

A Biblical View of Spiritual Gifts **For The Common Good** **Introduction**

Diversity of Spiritual Gifts

Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you used to be enticed and led astray by mute idols. Therefore I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God works all of them in each person. A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: **1 Corinthians 12:1-7 CSB**

As a pastor, I feel that I am obligated to be a student of current events, so that I might be ever-ready to speak the truth as it relates to present day culture. Because of my convictions in this matter, I find myself watching a great deal of news shows on television. This practice has become increasingly frustrating for me, not just because most of the news stories covered in today's media are depressing (which is true), but also because of the format in which newsworthy topics are now discussed. Gone are the days when an informed reporter, or news anchor, accurately gave an unbiased, factual report on current events. Now, we are subjected to endless editorialization, accompanied with the clamor of opposing views shouted over one another by obnoxious idea-logs who refuse to concede that the opinions of those who disagree with them are of any value whatsoever. It is hard to be discerning of what is truth, above the noise of those who only care to hear the sound of their own voices.

I imagine that being a member of the first century church in the city of Corinth (a major city in ancient Greece) was much the same. Corinth was not as well known as the city of Athens, but it was a major cultural force in the times of the Apostle Paul. The citizenry of Corinth prided themselves in their intellectual superiority and were enamored with the pursuit of philosophy and wisdom. In their zeal to be wise, they embraced a tolerant and open-minded view of the immoral culture around them. This immorality was even allowed to creep into the church, as its membership felt that in order to "keep in step with the times", notions of right and wrong needed to evolve. Black-and-white truths of scripture were being largely ignored, and the church had become a forum for the arrogant and proud "intellectuals" to gather and engage in loud debates in order to prove who among the congregation possessed the highest and best degree of "spirituality".

The Apostle Paul must have been sickened by the reports he received regarding this dysfunctional church, which he had labored so hard to establish. So he responded by sending the Corinthians not one, but two, scathing letters of rebuke for what they had become. Though the Corinthian Believers had been given every spiritual gift necessary for the health and function of the church (**1 Corinthians 1:7**), they had used these gifts as a means to outdo one another, rather than serve within the body. In short, gifts meant to honor the Savior were instead used to glorify the arrogant. Paul was compelled to put an end to this blasphemy once and for all. And he addressed the misuse of spiritual gifts in what is now known as the **12th chapter in the book of 1st Corinthians**. This section of his letter begins with the statement; **"Now concerning spiritual gifts brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware." (1 Corinthians 12:1 CSB).**

The Greek word for "spiritual gifts" is *Charisma*, which quite literally means "Grace Gifts". What Paul was trying to impress upon the Corinthians was that spiritual gifts are freely given to every Believer (**vs. 7**). The gifts are a complete act of Grace. In short, the Holy Spirit has endowed all who follow Christ, with a spiritual gift meant to honor Christ. They were not intended to make the Believer feel in any way superior to anyone else. Rather, they were given to allow the Believer to function as a productive

member of the church. God, in His wisdom, wanted each of His children to feel needed and to belong. In a world where multitudes of lost people all possess a desire to belong to something, God, through the death of His only Son, made a way for everyone to be connected. Not only did He give us grace to be saved, he also gave us "Grace Gifts" to give us purpose. In Christ, EVERYONE is relevant, and EVERYONE is necessary! Do you feel unneeded and irrelevant? Give your life to Jesus and find your true identity!

If I could be successful in only one aspect of the ministry, I believe that I would choose to be able to convince people that they will, in fact, only find their true identity; their "reason for being", the meaning of life, as it were, in the person of Jesus Christ. God created us all to be unique. People are much like snowflakes. No two are exactly alike. *The Bible* teaches us that God knows all about us, before we are ever even born (**Jeremiah 1:5**). God always has a plan for every life, but that plan will never take form until a person who was born once is born again. Please allow me to explain.

When a person is born in the ordinary way, that individual was uniquely designed by The Creator-God of the Universe. *The Bible* says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (**Psalm 139:14**), meaning that God Himself designed us with a specific purpose in mind. Talk about meaning, it doesn't get any more meaningful than that! When a person has been designed by God, he or she is born with certain abilities. Some are creative, some analytical, others are more practical and prudent, and so on. These people can function in society, but they can never realize their true potential until they are reborn in Christ. When a person is saved, by the Grace of God, they are then, and only then, given their second set of abilities, known as spiritual gifts. In short, we are born with talents, and then born again with spiritual gifts. When the two sets of these God-given abilities are combined to be used for kingdom work, the person to whom they have been given finds his/her meaning of life!

What a tragedy it is for those in this world who never truly know who they were meant to be, because they never experience this reality that is only found in Christ Jesus. The "Grace Gifts" given upon salvation complete us as God's workmanship. In Christ, we serve our true purpose on this earth until the day He returns, and we are made fully complete. Until that day comes, every Believer can find true satisfaction in life, by knowing exactly why we are here. We combine our talents with our spiritual gifts to make an everlasting difference in this fallen world, and in so doing, **we bring honor and glory to God**. If anyone should ever ask you, "What is the meaning of life?"; you now have the answer!

As Christians, not only are we obligated to both discover and use our spiritual gift(s), but we are also accountable to use them correctly within the Body of Christ. The shameful misuse of spiritual gifts at Corinth should ever serve as a reminder to us to prayerfully examine our motivations as we endeavor to carry out our specific responsibilities within the church. ***God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6 CSB)***. So, we must never take the "Grace Gifts" that we have received and use them to selfishly exalt ourselves.

All of us can remember back to our high school days, when a student with wealthy parents was given a fancy new car to drive to school during their senior year. I can still recall how these "lucky" individuals would make the rest of us feel less than privileged, as they bragged upon the countless features and extras on their fancy cars. In my day, it was luxury itself to have an eight-track tape player in the car! Remember those? If the song was more than three minutes long, there would be an audible pause and click in the middle of the music to allow the song to continue on the next track!! My how the times have changed... but I digress. Regardless of the technology, those who had special privilege should never have lorded it over the rest of us, but many were just unable to resist the temptation.

My first car was a beat up station wagon, so I never really had the opportunity to boast, when it came to my method of transportation. Come to think of it, my first car was a pretty effective tool for teaching me humility at an early age. The real truth of the matter was that none of us actually earned or deserved those first cars. They were given to us by our parents (if you worked to pay for your first car, then the exception is duly noted). We didn't have any right to brag, because we had nothing invested. We were merely the recipients of our parents generosity, or in some cases, they had simply grown weary of driving us themselves. Either way, the point of the car analogy is that spiritual gifts (much like our first cars) were *given* to us. God gave us these gifts freely, and we are obligated to use them for their

intended purpose; to strengthen and encourage the church. They are not intended to give us bragging rights, because, quite frankly, we had nothing to do with getting them. *All the glory belongs to our Father in Heaven.*

Paul admonished the Corinthians that spiritual gifts were a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (**vs. 7**) given for the common good. The word manifestation is used here to describe a tangible "proof" of The Holy Spirit's residency within every Believer. Every Christian has a spiritual gift (**"Now to EACH one..." vs.7**). A ship's "*manifest*" is a list of every item aboard the ship. In a similar fashion, a spiritual gift is proof that a Believer truly has The Holy Spirit within him. There is then no such thing as a Christian without one or more spiritual gift(s).

As stated previously, the gifts are given for "*The Common Good*". The Greek for this phrase literally means "*to be borne together*". In other words, our spiritual gifts are to be used in conjunction with the spiritual gifts of other Believers to carry "the load" of the church. I am reminded here of *The Old Testament* priests, who so diligently carried The Ark of The Covenant by placing poles through its rings and bearing the burden together, so that the children of Israel could follow after God. We, the church, are also a "royal priesthood" (**1 Peter 2:9**). And we have been chosen to "bear together" the burden of Christ's great commission, the "*New Covenant*" of the gospel, so that others can follow after God.

We all not only have different talents, but also different gifts. When these are combined in a genuine effort to serve Christ and each other, then the church is lacking in nothing to carry out its mission in our world. God specifically designs the church body to carry out the church's mission. As the old saying goes; "*God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called*". When the church functions as it should, everyone has a purpose, and everyone has value.

Remember, Jesus' last prayer, before He went to the cross (found in **John 17**). ***"I have given them (the church) the glory You have given Me, so that they may be one as We are One. I am in them and You are in Me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me."*** (**John 17:22-23 CSB**). It is the desire and prayer of our Lord, that we become one with Him, as well as, with other Believers, and that we share the message of the gospel with the world by working together with our talents and spiritual gifts to bring Him glory! That is the mission of the church, and anything less would be a disgrace to the One Who was willing to give His very life to see it accomplished. It is with this in mind that we begin to carefully examine the proper use of our spiritual gifts within the Body of Christ.