

## **The Cross and Christian Community**

The Cross & Christian Gifts: The Spirit

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### **The Cross and Christian Gifts: The Spirit 1 Corinthians 12:1-13**

Let me ask you to open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 12. If you don't know where 1 Corinthians is, Paul wrote two letters to the church at Corinth, both found in the New Testament, the second major division in your Bible. Take a moment to look at the Table of Contents. Find the first letter. We're in 1 Corinthians 12.

Our faith family has been walking through this book of 1 Corinthians this year and allowing God to teach us. So we come tonight to 1 Corinthians 12. Let me read a portion of this chapter over you as you follow along, beginning with verse 1:

*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:1-3)*

Just a quick word of explanation right there. He's obviously talking about "with meaning" or "with intent", somebody that intends to curse Jesus or intends to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Jesus Himself said in Matthew's Gospel that there would be people who said, "Lord! Lord!", but they were not true disciples. So Paul's talking about people that mean this.

Verse 4:

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to 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. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:4-12)*

There are a handful of subjects in the Bible that don't need a ton of introduction. We just have a tendency to come to them with an element of interest. A lot of times, those subjects

are of interest to us because they've been so abused or maybe been so ignored in the church of Christ. Maybe most of us in this room have seen what looks more like a circus than a religious program on television at times. Many of us have had friends or family members tell us about a mystical experience—a spiritual experience—they had which they believe God had instigated and met them and led them to. There are a number of us in this room who would say we have seen the chaos that has been created by this particular issue in some churches, oftentimes splitting them wide open, dividing the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are a subject that we are interested in. And to be quite honest, we should be. As defined and practices by the modern church, I think it's safe to say that spiritual gifts are highly overrated. But, as described by the Bible, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, I think we need to recognize that spiritual gifts are sorely underrated. So we need to come to this subject.

I want us to jump right into it and I want to pick up on something Matt said a minute ago when he read from the book of Hebrews and talked about the Old Testament prophets. One of the things the Old Testament prophets looked forward to and told about was the messianic age, the last days, in which God would pour His Spirit out in unprecedented ways. He was going to put His presence in all of His children, men, women, boys and girls. When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost, he declared that that prophecy had been fulfilled. And now the limitless, boundless, eternal, all-powerful God dwells in weak, finite, ignorant men, women, boys and girls, who walk around in sin-infected bodies.

Now, I don't know if you've ever thought about it or not, but that is a train wreck waiting to happen. I mean, process that for a moment. The God of the universe—all of His power, all of His glory, all of His greatness, all of His might—takes up residence in a limited, finite, weak, frail creature of dust. No wonder there are problems when it comes to navigating the work of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives. It would just make sense. And this is part of the issue here in Corinth; this train wreck kind of happened. It doesn't have to happen; it doesn't always happen; but it happened here over this particular issue.

So when we come to the issue of spiritual gifts, we come with a realization how there is somewhat of a disconnect that we have to navigate with this big God dwelling in little vessels like us. And, if we're not careful, there can be some tension with some of that.

### **The truth about spiritual gifts...**

So let's start with some truth about spiritual gifts, some big picture kinds of things. We begin at this point right here: Spiritual gifts are easily misunderstood and misappropriated. We can understand that when we understand this seemingly disconnect between this big God and us small creatures. And it certainly happened here in Corinth.

There are a couple of things in verse 1 there that help us to understand there was a lot of things about spiritual gifts that they didn't get, just like there is so much about spiritual gifts that many Christians today don't get. One of them is just in the beginning, when Paul says, "*Now, concerning spiritual gifts...*" That takes us back to 1 Corinthians 7:1, where we discovered that the Corinthians had written a letter to Paul asking questions about a number of subjects. A big chunk of 1 Corinthians is Paul's answers to those questions.

This was one of those questions, one of the things they were asking about. There was stuff they didn't know or understand, and consequently, there were people in Corinth who were believing things about spiritual gifts that weren't true. So they were exercising spiritual gifts in a way that wasn't right.

Paul says, "...*I do not want you to be uninformed.*" (1 Corinthians 12:1) The implication is that they were uninformed. There was information that they didn't have and that information is what had gotten them off track. And it's always that way, isn't it? When we're lacking understanding from God, when we're lacking truth, when we're lacking right teaching, it has a tendency to send us off in directions in which we get messed up. That's exactly what was going on here in Corinth.

That leads us to a second truth: Spiritual gifts often cause disunity and division in the church. Whenever there is misinformation and misunderstanding and misappropriation, there are likely going to be people on different sides of these issues. That's going to create a schism. That's going to create division and disunity, and that's exactly what was going on here.

We see it implied right here in verse 1, and, if you look down at verse 25, you'll see Paul say there, "...*that there may be no division in the body...*" I'm talking to you about this. I'm teaching you so that this might not be there. We knew from the very outset of this book in 1 Corinthians 1 that there were divisions over all kinds of things. The Corinthian church was like a version of Christians gone wild. It apparently looked more like a WWE match sometimes than it did a religious gathering of people coming together. It was a mess! And they were at odds with one another.

When you think about it in this issue of spiritual gifts, there were phonies in the church at Corinth, imposters who were claiming to have manifestations from heaven that they really didn't have or that they had and were inspired from something other than spiritual resources. There was confusion in the church. There were people who were trying to exercise gifts simultaneously in worship gathering with other people exercising their gifts and it created chaos.

There were egos in the church, where there were people who were manifesting and displaying in flashy and showy ways some of the more sensational gifts like tongues. And then there was alienation in Corinth. There were people who didn't have those sensational gifts that were being pushed aside and belittled because they didn't have certain gifts. A lot of that created a lot of envy in the church at Corinth. There were people who wanted gifts they didn't have, and they longed to have those more sensational, more platform, more visible types of gift. And all of this created chaos in the church. It does that so often when there is misunderstanding that leads to misappropriation, ultimately causing division and disunity in the church.

Then, we come to one more: Spiritual gifts should be desired, discovered and developed. I hope some of you at that point are saying, "Are you kidding? After what we just said?" I mean, wouldn't you come to this place right here and think Paul would say, "Forget it! Lose the spiritual gifts thing. Go after things you can agree on, like missions and evangelism. This is not that big of a deal, so just move on and don't worry about it." And you know what? That is exactly what many Christians have done; it's what many churches have done. They've not only done it with spiritual gifts, they've done it with the activity of the Holy Spirit in all things. But Paul doesn't do that.

Look at this in verse 1, "...*I do not want you to be uninformed.*" In other words, "I don't want you to not have the information." Then he spends three chapters—1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14—informing them, teaching them, filling in the gaps and encouraging them to pursue these things; to desire them, discover them and develop them for the glory of God and the good of the body there at Corinth.

Just look down at verse 31 here in 1 Corinthians 12. He says, *"But earnestly desire the higher gifts."* Look over at 1 Corinthians 14:1: *"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts..."* Look at verse 12: *"So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church."* Then in verse 39: *"So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy..."*

You can't read these three chapters without understanding that Paul wasn't giving up on this. He said, "I want you to be informed. I want you to know this stuff." The Corinthians had gotten reckless, and they had driven off in a ditch. But instead of the Apostle Paul taking away their license, he helps them get back up on the road and get in the right lane and move ahead. This is why it's important for us to come to this place and study this.

### **The theology of spiritual gifts...**

So we come to 1 Corinthians 12 and what we have is really a big picture—a flyby, a 30,000 foot view, if you will—and Paul speaking into their curiosity and to their error and their division and their disunity in order to set them on a right path to pursue something that—listen, watch it now—was obviously incredibly important for their spiritual well-being. I want to show you why that is.

I think that anytime we come to the issue of spiritual gifts, there are really two big picture items that we have to keep in mind. One of them is the Spirit of God and the other is the church of God. I would submit to you that sometimes spiritual gifts are talked about, preached about, pursued, analyzed with not a lot of conversation about those two things—about the nature of the Spirit of God and the nature of the church of God.

Why is it important for us to get those? Because the Spirit of God gives spiritual gifts to the church of God for God's purposes. Paul tells us that in this chapter in somewhat of a brief, concise theology of spiritual gifts. So I want us to move from just some truths about spiritual gifts to a theology of spiritual gifts, and I want you to look at it in verses 12 and 13.

Now, let me tell you what's happening here. Verses 12 and 13 are serving as somewhat of a hinge on which a two-sided door is swinging. One side of that door is the Spirit of God; the other side of that door is the church of God. And we have the hinge right here—the theology, this concise treatment of the foundation of this thing that provides what we need to consider everything that's in this chapter and the coming chapter—to look at them through the right lens, to think rightly about spiritual gifts.

Most of you are familiar with the hinge that your door swings on. Those hinges have hinge pins in them that hold them to the door posts. And in these two verses, I think there are some hinge pins that we can use to understand spiritual gifts to a greater degree.

Here's the first one: Believers are immersed in and indwelt by God's Spirit. Both of those dimensions are noted in verse 13. He says, *"For in one Spirit we were all baptized..."* That's the word for "to dip under" and "to immerse." The Apostle Paul says that it's in one Spirit that we are all immersed in. Then he says, going down to the end of the verse, all of us—Jews and Greek, slaves and free—we were made to drink of one Spirit. That's internalization or indwelling. So you've got the baptism, which is the immersion, and then you have the drinking, which is the indwelling or the internalization.

Both of those are pictured in water baptism. Every time we put somebody under the water, we are picturing their death, burial and resurrection and the life of Christ. But we are also demonstrating this—we're picturing this—because this is what happened when you got

saved. When you came to know Christ, repented of your sins, placed your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit overwhelmed you. He got all around you, and He got inside you. He just completely took over.

And this is what Paul is describing right here and this is what we picture when we immerse somebody in water baptism. Now, if we really were being legalistic about it, we probably wouldn't hold your nose or let you close your mouth when we dunked you in the water. But we might lose some of you if we did that, so we'll not go there; we'll just keep doing it like we're doing it.

But I would pause and say in all seriousness to those of you that are here tonight without Christ: This is how you get the life of God that you were created to have back. This is how you get back to what you were created to be, not by being dunked in a pool of water, but by repenting of your sins and placing your faith in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for your sins and incurred the wrath of God on your behalf. Because when that happens, this is what God does to you. He immerses you in His life; He immerses you in His Spirit; and He puts His life through His Spirit inside of you to take up residence.

It's not a train wreck for God. He knows exactly what He's doing. A train wreck happens on our end most of the time, because we're uninformed, because we misappropriate how the Spirit works in our lives. But God completely knows what He's doing and He desires to do that in your life. If you've never repented of your sins and trusted Christ, I appeal to you: Do that tonight. Believers are immersed in and indwelt by God's Spirit.

That leads to something else—the second hinge pin—and that is that God's Spirit joins believers together to form Jesus' body. Don't miss this now. It just keeps getting better and better. God's Spirit joins believers together to form Jesus' body. When He overwhelmed you, when you came to know Him, He didn't just immerse you in Himself and fill you with Himself, but He made us one in doing that with each and every one of us.

I don't know if you noticed it or not, but in those two verses—verses 12 and 13—the word "body" is used four times. Three of those times it has the word "one" attached to it somewhere. See it in verse 12: *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..."*

This is what he's described. This is what the Spirit of God does. He immerses you; He indwells you, and in doing that to us as individual believers, He brings us together as one body. But watch this now. Listen. This is really important. It's not just any body. Did you see it? It's Jesus' body.

I don't know about you, but I read verse 12 and know what he's talking about here because I've read this before, but - *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body..."* You get to that point right there and I'm just hearing him say, "And so it is with the church." Or, at the very least, "And so it is with the body of Christ, which we know to be the church." But he doesn't say that. Look at what he says. *"...so it is with Christ."*

The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is describing the body of Jesus. And guess what? We're it. And he's not dealing with this in a mystical sense or invisible sense, where he's just simply saying, "Oh, you people at Brook Hills, you represent the body of Christ." Or, "You are some manifestation." No, he doesn't say this. He says the

Spirit immerses you as individuals. He indwells you as individuals. And when He does that with multiple individuals, He makes you one into the physical body of Jesus.

Now, I want to illustrate this for you. I didn't have any of you to baptize tonight, so I'm going to baptize a couple of cups as an illustration. I want you to picture this baptistery and the water in it as the Spirit of God. What Paul is describing here in verses 12 and 13 is the activity of believers being baptized in the Spirit of God, with the Spirit of God and in so doing, made to be one body. So let's pretend this is you—this blue cup. When you came to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you were immersed in the Spirit of God. And when you were immersed in, you were filled up with the Spirit of God. Then along comes another believer, this is me or the person sitting next to you. That person repents of sin and places their faith in Jesus Christ. That person now also is baptized in the Spirit of God and indwelt by the Spirit of God.

Now, I just want you to think about some of the things that are happening. The Spirit of God is transparent. The Spirit of God is a spirit—that's exactly what He is. But now believers are baptized into Him. They get all of the Spirit. Both of these cups are being touched by all of this body. Each of these cups is still a unique cup—like you are a unique individual—but now they have become part of the same body.

And if we brought a wheelbarrow full of cups in here tonight and dumped them over into this water to where it filled the surface—they were each immersed and each indwelt—do you know what would happen? The transparent water all of a sudden becomes a solid. It all of a sudden becomes visible. What was invisible is now made to be visible by individual members of the body of Christ that now have been made part of the same body.

Beloved, this is what God does. This is what He's done with you; it's what He has done with me. We are not some mystical representation, some pseudo-representation of the body of Christ. We have been formed into the physical body of Jesus. Now, just press pause and let that soak in for a moment. It completely changes the stakes here. It completely changes how we relate to one another—the importance that we place on spending time with one another, associating with one another, serving one another. It completely changes the stakes of a commitment to attaching ourselves to one another in covenant relationship.

This is not some mystical organization that is just some representation of what's really real out there. This is what God has chosen to do in His Spirit: Is make you and me together as one, as the physical representation—no, not in a mystical sense, but in a real, literal, physical sense—the real, physical body of Christ in this world.

And you know what happens? Believers then receive grace from God's Spirit to make Jesus' body work right. That's the third hinge pin. We receive grace and this is what spiritual gifts are - this is the word that's used for spiritual gifts in the Bible: "Grace gifts", "grace deposits". And we receive that from the Holy Spirit, who has immersed us and indwelt us and made us one. And we do that for this reason: To make Jesus' body work right in this world.

Now, be careful. That is not a suggestion that something is lacking in Jesus, and He needs your help with it. But I'll tell you what it is a suggestion of and that is that He has trusted you and me with how He looks in this world. That's it. And how we look as the body of Christ is all the world knows about this Jesus because it is all the world sees of this Jesus. That's by design and He's entrusted us with that stewardship. What an incredible thought! What an incredible thing! And whether or not Jesus' body works like it is supposed to—like

He has trusted us with, to live it out—whether or not is dependent upon our stewardship of these things called spiritual gifts.

Let me show it to you in this chapter. I don't know if you noticed when I was reading a moment ago how many times the word "Spirit" is used in the verses leading up to verses 12 and 13. There are nine times, starting with verse 3. It's used twice there, and then you come down to verse 4, and you see it used there and in verse 5 and verse 6, it's used a couple times. Nine times in verses 3-11 and guess what? The word "body" is never mentioned.

But then, you come on the other side of verses 12 and 13, and you will find the word "body" 15 times in the verses after verses 12 and 13. And you won't find the word "Spirit" one time. What do we draw from that? Well, probably a lot of things but at least this: Spiritual gifts are not an end in and of themselves, like so many Christians think they are. They are not the end game. End game is the Spirit of God working in and through His children to make Jesus' body work like it's supposed to and look like it's supposed to. That's end game.

So I would offer you this simple working definition:

Spiritual gifts are the supernatural ways that God's Spirit  
works through God's children  
to make God's Son look right.

That's our stewardship. That's the trust that we have from the Lord Jesus Christ. And He has given us spiritual gifts to make that happen, to make Him look right. So no wonder, whether it's through misinformation or whether it is through ignoring this subject or whatever the reason, when God's church comes to a place where it's ignoring this issue of spiritual gifts, and how the Holy Spirit works in and through our lives and gets off track, finds itself in the ditch, and there's disunity, disharmony and division in the body of Christ, no wonder the world turns its back. No wonder nobody wants to pay attention to the gospel because Jesus doesn't look right.

Paul comes to the Corinthians and says, "Let me fill in the gaps. Let me give you what you need to get back on the road." For us here at Brook Hills, I see this as a precaution, as a guard, to help us stay the course and stay on the road. And I trust along the way, for some that are part of our body who've not yet discovered how God's wired you to be a part of this journey in making Jesus' body look like it's supposed to look, that this would be a journey in which you find out who you are in Christ from a standpoint of service and ministry and from a standpoint of you're connected into this body that makes you much more than a spectator—a listener of sermons, a singer of songs—but an individual through whom the Spirit of God is working to accomplish this high calling.

### **The test for spiritual gifts...**

So, how do we know when we're looking at the Spirit, when we're seeing the Spirit, when we're sensing the Spirit? It seems, in these verses leading up to 12 and 13, the Apostle Paul puts a test on the table, at least part of one that the Corinthians could use and we can use to know whether or not something is a manifestation of the Spirit, or it's coming from some other source. So I want you to see this. There are four aspects of this test that I want you to see.

First of all, God's Spirit works through believers to proclaim Jesus' glory. When we look at verses 2 and 3, we are helped to understand why it appears that the Corinthians had such

big problems. One of the indicators in verse 2 is that it appears that, at this point, they were being led astray by people within their own ranks to believe things about the Spirit of God, and how the Spirit of God works in the same way that they had been blindly deceived and led astray to worship idols before they ever became Christians. That's what he's talking about in verse 2.

And that makes this huge. Paul is serious about this if he would compare those two things. "The devastation of you being blindly led astray," he says, "to worship mute idols and all the different ways you were led. That's what's happening in your midst right now." And to entertain the possibility that that could actually happen, and we could get so far off track and so messed up with a particular part of our theology. As I said at the beginning, it seems that that happens so very often with this particular issue of spiritual gifts. It was happening there.

Another thing that we understand is that it seems their specific question had to do with gifts of speaking, like tongues and prophecy. It mentions mute idols in verse 2. And then in verse 3, he talks about how someone is speaking in the Spirit of God or what they would say or what they wouldn't say. When we come to 1 Corinthians 14, Paul's going to take those two gifts specifically—tongues and prophecy—and flesh them out a little bit more. It seems they were needing some information, some clarity, about these speaking gifts.

But what he tells them—listen to me—is something that is a good test regarding all spiritual gifts. The criteria that Paul puts on the table has to do with loyalty to Jesus Christ and the degree of clarity with which the speaker, the proclaimer, the exerciser, is actually glorifying Jesus in the carrying out of their gifts. That's why he says what he says there in verse 3. He says, *"Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit."* They can't say they are exalting Him and worshipping Him without the Spirit of God.

You see, the Corinthians were very familiar with the wild ecstasies and the ecstatic utterances of the cult of Dionysius. It's very likely that what was happening was they were asking the question, "Does this mean that everything spoken in ecstasy and everything we don't understand and we can't interpret is all from the Spirit of God?"

And Paul comes and speaks in this situation and says something that is true about every spiritual gift: This is the nature of the Spirit of God. He works in and through believers to proclaim the glory of Jesus Christ. You can mark that down. How do we know that? Because that's what Jesus said the Spirit does. In John 16:14, remember, he said, "When the Spirit comes, He will glorify me." He was very clear about it.

Peter says the same thing with regard to spiritual gifts in 1 Peter 4. He says that these gifts are given, and you implement them and carry them out in order that—in all things—that God may be glorified in Christ Jesus. To Him alone belong all glory and dominion. He was very clear about that. Why? This is the nature of the Spirit. The Spirit doesn't work otherwise.

Practical application: You and I, when we're asking the question, "Is this of the Spirit of God?" —when we're asking the question, "Is this a gift of the Spirit of God? Is this a manifestation of the Spirit of God?" —need to ask the question, "Is this making the name of Jesus famous? Is it calling attention to Him? Is it directing people's attention and driving people to Him? Is it inspiring people to pursue Him?" If it is, it very likely is a manifestation of the Spirit that He's using in the body.



But if you run across somebody that's claiming to have a spiritual gift and exercising that supposed gift in a way that is calling attention to them and making their name famous and prominent in the body of Christ, you better mark it down: It's not of the Spirit of God. How do we know that? Because the Spirit doesn't operate otherwise. This is His nature. This is His DNA. And this is the beginning point of determination of whether or not something is actually of the Spirit of God.

Look at another one. God's Spirit works through all believers in many different ways. One of the things that we identify periodically as being helpful for interpretation and meaning and finding a point in the text is repetition. Did you notice, when I read verses 4 through 6, some things keep rising to the surface? In my English translation, the words "varieties" and "same" keep showing up. There are different kinds of words—different descriptors all around them—but those are the constants all the way through those verses. There are varieties of gifts, same Spirit; varieties of service, same Lord; varieties of activities, same God who empowers them all in every one. Why? Because this is the nature of the Spirit.

There is one Spirit that has baptized us, made us part of one body, but He manifests Himself in a ton of different ways. And I want you to notice specifically that, even this thing that you and I call "gifts" and that the Bible describes as gifts in a number of places, is actually described in several different ways in those three verses. Called "gifts" in verse 4, then in verse 5 called "service", in verse 6 "activities", and then if you glance down to verse 7, you'll see another one is "manifestations." "Gifts" is not the only descriptor for the way the Spirit of God is working, for this thing that you and I traditionally refer to exclusively as spiritual gifts. They're also described as services and activities and manifestations.

I'll be honest with you and tell you I wonder if we haven't given too much air time, sometimes, just to the word "gifts" exclusively. I wonder if it might be helpful for some of us to not think so much about gifts, trying to determine what we've received, what we possess, and just ask the question, "What kind of services can we perform for one another in the power of the Holy Spirit? What kind of activities are there that we can engage in on behalf of the Holy Spirit? What manifestations are there of the Spirit in and through our lives? How does He act? What are the ways that He works?" And take, sometimes, some of the pressure off.

Let me tell you something if I can, and I want to be really careful here because I know there are disagreements about this. Personally, I don't think the lists we have of spiritual gifts in Scripture are exhaustive. And there are a number of reasons for that. Spiritual gifts are listed by name in about four different places in the New Testament. One of them is here in 1 Corinthians 12; another is Romans 12; then you've got Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. And then spiritual gifts are discussed in a couple other places, like Romans 1 and here in 1 Corinthians 13-14. But the lists that are given there are different, some are long and some are short; some can list these particular gifts and others list these particular gifts.

But the thing I have the hardest thing getting my arms around sometimes is the idea that the limitless, boundless Spirit of God, by the end of time, will have worked in the lives of billions of Christians—billions of believers—in innumerable situations throughout history. It's just hard for me to fathom that biblical writers would limit the ways that He could work in that many variable situations to about 22 jobs that show up on most spiritual gifts inventories.

I don't want you to get bogged down with that right now but what I do want you to do is simply begin to look and think about how the Spirit acts in your life. Sometimes, we spend

so much time trying to pigeon-hole something with a name that we get so consumed with that, and sometimes get confused with that and overlook the many different ways that the Spirit of God manifests Himself in and through our lives as believers.

So if somebody comes along, and they say that they're gifted and you're not, or they say that their gift is better than your gift because your gift doesn't look like their gift, or they say, "If our church really had the Spirit of God, we would all have this one particular gift because it's most important," you and I need to reject that and run from it because the Word of God says that He shows up in many, many different ways as He works in and through our lives. Know that about the Spirit of God.

Number three: God's Spirit works primarily to benefit the body, not the believer. When I say that, I'm talking about the individual believer who possesses a particular spiritual gift. Know this: The Spirit of God works primarily to benefit the body and not the individual believer.

How do we know that? Because that emphasis keeps showing up when you look at these different passages that talk about spiritual gifts. There is this emphasis that the Spirit's target is the body as a group. And that just makes sense, doesn't it? If what we said a minute ago—that the Spirit of God works in the children of God to make the Son of God look right—that just makes sense that that would be the primary goal for Him, not just what He's doing in my life.

Notice, the Apostle Paul says it right here in verse 7, *"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."* And you know something? Even over in 1 Corinthians 14, when he starts talking about one of the gifts that may have some benefit for the individual who possesses that, listen to how he talks about it in verse 4: *"The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up."*

Look at verse 12. He says, *"So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church."* Look down at verse 17: *"For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up."* "You don't want to do this," he says. Verse 26: *"What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up."* It's almost like Paul's saying, "Get a clue! This is what this is about. This is what we're after because this is what the Spirit of God is interested in."

So beginning in verse 8, Paul gives some representative examples. He says, *"For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit..."* He gives those representative examples. Why? To all come back to say, "They all come from one Spirit, and they are to this end game: The common good of the body." He doesn't list all the gifts that are even listed in other places in Scripture. He's just giving some examples and really saying, "It doesn't matter what it is."

And right there—let's just be honest—some of us come to the lists right there and are longing to say, "Preacher, tell me what that gift is. What is that gift of wisdom? What is that gift of knowledge? What does that look like?" And that's where we go, without looking at the text and asking the question, "What is he saying?" What he's saying is, "Look, all of these gifts, the many expressions of the Spirit, are given for the good of the body."

Beloved, one of the things that would help us more than anything with spiritual gifts is to spend a whole lot more time on the things we do know in Scripture than the things we don't know. And I'll tell you, not only do we not have any assurance that the lists of spiritual gifts are exhaustive, but we are not given precise definitions of hardly any of those things. That's why we come to them and say, "Okay, what is the gift of knowledge? What is the gift of wisdom?"

You read some of the commentaries and track with some of the Bible scholars, and you'll hear them say things like, "Well, this probably is such and such. This likely is something." And yet, somewhere, somebody along the line takes those likelihoods or those maybes and makes them definitive and begins to put them forth as categories that we need to figure out which one we need to fit in. And the Apostle Paul is saying, "Now look, there are tons of them. There are many ways the Spirit shows up. But know this: They're not primarily intended to build you up as an individual believer; they are intended to build the body up." And this is important for us to see.

Now I want to press into this one point real quick. Go back one book in the Bible to Romans 1. Go back to the book of Romans; go all the way to the beginning of it. Paul's letter to the church at Rome, and I want to show you something he says here. I hope this will be something that will be a help to some of us. In Romans 1:11, the Apostle Paul says, "*For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you...*" Stop right there. Paul is not saying, "I'm an apostle. I've got all the gifts. I'm going to bring some of them to you." That's not what he's talking about when he says, "I'm going to impart to you some spiritual gift."

Understand this, Beloved: No man gives these gifts; no prophet gives these gifts; no church gives these gifts; no denomination gives these gifts; the Spirit of God gives these gifts. What Paul is saying is, "I want to come and I want to exercise my gift in your midst in order to strengthen you."

You say, "How do you know that?" Keep reading. Look at verse 12: "*...that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.*" You know what Paul was longing to do? He was longing to get to Rome so that he could get with the believers there, and he could do his thing and what he did as a believer in his ministry and encourage them. And they did their things and let the Spirit work through them, and he would be encouraged, and in both cases, faith would be built up. He says, "I want you to be strengthened. I want your faith to be built up. I want my faith to be built up."

And I think when we look at this in Romans, we can carry that a step further and think about Paul's reason for writing to the church at Rome. Do you remember what it was? He wanted to come to them so they could be of help in launching the gospel further to the unknown world. He wanted to get to Spain. He was desiring to get in their midst for the mutual strengthening of him and them so that, together as partners, they could advance the gospel to the unknown world.

And Beloved, let me tell you something. There is a pretty good aspect of this test of spiritual gifts being for the common good right there. When you find yourself wondering if something is a manifestation of the Spirit, you might want to stop and ask the question, "Is this strengthening the faith of believers in Jesus Christ in such a way that it spurs them on to want to be more effective and more involved in disciple-making? Is this something that is happening for the building up of the faith of the body?"

And when you are on a journey trying to discover how God has wired you, don't worry about trying to put a label on it. Don't worry about trying to put a name on it. Just look at your life and ask the question, "What is it that I do?" Ask other believers in Christ who are walking with the Lord that know you, "What is it that I do that seems to strengthen the faith of other believers around me and makes them want to pursue Christ more and advance His cause every place on the planet, beginning right where they are, going to the nations? What is it that I do? Is it going into a group of people and getting things organized? Is it just being able to sit and keep my mouth closed and listen to somebody for a long, long time who's hurting and just needs to talk? Is it that grace that I have to be able to just hug somebody that needs to be encouraged and loved on? Is it teaching? Is it preaching? Is there something that I do that builds faith in other believers, whether I can put a name on it or not? How's God working in and through my life to encourage the body?"

Here's one more in 1 Corinthians 12, and then we're done. God's Spirit works through believers according to His sovereign plan. We really come full circle here, back to where we started, because another thing that we see as kind of a common denominator—it surfaces quite a bit in the biblical teaching on spiritual gifts—is something that our pastor has articulated several times and in several different contexts. It's something like this: God's got this thing rigged so that He gets the glory, because He's the One that deserves it.

And so Paul says in verse 11, *"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."* Look at verse 18. Paul says, *"But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."* Look at verse 28: *"And God has appointed in the church..."* all these spiritual gifts. In Romans 12, Paul will say that He gives us different measures of faith in the exercising of these gifts.

In Ephesians 4, he will say that He gives us different measures of grace for the exercising of these gifts. God's got this thing wired, and He's got it wired to the end of 1 Peter 4 that I quoted just a moment ago in which the Apostle Paul says, *"As each has received a gift [because all of you have at least one], use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied [diverse, many-faceted, manifold] grace..."* And then he gives a couple of examples of serving and proclaiming the oracles of God, and he comes to that place and says, *"...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."*

Do you understand this? This is how huge spiritual gifts are. They are given to the end that God would be glorified. And for you and I to say, "Oh, you know, we'll get off in the ditch. Let's not worry about it. I'm not really interested in spiritual gifts," or, "I'm too concerned that I'll get confused and all that. Let's just leave it alone." All the time, God is saying in His Word, "I'm giving you these to make my Son's body look like it's supposed to look, so that I and I alone would be glorified."

Now, here is the application. Here is where the pressure comes off. He has wired you exactly like He intended to wire you for these purposes. And He's put us together in the same body with these many different wirings to come together to accomplish that purpose to that end. This is His desire. So when somebody comes along and they tempt you, "Hey, you need to pursue this gift over here," and especially if it's some sensational gift, or if you're tempted—watch this; come in here real close now—to compare yourself to some other believer because of the way they serve and the way they exercise their gift, and you don't see yourself being able to do that, or somebody comes along and says, "You need to take this class in order to learn how to exercise this particular gift because it's more important," or, "You need to do this particular exercise, so you can learn how to speak in this way," Beloved, run from it! It's not of the Spirit of God.

Rest in His sovereign assignment of how He has created you because He's got this thing rigged. And He's got this thing rigged for His glory. And that's what we desire. That's what we want, because we know that performance-based relationship with God was completely eradicated at the cross of Christ, wasn't it?

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