

1 Corinthians 12 (Part 1): 1-7 • Spiritual Gifts – Introduction

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Hopefully you're in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Let's read through the first 7 verses and then we're going pray.

It says, “Now concerning Spiritual Gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. (your bible may say ignorant) ² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (ESV)

That’s the preface right there to spiritual gifts. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word. We look to You. We depend upon You. We rely upon You Lord, for insight and understanding from Your Word. Teach us today. We ask in Jesus name, amen.

All right. Beginning here in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, we are embarking on a 3 chapter study of the subject of spiritual gifts. I have to always look around the room when I say that, because it inevitably makes some people uncomfortable. I just have to say that right out the get go.

Some people just get really nervous when the subject of spiritual gifts come up because, well, some of them have good reason to be, to be honest with you, because spiritual gifts have really been abused. And they continue to be abused, frankly, in many churches.

Over the years there have been and continue to be unbiblical, and because of that dangerous functional demonstrations of the gifts of the Spirit. And many times it's not the gifts of the Spirit that's being demonstrated. It's carnality, the

carnality, the fleshly carnality of man. And that has caused people to have 3 basic negative responses towards spiritual gifts.

I'm not going to ask anybody to raise their hand if you've had a negative reaction to spiritual gifts, but I know that a lot of people have, and there's usually one of 3. Let me put these on the screen for you so you can see them. Common negative reactions.

Common Negative Reactions to Spiritual Gifts

- Ignore them entirely

First of all, the first one is, just to **Ignore them entirely**. And that's frankly what a lot of churches do. They just don't ever talk about it because perhaps they're not teaching through the scriptures, chapter by chapter, and verse by verse. They choose never to really deal with it. It's like spiritual gifts, what are those?

We just, we're uncomfortable with it, there's been abuses. People don't, they get nervous when we talk about it so, we just won't talk about it. Because we don't want to make anybody nervous, right? We don't want to bother or upset anybody, so we'll just ignore them.

Many Christians grow up in their Christian walk, never learning about spiritual gifts, even though they are a huge part of the New Testament. Obviously, in the Book of Acts, we see them over and over again. Paul writes about them through his epistles and so forth. And yet, there's many, many Christians, who remain ignorant of spiritual gifts, even though Paul said at the beginning of this chapter, brothers I would not have you be ignorant. And yet we remain so largely because they've been ignored.

Common Negative Reactions to Spiritual Gifts

- Ignore them entirely
- Relegate them to a bygone era in the Church

Secondly another negative response is that we just, **Relegate them to a bygone era in the Church**, and that's frankly the position of a lot of people and a lot of churches. The gifts of the Spirit died out after the apostolic era, they're no longer functional today. And they'll give different reasons for their lack of functioning in the body of Christ.

They'll say things like, well, the early church needed an extra boost to get going. And so God gave spiritual gifts to the church in those early years of the first

century or so. And then after the church got rolling, we no longer needed them. Other people will say, well, they were only in play until the Bible was written in the sense of the New Testament.

Paul's letters hadn't been written yet. The gospel accounts were still being formed. And so once those came into play, and they were well distributed among the churches of the day, it was no longer necessary for spiritual gifts to function in the church. It was like, it's no big deal. That makes it easy, doesn't it? That's very convenient. They're not for today. They're not for today. And by the way, we will deal when we get to chapter 13 with probably the most popular excuse that is given as to why they're no longer functioning today.

Common Negative Reactions to Spiritual Gifts

- Ignore them entirely
- Relegate them to a bygone era in the Church
- Consider them demonic

And then thirdly, some people have a negative reaction just to **Consider them demonic**. And that puts it in a nice little container for you. You involved in spiritual gifts, you're dealing with demonic activity. You better steer clear of that stuff.

And I get it. Sometimes the way churches operate in the gifts of the Spirit, it looks demonic. I mean, some of it is downright scary. And if you've ever been to one of those churches, and I have, it's weird. And you have a good reason to walk out of there going, eh, I don't know. This is weird. This is weird stuff.

But one of the things we have to remember about the Holy Spirit, who's the One who gives the gifts. That's why we call them the gifts of the Spirit. He is an incredible gentleman and He's also God, which means He is perfectly in order as we're going to learn when we get to chapter 14.

And by the way, spiritual gifts covers 12, 13, and 14. When we get to chapter 14, Paul is going to make a statement about God's character and he's going to say, our God is not a God of disorder, but a God of peace. (1 Corinthians 14:33)

And unfortunately, what we see in some churches who are operating, or desiring to operate in the gifts of the Spirit, is rampant disorder. And that's why people are put off by it. But you know what's interesting? God's order, when it is displayed properly, doesn't put people off. In fact, it gives people a sense of peace, it gives people a sense of purpose, and it gives people a sense of

understanding. But when things are wacky and chaotic and unbiblical, they become very dangerous. Listen, whenever we live our lives in an unbiblical fashion, we invite danger into them.

Those are probably the 3 most popular negative responses so as a result, the same ignorance that the apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians to grow past, has largely remained in the body of Christ.

For starters, when we talk about spiritual gifts, I think there are some people that were so unaccustomed to thinking about it, dealing with it, studying this topic, some of us need a definition. We need to define what spiritual gifts are. Let's do that on the screen here. I wrote this just off the top of my head, so it's not perfect. But I'm going to say here that,

Spiritual gifts are abilities given to believers that exceed our human, natural abilities. They are “supernatural” giftings, given by God, enabling us to function in a spiritual capacity.

Spiritual gifts are abilities given to believers that exceed our human, natural abilities. (therefore) They are “supernatural” (don't get weirded out by that name or that word. Supernatural just means, beyond the natural, or transcending the natural. All right. They are) giftings, given by God, enabling us to function in a spiritual capacity.

Now, I think that's a fairly decent definition. It probably doesn't go all the way. Okay. But it helps us to lay some groundwork to understanding these things.

The Book of Acts is a beautiful story chronicling the beginning of the church, but showing us how God used spiritual gifts in the lives of believers to literally turn the world upside down during that first century. And we see incredible, supernatural, things that are going on. And we see it in people like Peter, and John, and Philip, and some of the others.

And some of the supernatural giftings that we see in the Book of Acts, they're not the stuff you're seeing in churches that are trying to operate in the gifts of the Spirit.

Sometimes it's something like boldness. We forget that boldness is a work of the Spirit. Peter, remember Peter? Here's a man who, when Jesus was being arrested, he denied that he knew the Lord. 3 times he denied that he even knew Him. It's like, yeah, you're one of His. I don't even know what you're talking about. 3 times. Of course, Jesus predicted he would.

Here's the crazy thing. Jesus is crucified, buried, resurrected on the third day, and then Peter receives this through spiritual gifting, boldness. And what do we see just 50 days later? We see Peter standing up in front of a huge crowd of people, declaring that Jesus is the Messiah. The very one that they clamored to have crucified before Pilate.

And as a result, 3,000 people come to the Lord that day. And then just a few days later, Peter and John heal a man who's begging, as they're going into the temple. He's crippled and he's, through the power of God, he's strengthened.

And these guys are hauled off before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel who just not 2 months before practically had sentenced Jesus to death and handed Him over to Pilate. The very same men, Caiaphas was there, Annas was there. All of these men who wanted Jesus to be crucified, and now Peter and John are standing in front of this very same council.

And what do you read about in Acts chapter 4? You read how Peter and John just stood up to these men and said, hey, listen, you guys want to know by what power this man was healed of his infirmity? We're here to tell you right now, it's the power of Jesus Christ whom you crucified. And let it be known there is no other power given under heaven by which we must be saved. I mean, these guys just came out of the chute, just guns blazing sort of a thing.

But it was the boldness of the Holy Spirit in their lives that was operating and yet, we hardly even talk about boldness as a spiritual gift anymore. We want to do all the flashy things. We want to do the things that get people's attention, and weird them out, and stuff like that. And you know what? That's where the Corinthians were at.

The Corinthians had a completely carnal sort of goal or sense of what spiritual gifts were all about. And that's why Paul had to lay down some initial guidelines for them as he's talking about spiritual gifts, because you see, the Corinthians were fixated on speaking gifts. Things like boldness. I don't know, there's not a whole..., that's not that flashy. But the speaking gifts, those are pretty flashy.

In fact, later on. Let me show you this on the screen. Later on in chapter 14, he's going to say to them,

1 Corinthians 14:26b (ESV)

When you guys come together, each one of you has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

When you guys come together, (he says,) each one of you has a hymn, (or) a lesson, (or) a revelation, (or) a tongue, or an interpretation.

You notice something about all those gifts that they have in common? You do them with your mouth. That's what the Corinthians were into. They were just totally fixated on all the things that made them look good. Because, I'm doing it, I'm saying it, and I'm getting to be in front and say it and on. He says, so when you come together, everybody's doing this. And there was complete disorder and it was chaotic, and all kinds of other things going on.

Paul had to speak to them here about these issues and that's what he's going to do. But the first thing he's going to address here is the remaining ignorance. Look at verse 2 in your Bible.

He says, “...*that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, (in other words, idols that couldn't talk) however you were led.* ³ *Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.*”

Now, again, what Paul is saying here is that, many of you guys came out of pagan idolatry. And notice that Paul holds nothing back in his statement when he says, and you guys, you were led astray. When you guys were pagans, you were led astray. He's taking the gloves off here, right?

In other words, Paul is basically saying to them, or exposing in them, a gullibility. You guys remember when you were pagans? You guys were completely deceived and carried away by all kinds of ridiculous junk. And there is a gullibility among you, a tendency in you to be led astray, and that tendency is continuing, and now it's happening in the area of spiritual gifts, and they need to grow up.

And we don't know exactly what question Paul was answering here in these verses, when he says, I want you to know that no one can say by the Spirit, Jesus is cursed, and it is only through the Spirit that you can say Jesus is Lord. We don't know what he's answering there, because this is a one sided conversation, right?

Paul received information from the Corinthian church, and we're not privy to what that statement is predicated on, but what it tells us is, they were confused. There was still confusion. There were still issues of ignorance, and so Paul is going to spend the next three chapters straightening that kind of stuff out.

And let me show you what he's going to be covering in these next 3 chapters. He's going to cover,

The Apostle Paul will cover...

- The USAGE of spiritual gifts
- The FUNCTION of spiritual gifts
- The MISUSE of spiritual gifts

The USAGE of spiritual gifts. He's going to cover **The FUNCTION of spiritual gifts**, and then he's going to deal **with The MISUSE of spiritual gifts**.

And we're going to cover all those things in our study of these 3 chapters as well so that when we get done with this study over however many weeks it takes us to do it, I believe you're going to know what Paul had to say related to this subject. And you're going to know what is expected of a church when it is operating in spiritual gifts, and what it should, and should not be doing. All right.

Here we go. Paul felt spiritual gifts were a key to ministry. I want to start there. Paul felt spiritual gifts were a key. I say that because in the church today, we don't look at spiritual gifts as a key to ministry. When we go somewhere to minister to people, we don't think about spiritual gifts being the key of what's going to make that ministry good or effective.

But I want you to see what Paul wrote to the Romans back in chapter 1. He said to them,

Romans 1:11 (ESV)

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—

This is what Paul thought ministry was about. When I go and talk to you, when I meet with you guys, he's telling the Romans, I want to bring the spiritual gifts that God has deposited in my life, that I might convey those gifts to you and that the Word of God, and the ministry of the Spirit, might be conveyed so that you will be encouraged.

And then look what he said to Timothy when he wrote to him. He said, Tim,

1 Timothy 4:14 (NASB)

Don't neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the [elders].

Don't neglect the spiritual gift within you, (I'm quoting this from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance (he says,) with the laying on of hands by the [elders]. Don't neglect that spiritual gift Timothy.

How often do you hear people saying that today? When you're talking to somebody who's about to go do ministry or something like that. How often do you hear someone say, hey, don't neglect your spiritual gift? Don't neglect... Hey, be walking in the gifts, the gifts of the Spirit are yours. You can operate in them. We're ignorant of them. We're like spiritually, huh? What are you talking about here exactly? And then what we often talk about are natural gifts and we call them spiritual gifts, so there's confusion.

We're going to try our best to clear up that confusion as we go through here. But as we get into these verses, I'm reminded of something. That Paul is writing to a group of people who are already operating in spiritual gifts.

It'd be one thing if these people didn't know anything about the gifts of the Spirit or the baptism of the Spirit. Remember when Philip went to Samaria and people started getting saved at Philip's preaching? They believed the gospel, they were baptized in water, and then Peter and John went up to Samaria to find out what was going on. They start talking to them about the Holy Spirit.

Well, Philip hadn't gotten there. He was just..., Philip was an evangelist. He was like, you need Jesus. And these people were getting saved, I mean, in big numbers. Well, Peter and John get there and they say, so what have you guys heard about the Holy Spirit? They're like, huh? We haven't heard anything. And so they started laying hands on them and these guys started getting baptized in the Holy Spirit.

They were ignorant and that's where a lot of Christian... These people in Samaria were born again, Christians, but they were ignorant of the work of the Holy Spirit to empower for service, which is what the gifts of the Spirit do in our lives. All right.

But Paul is going to talk to the Christians here in Corinth about the fact that there's more than just function to be concerned about when it comes to spiritual gifts.

Look with me now in verse 4. Paul says, “*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;*”⁵ *and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;*⁶ *and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all* (notice the word, empowers, which is what spiritual gifts are all about) *in everyone.*”

Now, notice Paul begins by saying, first of all, “*there are varieties of gifts.* Why is he saying this to the Corinthians? Because remember, they were fixated on the speaking gifts, the utterance gifts. They were just totally focused on that.

And so Paul would say, guys, hello, there's other gifts. There's all kinds of other gifts. You guys need to be looking at the whole package of what God has given us through spiritual gifts. There's varieties, but you know what? They all come from the same Spirit. They all come from the same Holy Spirit.

And this is very important because you see the Corinthians decided certain gifts were more important than others. And so they had this natural pecking order, which we do as humans, don't we? We naturally just think this is more important than that, and I want that because I've decided in my heart, in my mind, that's more important. So if you've got the spiritual gift of x, that's the one.

And if you've got that one, you're like specially blessed person. And if you've got this spiritual gift of this over here, it's like, no, we're really sorry that you didn't get blessed like the rest of us. But oh, well, God gives one gift and then another but I guess there needs to be those kind of people everywhere.

That's the attitude. We may not say it, but it's... And that's what was going on in Corinth. They believed that the utterance gifts were way up here and they'd forgotten, and let go of, and released all the other understanding of many of the other gifts. Paul reminds them that all the gifts are important.

Next he says in verse 5, look here, he says, “*and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;*” Not only are there different gifts that God gives us through His Spirit, but there are different ways of using those gifts.

In other words, listen, two people can have the same gift and use them in very different ways. Two people can have the exact same gift from the Lord, but one uses it one way, another uses it another way. And that's great. And you and I have to be careful not to think, well, you got to do it this way. Right? There are different ways of functioning in those gifts.

Then in verse 6, he says, look with me there. *“and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”* All right. What does he mean here by, activities? If you have *an NIV on your lap, your Bible says, “there are different kinds of workings.”* And if you have a New American Standard, it says, *“there are different kinds of effects.”* And frankly, that's probably the most clear rendering because he's talking about the result of the gift. Okay?

There's different kinds of gifts. There's different uses for those gifts, and then there's different effects. There's different results of the usage of those gifts, right? And he's talking about what's being accomplished.

And this is where we struggle. Again, by making comparisons, one with another, we look at the result of someone's gift, and we look at the result of our gift, and we think, wow, and in that comparison, we really shortchange ourselves. We look at 2 men who pastor a church, one has a church of 5,000 and the other has a church of 50. And in our human way of and worldly way of thinking, we assume that the effect of the gifting of those 2 men is such that one is successful and one is not. And that's wrong.

We make all kinds of assumptions. Two believers have the gift of evangelism. One person shares the gospel with hundreds of people at a time. The other person shares the gospel with one person at a time. And we make a determination of which one we think is more effective, and yet they're both being faithful to their calling in the ministry.

Two believers might have the gift of administration, which is a gift too from the Lord, and one might oversee a multi-hundred employee ministry, Christian ministry, in their administrative gifting. And the other one oversees 4 or 5 volunteers in a local church, but they're both functioning in their gift, but they have different results because they're called to different areas.

And Paul makes the point, it's the same God who empowers them all so he's saying, don't get caught up in worldly things like the size, or the magnitude of something. And, because what God is most concerned about is your faithfulness.

You've been given a gift, maybe even multiple gifts. What is God most concerned about? You being faithful with that gift. That's what He wants you to be. By the way, did you notice in these verses 4, did you notice the reference to the Trinity? Did you see it in there? Look at it again.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; (talking about the Holy Spirit) ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;” Kurios, Lord. Referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. And there are varieties of activities but it is the same God. Theos, referring to God the Father who empowers them in everyone. All the persons of the Trinity are involved in giving gifts to believers within the church.

And then finally Paul makes the statement in verse 7, look with me in your Bible. He says, *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* And this is where Paul ends here with the purpose of spiritual gifts. What is the purpose? It's, *“for the common good.”*

This was an important thing to say to the Corinthians. It's an important thing for us to hear. It is for the profit of the entire body. It is not for self-display. It is not for self-gratification. It's not to make you look good. It is to make God look good and to benefit the body of Christ; the common good.

And listen, this last statement that Paul makes here in verse 7 is pivotal to understanding the rest of what Paul says about spiritual gifts. In fact, if you needed to underline a single verse that will help you be an interpretive aid to the rest of these chapters related to spiritual gifts, that's the one right there. The gifts of the Spirit are given for the common good.

And so with that foundation of understanding that Paul has laid for spiritual gifts, he's now going to go on and he's going to speak of the gifts of the Spirit specifically. He's going to give a list of the gifts of the Spirit, which we're going to talk about next week when we come together.

We're going to talk about each of these gifts one by one, and we're going to talk about what they are. We're going to talk about what they're not. We're going to talk about how they've been misunderstood, how they've been misused. But we're going to learn about spiritual gifts as Paul gives us this, a list of the gifts of the Spirit next week.