

Turning to a further question of the Corinthians, Paul begins in this chapter a discussion concerning spiritual gifts. These were misunderstood and mis-used for division rather than the common good. In the first eleven verses Paul emphasizes three facts about the gift-giving by the Holy Spirit which lay a foundation for the diversity and unity which the Holy Spirit creates. The Spirit's sovereign distribution of grace-gifts counters the mis-use in Corinth.

- I. **The Holy Spirit now leads in the life of believers** (12:2-3). There is a clear difference between their former lives and their present lives as believers.
- II. **The Holy Spirit works in unity with the Godhead though the gifts are diverse** (12:4-6). Though there are different gifts, different kinds of service, and different effects, it is the same Spirit, the same Lord and the same God.
- 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 certain (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 make some cautious suggestions.
 - a. word of wisdom and word of knowledge – "Word" probably indicates something with communicating and is part of the gift, i.e., not just a gift of wisdom or knowledge. Within the Corinthians letter "knowledge" often refers to knowledge of God, of Christ, of His glory, or of the fact that He alone is God. The wisdom of God is contrasted with worldly wisdom in ch. 1-3 and appears to concern how one understands being right with God, i.e., the Gospel. There is no Biblical nor historical basis for understanding either of these gifts as special God-given insights into specific needs which people have.
 - b. faith – As a special gift this must be more than saving faith. Perhaps it is a higher degree of trust such as would be needed when facing challenges such as martyrdom.
 - c. gifts of healing – Healing is reported in the book of Acts, especially through the apostles. This is not to be confused with God's ability or willingness to heal in response to prayer. It probably belongs to the apostolic sign-gifts (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12).
 - 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 – (This will be handled in more detail in chapter 14.)
 - f. distinguishing of spirits – John wrote warning of false prophets, that believers should "test the spirits whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). This might be the meaning here or perhaps discerning demons as did Paul in Acts 16.
 - g. various kinds of tongues – (This will be handled in more detail later.) "Tongues" probably referred to 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).
 - a. It is the same Holy Spirit that is working in all grace-gifts despite the variety. The gifts listed may have been selected for the list by Paul because they were the more showy gifts by which the Corinthians tried to elevate themselves above others. Spiritual gifting provides no basis for competition. If dissension arise, something is wrong with the believers (not the gifts).
 - b. The distribution of gifts is totally at the discretion of the Holy Spirit. We do not determine what gifts we have and therefore have no reason for comparison or self pride. We may desire the greater gifts (12:31; 14:1), but have no guarantee, that we will receive them or any other gift. I believe that it is contrary to Scripture to believe that any grace-gift can be obtained with our efforts.

The source, working and purpose of spiritual gifts embody unity. Confusion and differences in this area must find their solution in Scripture and not in claims to experience or lack of it. Even miracles and a superficial confession of faith do not prove a person to be a follower of Jesus. Practices, teaching and life-style should conform to Scripture.

Foundational truths about spiritual gifts are laid in this passage: the Holy Spirit is at work in every believer, gifting every believer for the benefit of the whole Body. Grace-gifts should not be a source of personal pride nor be used for personal advancement.