



Have you ever known someone who was very gifted in something, but then when you tried to get to know them, they weren't very kind. I recall a time when I was asking a more well-known theologian a question via email. Their response to me began with something like, "The only reason I'm answering you is because my friend asked me to do this, but I don't generally have time to respond to questions like this." Ok, I get it. He's busy. He has to lay out the expectations. But, wow, that sounded rude.

Let me ask you a question. Would you like to have a church filled with talented people who aren't personable or would you rather have people who care about people and aren't *as* talented? I imagine we'd all want people who are loving. We'll sacrifice talent for love because *love* goes a long way. That said, we still recognize we need some type of ability, right? We wouldn't have someone pastor who has no idea how to teach. They may be loving in action, but if they don't know how to study or proclaim the truth, we would all recognize they should do something else, right? How do we answer these tensions? Paul addresses this in these chapters we're studying now. What we discover is that the Corinthians seemed to emphasize the abilities above love. Like so many other scenarios, the Corinthians viewed gifts as a status symbol. If you had "supernatural" gifts then you were more spiritual. If you had normal gifts, you were just a "normal" Christian. Paul comes in to correct this mindset as well. And in these verses, Paul gives us the *correct* view of gifts within the church. In the following weeks, we'll hear more of Paul's corrective on the basis of the right view of gifting.

These verses provide us with foundational truths regarding gifts in the church. And the foundational truths are founded in the character of God himself. Read verses 4-6 with me again: 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.¹

If I can word it this way, we see *unity* and *diversity* in God, and God designs for his church to put this on display as well. When Paul says "the same Spirit," and "the same Lord," and "the same God," Paul is showing us that the Spirit is God and that the Father and Son are God. But, as I use the word diversity, some could have concerns because our current culture can either redefine or misapply diversity. When I say "diversity," I am saying that there is a God-given *variety*. The word "varieties" in this text has the idea of diverse in its meaning. However, diversity for diversities' sake is problematic. God's intention is *unity* in the midst of diversity. This shines forth his *triune* nature: God in Three Persons. This is foundational in understanding gifts in the church: there is variety and there is oneness.

With this backdrop, I believe the main idea of these verses is that **God the Spirit gives gifts to each believer for the local church's common good**. As I was trying to think through the idea of spiritual gifts, I thought about an unhelpful way to view spiritual gifts versus a helpful way. Imagine that you have a pizza. It's cut up in pieces. Some are different sizes. You may have different toppings on one side than

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:4-7.

another side. But everyone goes towards the pizza in order to take a piece and consume it for themselves. I don't eat your piece. You don't eat mine. You may have gotten a bigger piece and I a smaller one. But it's just consumed for our individual selves. That's how I think a lot of people think about spiritual gifts – including the Corinthians. Who got the biggest piece? "Look at how special I am because I got this." Or, "I feel so good about myself because I love this spiritual gift." But what if spiritual gifts are more like putting together a beautiful puzzle? We don't approach the table to take, we approach the table in order to put our piece in. We don't say, "Hey, look at how awesome my piece is. It's bigger than yours!" No. The goal is putting the puzzle together for the mutual encouragement of everyone. God gives gifts to each believer for the common good! Now, let's move through the text a little more. I'm going to take the main idea section-by-section:

1. God the Spirit. . .

The Holy Spirit is the One who is emphasized most in this text. Again, this is a necessary corrective. If you ever grew up in a church that talked much about spiritual gifts, how often did you hear people say, "Depend on the Spirit and watch him work his gifts through you?" Probably most of you simply took spiritual gift tests, and you trusted the spiritual gift test results. Honestly, that sounds so formulaic and doesn't seem very dependent on God.

Paul is urging the Corinthians, and all readers, to see the great glory behind gifts. God the Spirit is at work within God's churches! And while there are a variety of gifts, there's ONE Triune God behind all the gifts. The Father, Son and Spirit give these gifts *through* the working of the Spirit. This is an awesome reality. Jesus said that he had to leave so that the Spirit would come – and Paul shows us how the Spirit is actively at work in local churches, even our church, Ventura!

So, don't miss this point. Look at verses 4-11. The word "Spirit" is mentioned seven times in 8 verses. All this should get our eyes more focused on the Giver than on the gifts. The Spirit is One we worship. So, if in the talk about spiritual gifts you end up emphasizing your gifts more than the Spirit behind the gifts, you might be off-track. But if we understand this loving reality that God the Spirit is behind all gifts, we are humbled and amazed at *his* work! Now, let's go to the second point.

2. . . .gives gifts. . .

Interestingly, in verse 1, the English translation says "Now concerning spiritual gifts," and then in verse 4, we read that there are "varieties of gifts." What's interesting about this is that the Greek word for "spiritual gifts" in verse 1 is a completely different word than the word used for "gifts" in verse 4.

In verse 1, in the Greek, the word "gift" isn't even there. The only word that shows up is the word for "spiritual." This verse could be translated, "Now concerning the spiritual" or "Now concerning the one who is spiritual." The idea seems to be that the Corinthians were asking about how spirituality related to gifts that people seemed to have in the church. They were viewing spiritual gifts as a badge of honor. But I love what one commentator says, "**These gifts are not given as a sign that the recipients are especially spiritual or have received a super-sized portion of the Spirit. The Spirit distributes the gifts according to his sovereign purposes. . .**" (Garland, p. 574).

The Spirit gives, but not in order to show who's more spiritual. Now, how do we know this? Paul's verbiage in verse 4. The word Paul uses for "gifts" in verse 4 is the word from which we get the English word for "grace." If you mark in your Bible, maybe you want to write "grace gift" to emphasize that the

gifts are purely of grace. Now, isn't that redundant? Aren't all gifts of grace? No. Recently, I won a gift card from my children's orthodontist office. But how did I win it? We referred someone there, and our name went into a bowl. Even though the gift card was a gift, I had to do something to even have the potential of getting it. Is that how the Spirit is with our gifts? Does he say, "Well, you have to do this or that and then maybe I'll give you a chance?" NO! This word Paul uses here emphasizes *grace*, and grace is apart from any of our works. The Spirit doesn't give because we're so amazing. He gives because he's so amazing.

This is in line with the gospel message itself. Remember that all of 1 Corinthians, even the topic of spiritual gifts, must fall under Paul's main emphasis of this letter. He determines to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and him crucified. What do we learn in the gospel? Are we reconciled to God because we're great? Are we forgiven of our sins because we have proven how sorry we are? No. Jesus died on the cross and took the punishment we deserved. He took it on himself, and then by grace alone, he awakened many of us to his goodness and grace! He forgave us. All we did was turn to him and say we couldn't save ourselves at all! And he rescues. Well, Paul now moves on and says it's the same with our spiritual gifts. We couldn't earn them. You and I have gifts at the sovereign pleasure of God. He has given you gifts and me gifts according to his pleasure. This is emphasized all the more in verse 11, when Paul writes, "¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he will."² Just as God saves according to his will, he gives gifts according to his will. It's all on the basis of grace. And since it's on the basis of grace, we can rejoice!

I say we can rejoice because I've heard stories of people in more extreme charismatic circles and they spoke about how almost-despairing they were when they didn't have the "gift of tongues." They viewed it as the supreme/essential gift for spirituality. What was wrong with them? But then they learned that the Bible doesn't teach that. Gifts are given at God's will, and there are a variety of gifts! But may we never highlight certain gifts above others. That only breeds disunity – and it dishonors our Triune God.

So, let's remember God the Spirit gives the gifts. Now, you can say, "What are these gifts?" Paul says these gifts are also "service" and "activities," in verses 5 and 6. I appreciate the definition Ben Jacques gave last week. "**Spiritual gifts are ministries or abilities that the Holy Spirit gives to Christians for the edification of the church**" (Lexham Bible Dictionary). Spiritual gifts are truly gifts when they minister to and build up the church. Gifts aren't just abilities and talents that we naturally have, but they are gifts when they actually help other people grow in becoming more like Christ.

Listen carefully, if you are helping others within the local church to grow to become more like Christ, the Spirit is working through you! But you could say, "Yeah, but I'm just not as gifted as this other person." Hold on! Paul says that God is the one who is empowering every gift. And then in verse 7, we read, "⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."³ Notice here that every gift is a manifestation of the Spirit. Think about Corinth for a moment. If they highlighted certain gifts above others – as more spiritual – what were they saying about the Spirit? Essentially they were saying that they liked certain things about the Spirit more than other things. But does the Spirit have any deficiencies? No! So, if you ever say, "But I wasn't given the cooler/more amazing/more spiritual gifts," you're falling into the Corinthian trap! **Every gift is a manifestation of the Spirit – and the Spirit is eternally glorious in every manifestation of himself through each grace-gift.** Therefore, we should highly appreciate every gift!

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:11.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:7.

Now you might be saying, “OK, so what grace gifts does the Spirit give?” Let’s read verses 8-10: ⁸For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.⁴

Right here you could think this is an exhaustive list, but if you compare spiritual gift lists, you find no two are identical. This indicates that the emphasis of gifts isn’t on the gifts themselves, but actually on the Giver and also the purpose of the gifts. For a little while I thought this sermon would include me giving definitions of what each gift here means, but then I realized that Paul’s point is *not* the gifts. While he spends three verses explaining various gifts, he does it to emphasize another point. There is clearly a variety of gifts, but the emphasis of Paul is on the one and same Spirit! So, if you were hoping to have me define what prophecy means or tongues or utterance of knowledge, you’re going to be disappointed. I will say that in this list, we do see gifts that seem much more “super-natural” and others that seem more normal. But Paul makes clear that we shouldn’t downplay any of these – nor should we feel more loved or appreciated by God if we had one gift over another.

In some of my conversations with people about gifts and abilities, they talk as though they’re a second-class citizen because God hasn’t given them a certain gift. As they talk, it kind of reminds me of the days in PE class when the teacher picked two kids to pick teams. How many of you were like me and picked towards the end? It was always a humbling experience. And I wonder how many think that God works this way with his gifts. He divvies out gifts and he scraped the bottom of the barrel to at least give you something. I hope you look at me right now as I say this to you, “That’s a lie! That’s a Corinthian, fleshly, Satan-induced lie!” If you are helping people to look to Jesus and love the Lord, you have been gifted and empowered by the Spirit! He is working in you. Whether you are preaching, teaching, raking leaves, taking someone out for coffee, and serving through all sorts of ways – if the Spirit is working in you, you are graced by the Spirit!

But you could say, “But Pastor Timothy, I’m not sure I’m really graced by the Spirit.” That leads to the next point:

3. . . . to each believer. . .

Verse 6 says that God “empowers them all in everyone.” How much more specificity do you need? God empowers all gifts in *everyone*. Then, in verse 7, “To each [person] is given the manifestation of the Spirit. . .” Every believer is graced by the Spirit. Now, you could say, “But I don’t see it.” Then ask others around you how they’ve been drawn closer to Jesus through you. You know, I can think of the elderly woman in the church I grew up in. Her name was Rose White. She was a short-Italian woman. She kissed all the boys on the forehead and told us every week that she prayed for us. She didn’t have much money. She didn’t have much theological training, but she loved, absolutely loved, Jesus. I imagine God worked many things in the lives of many people through this woman’s love and prayers. I can think of Ruthie Mayou. She was a member for decades here at Ventura. She loved the people, smiled, wrote cards for birthdays and anniversaries. She sang in choir and played the organ. Her simple sweetness and care affected so many of us – even to this day. What would we term her gift? Did she have the amazing tongues or gift of prophecies? No. She had the amazing gift of love and care through writing cards and

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:8–10.

smiling. She manifested the Spirit. I think of the perseverance of her husband, Mark, who amazing makes it to gather with the church regularly in the midst of his physical trials. I think of people who can quickly fix things for people and while they're doing it, they express the self-sacrificial love of Jesus.

You see, the point isn't *what* your gift is. The point is that the Spirit is working through you to help others see and savor Jesus. This leads me to the final point:

4. . . for the local church's common good.

A while back I was an article written by a Christian satire website that said something like, "Man confesses that his spiritual gifts align with only the things he loves to do." This seems to be how many people talk about spiritual gifts, but how does this align with Jesus Christ and him crucified? I mean, Jesus expressed his love for the Father and for us – but does that mean Jesus never sacrificed? Absolutely not! Because Jesus loved, he sacrificed. This is how we also should view our grace-gift of the Spirit to us.

Ok, so it's my confession time. All of what I said leads me to make this statement: I don't like spiritual gift tests. I think the gift tests focus more on the gifts than on Lord and his people. Now, as I say this, some of you might struggle with what I'm saying. Others of you might be thinking, "Well, how am I ever going to know what my gift is?" First, the Spirit himself is the gift. Second, the Spirit will manifest himself in and through you *as you serve the local church*.

The point of Paul is that the Spirit is manifesting himself in different ways. But verse 7 is explicit: ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.⁵ The purpose of the Spirit is the common good. But the common good of who? As we look forward in the following verses, the context is clearly the local church. Who are the Christians we are most responsible to help grow in Christ-likeness: those with whom we've committed. It's like asking a Father, "what children are you most responsible to care for?" Answer is your own. So, Ventura, think about this. Paul is emphasizing the privilege, responsibility and sacrifice that the Spirit gives to each one of us. You and I are to be members of one another for the common good. I don't just think about those things I love to do most and only do those things. I remember when I was in college and the President of the University said to those training to be pastors: If you are too good to change a toilet, you shouldn't ever be a pastor! He's right. Because why would I pastor if it isn't based in love for others?

So, how can you discern the Spirit's manifestation in you? The only way you can see it is if you actually serve people within the body of Christ. Now comes my question: How are you serving people in this local church? How are you sacrificing? How are you loving and caring for one another? This is when you can see the Spirit at work. And as you serve and sacrifice, you might discover there are certain abilities that he has especially empowered you to do. But don't spend your time figuring out your gift. Spend your energies truly loving and caring for others – then you may discover your special gifting.

The point isn't you. The point is the glory of God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. The purpose of God's work through you is the growth of the local church. Are we on mission together, Ventura? Are we truly pursuing Jesus together by exalting God and edifying the church? I pray so.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:7.

If we live in line with this mission and rejoice in the Spirit's sovereign freedom to manifest how he wills, we won't care so much *what* our gift is. Instead, we will rejoice in *every gift* given through each person.

This reminds me of an illustration I heard years ago when a man was speaking at the funeral of his mother. He compared his mother and father, saying that his father was a leader. His father was well-known by many. His mother was often in the background, but her background work was absolutely vital. Where his father was like a chandelier, his mother was a night-light. He went on to say, in the night, you don't want a chandelier on in the hallway. The night light comforts you if you're scared of the dark. It can help guide you if you need to walk somewhere. It's subtle. It's necessary.

Now, if I can take the illustration further, a chandelier has a purpose, too. It's beautiful. It shines for many people. Then we can talk about spotlights or candles. Every form of light has its purpose, and we appreciate them all. There's a variety of candles. But the point is *light*. With us as Christians, we are all lights who reflect the light of Jesus in various ways. May we not wish to be a chandelier or a spot light if we are a nightlight. But let's not focus on what kind of light we are as much as focus on the Light, who is Jesus. And together, let's pray that we would depend on the Spirit – looking to him to grace us however he wills. Let's pray that we're obedient to him and encouraging others to look to Jesus. And, if you're sitting here today saying, "I'm not connected with other Christians in the local church, I urge you to do so. You're missing out. You're not experiencing the glorious privilege of expressing the Spirit to believer with whom you've committed." Let's together pursue the Lord.

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