

The Gifts of the Spirit

Intro: A topic for discussion not division

1 Corinthians in outline		
I.	1.1-9	Introduction
II.	1.10-6.20	In response to reports from Corinth
	1.10-4.20	A church divided, internally & against Paul
	5.1-6.20	Immorality & litigation
III.	7.1-16.12	In response to a letter from Corinth
	7.1-40	Marriage & singleness
	8.1-11.1	Food sacrificed to idols
	11.2-16	Men & women in worship
	11.17-34	Abuse of the Lord's supper
	12.1-14.40	Spiritual gifts & spiritual people
	15.1-58	The resurrection of believers
	16.1-12	About the collection & Apollos' visit
IV.	16.13-24	Conclusion

Paul's introduction

'Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced & led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no-one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no-one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.'

1 Corinthians 12.1-3

The true test of spirituality is whether someone knows Jesus as Lord, not whether or not they have certain gifts.

The 'principle work' (John Calvin) of the Spirit is salvation, not the giving of gifts: *'The Father activates the plan of salvation in eternity, the Son achieves it at Calvary & the Spirit applies it to us personally.'*

1. Gifts are from God

The point is made by the word: the word translated 'gifts' (charismata) comes from the word for 'grace' (charis). Biblically, it refers to any gift of God's grace including marriage / celibacy (1 Cor 7.7) & salvation (Rom 6.23)

Probably unhelpful to use word 'charismatic' to refer to a style of singing or to a few dramatic gifts; in the strict sense, every Christian is a charismatic

The stress is that the 'gifts' are from God – they are 'given' (vv.'s 7, 8 & 11)

Some implications

- a. **Don't demand** – trust the sovereign giver
- b. **Don't boast** – all of our gifts come from Him
- c. **Don't envy** – you have the gifts God wanted you to have
- d. **Don't idolize** – exalt the giver not the gifted

2. Gifts are from God... *in variety*

*'There are **different** kinds of gifts but the **same** Spirit. There are **different** kinds of service, but the **same** Lord. There are **different** kinds of working but the **same** God works **all** of them in **all** men.'* 1 Corinthians 12.4-6

*'The body is a **unit**, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form **one** body. So it is with Christ. For we were **all** baptized by **one** Spirit into **one** body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were **all** given the **one** Spirit to drink.'* 1 Corinthians 12.12-13

* **Unity**

We have received the same Spirit, serve the same Lord & have the same God at work within us. 'Baptism in the Spirit is a universal Christian experience because it is an initial Christian experience.' (John Stott)

* **Diversity**

About 10 gifts are mentioned in this chapter (and over 20 in NT – see other lists in Romans 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4); some gifts appear mundane (e.g. service) & others exciting (e.g. healings) but there is no distinction between 'natural' & 'super-natural' gifts (apostleship & administration sit side by side!)

There's no suggestion that these lists of gifts are exhaustive (e.g. there is no mention of gifts of music or hospitality). It is helpful therefore to think of a spiritual gift as *any talent in His people that God uses to make disciples*.

The key stress is our diversity – see verses 29-30

Some implications

a. I belong – verses 14-19

b. I need you – verses 20-26

3. Gifts are from God in variety... *for others*

'Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.'
1 Corinthians 12.7

We sometimes want certain gifts to boost our profile / our ego / to have an assurance of God's presence with us, but our self-worth & assurance in our faith comes from the cross alone. The reason God gives us gifts is not to make us feel better about ourselves but so that we can serve others.

Some implications

a. Get serving

b. Get seeking

'But eagerly desire the greater gifts' 1 Corinthians 12.31

'Follow the way of love & eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.' 1 Corinthians 14.1

In between these commands comes chapter 13 – not a cute chapter about love but a stinging rebuke to the Corinthians who were approaching the topic of gifts thinking of themselves not others.

'Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.' 1 Corinthians 14.12

We are to pray for & try to excel in gifts that build up God's church.

c. Get speaking

'Follow the way of love & eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no-one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.'

1 Corinthians 14.1-5

	Prophecy	Tongues
14.2-3	Intelligible	Unintelligible
14.3	Builds up other believers	Builds up self
14.23-25	Challenges unbelievers	Confuses unbelievers

This does not mean that tongues are without use (see verses 18-20) but it does mean that there is a clear priority. 'Grown-up' thinking says *'God gives gifts to build others up & therefore I want to seek the gifts that most build others up.'*

Therefore the gifts I want most are 'word gifts' – the gifts of explaining God's word to believers & unbelievers so that they might come to know Jesus & be built up in Him. They are not the only gifts that matter & we certainly should not put those who have them on a pedestal, but they are the principle way that God builds His church & therefore we should look for opportunities to use those gifts & to seek to grow in our use of them.

Some questions to think through

1. Are there any ways that my thinking about gifts needs to change?
2. How am I using my gifts in service of Christ at the moment?
 - are there any needs at church that I could meet?
 - are there any new initiatives I could offer to start that might help?
3. How can I get better at speaking the truth to others to build them up & help them to love Jesus more?