

Grace-Gifts Are For Serving

Glenn Robertson

1 Corinthians 12:1-12

God give gifts to enable the church body to work His works on earth.

1 Corinthians 12:1 NIVO

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.

³ Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,

⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,

¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

¹² The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

While most Christians want to identify their "gift," the real issue is: Are you using what you already know to serve now? Paul does not spend any time working on gift analysis. He doesn't help you identify your gift so you can feel spiritual. He tells us to use the gifts and talents we have to maximum service.

What good is it to seek gifts if we are not using what we know we can do, even now ?

1. Paul's teaching on grace-gifts is a response to questions about gifts in a divided church.

Paul's teaching on grace-gifts is a response to a letter regarding the issue of gifts in the Church at Corinth, which was divided over the use of gifts. The Corinthian church was a church that divided over almost everything. They divided over the leaders, over worship, over food. They had members who took each other to civil court instead of finding the path of love and forgiveness.

We know Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts is a part of a larger attempt to address the things that divided the church. Paul uses the formula: "Now concerning..." Περὶ δὲ (1 Cor. 12:1 BGT) Paul is answering a series of issues presented to him by a letter.

1 Corinthians 7:1 NIVO

Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.

7:1 Now about ... Marriage

7:25 Now about virgins:

8:1 Now about food sacrificed to idols:

12:1 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers

15:12 some saying there is no resurrection of the dead

16:1 Now about the collection for God's people:

16:12 Now about our brother Apollos:

When Paul writes about gifts he is not primarily giving us a doctrine of gifts as much as trying to speak pastorally to the church over divisiveness. He is trying to work toward unity, love and harmony (chapters 12, 13, and 14 respectively).

Spiritual gifts or grace-gifts was an issue that rose up in the church of Corinth. It had become a contentious issue. Paul's answer to this issue covers chapters 12 – 14. Yes, that includes the love chapter. That great passage on love is a response to the lack of love being displayed in the church over the divisiveness of their claim for spiritual gifts. By inference in the text, it appears that some were claiming they had exclusive possession of the Holy Spirit by being able to speak in tongues. That claim still has current followers.

Instead of spiritual gifts helping the church be a wheel that can move to do the mission of God, they became fractious spokes, who

kept pulling away. The exclusive claim of the Spirit by a unique gift created division. It also misrepresented God's work in the Spirit.

Paul's argument is to say that the Holy Spirit gives a variety of gifts. There are no exclusive gifts. There are no external proofs that someone possesses the Holy Spirit, contrary to the practice of many practice it that way today. The Holy Spirit is present in every believer, **even if you do not see any manifestation. The best indication of the work of the Holy Spirit is not in a manifestation of a gift, but in the changing of a life by work of the fruit of the Spirit.**

2. Paul cautions: You can be led astray in the spiritual realm.

² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. (1 Cor. 12:2 NIVO)

The Corinthians were once led astray by the practice of idolatry. They were led to believe that a spiritual life existed where in fact it did not. Idols are mute and dead, yet they were firmly fixed on that belief until they were saved. So they can be led astray in the realm of spiritual gifts as well.

Adding to Scripture is as evil as removing from Scripture.

To add new rules and prohibitions than the Scripture teaches is just as wrong as removing teachings. We are exhorted to not follow after divisive teaching.

1 Timothy 6:4 NIVO

he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions

Traditions often hold people into teachings which are not in the Scripture, yet people get **dogmatic and passionate** for their tradition. We do well to not allow tradition to override Scripture.

As Baptists we say that the Scripture is our only criterion for truth and practice. We often, like other groups, allow our traditions of practice go beyond the rules of Scripture. Other groups also, in this case Pentecostal types, go beyond the Scripture when they insist on spiritual manifestations as proof of the Holy Spirit. Besides, most of those who use tongues have to be taught how to speak in a tongue, which argues against it being a Holy Spirit derived gift.

3. If you confess Jesus is Lord, you have the Holy Spirit.

³ Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:3 NIVO)

Some in Corinth were saying that you had to speak in tongues to have the Holy Spirit. There are groups who keep that false teaching going today. This passage should end that practice, but many keep insisting on the false teaching.

Tongues is not proof you have the Holy Spirit. In most cases, people learn to speak in tongues. Someone has to teach them how to do it. The truth is that the Holy Spirit leads you to confess Jesus is Lord. It

is with the Holy Spirit that you are born-again. The Spirit gives life to Spirit. To be saved is to be born by the Spirit of God into eternal life. It comes when you die to self and sin and come to the place you confess Jesus is Lord!

For many, looking to the ability of having a proof such as being able to speak in tongues or be able to be slain in the Spirit are actions, and they becomes works instead of depending on faith. We are not saved by works. We are saved by faith.

Paul does not tell people they cannot speak in tongues. He does not go that far. However, he does tell us that the Holy Spirit gives all gifts, not just tongues. As far as gifts go, Paul puts tongues on the bottom of the list, because it is only a help to the individual, not the body as a whole. In chapter 14 Paul says that tongues do not help the church in public worship because they are not understood. He says that they can lead to confusion, and disorder. Instead, we should have order and intelligent preaching because it helps build people up

The most important part is to connect chapter 13 with the divisive discussions over spiritual gifts. God has called us to love each other. God has placed me in positions to minister to charismatic pastors, and I love them. I don't always agree with them or how they do their ministry. However, I have no choice but to love them because Christ has called me to love all people.

4. Gifts are for service, not self-exaltation.

a. We are not called to seek ecstasy.

If the glory of Christ comes upon you that is great. However, it is not the goal of the Christian life to see how high you can jump in Jesus. The goal is to see how straight you walk when you hit the ground.

b. Gifts are to enable the church to accomplish its mission.

God gave gifts for a different purpose. He gave gifts to enable us to do the work of His mission. Gifts are God's empowerment to enable the church to do ministry.

Go back to the illustration last week of the wheel. The hub connects to the spokes. The life of the hub works its way down the spokes until the spokes connect to the rim and the rim to the tire, so the power of the hub is expressed on the road. Gifts are of no use if they do not connect people to helping other people.

It does no good to acquire a gift in the Holy Spirit if you do not use it. A gift is not a label to wear, but a service to do.

c. Gifts are never meant to be a road show.

People staging gifts and getting the light shown upon them that by their power they can bring healing is a perversion of gifted ministry. It is quite the opposite of what we see in Acts when Peter and John say, do not think that it was by our power we made this man well.

Acts

Do not do your works before men. Jesus

d. The list of gifts is not comprehensive.

Paul makes a list of various gifts. His list is never meant to be a complete list of gifts. He adds some gifts in Romans 12. Paul's purpose is not to speak on a doctrine of gifts but to quell a division over gifts. **Unity** is more the theme than individual giftedness.

Some of the gifts he mentions are unique works of the Holy Spirit. Others, are gifts which God has developed in the believer over time.

Gifts, services, workings are all three different terms to describe how the Holy Spirit works in the members. Yet, the words are synonymous just as he uses three different words for "unity."

I will speak more about the nature of gifts next week. But let me say this, **people have read a lot of doctrine into Paul's teaching when the larger context says otherwise.**

Today, I want you to hear one thing: God gifts people. He gifts them to serve.

If you want to think about gifts, you need first to think about servng.

