

## 8,7,25 1 Cor. 12, Spiritual Gifts

Since chapter 12 has one primary theme, I'm going to begin by simply familiarizing everyone with what's in the chapter so we can all have an overview in mind before we look at what the application of all this would be for us individually.

And as with much of what Paul instructs the Corinthians about, this is not difficult to understand, we probably learned something about spiritual gifts a long time ago. But the implications of the principles *behind* Paul's listing of gifts to our daily lives are extremely important.

(1 Cor. 12:1-3) Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these voiceless idols, however you were led. Therefore, I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Before I go on – How messed up would a group of people have to be for Paul to need to explain to them that when someone is cursing the Lord, that person isn't "speaking as led by the Holy Spirit"?

I know that one of the biggest questions people have about spiritual gifts is "what gift do I have?" And there are two reasons this matters to us:

1st) As we saw in our study of 1 Cor. 3, the use of our gift is what will be examined and evaluated at the Bema Seat.

And 2nd) We all want to believe that our lives have value in contributing to the growth and health of the Body of Christ.

In the past we've touched on the answer to the first question about identifying our gift, but we'll need to refresh our memory of that in *this* context to make sure we know where to go from here.

Some of the spiritual gifts are listed in 1 Cor. 12 and as 1 Pet. 4:10 tells us; "*As each one* has (past tense) received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Our gift is our stewardship – our calling.

But one of the most important things to remember is that we don't have to be able to *label* our gift; we just need to grow spiritually and let the Lord define our lives in a way that what we've been given will eventually surface in service to others.

The gift we have received from the Lord is not determined by what *we* decide or by what *others* tell us we should do.

As with all things that matter most in this life, the exercise of our spiritual gift has to come from spiritual growth- meaning that the service we do is to be the expression of who we are becoming in Christ. As we grow and our spiritual personhood begins to take shape, our unique calling will also begin to take shape in our thoughts and even our emotions.

So, when you walk into a Church, or into any fellowship of believers, you will be seeing things and desiring things in a way that are going to be, to some extent, unique to you.

If someone with the gift of evangelism walks in, he will want to know whether this fellowship is doing what they can to reach the lost; and he will be more than willing to offer any support he can give to help make that happen. If a pastor or teacher comes in, he's going to want to find out whether the people are growing in their understanding of God's Word. And like the evangelist, he would be willing to help with that.

A person with the gift of helps will be looking around to see who needs what in terms of material needs or comfort or encouragement. These are the things that tug at his heart in a Church, just as reaching the lost does for the evangelist and spiritual advance does for the teacher.

So, let's look at what each gift means in the original language, and as we do, pass what we see through the grid of how our gifts often match our burden for certain needs in the Church. Also keep in mind that I believe Paul's intent wasn't to provide a comprehensive listing of all possible gifts. As we'll see in chapter 13, there are more important things to consider than being able to put a label on our gift.

So, we'll start with vs. 8, the "word of wisdom" and "the word of knowledge". The way "wisdom" is used in both the Old and the New Testament relates to presenting Biblical truth in a way that *applies* that truth to real life situations. The emphasis on

wisdom is on the ability to move what's taught beyond accurate doctrine to life-application.

"Knowledge" normally refers to facts – specific and true. But since this is a supernatural gift, the assumption is that this knowledge is something the person had not learned or memorized. The New Testament hadn't been completed when Paul wrote this, so there was a constant need for the Holy Spirit to bring revelation concerning God's plan and purpose to His people.

I suppose it should be mentioned what the word for knowledge ("Gnosis") does *not* refer to. An author named Kistemaker explains it like this;

Some Charismatics or Pentecostals view the word of knowledge and word of wisdom as gifts of the Holy Spirit that enable a believer to give revelation regarding a decision or situation. Those who use these gifts in that way will often say something to the effect of, "I have a word from the Lord for you." In doing so, they claim to be speaking on behalf of God and claim that their words are to be strictly obeyed.

That's not what's "gnosis" is at all. It's possible that Christians who have a gift of "wisdom" and who can see *applications* of God's Word to situations others might not see, can give their advice; but it shouldn't be placed on the level of "thus saith the Lord". Only the scriptures have that authority.

In vs. 9 we have faith & healing. This wouldn't be the faith we all have for salvation or for endurance in trusting the Lord for our spiritual growth. I'm going to use Charles Hodges for the gift of faith;

It is generally supposed to mean the faith of miracles to which our Lord refers in Matt. 17:19, 20 and also the apostle in 1 Cor 13:2; "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,". But to this it is objected, that the gift of miracles is mentioned immediately afterwards as something different from the gift of faith.

Others say it's that faith which manifests itself in miracles, in healing, in prophecy, and in discerning of spirits. But then it is nothing peculiar; it is a gift common to all, whereas it is intended to be distinguished from them, just as they are from each other. In the absence of distinct data for determining the nature of the faith here intended, it is safest, perhaps, to

adhere to the simple meaning of the word, and assume that the gift is a *higher measure* of the ordinary grace of faith. Such a faith as that which enabled men to become confessors and martyrs, and which is so fully illustrated in Heb. 11:33–40. This is something as truly wonderful as any gift of miracles.

A person with the gift of healing, if they are operating in the guidance and filling of the Spirit, can heal as part of God’s purpose for the one healed and for the glory of Christ. When we studied John we saw that this happened often.

Vs. 10 adds the gift of miracles, which would include healing, but also casting out demons (Acts 16), causing blindness (Acts 13) and even raising the dead (Acts 9). So, this gift is more comprehensive than the gift of healing.

Vs. 10 also mentions prophecy, tongues and interpretation of tongues, but I’m going to spend a significant amount of time on those gifts because the entire 14<sup>th</sup> chapter focuses on them.

“Discerning of spirits” is somewhat self-explanatory, but I found a good overview of this that we should consider;

Every born-again believer has a certain amount of discernment, which increases as the believer matures in the Spirit. In Hebrews 5:13-14 we read that a believer who has matured beyond using the milk of the Word as a babe in Christ is able to discern both good and evil. The maturing believer is empowered by the Spirit of God through the Scriptures to tell the difference between good and evil, and, beyond that, he can also distinguish between what is good and what is better. In other words, any born-again believer who chooses to focus on the Word of God is spiritually discerning.

However, there are certain believers who have the spiritual *gift* of discerning spirits—that is, the God-given ability to distinguish between the truth of the Word and the deceptive doctrines propagated by demons, or even the presence of demonic spirits themselves. We are all exhorted to be spiritually discerning (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1), but some in the body of Christ have been given the unique ability to spot the doctrinal “forgeries” that have plagued the church since the first century. This discernment does not involve extra-biblical revelation or a voice from God. Rather, the spiritually discerning are

so familiar with the Word of God that they instantly recognize what is contrary to it.

Finally, in 1 Cor. 12:27-28 Paul adds apostles, prophets, teachers, helps, & administrations.

The apostles were men chosen of God in the early Church and sent out to take the gospel to the known world and build up the churches that resulted from that outreach. Eph. 2:19-20 tells us that it was the “apostles and prophets” that laid the foundation of the Church.

You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.

There is disagreement on whether there are still apostles in action now since the word “foundation” is used to describe their ministry. I won’t debate that now; I don’t see it as crucial. I lean toward their cessation, but I would never want to limit what God might choose to do.

I would however be *very* dogmatic regarding their appointment. Paul makes it clear that to be a legitimate 1<sup>st</sup>. century apostle of Christ a man had to have seen Christ and been commissioned by Him personally. When the other 12 apostles questioned Paul’s apostleship, Paul explained what his credentials were in 1 Cor. 9:1, “. . . Am I not an apostle? Have I not *seen* Jesus our Lord?” We know when the 12 disciples saw Christ – they lived with Him for 3 ½ years. But Paul wasn’t even saved before our Lord ascended to heaven, so how could *he* claim this? Christ appeared to Paul, when he was Saul of Tarsus, and commissioned him on the road to Damascus in Acts 9.

The last three gifts sited are “teachers, helps, & administrations.”

According to Henry Brooks,

“To teach” (“didaskalos”) is to shape the will of the one being taught by the *content* of what is taught . He is one who provides instruction or systematically imparts truth. An effectual teacher is the one who turns our ears into eyes so that we can see the truth. A teacher affects eternity.

The word for “helps” means “To take hold of as by the hand figuratively to support from falling . . . strictly described a laying hold of; hence to help and offer assistance.”

I also need to briefly comment on “administrations”, because there are some nuances that are slightly different than our common usage. In the original this word means: “. . . a person gifted to ‘steer the ship’”. This is an expansion on that word from a Greek lexicon;

This gifted person is steering the ship through the dangerous waters of this fallen world system and guiding it towards the destination God has appointed for it. This meaning would suggest that most pastors have this gift, but it is not restricted to pastors. This gift includes actual guidance and control over the course of events related to a local Body. It goes without saying that this strategic position calls for close communication of the "pilot" on earth with the "Pilot" in Heaven via His Word and prayer.

Can you imagine what a genuinely Spirit-filled assembly would be like if all those in the assembly were utilizing their gifts for the benefit of each other? We'd see microcosms of the Book of Acts scattered throughout the world, not only getting the attention of the unbelieving community around them, but bringing incredible spiritual (and sometimes physical) health and growth to the Body of Christ.

You could go through all the lists and historical examples of Christian gifts and service you can find in the Bible and it will always be the same- your heart, your desires, your willingness to help, will likely match your spiritual enablement; because the Lord doesn't just give gifts to His people; He develops people over time by character, desire and ability shaping them into the kind of people who will exercise those gifts from a position of life and personality, not just from a place of expertise in a field of study. He's causing us *to become* what He wants us to do.

Our overall purpose in this life as we prepare for eternity is to bring Christ to the lost; use the spiritual gift God has given us to strengthen and build up the Body of Christ; and study to show ourselves approved of God by moving steadily from spiritual infancy to maturity.

Witnessing and the use of our spiritual gift make up the “service” part of our calling; spiritual advance gives *definition* to what we do, and spiritual growth determines the *effectiveness* of what we do.

Just like the Old Testament prophets, God uses everything in our lives to mold us into the incarnation or embodiment of the calling He has given us. Our gift doesn’t just identify what we do; it identifies who we are first; what we do flows naturally from who we become.

And, as to the *second* reason we want to know what our calling is, we’ve also talked extensively about the Bema Seat, so I don’t want to go back over that again now, other than to reiterate that the issue of whether we buried our talent or used it for the glory of Christ will be the primary issue examined at that event.

The whole issue of rewards or loss of rewards, and of sharing the throne of Christ, is based on what we’ve done with the stewardship the Lord has entrusted to us at Salvation. We see this same principle in the Jewish context of Matt. 25:23;

His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you *ruler* over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

In the next section, Paul focused on two things: The first is that the Holy Spirit decides and delegates each individual gift based on His infinite wisdom of what would work best in advancing the spiritual stature of the Body of Christ. He’s like a coach who decides what position each member of the team will have that will result in the best potential of winning games – *if* they all work together, each one doing his part.

(1 Cor. 12:4-11) There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one *for the profit of all* (remember that phrase) for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one

and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

As Watchman Nee describes it:

Each servant of the Lord has a measure of the sphere of work which God has apportioned to him; each believer has a divinely-appointed course to finish. If each one will stand in his post, do his share of work, and finish his appointed course, what a glory shall be seen!

And how can the church be established if each one in the church aspires to be a great pastor or a great evangelist or a great teacher? Ought we not walk in the course of the Lord's will? We should not aim at a great thing; we should stand instead in the place of God's choice. If He wants us to do a small work quietly, we are happy to do it. God does not seek "great talent"; He uses whoever is willing. May we all be willing to take our place under the divine appointment.

Our gift is primarily designed for service to others in the body of Christ. There may be characteristics of what we do that affect our relationship with unbelievers (especially evangelism) but as we saw when we studied the Judgment Seat, our evaluation at that event is based on our Christian service to one another with the goal of edifying or strengthening the Church.

Next, Paul's emphasis is on the *interdependence* of the members of Christ's body – just like in our own physical bodies, the only time things work well is when our Head is being obeyed by every member of our body. If any of our members decides to go rogue and do their own thing, the whole system collapses.

(1 Cor. 12:12-16) For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where



would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

So, again, whether we realize it or not, we definitely need each other. It will take as many of us as possible, doing what the Lord asks us to do, for the Church corporately to reach the goal God has for us;

(Eph. 4:15-16) Speaking the truth in love, (we) may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which each part does its share, causing the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

We don’t get there alone or by acting independently. “Each part” must “do its share”. The weakness and vulnerability of the Church is often due to the impersonal nature of the way contemporary Churches assemble. How can we meet each other’s needs if we have no idea what those needs are? This is another reason the Holy Spirit forced the Church into home fellowships for the first 300 years of Church history. The whole idea of mega-churches and massive temples came later and were never a part of God’s plan.

That doesn’t mean God can’t use large gatherings and buildings, it just means there’s going to be a significant limitation in genuine body life if those churches don’t provide a way for their members to develop close, personal relationships. A church can’t be truly healthy if only a few public spiritual gifts are in action.

To function both spiritually and effectively, the Body of Christ has to be personal, organic and committed to each other. That's difficult when the main focus of our Church services is on whatever is happening on stage.

In the last section of the chapter, Paul gives us a priority listing of gifts, which is summed up in (1 Cor. 12:31), by exhorting us to “earnestly desire the best gifts . . . “

Paul isn't saying that we, as individual believers, are to be seeking for certain gifts to be given to us personally; we all received whatever gift we have when we were saved. This verse should be translated “. . . desire *the use* of the “*most profitable*” gifts when you meet together in the corporate setting of the Church.

This is from G.G. Findlay's Expositor's Greek New Testament;

Carefully and luminously, Paul has set forth the manifoldness of the Holy Spirit's gifts that contribute to the common life of the Church. All are necessary, all honorable in their proper use; all are of God's ordination. The use of some of the gifts are, however, more desirable than others.

And William MacDonald adds this:

When Paul says: “But earnestly desire the best gifts,” he is speaking to the Corinthians as a local church, not as individuals. We know this because the verb is plural in the original. He is saying that as an assembly they should desire to have in their midst a good selection of gifts that edify. The best gifts are those that are most useful rather than those that are spectacular. All gifts are given by the Holy Spirit and none should be despised. Yet the fact is that some are of greater benefit to the body than others. These are the ones that every local fellowship should ask the Lord to raise up in the assembly.

Just to cite one obvious example – which would be the most valuable to have in action in a Church setting – the instruction of an Apostle, or someone speaking in tongues?

Also, we need to include Eph. 4:11-12;

He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastor-teachers (there's no “and” in the original, “pastor-teachers” is a compound word description of the person, and these are given) for the equipping of the saints for their work of ministry . . .

We've all received a gift, but that gift needs to be developed to the point where we are using it as spiritually mature vessels fit for the Master's use.

Eph. 4 is not a listing of spiritual gifts, but a listing of gifted *men* given to the Church. These are the ministries within the body of Christ that are the laborers Paul talks about in 1 Tim. 5:18 and 1 Cor. 9:14 who are worthy of their hire.

Most of the gifts in 1 Cor. 12 are distributed to the individual members of the Church to serve each other, and there is literally no one who does not have a spiritual gift for that purpose, but those cited in Eph. 4 are chosen to lay the foundation for what follows in that chapter – the *means* God has chosen to instruct the members of the Body of Christ about God's eternal purpose in Christ and how that purpose is to be realized through each of their unique ministries.

What I'd like to do now is read a quote I found that gives an excellent explanation of what spiritual service to the Church is really all about; it's from a commentary on Rom. 12:1 which says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Service is not, in the first place, something done. Service to God is not, in the first place, what we *do* for God, but, according to His Word, it is firstly what we *are* for God; that is, that we are for God as being completely the Lord's, and when we get there in truth, all the other problems or questions about service are resolved. We are not asked to decide what we will do, where we will go, how we will work. The one question that arises from the Lord's side is, Are you Mine? 'If so', He says, in effect, 'then I take it for granted I can do exactly as I like with you, and can get exactly what I want from you. You will have no quarrel with Me if I ask you to take a certain line, to follow a certain course, to go in a certain direction or stay in a certain place'. All that is settled in the initial and comprehensive thing, "present your bodies a living sacrifice". Any kind of question or argument or difficulty with the Lord as to the nature or form or direction of service represents some basic and root reservation as to our genuine subjection to the Lord. To have grasped the ground upon which this making of our bodies a living sacrifice unto the Lord; to have truly grasped the implications of that transaction, is to have settled once for all every other question that would ever arise.

Do not start off with the question of where or how you are going to serve the Lord, what you are going to do for the Lord, but see to it that the Lord has you completely and fully; that you can say that the mercies of the Lord have captured your heart. That you are in the place of full surrender and subjection to Him, for all time. You seek to be at the feet of your Lord, and all other questions about service will cease to exist. The Lord will be able to do as He likes and your life will be to His glory.

I'm sure you can see how incredibly important that is when we are considering anything related to what our gift is, or what our service to the Lord is meant to be.

As I said in the beginning, it isn't necessary to attach a label to what you do, but there may have been one or more of these ministries that tugged at your heart, because for anyone who has taken the ground of being a "living sacrifice" to God, the Holy Spirit will be at work developing a deep inner motivation and desire to meet certain needs in the Body of Christ. As we grow, He will give specific burdens for the people of God which are often indications of a supernatural enablement that would allow you to help lift that burden.

I'll share one other overriding principle that we have to keep in mind when we consider and pray about any activity we undertake in Christian service. As we've seen in numerous studies, all we do must spring from our relationship with Christ. In the area of spiritual gifts, it's especially important that we move *only* as we are abiding in Christ; there is no independent, self-seeking action in true, spiritual ministry. Ok, here's the principle behind that;

Abiding in Christ is the opposite of abiding in ourselves. To abide in ourselves is simply to try to do this working for the Lord, out from ourselves; asking the Lord to help us to do it. Abiding in Christ is simply doing everything, meeting everything as out from Christ. It is a sure ground. There is no need for question and reasoning: "Can it be done? Can I do it?" Or, "I am not sure about it." It can be done by the grace of God. The Lord Jesus has met everything that you or I will meet, and in all things has done what is needful. That strength is available to faith, and faith says, "Well, in myself the thing would be absurd, and to attempt the thing would be ridiculous; as to myself it would be folly to even contemplate it. But it can be done; I can meet this demand, and I can stand up to that one; I can go through with this, and I can

do that – as Paul said, 'I can do all things through Christ, Who strengthens me.'" It is what Christ is as our secret source of strength, of sustenance, and of nourishment that will accomplish the task at hand.

Finally, and I'll close with this, behind all that we've learned about gifts, stewardship and God's calling on our lives there is meant to be one thing above all others that drives us; the one thing that stands out in nearly everyone of our Lord's parables about servanthood - and that is *faithfulness*.

God shapes us into someone He can entrust with responsibility, and the specifics of that responsibility are defined and evidenced over time as we become what is essentially an incarnation of what we are meant to do. A gift is a person before it's a ministry.

Some time ago, when I was perusing Chuck Missler's website, I came across a copy of the following letter that was found in the room of an anonymous African martyr following his death. This is the mindset of someone the Lord can definitely trust to be faithful to the end.

I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His.

I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals. I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity.

I don't have to be right, first, recognized, praised, regarded, or honored. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power. My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear.

I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problems recognizing me—my banner will be clear!