

1 CORINTHIANS 12.1-11

Concerning Spiritual Gifts (1)

Intro: “Now concerning spiritual gifts,” lets us know that Paul is again addressing a matter brought up in their letter (see 7.1). Paul addresses this topic over the course of chapters 12 - 14.

While it would seem that a variety of questions were raised, Paul spends most of his time addressing their attitudes concerning these gifts. Before looking at what Paul says in these chapters, let’s spend a little time reviewing some things revealed about spiritual gifts in Acts.

1. The Spirit was promised to the apostles (Acts 1.8). Note John 14.26; 15.26-27; 16.13. The Spirit both revealed the word to them, and confirmed it through miraculous signs (see Mark 16.20).
2. Acts 2 is significant in that two different “givings” of the Spirit are seen.
 - » We see that the apostles received the promised Spirit in Acts 2.1-4 and miraculous signs accompanied this baptism of the Spirit.
 - » However, the “gift of the Holy Spirit” is offered to any and all who would repent of their sins and be baptized into Christ (vs. 38). I.e. the restoration of man’s spirit to its original condition, created in the image of God. See also Ezekiel 36.24-27; John 3.5.
3. Significantly, although ALL Christians received the “gift of the Holy Spirit” at baptism, ONLY the apostles performed miraculous signs during the early days of the church. See Acts 4.33; 5.12. The first non-apostles to perform these works were Stephen and Philip, men whom the apostles had laid their hands on (Acts 6.6,8; 8.6). That the passing on of these gifts could occur through the hands of an apostle only is seen in Acts 8.14-18.
4. Other than Acts 2.1-4, we read of only one occasion where the Spirit “baptized” by someone: the first Gentile converts (Acts 10.44-48).

That this was unusual is evident from the text and was for the purpose of showing that the Gentiles were accepted by God, see also Acts 11.15-18.

5. Summing up: although every Christian received the gift of the Holy Spirit, most did not have miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

Returning our attention back to Corinth, it is clear that several in the church possessed miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Presumably, Paul had laid his hands on some of them during his 18 month stay in Corinth. Many, probably most, of the Christians in Corinth did not possess these gifts. Furthermore, it is evident from chapter 14 that those with the gift of tongues were arrogant about their ability, deeming their gift as greater than others (including prophecy). So, there was yet another situation where the Corinthians’ pride and arrogance could be manifest. So, Paul addresses the matter in the following way:

- » All gifts come by the same Spirit (ch 12)
- » Without love, no gift is profitable (ch 13)
- » The proper use of the gifts (ch 14)

VSS. 1-3, THEY HAD ALL FOLLOWED THE SAME SPIRIT

1. This is a difficult passage, but it makes more sense when we keep in mind that Paul is contrasting their former life as pagans (vs. 2) with their current life in Christ (vs. 3).
2. Their former life was characterized by worshipping idols. These idols were deaf and dumb, Psalm 115.4-7; Isa 41.21-24, yet they had been led astray into worshipping them.
3. But now, they confess “Jesus is Lord”, i.e. the only Lord (8.6) with all authority and deserving of absolute allegiance (Matthew 28.18). The only way anyone can make such a confession is “by the Holy Spirit.” No, this is not a direct inner-working of the Spirit that convicts some and not others (as Calvin would assert).

Rather, the Spirit revealed and confirmed the message of Christ, it is only by His work that any could or would proclaim Jesus as Lord. The rest of the world, those who would say “Jesus is accursed” have clearly not been led by the Spirit, that is they have not accepted His testimony about Jesus.

4. Paul’s point is a simple one: the saints in Corinth had a shared experience. They had all been pagans, they had all worshipped the mute idols. If they had not followed the Spirit, they would be in the condition of calling Jesus accursed. But they had all followed the Spirit’s teaching, they had all come to the confession that Jesus is the Christ. They were united in their following the Spirit in salvation, now they needed to be united in the exercise of the Spirit’s gifts.

VSS. 4-11, ALL GIFTS WERE FROM THE SAME SPIRIT

1. These verses enumerate a variety of Spiritual gifts. The term for “gift” in vs. 4 is charisma. “The -ma suffix denotes the result of an action, and in this case, charisma refers to the results of grace—the free gift.” (Garland). Significantly, this term is not limited to miraculous gifts (see Romans 5:15-16; 2Cor 1:11; Romans 1:11-12; 1Cor 1:4-7).
2. However, keep in mind that the true emphasis of this passage is not on the variety of gifts, but on the SAME SPIRIT that gives the gifts. Thus, there should be unity among saints that exercise a variety of gifts.
 - » Note the unity found between the Spirit, the Lord and God (vss. 4-6)
 - » “Services’ (ministries NASB) match nicely with the Lord’s ministry and with his self-sacrifice proclaimed in the Lord’s Supper, which was just discussed in the previous section (11:17–34). ‘Workings’ (effects NASB) are appropriate to God (Gal. 2:8; Eph. 1:11; 3:20; Phil. 2:13) and imply that all things accomplished in the church are effected by God’s power.” (Garland)
3. Vs. 7 is key to the whole chapter. You will note two main points:

- » Each gift is a manifestation of the Spirit. The gifts are many and varied, but their source is the same Spirit.
 - » The purpose of each gift is the common good!
4. Vss. 8-10 enumerate many of the gifts. A few notes on them:
 - » You will note that the “word” is listed first (vs. 8), while “tongues” come last (vs. 10). While Paul does not say so here, he makes it clear in chapter 14 that the giving of the word is superior to speaking in tongues. However, the Corinthians had it backwards.
 - » What is meant by “faith” in vs. 9 is uncertain. That Paul is not talking of the faith required of every believer is clear from the words “to another” that a disciple might have this gift as opposed to others. “It is possible that “faith” stands at the head of this next grouping of gifts because they depend especially on the power of faith (Edwards 1885: 313). Healings and miracles plainly are related to faith (Matt. 16:8; 21:21; Mark 5:34; 10:52; 11:2; Luke 17:5–6; Acts 3:16; 27:25; Heb. 11:29–30; James 5:15), and Paul says that prophecy is given “in proportion to faith” (Rom. 12:6). We may assume that discerning the spirits also takes root in faith.” (Garland)
 - » That these gifts disappeared soon afterwards is accounted in history. “Chrysostom lamented that the passage is obscure on account of the cessation of the gifts, ‘being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place’” (Leon Morris)
 5. Paul brings us back to the main point in vs. 11: all of these gifts come from “one and the same Spirit”! Thus any credit belongs to the Spirit, and not to the individual. Furthermore, while the Spirit gives all of the gifts, each Christian only received some of the gifts. Throughout, the Spirit is emphasized over the individual saints, showing why they should be humble in exercising the gifts they had received.