



## **1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30**

### **“WHAT ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS?”**

(Sermon Plus Study And Application Questions)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

## **I. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 (RSV)**

**(As the text appears in your modern Bibles)**

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. 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 working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 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 inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

### **Next Week**

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 by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 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." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

## **II. SCRIPTURE SHEET AND SERMON**

**(As heard by ancient hearers)**

**I CORINTHIANS 12:1-11, 28-30 "WHAT ABOUT THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT?"**

//Rom. 12:6-8, 1 Thess. 5:19-22, Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 4:10-11

**I. 12:1-3 INTRODUCTION: DISTINGUISHING THE HOLY SPIRIT AND OTHER SPIRITS.**

New Topic: *Peri de*: 7:1, 25; 8:1; 16:1, 12

1 a Now concerning spiritual things (manifestations), brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. **A Mild Jab**  
2 b You know that when you were heathen (pagans), you were led astray to dumb idols, **8:5, PAGAN PAST(1**  
however you may have been led (moved). **Passive Voice: Unholy Spirits Led Them To Idolatry**  
3 a' Therefore I want you to understand, **Not All Religious Experience/Spirituality Is Christian!**

b'1 that no one speaking by the Spirit **(9x Holy Spirit) Distinguished From Other Spirits**  
2 ever says "Jesus be cursed." **Paul? Anathema, 16:22, Gal. 3:13, JEWISH JUDGMENT(2**  
2' and no one can say (confess) "Jesus is Lord" **Spirit Highlights The Basic Creed, Rom. 10:9, 1 Jn. 4:1-6**  
1' except by the Holy Spirit. **Rom. 10:9-10, Dt. 13:1-5, CHRISTIAN CONFESSION (3**  
**Christological Criteria For Gifts & Spiritual Experience //Jn. 15:25**

**A. 12:4-11 VARIETY OF GIFTS BUT 1 SOURCE (GOD) AND 1 GOAL (THE COMMON GOOD).**

Goal = Regulation, Not Suppression; Not Professional But Organic

**1) vv.4-6 Variety Of Gifts, Unity Of Origin In Triune God. TRINITARIAN GROUNDING OF GIFTS**

4 a Now there are varieties (allotments) of grace-gifts, **Image: Light = grace, Church = prism, Gifts = Rainbow of colors**  
b but the same Spirit, **charis-ma-ta = Multiple Grace Gifts, Divine Generosity, 1:7**  
5 a' and there are varieties of service (ministries), **Trinitarian Reality , Not A Monad: From Father, Through Son, In Spirit**  
b' but the same Lord (i.e. Jesus), **Inspiration (v.4), Venue (v.5), Outcome (v.6) JESUS CHRIST**  
6 a'' and there are varieties of workings (energies/empowerments/ outcomes), **Not Self-Generated, For Others**  
b'' but the same God (i.e. the Father) who works (inspires) them all in every one. **GOD THE FATHER**  
**Not Innate Talents, Triune God At Work In Us, Normal Stuff!**

**2) vv.7-11 Sample List Of Nine Gifts Given To Each For All. SAMPLE LIST: 9 GIFTS, (\*Jesus)**

Goal = Common Good, Gal. 3:5, Eph. 4:1-11

7 a Now *to each* is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. **Passive Voice, Each Is Gifted For Service**  
8 b<sup>1</sup> To one is given through the Spirit a *word*(utterance) of wisdom, **WISDOM, 1 Kgs. 3:16-28,Is. 11:2,Lk. 2:20-26 (1\***  
b<sup>2</sup> to another a *word* of knowledge according to the same Spirit,/ **KNOWLEDGE, Lk 7:39-50, Jn. 14:26 (2\***  
9 c<sup>3</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, **SPECIAL FAITH, Jn. 11:41-42, I Cor. 13:2, Mt. 17:20 (3\***  
c<sup>4</sup> to another grace-gifts of healings (cures) by the same Spirit, **Plural, HEALINGS, Lk. 9:2, 10:9, 7:22 (4\***  
10 c<sup>5</sup> to another the workings of miracles (powers), **MIRACLES, Lk. 9:10-17, Jn. 14:12, Acts 4:29-30 (5\***  
c<sup>6</sup> to another prophecy, **REVELATION, 14:29,32, Jer. 1:9, Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:16-18, Lk. 18:31-33, 22-23 (6\***  
c<sup>7</sup> to another discernings of spirits,/ **ASSESSMENT, 14:29, Gal. 1:6, I Kgs. 22, I Jn. 4:1;Lk. 4:1-13, 9:49-50 (7\***  
b<sup>8</sup> to another various kinds of *tongues*, **TONGUES, Spirit speech, Acts 10:44-45, 19:6, I Cor. 13:2, Mk. 16:17 (8**  
b<sup>9</sup> to another the interpretation of *tongues*. **INTERPRETATION, Companion Gift , I Cor. 14:17-28 (9**

11 a' All are worked (activated/energized) by one and the same Spirit, **All The Gifts Are Needed For Church Vitality**  
who apportions *to each one* individually as he wills. **The Holy Spirit Decides/Distributes, Heb. 2:4, Rom 12:3**  
**The Spirit Is Disclosed In Giftings; Unity- Not Uniformity, 12:12-27**

**A' 12:28-30 THE GIFTS ORDERED AND APPORTIONED FOR THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH.**

Gift Lists Are Representative, Not Exhaustive

**1) v.28 The Gifts Are From God And For The Church.**

**4 ADDITIONAL GIFTS**

28 And God has appointed in the church: **Enumeration Indicates Importance, 1-3 Communicate God's Message**  
(1) first *apostles*, **1-3 Are Church Founders, APOSTLES (10**  
(2) then prophets, **1 Thess. 5:19-20, Rom. 12:6, 1 Cor. 14:3**  
(3) third *teachers*, **The Church Is A Charismatic/Gifted Community, TEACHERS (11**  
(4) then workers of miracles, **What They Most Valued (i.e. Tongues) Is Placed Last**  
(5-8) then healers, *helpers, administrators*, speakers in various kinds of tongues. **Rom. 12:8? HELPERS (12**  
**ADMINISTRATORS/ GUIDANCE (13)**

**2) vv.29-30 The Gifts Apportioned By Spirit: 7 Rhetorical Questions Expecting Negative Answers.**

**7 Rhetorical Questions All Expecting Negative Answers**

29 Are all apostles? **No, but some are. 1-3 Are Persons**  
(1) Are all prophets? **No, but some are. Gifts Continued In Post-Apostolic Times:**  
(2) Are all teachers? **No, but some are. Justin Dialogue 82, Against Heresies 2.34.4**  
(3) Do all work miracles? **No, but some do. 4-7 Are Functions**  
(4) Do all possess gifts of healings? **No, but some do. A Double Plural: Gifts/Healings**  
30 (5) Do all speak with tongues? **No, but some do. vs. Doctrines Of Classic Pentecostalism**  
(6) Do all interpret? **No, but some do. Rom. 12:6, "Let us use them..."**  
(7)

## WHAT ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

*“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*

Paul’s cure for both individualism and isolation.

### 1 C O R I N T H I A N S 1 2 : 7

All the tools assembled at the work bench, Brother Hammer presiding. Several suggested he not lead because he was too noisy. “If I must leave the shop, Brother Screw must also go. You must turn him round-and-round to accomplish anything.”

Brother Screw defended himself, “So be it, but Sister Plane must go with me. Her work is always on the surface; her efforts have no depth.

To this Sister Plane responded, “Sister Rule must withdraw; she measures folk as through she were the only standard of all things.”

Sister Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper. “You ought to leave as well, Mr. Scratchy, always rubbing people the wrong way.” Into the midst of this early morning battle walked the carpenter for the day’s work; at his entry the tools fell silent.

Putting on a leather apron, he gathered planks to build a new pulpit for the Nazareth synagogue. One by one he used hammer, screw, plane, rule, sandpaper. When the pulpit was finished and the Master gone for the evening, Brother Saw rose to full height, “Brothers and sisters... all of us are workers together with the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

This humble allegory offers a window into God’s design. Left to our sinful selves we compare and compete; it is in the Master’s hand that we learn mutual appreciation. There is a unity in our work but not uniformity in our function. Together we can do more than separately; we need each other more than we know. It is as important to know which tool *you are not* as *which you are*. In the work there is interdependence as one prepares for and completes another. In the Master’s hand it’s OK to be who I am and do what I do. Jesus is good with his tools, and he is good for his tools. God has designed each believer with special capacities. Working out the details of that call over a lifetime is the ongoing adventure of Christian faith. Questions are helpful here, questions like:

What gifts and holy energies has God given me?

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from L. Flynn, *19 Gifts of the Spirit* (Wheaton, ILL: Victor, 1982), 28.

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**I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 5**

Where does my deep joy connect with the world's deep need?  
To what am I drawn? What do others praise in me?  
What do I dream about in unguarded moments?  
What needs do I see that no one else notices?  
Where do I have sticking power and endurance?  
Where has God placed me?

We will not discover our gifts and calling from a written inventory or a sermon on spiritual gifts, valuable as these may be.<sup>2</sup> It is in relationship with Christ and other disciples that we best discover how the Holy Spirit works in us to build up the church.

It is not strictly necessary to know your spiritual gifts in order to use them. For hundred of years before we recovered the doctrine of *the priesthood of all believers* at the Reformation- and more recently *the doctrine of spiritual gifts* in the successive waves of the Pentecostal and Charismatic renewals, Christians used the gifts, unaware they were doing anything but what seemed right and natural. But I do believe that increased awareness and biblical knowledge are important. A church that embraces the practice of spiritual gifts will be more unified and fruitful because it allows people to be who they are by God's design.

But be forewarned. Spiritual gifts are not blanks; they are live ammunition that advance the kingdom of God in contested territory. If the image is that of a harvest, then the gifts of the Spirit are farm implements to bring in the crop. If a battleground, then the gifts of the Spirit are the weapons of warfare. Jesus operated constantly in the gifts of the Holy Spirit;<sup>3</sup> it's where the insight and power came from. The only one he did not need was the gift of tongues because the communion of his prayers was unhindered.<sup>4</sup> An awareness of spiritual gifts increases the intensity of church life and our expectancy for living interaction with God. Everyone matters, and no one has all the gifts. No longer will we be like the bus where the pastor drives and passengers observe the scenery. Instead, we will be more like

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<sup>2</sup> See Dan Dick & Barbara Miller, *Equipped for Every Good Work* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1989); also Christian Schwartz, *The 3 Colors of Ministry* (St. Charles ILL: Church Smart Resources, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Note on the Scripture Sheet the seven gifts listed in vv. 7-10. In the right column there is a star (\*) beside the ones Jesus utilized. Scripture passages are listed for each gift. Jesus was a charismatic, a mystic, a seer, a prophet, God at ground level!

<sup>4</sup> John 11:41-42.

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**I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 6**

the ant hill where everybody has a job and everyone is doing what God designed them to do.<sup>5</sup>

This is how it is with the wondrous gifts of the Holy Spirit, some of which look like sanctified natural talents- for example: teachers, helpers, administrators, others of which are more overtly supernatural- say prophecy, healings, and miracles.<sup>6</sup> Gifts of the Spirit are not merit badges to be displayed and compared; they don't separate us into first and second class Christians. A church that belittles any of the gifts will be weakened in its capacity for kingdom work. They are not toys for play or trophies for display. Neither are they rewards for being good; they are specific bestowals of God's multi-faceted grace through the indwelling Holy Spirit. And, surprising to many, they are no guarantee of spiritual maturity and godly character. They are the powers of the Spirit through every believer so the work of Jesus continues through his body, *and that body we are!* It is both ignorance and false humility to say you do not have one or more of the gifts. Verse 7 has no exceptions, "*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*"

Listen! There is no such thing as a Christian without the Spirit. To say I know God the Father but not God the Son is to carve up the Trinity. To claim to know Christ but not the Holy Spirit is to divide the godhead. The work of the Triune God is one, and where one of the three is to the forefront, all are mutually present. In verse 3 Paul says no one can make the confession *Jesus is Lord* "except by the Holy Spirit." Now the Holy Spirit may not have much of you, and you may not understand the Spirit's vast work as the third person of the Blessed Trinity; you may have grieved the Spirit by repeated resistance, but if you have placed faith in Jesus at the simplest level, then the Holy Spirit dwells within waiting to be acknowledged and released through the divine energies which are the gifts. And when, from time to time, you have an experience of being filled with the Spirit or being illumined by the Spirit's light, it's not so much an experience *from without* as a filling *from within*, a release of One already at work in the depths of your life, a new work of the same grace that's been active all along.<sup>7</sup> Spiritual gifts are a form of religious experience. To be used in the area of your gifting is full of meaning; something inside says, "Yes, Lord. For this I was made."

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<sup>5</sup> The bus and ant analogies are from J.I. Packer, "Experiencing God's Presents," *Christianity Today*, August 2003, 55.

<sup>6</sup> For a delightful catalog of a neglected part of Methodist heritage, see Daniel Jennings, *The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley* ([www.seanmultimedia.com](http://www.seanmultimedia.com)). Jennings has searched the Journals of John Wesley for some remarkable reports!

<sup>7</sup> For an assessment of the charismatic movement and its contribution to the renewal of the church's full canonical heritage, see the case study of Dennis Bennett in William Abraham, *The Logic Of Renewal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 16-23.

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## **I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 7**

The film *Chariots of Fire* is the story of two British runners in the 1924 Olympics. Eric Liddell is a devout Christian and one of the world's finest runners. His sister Jennie wants him to leave running to join the family on the mission field. She feels Eric is putting running ahead of God. He attempts to help his sister see his point of view, "I've decided I'm going back to China. The missionary service has accepted...."

Jennie interrupts, "Oh, Eric, I'm so pleased."

"But I've got a lot of running to do first. Jennie, God made me for a purpose, for China. He also made me fast, and when I run, *I feel his pleasure*. To give it up would hold him in contempt. You were right; it's not just fun. To win is to honor him."<sup>8</sup>

What Liddell said of running, "He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure," ought to be the testimony of every Christian. I feel God's pleasure when I study and preach, when I pray in the Spirit, when I receive a word of prophetic guidance, and when God gives wisdom in counseling and leadership. I feel God's blessing as I do the daily work of a pastor which is the role through which my gifts are exercised. A sense of partnership, of being a co-laborer with God, is what I wish for each of you. Jesus Christ wants you as a follower, an understudy and apprentice, as one through whom he can work for good. Spiritual gifts are one of the vehicles through which this happens.

### **What Gifts Are Not**

Spiritual gifts need to be distinguished from three related categories. First, spiritual gifts are **not the same as natural talents** which are general gifts of creation. Every human being has capacities in which we rejoice, but only Christians have gifts from the Holy Spirit. When someone with great talent sings, we say, "What a great voice." But when a gift of the Holy Spirit is operative through a believer who sings, we say, "What a great Jesus." With natural talents the focus is *on the person* performing; in spiritual gifts it is *on the Lord who is present* with the gift a window to the Giver. Place natural talents under the doctrine of creation, but do not simply equate them with spiritual gifts because they are not the same. Spiritual gifts are only given to Christians as part of their relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They are proprietary. The Holy Spirit leads us to the confession that *Jesus is Lord*, and the Holy Spirit *apportions (gifts) to each one individually as he wills*. You do not pick spiritual gifts; they are assigned. An instrument is placed in your hand, "This is what you will play in the orchestra. Follow my baton, and we will make music together." The Spirit then weaves your gifts with others for the benefit of all. You are thus written into the score of God's symphony. And if you do not play your instrument, the music that might be is diminished.

Secondly, and like currency, gifts of the Spirit have **counterfeits**. They are imitated

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<sup>8</sup> PreachingToday.com search under 1 Cor. 12:1-11.

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by God’s non-loyal opposition. In the realm of the occult and other religions, people have all sorts of encounters. Real power is there: things like astral travel, spiritual healing, prophecies, love potions and cursings, all sorts of exotic stuff which has great appeal- and often sadly to ignorant Christians.<sup>9</sup> Buddhist monks levitate; Native American shamans experience remote viewing; witch doctors cast spells; New Age gurus channel ascended masters; astrologers and palm readers tell fortunes. Some are frauds, but these things actually happen, and they are not from the Holy Spirit because they do not lead to Jesus as Lord. They are seductive counterfeits that lead to darkness and bondage. Paul knew this from first hand observation of the many spiritual paths and religions that filled the ancient world. It’s why he wrote so plainly of the spiritual experiences the polytheistic pagan Corinthians had before they came to Christ: verse 2, “You know that when you were heathen *you were led astray to dumb idols*, however you may have been led.” They were led OK, to idols, but not by God. So if someone claims spiritual power or supernatural insight and does not confess *Jesus as Lord*, you immediately know whatever powers they are experiencing are alien. Not everything that bears the label *spiritual* is safe for your soul; not all spiritualities honor Jesus Christ. Afternoon TV is not the place to learn spiritual practices, and here naivete is deadly. At times the church must extract silly Christians from dangerous entanglements.<sup>10</sup> I always go back to our first baptismal vow, “Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness?” The question being, To whom are you loyal? To the living God, or to other powers, to idols?

Thirdly, spiritual gifts are **not the same as spiritual fruit**.<sup>11</sup> Gifts are the powers of Christ offered through us *in a moment*; the fruit of the Spirit- on the other hand, is the character of Jesus formed in us *over time*.<sup>12</sup> Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and the rest of the fruits listed in Galatians 5 are not gifts of the Holy Spirit; they are slow growing fruits. Spiritual gifts flow through us for others; spiritual fruit grows in us for our maturity in Christlike character. In heaven there will be no need for spiritual gifts as we have known

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<sup>9</sup> See Cindy Jacobs, *Deliver Us From Evil* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2001) for a fuller catalog of gateway practices for evil.

<sup>10</sup> A simple treatment by an acknowledged scholar and pastor is Don Williams, *Start Here: Kingdom Essentials for Christians* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006), Chapter 7, “Release the Captives,” 62-72.

<sup>11</sup> For a treatment of the fruits of the Spirit, see Philip D. Kenison, *Life On The Vine* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> This is the reason Paul differentiates between the *gifts* of the Spirit and the *fruit* of the Spirit. The first is the power of Jesus through me in a moment, and the second the character of Jesus being cultivated in me over time. They are meant to work together.

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**I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 9**

them. “They will pass away,” said Paul.<sup>13</sup> When the battle is over, we lay down our weapons. What abides is the character of Christ formed in us along the way.

This is why it is possible- through not desirable, to be a powerful channel of the gifts and remain immature character wise. Church history is littered with those God used to heal and deliver others but who never developed deep, godly character. There is some truth to the stereotype of the immoral evangelist or the philandering healer or the greedy pastor. Robert Duval played such a figure in the movie *The Apostle*; in his sad life spiritual gifts operated and fruit withered. Gifts need graces for depth of character, and graces need gifts for power.

The common sense idea that God uses only clean vessels is false. God desires holy lives, but God has a embarrassing history of using whoever’s available to receive his gifts for the sake of others. The ideal is for gifts and fruits to work together, which is why Paul always treated them in tandem. The great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, is sandwiched between two chapters on messy spiritual gifts. The love chapter is not about romance, though often read at weddings. It’s about love as glue that holds a spiritually powerful church together, “Though I speak in the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am nothing....” The gifts of the Spirit are gasoline to power the church engine; the fruit of the Spirit is oil that keeps everything moving smoothly without undue friction. The gifts work best when accompanied by love in all its forms.

A mature church welcomes all the gifts- even the more exotic ones, and at the same time allows the Spirit to cultivate the rich character of Christian holiness. For one branch of the family to say, “We specialize in the gifts” (the Pentecostals), for another to say, “We specialize in holiness” (a Wesleyan theme), and for another to claim, “We specialize in evangelism” (a typical Baptist theme) is to divide the work of God. But the full reality of the Spirit’s work is available to the whole church. We don’t have to choose. It’s not either/or but both/and. When power and love are truly yoked, there are blessings galore. After all, that’s how it was with Jesus. In him people met the love and power of God in perfect union, never one without the other or one at the expense of the other.

So what are the gifts of the Holy Spirit? They are the power tools of ministry; they are the influences of the risen Jesus among his people through the same Spirit that empowered him. There are complex historical and theological reasons why the person and work of the Holy Spirit have been minimized in the Western Church, but in our day and due to the growth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, the work of the Spirit is being

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<sup>13</sup> In 1 Cor. 13:8-13 temporary gifts and permanent fruit are repeatedly contrasted.

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## **I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 10**

highlighted.<sup>14</sup> It's messy, and it's exciting. Jesus is more than an ancient hero, more than a crucified Savior, more than the risen Lord, more than a teacher of principles. The risen Lord is at work *through his people now* in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. For us to remain ignorant out of fear or prejudice is a mistake of the first order. Pastors who stay away from teaching and modeling the gifts because of the excesses or errors of others will soon be nothing more than maintenance workers in dying institutions. Ours is a highly interactive God who is not a bit embarrassed about mixing-it-up with people and all creation. All the gifts are for today; all the gifts are for the church. We need the full rainbow of the Spirit's colorful work. The risen Jesus who is physically absent because of the ascension is ever-present in our midst through *another Comforter*, the one he and the Father sent, the Holy Spirit. There may have been a time when ignorance was understandable. No more.

### **The Issue Of Ignorance (12:1-3)**

Verse 1: "Now concerning spiritual gifts... I do not want you to be ignorant."<sup>15</sup> That sounds reasonable enough: Pastor Paul desires his people to know what they need to know. But for the Corinthians it was something of a jab at their self image. Their church was full of spiritual gifts.<sup>16</sup> Their worship time was a showcase for power tools. Yet Paul considered them childish in understanding and did not mind saying so. They were still at the *look at me* stage of maturity. Gifts were *about them* rather than about the mercy of God *through them to others*. This is an understandable stage, and if God releases the gifts in our midst in a fresh way, we will have the same problem. It is spiritually intoxicating to be touched by God and be a vehicle for spiritual giftings. It takes a while to work through the issues to maturity.

The simplest test to distinguish whether or not a revelation or experience is from the Holy Spirit is *the Jesus test*. Scholars call it *the Christological criterion*; for simplicity I call it *the Jesus test*. Is what you have experienced compatible with the self-revelation of God given in Jesus as recorded in the Gospels? The boundaries for the work of the Spirit are the outlines of Jesus' ministry. It is the Spirit who leads us to the doctrinal confession that *Jesus is Lord*, which is a statement of Jesus' deity. What Yahweh is- the LORD, Jesus also is. The

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<sup>14</sup> For a treatment of the theological issues including the disputed *filioque* and its effect on the doctrine of the Spirit, see Colin Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Towards A Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London, T & T Clark, 2003), especially chapter 3, "Eastern and Western Trinities: Being and Person. T.F. Torrance's Doctrine of God," 32-57.

<sup>15</sup> For treatments of our text that incorporate rhetorical insights and theological concerns, see Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1987), 81ff.; PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 146-151.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 1:7.

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## **I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 11**

Holy Spirit highlights Jesus by bringing his words to memory and giving insight into Scripture. The Holy Spirit is hot on Jesus. The invisible, spiritual realm with which we are surrounded has all sorts of options. But only those experiences that lead to Jesus Christ are to be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Everything else is suspect. This is *the Jesus test* for the identification of the work of the Holy Spirit. Is this something like what Jesus did and compatible with his character? Does it do for people what he did for people? Get the idea? If it ain't like Jesus, it can't be the Spirit, because the two, along with the Father, are in perpetual Trinitarian agreement. The Trinity is never divided. We are free in the church to explore the riches of the experience of the Holy Spirit within the boundaries of the revelation of the Father given in the Son. One of the jobs of pastors is- like a referee- to blow the whistle when people get out of bounds. But that is not yet our problem; our issue is, Are we in the game? Are we running some plays? Does the Spirit have room to move here?

### **The Trinitarian Grounding Of The Gifts (vv.4-6)**

I am indebted to the legendary John Hutchinson who was my physics teacher and coach. On the football field he taught me not to be a quitter; I stopped playing only after a severely broken leg one year and a major concussion the next. I remember the day we began our study of optics. "Coach" gave us a prism and had us stand near the window. The ceiling and walls of the lab burst into rainbows. He then wrote on the blackboard the name *Roy G. Biv*. To this day it helps me remember the colors of the spectrum: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. This is an image for what happens when the one invisible grace of God strikes the facets of church and is refracted into a rainbow of spiritual gifts.

"Now there are varieties of gifts," wrote Paul in verse 4, "but the same Spirit." And since each of the gifts may operate through any of a multitude of ministries, he continues, "...and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord..." The gift of *teaching* can operate through the ministry of preaching or the ministries of writing or counseling. The gift of *faith* can work through an individual to help them believe for the seemingly impossible or in a Finance Committee to believe God's people will come through with giving. The gifts of *helps* can operate in Sunday School or a nursing home. The gift of *administration* can operate in a home and in the Board meeting. We have a diversity of gifts coming through a diversity of settings. *Prophecy* can operate through a song, a sermon, or piece of art.

Thus far we have a variety of gifts operating through a diversity of ministries and settings. But we are not yet at the bottom line, the practical payoff. Verse 6, "And there are a variety of workings (or effects), but the same God who works them all in everyone." The bottom line is changed lives. People converted, healed, taught, restored, forgiven and delivered; people given hope and help; mercy received, truth spoken, justice sought, decisions made, calls obeyed, books written, songs sung, missions carried out, martyrs remembered, the work of Christ continued in the church by the energies of the Spirit of God

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## **I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 12**

operating through the people of God to the glory of God. The Trinity is not just a speculative doctrine or a difficult piece of church arithmetic. It has an intensely practical side in the operations of the church. A life-giving church is one that opens itself through the Triune God to all the means of grace and to all the multiple effects of that grace.<sup>17</sup> We become living channels for the ongoing ministry of Jesus; we become in practice what we are by design, the very body of Christ operating on earth with the invisible energies of heaven.

The Morris Antique Mall is in Hot Springs, Arkansas. It used to be a church. Once it held saints; now it holds dusty stuff and musty smells. In the next decades this will happen to thousands of our churches.<sup>18</sup> It doesn't have to happen at 211 North Main. A church that opens itself to the grace of God and to the gifts of the Spirit that are the multiple effects of grace will not become a resting place for rusty relics.<sup>19</sup> We are a place for the invisible God of grace to take on color and be seen to the amazement of the world. John Piper wrote:

“The difference between Uncle Sam and Jesus Christ is that Uncle Sam won't enlist you unless you are healthy, and Jesus won't enlist you unless you are sick. What is God looking for in the world? Assistants? No. The gospel is not a help wanted ad. It is a help available ad. God is not looking for people to work for him but people who let him work mightily in and through them.”<sup>20</sup>

### **A Sampling Of The Gifts (vv.7-11, 28-30)**

In verses 7-11, and again in verses 28-30, Paul samples the Spirit-phenomena operating through ordinary believers. They are the goodies the Holy Spirit splashes on the church.

Have you ever received or given a word of counsel that came from wisdom deeper than your own? It is the spiritual gift of *the word of wisdom*. Ever known something without being quite sure how you knew it, and then had God verify it in experience? It was- perhaps-

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<sup>17</sup> See Alexander Venter, *Doing Healing: how to minister God's kingdom in the power of the spirit* (Cape Town, SA: Vineyard International, 2009), Chapter 11, “Working with the Spirit in grace gifts,” 173-186.

<sup>18</sup> For tough diagnosis of our own declining U.M. family, see Gil Rendle, *Back to Zero: The Search to Rediscover the Methodist Movement* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2011); Lovett H. Weems, *Focus: The Real Challenges That Face The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> “Preaching Resources,” *Leadership*, Winter 1996, 74.

<sup>20</sup> PreachingToday.com search under 1 Cor. 12:1-11.

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## **I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 13**

*the word of knowledge*. Have you ever believed God with confidence for something you had no rational reason to expect? It is *the gift of faith*. Have you ever been prayed for and been healed at some level? Or, do you find that when you pray God regularly touches people with hope and wholeness? It is one of *the numerous gifts of healings* the Spirit bestows.

Has God's power ever come through you to another person to free them from some spiritual bondage, or have you even been the recipient of an out-and-out miracle? It was a gift of the Spirit. Has someone ever spoken to you in such a way that the words went directly into your heart and changed the way to related to God, yourself, or others? Their words were a telegram from God with your name attached. It was *the spiritual gift of prophesy*, understood not as a word about *the then-* the future, but a word for *the now*. Have you ever heard someone speak about spiritual things and smelled a rat? Ever felt uneasy and not quite known why? It was, perhaps, the gift of *the discerning of spirits*, a sensing and seeing below the surface to reveal the true source of things. Have you ever heard someone pray in a heavenly language they never learned and sensed the Spirit of God? Or have you ever been moved to pray in groans not composed by your rational faculties?<sup>21</sup> It is *the gift of tongues*, which when interpreted, is the functional equivalent of prophesy. It's a gift of mystical prayer, the heart speaking to God without the aid of the mind. It's not for show, and not a sign of special status with God. It is a prayer gift given to some for the good of the whole, and we ought not make too much of it or too little. As a gift of the Spirit, it has inherent value. I suspect that during our worship several people are quietly using this gift.

My point is this. Once we open our eyes to the operations of the Holy Spirit in the church we see all sorts of things we earlier missed. It is not that the gifts are not already operating but that they are operating selectively, with low intensity, and without much awareness. Brothers and sisters, the church is not primarily an institution that begs for your support. It is a living organism that invites your participation. We are the body of Christ, his living extension in the world. All the gifts are necessary; all are important; every Christian is an avenue because the Lord's will is to work through one and all. There is no such thing as a non-gifted Christian. And none of it is for ego; it is all for *the common good* because in Christ we are dependent on one another for our health. Spiritual gifts are the power of Christ coming to and then through us for the good of others.

Pastor Phil does not decide what tool you find in your hand; that is the prerogative of the Spirit "who apportions to each one individually as *he* wills." When the Holy Spirit passes out or stirs up the gifts, he doesn't ask my approval! All of this church is under my temporary leadership, but very little of this church- spiritually speaking, is under my control, and that's good for us all. I would turn everyone into a teacher, but the church needs more

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<sup>21</sup> Romans 8:26.

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## **I Corinthians 12:1-11, 28-30 ..... 14**

than teachers. Billy Graham would make us all evangelists, but the church needs more than evangelists. Martin Luther King would want us all to be prophets, but the church needs more than prophets. Larry Moore would make us all musicians, but we need more than musicians. We need all the gifts through all the people. There are no little people, and if we think so it's an indictment that we've not taken time and prayer to uncover their gifts.

All the resources we need to do God's will are already here or on-the-way with new people. There are prophets who do not know it. Gifts of healing that lie buried. Persons with radar-like discernment who never share their insights. Teachers who've never taught and preachers who've never preached, a church of buried treasures. We are not lacking in spiritual gifts. We are lacking in our knowledge of them and in our willingness to admit God can use any of us. We are also a little fearful about the experiential dimension and concerned about looking stupid or flaky. Many would rather remain passive recipients of ministry rather than becoming ministers ourselves. "Let the staff do it," is not an adequate response. Better to say, "Let the Spirit do it through us all." You are not consumers.

That is one of the problems when the professional mentality is applied to pastors. When you go to a doctor, you expect to receive treatment, not to receive medical training. With a lawyer, you expect to receive counsel, not to be trained as an attorney. But if you come to a pastor, the analogy breaks down. Our job is not to do something spiritual for you or to you but to train you, to uncover your gifts and help you find your place in the body of Christ. What we need is already here, buried in our midst, begging to be rediscovered.

### **Conclusion**

Little Jamie Scott tried out for the play at his elementary school. His heart was set on one of the main characters. His mother feared he would not be chosen. That day, his mom went to pick him up, just in case he was disappointed. When Jamie saw her, he rushed up, eyes shining, "Guess what, Mom? I've been chosen to clap and cheer."<sup>22</sup>

Let's make an agreement for the rest of 2012. We will not criticize but clap and cheer as people open themselves to the person and gifts of the blessed Holy Spirit. Things might even get a bit exciting and unpredictable around here! What if we prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit. Send down your light and fire. Renew us as disciples of Jesus Christ." Might something happen? Something it takes God to explain? So as you come to Lord's table today, come with open hands, a hungry heart, and a prayer to be set on fire by the Holy Spirit. Then come and tell me what happens in the next days and weeks. We will warm our hands at each other's flame! **Pastor Phil Thrailkill, Main Street UMC, September 2, 2012**

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<sup>22</sup> PreachingToday.com search under 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.

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**III. STUDY QUESTIONS**

**I Cor. 12:1-3**

1. Why is ignorance of the Spirit and spiritual gifts so widespread? What about them frightens us?
2. What do you think of Paul's acknowledgment of pagan religious experiences in vv.1-2?
3. How does v.3 offer us a litmus test for true confessions of faith?

**I Cor. 12:4-11**

4. How are vv.4-6 a Trinitarian view of God's working in the church?
5. How are spiritual gifts overtly and unapologetically supernatural? Why is this an issue in our day?
6. Answer the questions: What is the focus of the gifts? Who gives them? Why does Paul use the phrase *the same Spirit* over and over? How many gifts are here listed? Which ones were used by Jesus in his ministry? Why not tongues? Are gifts just for super-charged Christians?

**I Cor. 12: 28-30**

7. Note in v.28 how the concept of *offices* or *ministries* is added to gifts? Why the ranking?
8. In vv.29-30 the teaching is that not all are expected to have the same gifts? Why is this?

**IV. APPLICATION QUESTIONS**

1. Sit down, get quiet, pray, "Come, Holy Spirit." Wait for a word or an illumination. Ask, Is this God?
2. Have you ever had or sought an religious experiences that were not of God? What happened?
3. What makes a church or a person *Spirit-filled*?
4. With all this promised activity, why are our churches so passive and often totally boring? Visit a Pentecostal or Charismatic church and bring back a report to Pastor Phil.

**V. PRAYER**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray:  
**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,**  
**your Holy Spirit anointed Jesus to bring the kingdom down to earth**  
**and to illumine the world with heavenly revelation.**  
**Your love moved through him**  
**so that his hand was your hand and his word your word.**  
**We have tried hard to be the church on our own.**  
**We have made much of programs and little of prayer.**  
**How pitiful are our attempts to accomplish by human effort**  
**what can only be done with direction and power from on high.**  
**Refresh our weary souls and bodies at this holy table.**  
**Remove from us the stain and burden and shame of our sins.**  
**Fill us with the wine of heaven, and we will be your merry servants.**  
**Come, Holy Spirit, and open to us the truth and riches of our dear Savior.**  
**Scatter your gifts, and speak to us as we wait in silence before you.**  
**Amen.** (Open your hands. Wait on the Lord. Listen for his voice.)

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