

Our Spiritual Journey: The Gifts of the Spirit – Part 5

Making sure the gifts are Spiritual!

I Corinthians 12:1-7

Our last study showed us that Paul needed to discuss the subject of spiritual gifts to the Corinthians for three chapters – compared to the much smaller portions of discussion with the churches in Rome and in Ephesus. The church in Corinth had some big problems. The Corinthians had some growing up to do. Pride and confusion were making a mess of a lot of things – not just the matter of spiritual gifts. (See the previous message) Our first goal in this lesson is to see the bigger picture of what Paul is dealing with / the bigger problem in the church of Corinth.

I Corinthians 12:1 – “*Now concerning spiritual matters.*”

The Greek word for “*gifts*” does not appear in this verse. It has been implied and inserted in most translations. Literally, it says, “*Now concerning spirituals*” (i.e., spiritual matters / things). So, it is not a mere dissertation about spiritual gifts, but rather, Paul wants to talk about spirituality, spiritual maturity and conduct. The matter of spiritual gifts is a great way to reveal the big problem going on among them (i.e., immaturity, carnality, pride, contention, and competition). The real theme in chapters 12 – 14 is that love is the thing missing. The flow of God’s love is the only cure for their failings (as we will see in chapter 13). In today’s churches Paul might have used the music ministries of many churches to show their greater need. Or he could also have given attention to big, grand buildings, and flamboyant programs – Or lifeless traditions and forms of worship, or vain academic knowledge without obedience. Unfortunately, the wrong emphasis on spiritual gifts is still a problem in some churches today.

But, when Paul is teaching the Corinthians about spiritual gifts, he is actually addressing the matters of meekness, humility, godliness, Christlikeness, and God’s love in their hearts and lives.

I Corinthians 12:2-3 – From Idolatry to Adoration.

The Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us and makes Christ precious to us. He gives believers a hunger for Christ’s knowledge and a desire to worship and serve Him. We can do nothing profitable without the Spirit of God (I Corinthians 2:1-16). Spiritual gifts are designed to cause people to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and to enhance their worship and service of Him.

I Corinthians 12:4-6 – All the Variety is All from God.

This has been discussed with the Romans and Ephesians. It is about to be discussed again with the Corinthians. The important take-out points are that these gifts are privileged opportunities to be a blessing. Proud competition will grieve God’s Spirit and quench His work (Ephesians 4:30-32; I Thessalonians 5:14-23). The attention is on what **God** is doing, **not** on what **we** are doing!

I Corinthians 12:7 – Don't become a “Non-Profit” organization spiritually!

Some may feel that God's Spirit wants to show them off to others. But glorifying us is not on God's agenda. A consensus of the translations will easily show that the profiting of everyone, not just one person, is what God has in mind. In other words, spiritual gifts are for the edification of the saints. Our focus, whatever we are doing, should be on how we can be used of God to build others up – not to acquire the admiration of people (I Corinthians 10:24; 14:26,40; 16:14).

I Corinthians 12:29-31 – Go for the More Excellent Way!

It is good to desire to be used of God to bless others but trying to just collect spiritual gifts to see how many you can get is vain. The same with bragging that your gifts are more important than others. There might be a touch of irony in Paul's words, when he says to *“earnestly desire the best gifts.”* It is like he is saying, *“Go ahead and focus on spiritual gifts if you want, **but** I am going to show you something far better.”* Or *“No one gets all of the spiritual gifts... no one needs them all... there's plenty to go around... **But**, I want to show you the more excellent way for all of us.”* At that point Paul goes on to talk about love in chapter thirteen.

Observations on I Corinthians 13

I Corinthians 13:1-3 – Paul's Equation:

Spiritual gifts + Knowledge + Faith + Sacrifice + Martyrdom – Love = 0.

I Corinthians 13:4-8a – The Superior and Enduring qualities of Love.

It is in this environment of love that every ministry can thrive, and every believer can grow and be profited (Ephesians 3:14-19; 4:11-16; Colossians 3:14; I Peter 4:8; I John 4:7-21; Jude 1:20-21).

I Corinthians 13:8-13 – Spiritual gifts are of a temporary nature, but love is eternal.

Spiritual gifts are like tools in the hands of God to be used for building His kingdom. But, one day the work will be complete, and we will need our toolbox no more. In our glorified state, all God's people will have all the perfect knowledge and abilities that we could ever need. Faith, hope, and love are the core commodities of our spiritual wealth today. One day, in heaven, even faith and hope will not be needed (Romans 8:24-25; Hebrews 11:1). However, heaven is a world of pure love. There is no greater spirituality – no greater gain in this life than to live in this world under the control and power of God's love.

There is some more practical discussion about the use of spiritual gifts in chapter fourteen. Hopefully, we will gain more perspective about what in the world we should be doing today.