

The familiar phrase, “now about”, as well as “brothers”, shows that Paul is now turning to answer another question of the Corinthians. His topic, however, is not disconnected to the rest of the letter since problems in the behavior of the Corinthian believers reveal themselves again in this chapter. Out of context of mis-use arose some question about spiritual gifts.

This chapter pivots around verses 12 and 13 in which Paul brings together the ideas of diversity and unity which he developed in the first eleven verses. In these first verses we gain a foundation for the unity and diversity among believers which the Holy Spirit creates. Three facts are emphasized about the gift giving by the Holy Spirit which we find in this chapter.

### I. **The Holy Spirit now leads in the life of believers** (12:2-3).

Paul is introducing a contrast between their former lives and their present lives as believers, that he will then develop.

1. Their former lives have three characteristics. They worshipped mute idols. (Mute points to the total deadness of the idols.) They were led astray, a term usually used in the sense of someone being forcibly led away. The influences on their lives were vague and undefined.
2. Paul offers a clear contrast to this in the only real confession which a believer can make. The wording emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the confession of the believer. The real confession of faith by a believer is Holy Spirit led. The confession of the believer as led by the Spirit acknowledges the humanity, the deity and the lordship of Jesus Christ. (His humanity is expressed in the name Jesus. His deity and lordship is found in “Lord”, the term used when translating Jehovah into Greek.)
3. Paul will continue to play on this contrast in the rest of the chapter, showing that the living God is a work in their lives (vv 4-6), gifts have self-less purposes (vv 7-10), and every child of God in the church receives sovereignly from the Spirit a spiritual gift (v 11).

### II. **The Holy Spirit works in unity with the Godhead though the gifts are diverse** (12:4-6).

1. The similarities first impress the reader. “Different kinds” and “the same” are both repeated three times. There is a wide diversity being presented but at the same time a unity behind that diversity is clearly being established.
2. The distinctions reveal the individual involvement of each Person in the Triune God in each gift.
  - a. There are different gifts but the same Spirit. Grace-gifts appear to be abilities given by the Holy Spirit to those who receive Christ as their Savior. Both the timing of this gift and the source distinguish these abilities from natural or inherited abilities.
  - b. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. “Service” emphasizes lowly, humble service for which purpose every gift is given. The one directing that service is Jesus Christ.
  - c. There are different kinds of working, but the same God. “Working” can have the idea of activity or effect. The latter is the thought in chapter 3 (planting and watering but God giving the increase). God. No matter what the gift is or how serves others, that which it produces is from God.

Spiritual gifts should never be the source of personal pride or means for personal advancement. They should be used under the direction of Christ and not thoughtlessly.

### III. **The Holy Spirit sovereignly and purposefully distributes varied gifts** (12:7-11).

This truth is repeated a number of times in different ways throughout verses 7-11. Certain aspects are emphasized at different points.

1. *The Holy Spirit distributes gifts individually but for the common good* (v 7). The “manifestation of the Spirit” refers to the gift as it shows the presence or working of the Spirit. Every true Christian receives such a grace-gift which is given for the common good. It is incorrect one or more grace-gifts as something for personal benefit.
2. *The Holy Spirit distributes many varied gifts* (vv 8-10). We have no use (i.e., Biblical) definitions for many of the following gifts. Our distance from NT times keeps us from clearly understanding what is meant in many cases. With this caution in mind, we can take a brief look at the list.
  - a. word of wisdom and word of knowledge – “Word” probably indicates something with communicating. Other passages may associate these with communicating aspects of the Gospel and of doctrinal truth.
  - b. faith – Perhaps this must be more than saving faith
  - c. gifts of healing – Healing is reported in the book of Acts, especially through the apostles.
  - d. effecting of miracles – Probably broader than healing, it may have included such things as is reported in Acts as the death of Ananias and Sapphira, the raising of Dorcas, and the blinding of Elymas.
  - e. prophecy – We will look at prophecy in more detail in chapter 14.
  - f. distinguishing of spirits – perhaps discerning false teachers and prophets
  - g. various kinds of tongues – To be discussed in more detail later, but probably speaking unlearned but knowable human languages.
  - h. interpretation of tongues – This relates to the gift of tongues and making it understood.
3. *The Holy Spirit distributes at His discretion* (v 11). It is the same Holy Spirit that is working in all grace-gifts giving no basis for competition or dissension and distributing them totally at His discretion.

Confusion and dissension concluding spiritual gifts is unfortunate when we consider that the source, working and purpose of those gifts embody unity. The solution must be found in Scripture and not in claims to experience or lack of it. We may begin knowing from this passage that we now have the Holy Spirit working in us. He gives each born-again person a special ability for the common benefit of the Body.