

# Understanding and Using Spiritual Gift

*(1 Corinthians 12:1-11)*

Now, Paul addresses problems caused by confusion concerning spiritual gifts. Because of their spiritual gifts, some in the church at Corinth thought they were more spiritual than others. Others were apparently trying to obtain particular spiritual gifts they thought would make them appear more spiritual. Therefore, in this section, Paul brings the Corinthians to a basic understanding of spiritual gifts. This section reveals **two** requirements for properly understanding and using spiritual gifts:

## **Remember the purpose of all spiritual gifts (12:1-7)**

Some of the Corinthians had apparently asked Paul about spiritual gifts. Therefore, he writes: *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant (12:1)*. The Corinthians' pagan backgrounds caused them to be susceptible to misunderstanding spiritual gifts and to be *carried away (12:2)*. Therefore, Paul writes, *that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed*. Likewise, no one can sincerely acknowledge *Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost (12:3)*.

Confessing *Jesus is the Lord* means nothing unless a person is sincere and obeys God's Word. Jesus says, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mt 7:21a)*. Then, what does our Lord say in the remainder of that verse?

Paul continues: *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit (12:4)*. The word translated *gifts* (CHARISMA, car'-is mah) means "grace gifts." There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, of which at least twenty are mentioned in the New Testament. This number is not exhaustive because many are categories of gifts. What does verse 6b reveal about all spiritual *gifts*?

The word translated *administrations* (DIAKONIA, dee-ak-o-nee'-uh) could be translated "ministries" (12:5a). Our word "deacon" is a derivative of this Greek word. There are different kinds of ministries in the church. Anything we do as Christians to build up or serve others is ministry. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift with which to minister. How does 1 Peter 4:10a-b express this truth?

We may have differing gifts, but they are all from *the same Lord (12:5b)*. This means they are all equally important. So, no one should think a particular gift makes anyone more spiritual or important than another believer.

There are different gifts because *there are diversities of operations* (12:6a). The word translated *operations* could be translated “results” or “works to do.” Although we minister with our spiritual gifts, God brings about His desired results. For example, as a pastor I am responsible to faithfully use my gifts of teaching and preaching, but I am not responsible for the results. How has Paul already explained this (3:6)?

No one should boast about his or her gift because *it is the same God which worketh all in all* (12:6b). Not only do all spiritual gifts have the same source, but they also have the same purpose. Paul emphasizes this fact: *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal* (12:7). Every spiritual gift, or *manifestation*, is given for one purpose: *to profit* all the church. Spiritual gifts are neither for personal glorification nor personal benefit.

To understand and use your spiritual gift, **remember the purpose of all spiritual gifts** (*to profit* all the church) and ...

### **Research the diversity of spiritual gifts (12:8-11)**

All spiritual gifts are critically important. In verses 8-10, Paul catalogs nine spiritual gifts. Several other gifts are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:28-31; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:9-10). He begins the list by writing, *For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom* (12:8a). The word *wisdom* (SOPHIA, so-fee'-uh) means cleverness or skill. It refers to the ability to skillfully apply God's Word. A pastor must have this gift to properly preach and apply God's Word.

The gift of *knowledge* (12:8b) refers to someone who can research and understand the deep truths of God's Word. This gift is often found in Bible college and seminary professors. During my college days, from some professors, I learned a lot of Bible *knowledge*, but sometimes little, if any, *wisdom* or application.

Others receive the gift of *faith by the same Spirit* (12:9a). Every Christian has some degree of *faith* because *faith* is required to be saved (Eph. 2:8). Therefore, all believers have **saving faith**, but not all believers have the **gift of faith**. The gift of *faith* is the God-given ability to trust God in the face of overwhelming difficulty. The gift of *faith* is frequently seen in missionaries, who happily trust and serve God, despite living without modern conveniences and often in the midst of dangerous circumstances.

God gives some the *gifts of healing by the same Spirit* (12:9b). This is the first of the “sign gifts,” which verify a messenger is from God. The gift of instantaneous healing is seen in the early church, such as the healing of the lame man by Peter and John (Acts 3:6). At Ephesus, handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul were taken to sick people, and they were healed (Acts 19:12). However, most bible scholars feel this gift was temporary and was given to authenticate, or confirm, the messengers of God. As the writings of the New Testament neared completion, this gift was no longer needed because God's messengers could be verified by the New Testament. Therefore, in Paul's final epistle, near the end of his ministry, what does he write (2 Timothy 4:20b-c)?

Also, Paul didn't send Timothy a handkerchief but told him to take a little wine for his frequent sicknesses (1 Tim. 5:23). While Paul did not demonstrate his gift of healing in his later ministry, God still heals today. His prescription for healing is found in James 5:14-15.

Next is the gift of *working of miracles* (12:10a). This ability to alter natural events is another of the sign gifts. When Paul and Barnabas were in Iconium, they were *speaking boldly in the Lord* (Acts 14:3a). What does the rest of that verse record?

Miraculous *signs and wonders* were credentials, or confirmation, of the apostles. When God's message was complete in the Bible, these *signs and wonders* were no longer needed to validate God's messengers. But God can still do what He wants when He wants.

Paul says God gives to some the gift of *prophecy* (12:10b). In the Bible, *prophecy* did involve foretelling the future. Now, everything God wants us to know about the future is contained in the New Testament, especially the book of *Revelation*. However, *prophecy* is a present-day gift. The word translated *prophecy* (PROPHĒTEIA, pro-fay-ti'-uh) means "to speak forth the word of God." So, this gift is given to people to proclaim the written Word of God, the Bible. Modern prophets proclaim God's written Word for three purposes: *edification, exhortation, and comfort* (1 Cor. 14:3).

God gives some the gift of *discerning of spirits*, or discernment (12:10c). This is the God-given ability to quickly discern whether someone is a true prophet of God or a counterfeit. It is more difficult today than ever before to detect counterfeits. Religious television channels are filled with *wolves* who are *in sheep's clothing* (Mt 7:15). God gives some Christians the special ability to detect false teaching. This gift is typically found in pastors who are called to protect their flock from false doctrine and spiritual charlatans.

God also gives some the gift of *divers kinds of tongues* (12:10d). This gift is as controversial today as it was in Paul's day. The controversy centers on whether the word *tongues* refers to known human languages or unknown heavenly languages. The word translated *tongues* (GLŌSSA, glow'-sah) means "language." This gift is the ability to speak an unlearned, human language. On the day of Pentecost, believers preach to people from all over the Mediterranean world. The believers do not speak the many different languages of the people present. However, as believers are speaking, what does Acts 2:6b record?

The gift of *tongues*, or languages, may include learning a new language with miraculous speed. This gift is often required of missionaries.

To others, God gives the gift of *interpretation of tongues* (12:10e). This refers to the supernatural ability to interpret, or translate, an unlearned language (1 Cor. 14:27). There is no biblical record of this gift being used.

Spiritual gifts cannot be chosen nor should they be solicited by believers. Instead, all the gifts *worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will* (12:11). Since spiritual gifts are sovereignly given by the Spirit, there should be no jealousy, pride, or rivalry associated with them. The key to effectively using any spiritual gift is obeying what command in Philippians 2:3?

To understand and use spiritual gifts, **remember the purpose of all spiritual gifts and research the diversity of gifts.**