

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.”

The opening phrase in verse 1 tells these believers that Paul wants them to be ‘in the know’ as it relates to spiritual issues. The concern is about ‘pneumatikos’ or spirituals, which could refer simply to ‘spiritual people’ or it may refer to ‘spiritual things’ and in relationship to the context, be referring to ‘spiritual gifts.’ And as we read on through the chapter—really through the next three chapters—is clearly this whole issue of spiritual gifts.

What are the evidences of spirituality? Or if you like, what sets a spiritual minded person apart? Who are the really spiritual people? That was the question in Corinth, as well as one that remains a question this morning. Then as now, people were tempted to believe that spectacular giftedness was the real evidence of spiritual maturity, or giftedness in comparison with which the practice of basic Christian virtue seemed rather boring.

And if you think about it, here we are all these centuries later in the context of the modern church, and many of us are tempted to believe the very same thing that was the cause of confusion in Corinth—that the really ‘spiritual’ people are the people who are able to manifest dramatic things in and through their lives, whether it be a dramatic speaking gift, whether it be the ability to speak in tongues, whether it be a fascination with the miraculous, whatever it was. We’re tempted to believe that it is in these things that we can determine whether or not a person is truly spiritual. And so no wonder Paul writes, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.” Here are some important matters that you need to understand. Because if you are uninformed, if you are clueless, if you are without knowledge, then you’ll be susceptible to wrong teaching. As a result of wrong teaching, there will then be wrong living;

and if there is wrong living, there will be chaos and ineffectiveness in the body of Christ. And so we need to get this nailed down, don't we?

If you remember, we began last week by taking a look at how spiritual gifts are defined. Here is the definition that I gave you on the screens:

“Spiritual gifts are gifts of grace granted by the Holy Spirit and designed for the edification of the church.”

Spiritual gifts which God gives to His people are essential for the effectiveness of the church. It is in the giving of these gifts and in the exercise of these gifts that the Holy Spirit matures us as God's people and places us in areas of ministry and usefulness for His kingdom.

Listen, it is on account of the fact that Satan understands and recognizes this that he is involved in counterfeiting and confusing us about these things. He often tries to 'muddy the water' so that a believer is tempted to ignore or neglect the importance of spiritual gifts. And this is exactly what has happened in a number of churches. Maybe out of fear, these Christians have pretty much thrown the baby out with the bath water. They don't talk about spiritual gifts at all.

Paul says, "It is important that you understand the truth in the area of spiritual gifts." These are not something which you and I earn. They are grace gifts to us from the Holy Spirit. When you got saved, the Spirit gifted you to make a contribution to the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are not for self-glory or self-promotion but are for the benefit of serving others. Spiritually minded people are those who walk by the Spirit, not according to the flesh. They cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. Now, don't think of spiritual gifts as being the same thing as natural abilities. It is more than that. God may use a person's

natural abilities in some way, as they become a vehicle for spiritual ministry that blesses others. Whether you have the skill to sing or play an instrument or do something with your hands, these abilities can become a platform for spiritual gifting that God uses to impact others for Christ. It might be helpful to think of them as more than just spiritual abilities and understand them as Spirit-given ministries.

Sam Storms — *“If we think of the gifts not just as abilities God gives but as roles or assignments—ministries—to which we are called, it will change the way we think about the gifts. Instead of asking, ‘How can I discover the special abilities that the Spirit has given me,’ rather ask, ‘Lord, where do You want me to serve?’”*

God has a place in which He wants you to serve, and He gives you what you need in order to do it. Spiritual gifts are special endowments given by the Holy Spirit to believers in Jesus Christ to serve God and others, especially within the local church. And these gifts are intended to build up the body of Christ, promote unity, and help fulfill the mission of the church in the world.

Now that we considered the overall instructions concerning spiritual gifts, let’s take a look at their importance. Notice:

2—How they are DESIGNED (12:4-7)

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

Spiritual gifts have been given by God and designed with a specific purpose in mind. They’ve not been given for us to show off, but to serve. I like how one

person says it—they are not toys to play with, but tools to build with. They are given by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of edifying, building up the church, not for entertainment or self-promotion. It is in this sense that they have been designed by the Head of the church Himself (see Eph. 4:8).

Notice that Paul uses this word ‘varieties’ at least three times in verses 4-6. God has so designed spiritual gifts that they come in a variety of ways. We’re not all carbon copy clones of each other in the body of Christ. As the members that make up the body, we each have a unique contribution to make. Though the gifts are varied, notice the common denominator—it is the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God who supplies them. So that there is unity which is being emphasized here, but it is one which is expressed through varieties of gifts, varieties of service, and varieties of activities. Now, as far as their design is concerned, here are some things to write down:

- These gifts are given to every believer in Christ

Verse 7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” There is no one in the family who has been left out. No matter who you are, if you are saved, you’ve been gifted by the Spirit. The moment you and I were born into the family of God through salvation, we were endowed with a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit. Regardless of your age or natural abilities, if you’ve been born again, you are gifted by God to serve and bless the body of Christ. Think of it this way: God gave you a gift on your spiritual birthday, not for your own sake, but all for the spiritual benefit of others!

“Gifts” —*translates the Greek noun ‘charisma’ and means gift of grace; the root word means to show favor or bestow*

Have you ever known someone who has a charisma about him or her? To say someone is full of charisma is to say he or she has a charm about them that tends to attract others. Or a 'charismatic' personality is one that stands out, one to which others are drawn. The word comes from a root word 'charis' from which we get the word 'grace.' Even the name 'Karen' comes from this root word. Paul is saying here that these gifts come as the result of God's grace. At salvation, every believer receives 'grace gifts' which are to be used in building up the local church. But notice also:

- These gifts are varied, some more noticed than others, but none more important than another

Verse 5 says, "There are varieties of service," and the word here is 'diakonia' which means ministry. We get the word 'deacon' from this word. The word shows that by design, spiritual gifts are not given for selfish interests, but they are given to serve and build up others. They are designed to 'build up' the body of Christ, not 'puff up' the person who has them. That's what was happening in the Corinthian church. Rather than seeking to bless and to serve other people, men and women in the church became enamored with themselves and their gifts, and they rallied behind competing personalities so that the church became divided. Paul addresses this in the opening statements of the letter. Natural abilities that are not in submission to the Holy Spirit can become things of pride and dissension.

Spiritual gifts are not designed as special privileges for the one who has them. Your spiritual gift is not for your own edification. Sanctification, yes. Service, yes. But self-promotion, no! When you are exercising your spiritual gift in the power of God's Spirit, two things will be happening—1) Christ will be glorified, and 2) Christians will be edified. God will use you in the lives of other people.

Some gifts may be more public in nature, but that certainly does not mean they're more important than other gifts. Each of us have been gifted in such a way to bless the body of Christ. Peter says it this way:

1 Peter 4:10—“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

- These gifts have the same source of power

Varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. Varieties of service, but the same Lord. And then verse 6, “There are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” The word ‘activities’ refers to various effects or that which is produced by the Holy Spirit.

“Activities”—*the Greek word is ‘energēma’*

We get the word ‘energy’ or ‘energize’ from this term. The point being made is that there are a variety of generated activities in the church, but the same God who empowers them all in everyone. God empowering and energizing the exercise of our spiritual gifts. That’s the way it is supposed to be in the church. Notice verse 7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Or in other words, you don’t operate the gift apart from the Giver. And you can’t separate the gift from the Giver. A spiritual gift is God Himself who is at work through your life in some capacity. That’s what Paul is saying. There are varieties of gifts, services, and activities, but the same power at work in each one. It is the Holy Spirit at work through you.

Sam Storms—*“We often mistakenly think that the only individuals in the church who are recipients of God’s power are apostles or elders or pastors or those with a seminary degree who can read Greek and Hebrew. But consider Stephen,*

neither apostle nor elder nor pastor, whom Luke described as ‘full of grace and power,’ by which he did ‘great wonders and signs among the people’ (Acts 6:8). Stephen was one of the first seven deacons. He was assigned ‘to serve tables’ (v. 2) so that the apostles could devote themselves to preaching the Word and to prayer. The only thing that set him apart is that he was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (v. 5).”

The power that filled Stephen was the same power that filled Paul, the very same power that is available to work through you and me today. A believer’s spiritual gift is a unique capacity to minister to the body of Christ through a vehicle or means by which the Spirit of God supernaturally touches the lives of other people. As you consider your own life, what might your contribution be to the body?

Gifts are Spirit-given ministries, the ability to do certain specific things, such as teaching, preaching, helping, administering, leading, and so on. These gifts are like so many electrical appliances. What a variety of these are available today! There are microwaves, toasters, irons, coffeemakers, mixers, razors. But if you look carefully at these electrical appliances, you will see that though they are vastly different in what they do (function), there is one thing in which they are always exactly alike: They all have a cord with a plug on one end, designed to be plugged into an outlet by which they utilize the same power. No matter how different the appliance is, the power is the same.

The same power God has given the pastor and teacher, He has given to the helper. And the same power He has given to the helper, He has given to the counselor and exhorter. And the same power He has given to the exhorter, He has given to the one who is an evangelist. Even though there are many different functions, all operate from the same source of power—the Holy Spirit.

And so there are varieties of gifts, service, and activities, but the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God who empowers them. The Spirit has gifted every believer, and there are a variety of ways in which you and I serve, but it is all under the direction of the same Lord. Think about all the ways men and women are serving the body of Christ here at Hopewell through both organized and unorganized means—teaching a disciple group, or serving in Adventure Kids, or coaching in our recreation ministry, or praying with someone, or checking up on the widows, or encouraging someone who has had a tough week. There are varieties of gifts, but it is the same Spirit who is at work among us.

3—How they are DISTRIBUTED (12:8-11)

“For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to 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. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.”

Each one of us in the body of Christ has received a gift, we are stewards of God’s manifold grace, and we are to use it to serve one another. Some may have more than one gift, no one has all the gifts, yet everyone has some gift. These gifts are distributed to us by the will of God (v. 11).

There are several observations that we can make about the spiritual gifts we find listed in the New Testament. In addition to this text, the other passages I mentioned earlier are Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. No passage contains the complete list of spiritual gifts. Which is to say there is no exhaustive

list in any one place. And there is no spiritual gift that is found on all the lists. As we compare the references or lists of gifts, we will find that each list is different and there are no two lists which are exactly alike. And some of the gifts are mentioned more than once, while other gifts are mentioned only once. Of the nearly 20 gifts which are mentioned in Scripture, we can arrange them into four separate categories. I'll briefly mention them, and then we will come back to them next time as we talk about discovering our spiritual gift.

Specialty gifts

Ephesians 4:11, "And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers." And verse 12 says it is for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. These represent the God-called leaders that God has supplied to His church. They had a very special part in the founding of the church, and some remain operational today such as evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The office of prophet and apostle came to a close once the revelation of God's Word in its entirety had been given.

Sign gifts

These gifts are those which were important in the days of the early church, those gifts which set the message of the apostles apart and authenticated their ministry. Those in this category would include the gift of tongues, interpreting tongues, miracles, and prophecy in the sense that God's Word was being revealed. Once the Bible was completed, these gifts were no longer necessary.

Speaking gifts

Peter takes the spiritual gifts and puts them in one of two categories—speaking and serving. The Bible says in:

1 Peter 4:10-11 — “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

Those speaking gifts include prophecy, teaching, wisdom, knowledge, and exhorting. Those who are counselors and teachers, or those who are gifted in evangelism. The gift of languages would have also been included here. There is the gift of knowledge and wisdom, which may include the element of teaching others.

Serving gifts

The spiritual gifts which are included in this category would be gifts such as administration and helping, giving, or acts of mercy, faith, hospitality, and discernment. This category would be where most of us find our place. While it may not be a speaking gift, it is no less important and is ministry to others in the name of the Lord Jesus.

So Paul says that there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each member of the body is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. That means no one in the body of Christ has been left out. No one is without some grace gift, some contribution which they can make, from the most seasoned saint to the youngest believer among us.

As I see it, there are two ‘spiritual afflictions’ in the body of Christ which are polar opposites of each other. On the one hand, there are Christians who struggle with feelings of uselessness and inferiority. They see others as necessary and useful, but they don’t include themselves in that same category. They feel unqualified to contribute. They may recognize they belong to the body, but if anything, they see themselves as the wisdom teeth or the appendix. I’m here, but not needed. But that’s not true, friend. There is no one in the body of Christ who is not gifted and needed.

Then on the other hand, there are those who experience feelings of self-sufficiency and superiority. They act as if they alone matter. Others may be dispensable, but not them. They may serve, but not out of humility. Their gifts are the means by which they find their identity. Spiritual gifts are not given to you so that you can ‘wow’ everyone and bring glory to you. You are given a gift to serve for the ‘common good’ of others and bring glory to the Lord. Our gifts are to be exercised for the common good of the body. They flow through you to the benefit of others beyond you. When you and I don’t make serving a priority, the body as a whole suffers for it.

If you read on in chapter 12, you discover that the issue that God is most concerned about is unity in the body. The analogy of the human body is critical because, although we only have one body, that body is made up of thousands of parts. Or just like an orchestra. When the body of Christ ceases to function as a unified whole, it demonstrates that the Spirit’s gifts are not being used properly. The believers in Corinth were guilty of sowing disunity in the body by playing a game of comparison and saying, “I’m more gifted than you, therefore I’m more important than you.” It led to jealousy over who had what gifts, and the church

became divided as some members were elevated over others. But it only revealed how they had completely missed the point.

Gifts are given for building up the body of Christ, as Paul explains in Ephesians 4, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Jesus has gifted His church in order that the body might be built up. Gifted leaders and gifted saints. Nothing can ever replace the collective impact that happens when the whole body is serving out of its giftedness under the direction of the Spirit. One reason that the church seems to be having very little impact on society today is that too many members of the body have little interest in serving for the common good of the whole body. They are more like consumers rather than those who make a contribution. They sit, soak, and sour. But when it comes to serving, ‘somebody else’ can do it. I came across a little poem that I thought really made its point:

There's a clever young fellow named Somebody Else.

There's nothing this fellow can't do!

He's busy from morning till way late at night

Just substituting for you.

When asked to do this or asked to do that

So often you are set to reply,

“Get Somebody Else, Mr. Chairman,

He'll do it much better than I.”

There's so much to do in our church,

So much, and the workers are few.

Somebody Else gets worried and worn

Just substituting for you.

*So next time you're asked to do something worthwhile,
Come up with this honest reply:
"If Somebody Else can give time and effort,
It's obviously true, so can I."*

Many people today tend to be 'ecclesiastical consumers.' In other words, they're only interested in what they can get out of their church, and so they bounce from congregation to congregation like a feather floating on a breeze. There is no commitment or loyalty to a specific local assembly of believers. In fact, they have little to no attachment to the church at all. And they are under no obligation for regular attendance—if they make it, they make it. If not, it's no big deal. Their Christianity exists completely outside and apart from the local church. That's not what God has in mind for the body. Every part is important and must not exist merely for itself, but for the greater good of the body. Spiritual gifts are all about making much of Jesus, not about us.

Imagine your life as a single instrument—unique, crafted with care, and full of potential. Alone, it can play a melody, but something always feels incomplete. You might try to tune yourself, play louder, or follow others, but the result is often noise, not harmony. But now picture an orchestra—dozens of instruments, each one different, yet all working together under the guidance of a master Conductor. With every movement of His hand, the music comes to life—rich, full, and beautiful. But without Him, even the most beautiful instrument and the most skilled musician will be out of sync.

Jesus Christ is the Master Conductor of life. He invites you to join His living symphony—not as someone who must be perfect, but as someone willing to trust in Him and follow His lead. When you come to Christ, your life is no longer a solo struggling for meaning. Instead, it becomes part of a glorious composition,

one of redemption, grace, and eternal purpose. Friend, if you're lost, come to Christ! Lay down the baton you've tried to wield on your own, and let the One who wrote the music of salvation lead you. In His hands, even the broken notes of your past can become part of a masterpiece of grace. We're all instruments in His hands!

When every part of the orchestra is playing its instrument according to the same music, under the leadership of the Conductor, the result is beautiful. And that's what we are this morning, church. A beautiful living symphony made up of all kinds of people, and it is the life of Jesus in us that makes the difference. My friend, if you don't know Him, I want to invite you to come to Him, and place your faith and trust in Him this morning. There's a chair in the orchestra with your name on it. There's a place at the table of God's grace for you. Come to Jesus!