

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

The True Source & Purpose of Spiritual Gifts 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Introduction

- In First Corinthians chapter eleven, the apostle Paul dealt with problems occurring during the meetings of the local church in Corinth, and here in chapter twelve he begins to address another issue which was also disrupting their church services. This important issue had to do with the use of spiritual gifts, and it would take the apostle Paul three chapters to discuss this problem (1 Cor 12 - 14).
- Evidently, this was one of the issues that was causing the divisions and schisms within the Corinthian church. Some of the dynamic and charismatic individuals were being given greater honor and position within the different factions.
- There were also some obvious cases of abusing spiritual gifts, and possibly even some counterfeit spiritual gifts that were throwing the church into confusion.



Introducing a New Area of Abuses Within the Church (1 Cor 12:1)

- As we begin studying this chapter, we must force ourselves not to miss the first three verses upon which the apostle Paul layered the rest of this section concerning spiritual gifts. 1 Cor 12:1-3 is the foundation on which Paul built everything that follows.
- "Now concerning" = This is the same opening phrase that we have seen previously in this letter (1 Cor 7:1, 7:25, 8:1). It indicates that Paul is giving a response to one of the questions that the Corinthians had asked in their original letter to him. We know for certain that they asked Paul for more information about how the spiritual gifts or manifestations should be handled in the local church at Corinth. Because of Paul's lengthy response, we can assume that the misuse of spiritual gifts was causing quite a bit of trouble and confusion within the Corinthian church.
- "Spiritual gifts" (*pneumatikos*) = This literally means, belonging to the Spirit. The word *gifts* is not in the original text, but the entire context shows very clearly that the gifts and enablings of the Holy Spirit are the topic throughout this discussion.
- "I do not want you to be unaware, brethren" = Again, Paul calls the Corinthians his brothers in Christ, and he tells them he does not want them to remain ignorant of the truths that he is about to explain in the next three chapters of this letter. He is concerned that the Corinthians gain some specific knowledge -- that they come to know certain truths.

A Reminder of Their Former Pagan Practices (1 Cor 12:2)

- "When you were pagans" (*ethnos*) = This word is a general term for the nations of the world, and it is often used for the Gentiles (in contrast to the Jews). This tells us that the majority of believers in the Corinthian church came out of a Gentile or pagan background, and they would tend to associate any unusual or spectacular manifestations of spiritual gifts in their church with some of their experiences in the pagan temple services.
- "You were led astray to the mute idols" = In 1 Cor 10:19-21 Paul had explained in even more detail that the idols themselves were simply inanimate blocks of wood or stone, but that the power behind them was demonic. As Paul begins the discussion here, we need to remember all that he previously said concerning a Christian's involvement with idolatry and pagan worship services.



- "Led astray" (*apagesthai*) = literally, carried away, which seems to more accurately describe what those former pagans would have experienced in their religious ceremonies. There would have been moments of ecstasy when a human being was, or was supposed to be, possessed by a supernatural being.
- "However you were led" = literally, *as from time to time you might be led*. The imperfect tense gives the idea of having different leadings on different occasions, first being carried one way and then another, in a chaotic fashion. The important point is that even after these former pagan worshipers became Christians, they still had a tendency to confuse demonic manifestations with those of the Holy Spirit.

Distinguishing Between Pagan Manifestations and Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12:3)

- "Therefore I make known to you" = Paul presented a test that they could use to distinguish between demonic activity and the activity of the Holy Spirit, since it seems that there were counterfeit or false gifts which were being manifested in that local church. True spiritual gifts are given by God to produce unity and harmony, while demonic counterfeits are meant to divide and disrupt the church.
- Notice that Paul was dealing with speaking gifts. Evidently there was a lot of confusion in the Corinthian church about the spectacular and dramatic behavior of some people who were exercising their speaking gifts in the church, supposedly under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The NEGATIVE Test	The POSITIVE Test
"No one speaking by the Spirit of God says, <i>Jesus is accursed</i> "	"No one can say, <i>Jesus is Lord</i> , except by the Holy Spirit"
We can certainly imagine this kind of statement being made by someone under the influence of demons, since demons are the sworn enemies of Christ. It is possible that some of the pagan worship leaders had actually uttered such statements in Corinth during Paul's ministry there. This seems to be the best way to understand why Paul included this negative statement as a test of authenticity, because it is difficult to imagine a circumstance when a born-again Christian in a church service would ever say such a thing.	The name <i>Jesus</i> points to His human existence during the incarnation when He came as a man to die for the sins of the world. This statement declares that Jesus is the God-man who now has all authority as the Lord of the universe. It says something about Jesus Himself, that He is truly God in human flesh. But it also says something about the relationship of the one who is speaking to the person of Jesus. It is a statement of personal submission to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Notice carefully that it is the content of the spoken words that determines their authenticity, rather than the way in which they are presented. Spectacular behavior, even if it has the appearance of being under the influence of a higher power, is no guarantee of divine inspiration. The true test of whether the Spirit is at work is a test of correct doctrine.

The Source of All Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12:4-6)

- "There are varieties (*diairesis*) of gifts (*charismaton*)" = The term *diairesis* will also be used in the following two verses, and it indicates the distribution of the gifts as well as the diversity of those gifts. The context in this first section of the chapter points to the variety and diversity of the different gifts as contrasted with their unified, single source. The Corinthian believers considered only the more spectacular speaking gifts as being important, but the emphasis on the variety of gifts clearly shows that the Holy Spirit considers every spiritual gift important.
- The term *charismaton* (from *charizomai*) means a gracious favor or benefit bestowed or received without being based on any merit or being deserved by the recipient. This is one of the terms that helps us to



understand the meaning of Paul's opening phrase, "Now concerning spirituals" (*pneumatikos*). Those spiritual things are the undeserved gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit.

- "But the same Spirit" = Even though there is a wide variety of gifts, they are all given by the same Holy Spirit. There is a unity behind all of this diversity. This verse specifically emphasizes the role of the third person of the Trinity (the Holy Spirit) in the gracious giving of these gifts.
- "There are varieties of ministries (*diakonia*)" = In the Corinthian church, spiritual gifts were used as opportunities for comparing, boasting, and attracting a following. But this verse emphasizes that spiritual gifts should be used as opportunities for humble service to others. The verse also implies that even if several believers were to have the same exact spiritual gift, they may be led to use that gift in many different forms of service or ministry.
- "And the same Lord" = In this phrase, the second person of the Trinity (Jesus Christ) joins the third person (the Holy Spirit) as the source of all the services that are performed through the spiritual gifts in the church.
- "There are varieties of effects (*energema*)" = that which is accomplished through energy. It seems that the Corinthians may have been focusing on the display of their gifts, without as much concern for producing a positive impact in the lives of their fellow Christians. Here the emphasis is on results -- something good will happen in someone's life when a gift is displayed.
- "But the same God who works (*energeo*) all things in all" = This term means "to effectively accomplish or produce something." Finally in this verse, the first person of the Trinity (God the Father) joins the Son and the Spirit as the source of all the effects produced through spiritual gifts in the church. Unity is needed, but unity within the church does not mean uniformity of gifts or ministries or effects. And even though there is diversity, there is also the underlying unity which comes from the One who gave all of these various gifts to the members of the church.

The Ultimate Purpose for These Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12:7)

- "But to each one is given (*didomi*)" = This phrase tells us that each and every member of the church has a special spiritual gift that is perfectly appropriate for that individual. Gifts of the Spirit are not reserved only for a few outstanding believers in the church, but every single Christian has at least one spiritual gift.
- "The manifestation (*phanerosis*) of the Spirit" = This term emphasizes that the results of spiritual gifts are openly displayed for all to see. In this case, these special manifestations of the Holy Spirit are to be expressed and exercised for the benefit of other believers within the church.
- "For the common good (*sumphero*)" = This term means, "to bring together, to confer a benefit, to be profitable or useful for all." Notice that a spiritual gift is never given for the benefit of the individual alone -- spiritual gifts are not merely for private or personal use. Instead they are intended to flow out of the gifted person to touch the lives of others around him or her.

Examples of the Corinthians' Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12:8-10)

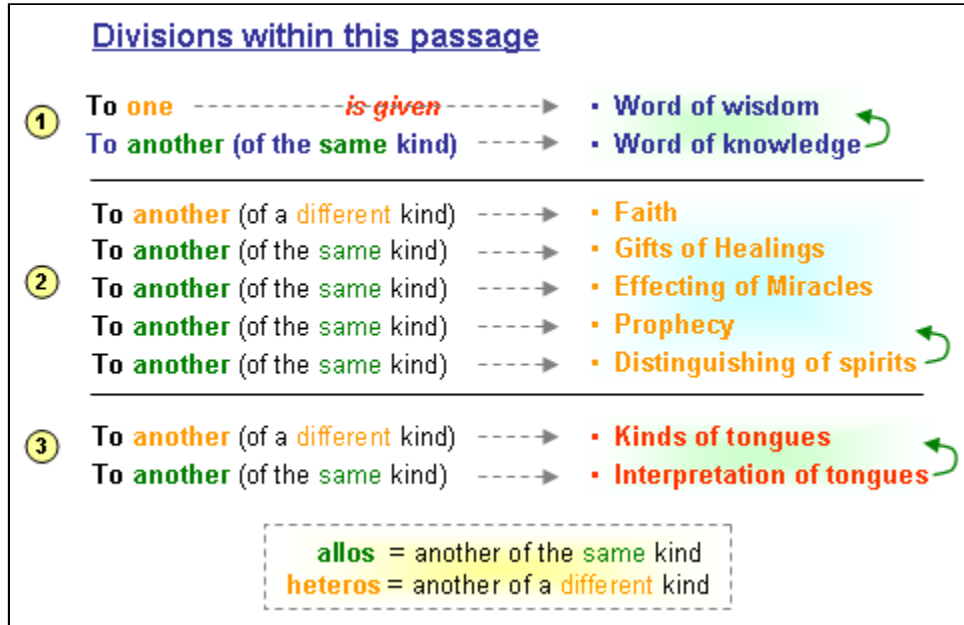
Word of Wisdom

- After emphasizing the great variety of spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul then went on to illustrate this variety by giving specific examples from within the church at Corinth. All of the gifts listed here were being used by carnal believers in Corinth for selfish purposes, and some individuals with more spectacular gifts were attracting a following. The church was breaking off into schisms, partly due to the abuse of spiritual gifts.
- "To one is given" = The word *one* picks up on Paul's statement in the last verse that to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit. One individual may have one spiritual gift, while another individual is given a different gift for the benefit of those within the church.
- "The word of wisdom (*sophia*)" = The apostle Paul had already discussed the difference between God's wisdom and the worldly wisdom of the Greek philosophers (1 Cor 1:18-31). He also gave more details about the wisdom of God (1 Cor 2:1-16). Here in chapter twelve where this verse lists the spiritual gift of wisdom, we should connect it with what Paul said earlier in chapter two and view it as a special manifestation of God's wisdom for the benefit of others within the church. The word of wisdom means this is the spiritual gift of communicating God's wisdom.
- God's wisdom is often veiled in mystery, but God actively revealed some of His mysteries to specific believers for the benefit of all. In chapter two we saw that God's true wisdom was received by revelation (1 Cor 2:1-11), it was transmitted by inspiration (1 Cor 2:12-13), and it is understood through illumination (1 Cor 2:14-16). From our perspective in history, we now have the completed revelation of inspired Scripture, so the functions of inspiration & revelation are no longer active. But we still need illumination today in order to understand the written Word of God. The spiritual gift of wisdom involves examining the Scriptures in order to perceive God's wisdom, and then to

communicate God's wisdom to other believers within the church.

Word of Knowledge

- "To another (*allos*)" = to another of the same kind. Somehow the first two spiritual gifts in this list are connected together. They are gifts of a similar kind or type.



- "The word of knowledge (*gnosis*)" = The apostle Paul had already spent time dealing with *knowledge* in this letter. In 1 Cor 1:5 he had said that God enriched the Corinthians with knowledge, but in chapter eight Paul described how they were misusing their knowledge by becoming arrogant and even sinning against other Christians by failing to use their knowledge lovingly (1 Cor 8:1-13).
- The spiritual gift of knowledge seems to represent the kind of knowledge that understands how to apply God's wisdom in specific situations for the common good of others. The gift of knowledge is the insight required to know when some behavior or activity is right or wrong for a Christian in a particular situation. Viewed in this way, the gift of knowledge is connected to the gift of wisdom because it helps believers to know how to use or apply God's revealed truths in their specific circumstances. We could say that knowledge is required for the proper use of wisdom.
- "According to the same Spirit" = Here again the apostle Paul showed that even in the diversity of gifts there is a unity of source -- they all come from and are directed by the same Holy Spirit. They are according to His will and as He sees fit.

Gift of Faith

- "To another (*heteros*) faith (*pistis*)" = The structure of this passage indicates that Paul is introducing a new set of gifts that are of a somewhat different kind than the previous gifts. The first gift in this list is the gift of faith, which is the ability to trust God based on His Word. Since all of the gifts in this list have to do with speaking or displaying something for the benefit of other believers within the church, it seems best to view the spiritual gift of faith as a special ability to communicate faith to others -- to help other people to trust in God more fully.
- As the first spiritual gift in this set of similar gifts, faith can be viewed as one of the gifts that draws attention to God or points to God's amazing power and greatness. Therefore, like the other gifts that follow it in this section, the gift of faith operates to encourage believers to trust in God more fully or completely.

Gifts of Healings

- "To another (*allos*) gifts of healing (*iama*)" = This term simply means to bring about a return to health, and there are many examples in the New Testament that show the gift of healing being used (Acts 3:6-8; 5:15-16; 8:7; 9:17-

18, 33-35; 19:12; 28:8). These examples show that the actual healing usually became a platform for presenting the truths of God's wisdom. The miraculous healing became the divine stamp of approval or authenticity for the message that was proclaimed.

- The spiritual gift of healing was never used solely for the purpose of restoring someone's physical health. Paul himself was sick, as were many of his companions, but he was not given the ability to heal them. He only exercised the gift of healing through the leading of the Holy Spirit as a means to confirm the power of the gospel, rather than to make Christians healthy.
- "By the one Spirit" = Paul continued to emphasize that it is the one Holy Spirit who is responsible for all of these gifts.

Effecting of Miracles

- "To another (*allos*) the effecting of miracles (*dunamis*)" = literally, this means effects which are powerful or miraculous. The New Testament also records many of these types of supernatural events (Acts 5:5, 10; 9:40; 13:8-11). As was the case with the gift of healing, these events usually became the platform for presenting or confirming the truths of God's wisdom. The miracle provided the divine stamp of approval or authenticity for the message that was being presented.

Gift of Prophecy

- "To another (*allos*) prophecy (*propheteia*)" = Here it appears that Paul is emphasizing the more miraculous predictive element in New Testament prophecy (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11; 27:21-25; 1 Tim 1:18). This was a special ability given to a believer for accurately predicting future events, and the authentication of the prophet's message occurred when those events actually took place just as they had been described. This miraculous insight into future events became a sign of the authenticity of the message spoken by the prophet during the time before the written Word of God was completed.

Distinguishing of Spirits

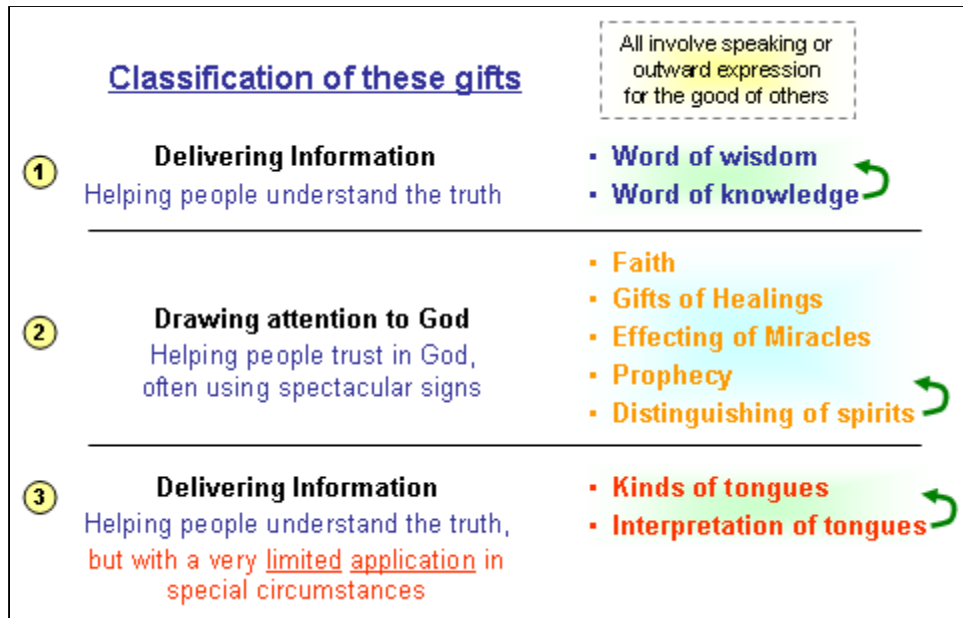
- "To another (*allos*) the distinguishing (*diakrisis*) of spirits" = This term is related to the verb *diakrino* which we studied in chapter eleven of this letter (1 Cor 11:29, 31), and it indicates the ability to distinguish or discern whether something is from the Holy Spirit or some other source. This type of gift would be especially valuable in the Corinthian church so that someone could give an immediate judgment on the things that were being said in that congregation.

Kinds of Tongues

- "To another (*heteros*) various kinds of tongues (*glossa*)" = the ability to speak to other people in languages that the speaker had not previously learned. From the New Testament examples of the use of this gift it is clear that the message spoken in tongues could be understood by listeners who did know those languages (for example, Acts 2:7-11). This means that the tongues were understandable, even though they may have seemed unintelligible to a person who did not know that particular language.
- Various kinds of tongues might have been a useful gift in the city of Corinth, since it was a commercial hub and the geographical center of that area. Foreign merchants and travelers often passed through Corinth, and the gift of languages would be a valuable speaking tool for presenting God's wisdom to foreign believers.

Interpretation of Tongues

- "To another (*allos*) the interpretation (*hermeneia*) of tongues" = Here is the last gift in this third set, and it involved the interpretation of the foreign languages that were spoken by someone with the previous gift. Someone who spoke in tongues was sometimes able to understand what he was saying (1 Cor 14:4), but it is also possible that he was able to correctly speak the message while *not* being able to understand all that was being said. In that case, the speaker would need someone else to interpret what was said. But even if the speaker *did* understand his message, it would lend confirmation and authenticity if a different person interpreted what was said.



- Clearly, all of these spiritual gifts involve some kind of outward expression -- typically they require speaking to others in order to build them up in their faith. Even spiritual gifts that get their name from some spectacular activity -- such as performing healings or miracles -- became a platform for speaking God's truth to others.
- The first set of gifts involved delivering information to others in order to help them better understand God's truth. The second set of gifts involved drawing attention to God and helping people to trust more completely in Him. The third set of gifts also involved delivering information, but in a special way and in limited situations which would make it clear that God Himself was behind the message. Notice that the last gift in each set is apparently given as a way to verify that the other gifts in each set are being used correctly.
- We have seen only nine of the gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit, but these are the ones that the Corinthians apparently were abusing in their church services. Some of the other spiritual gifts were not the ones being abused and causing divisions within the church at Corinth, so the apostle Paul did not mention them in this list. The gifts that became part of this list in 1 Cor 12:8-10 are here for a very specific reason -- they were being misused for selfish purposes by carnal Christians seeking attention in the church at Corinth.

The Conclusion Regarding the True Source of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12:11)

- "But one and the same Spirit works (*energeo*) all these things" = This verse is a fitting conclusion to this entire section. Despite the diversity of all these gifts, it is one and the same Holy Spirit who works or energizes all of them. This is the same word that was used in 1 Cor 12:6 where it was said that the same God works (*energeo*) all things in all. It is God -- and specifically God the Holy Spirit -- who accomplishes the results of the spiritual gifts that are manifested by believers.
- "Distributing to each one individually" = The word *distributing* is the Greek term *diaireo*, which is the verb form of the word *diairesis* that is translated "varieties" in 1 Cor 12:4-6. In this verse this verb means "dividing into parts and distributing." The Holy Spirit accomplishes this distribution in exactly the right way to exactly the right people. He gives spiritual gifts to each one individually. This reinforces the idea that each believer is given at least one spiritual gift that is perfectly matched to that individual.
- "Just as He wills (*boulomai*)" = This Greek term emphasizes the deliberate exercise of volition, rather than just a simple desire. The NIV version translates this phrase, "He gives them to each one, just as He determines." Whether a believer has a certain spiritual gift is completely up to the Holy Spirit, rather than to the believer himself or to others in the church.