

**Introduction:**

- A. Illus.: A few years ago the *Chicago Tribune* carried a story that speaks for itself: “*Violinists at a German orchestra are suing for a pay raise on the grounds that they play many more notes per concert than their colleagues do.*” For example, the 16 violinists pointed to their less-busy colleagues who play flute, oboe or trombone. Interestingly, the suit also argued that soloists shouldn't be paid more. The director of the Beethoven Orchestra in Bonn, Laurentius Bonitz said, “*Maybe it's an interesting legal question, but musically, it's very clear to everyone.*”  
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- B. Have you ever heard anything so preposterous!? Well, how about this: a church where the people whose gifts get the most attention think they are the most spiritual, and therefore, most important? It happens.
- C. This morning we fast forward in 1 Corinthians to chap 12. Turn there. The Christians in Corinth had been taught that they all had been given gifts by the Holy Spirit when they were born again, and they all could see it was true. But these people were like children fighting over each other's Christmas gifts. They tried to prove who was the most spiritual by what gifts they exercised in the church. So Paul turns to this subject in **v.1**, “*Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.*” And in the next three chapters he educates them and us.
- D. Do you know what a spiritual gift is? Lots of Christians think a spiritual gift is a natural talent used for the Lord's service. Someone might say, “*My spiritual gift is singing.*” Or “*My spiritual gift is helping people find jobs.*” Or, “*... caring for my family, practicing medicine, making people laugh.*” Our talents, training, and natural abilities are surely gifts from God! And he is pleased when we use them for him. But that is not what the Bible means here.

**Spiritual gifts are supernatural abilities given to all believers by the Holy Spirit so that Jesus may serve his people through our gifts.** The Holy Spirit gives every Christian a gift through which Jesus supernaturally serves his church.

Some amazing things were apparently happening in the Corinthian church. There was someone there who could heal people! Someone else worked miracles. Others would stand up in a service with a direct word from the Lord. Several spoke in tongues. The problem is that it is easy to start thinking you are the superior Christian when you can do some amazing things that other Christians can't do. Then, of course, it is a short step to think that the person with the most spiritual gift should have the most influence in the church. But spiritual gifts don't make us spiritual; the Holy Spirit makes us spiritual. Listen to **vv.1-3...**

- I. **BEING SPIRITUAL IS DEFINED BY ONE THING: OUR CONFESSION THAT JESUS IS LORD (12:1-3)**
  - A. First Paul reminds these people how easily duped they had been in the past: *"you were influenced and led astray to mute idols."* *That's how 'spiritual' you guys are!*
  - B. The only reason a Christian is spiritual is that we have the Spirit of God. And the proof that a person has the Spirit of God is that we say, with heartfelt love, 'Jesus is Lord.' None of us would ever say that unless the Holy Spirit changes our hearts.
  - C. The gifts the Holy Spirit gives us are exceptionally good ways to both say and show that Jesus is Lord. You and I are each gifted to display what a great Lord Jesus is. In fact, it is as if Jesus puts on a 'Lee disguise', a 'Carol disguise,' and does something only Jesus can do. But you can't disguise Jesus, and people experiencing our gifts, will see all the more vividly that Jesus is Lord. **Exercising our spiritual gifts doesn't show off how spiritual we are, it shows off what a wonderful Lord Jesus is to his church.**

Vv.4-6...

**II. OUR TRIUNE GOD TEAMS UP TO SUPERNATURALLY EQUIP US FOR EVERY ASPECT OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE (12:4-6)**

- A. When we confess Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit retools our lives for his service by giving us 'grace gifts' (v.4). In v.1 Paul used the word the Corinthians used, probably in a letter to him: *"Now about spiritual gifts..."* But Paul preferred a different expression, which he switches to here. The Gr. word for 'gifts' in v.4 and after is *charismata*, 'grace-gifts'. God in his grace gifts us with all kinds of blessings beginning with our salvation, but here Paul is speaking specifically of these **supernatural capacities the Holy Spirit gives us so Christ can serve his Body through us.**
- B. This is one of the places in the Bible where God in his three persons is mentioned. Here is the Trinity: one God in three persons. Do you see it: *"the same Spirit"* (that is the Holy Spirit), *"the same Lord"* (that is the Lord Jesus Christ), *"the same God"* (he means God the Father). Each person of the Trinity has a part in our grace-gifting. Our spiritual service represents the teamwork of the Trinity.
1. **V.4...** The Holy Spirit comes into our lives when we are born again. He is the Breath of God that makes us come to life. When he comes, he brings into each new Christian's life a Jesus capacity, a Jesus ability. He makes it possible for us to do something that only Jesus can do.
  2. **V.5...** The role of the Lord Jesus is to assign us as his Spirit-gifted people to particular areas of service. He directs us to a certain church, to certain relationships and ministries and needs. If we love Jesus and seek to obey him, we will inevitably find ourselves in some area of service that the Holy Spirit has gifted us for.

3. V.6... God the Father brings his *energy* (that's what the word 'working' means) to each of our acts of service.

He breathes life and power into them so that they have a supernatural effect. God doesn't 'work' the same way every time. The energy he brings to our gifted service is nuanced, customized, but God will never expect us to serve without it.

Illus.: Let me give you an example. Recently, I was talking to a faraway friend on the phone. She asked me if I remembered the time I wrote a letter to her husband 'John' when he was a new Christian. Actually, I don't. She said that in all his life that is the only letter he has ever received. She said my encouragement in that letter was so significant to him that he keeps it among his most precious possessions.

Now let's dissect that. The Holy Spirit has given me the gift of encouragement. It sounds kind of ordinary. I don't heal or speak in tongues. Furthermore, I am not by nature particularly sympathetic or sensitive, yet again and again I see Christ do amazing things in this particular area. On some occasion, I obviously felt I needed to write a letter to 'John', who was a young Christian at the time. I'm sure that letter was not unusual. **It wasn't a work of art, but it was a work of Jesus.** Then God brought his own 'energy', his own 'working' to it, so that it had that profound effect. I think maybe I'll write him another letter!

- C. Remember, the Corinthians were trying to use their Spirit-given grace-gifts to prove who was most spiritual. Do you see how stupid that is?! First, they are *grace*-gifts. They have nothing to do with merit or accomplishment. They prove how generous God is, not how spiritual we are. Secondly, here is the Triune God teaming up to gift us one and all, so how sick is it if we use those gifts to undermine our unity by trying to prove who is spiritually superior!? These gifts are God-given to bind us together.

## Vv.7-11...

### III. GOD GIVES EACH OF US US THESE POWERFUL GRACE-GIFTS IN ORDER TO BUILD CHRISTLIKE UNITY IN HIS CHURCH (12:7-11)

- A. “Now to *each one* the *manifestation* of the Spirit is given.”  
Do you see that: “*each one*.” He says it again in v.11: “*he gives to **each one**, just as he determines.*” You have been given a grace-gift to put on public display something *only* the Holy Spirit of God can do. Again, this is not one of your talents or natural abilities. **This is one of the Holy Spirit’s talents, something only He can do, and he does it through you.**
- B. V.7 says, “*For the common good.*” A literal translation of that phrase is simply “*for profit.*” We’re actually *not* a non-profit organization! Our gifts will influence unbelievers but they are primarily for the benefit of the church, to strengthen in every way our confidence that Jesus is Lord.
- C. Now Paul lists a series of these grace-gifts—vv.8-10...  
Elsewhere he lists others, repeating some and adding others. For example, look at **vv.27-30... Rom 12:6** says, “*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*” There Paul speaks of prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, and showing mercy.

When we step back and identify God’s purposes behind various spiritual gifts I think we see two categories.

**Some gifts are Jesus speaking to us.** Scripture is our most reliable Word from God, but these gifts and gifted people apply God’s word to our particular circumstances now. Sometimes they are God’s word for a particular hour and need, or a special word of blessing from him. **The rest of the gifts are ways Jesus helps the church as only he can.** Jesus brings his power and provision to us through these. Through the grace-gifts of the Holy Spirit Jesus makes certain we know what he has to say to us, and how much

he cares for us. And through these gifts the church as a Body preaches to unbelievers watching us that Jesus is Lord!

- D. What's striking about the list here in vv.8-10 is how supernatural these gifts all seem to be. I've been in church all my life and I've never seen some of these things happen. Some suggest that is because I've never been in a truly spiritual church, or that churches I've attended didn't have enough faith. Can you discern from this text what is wrong with that thinking?
1. One of the main points Paul is making here is that the Spirit sovereignly decides what gifts to give: v.11... Remember what an immature and contentious church the Corinthian church was, yet they had these gifts. Surely the Spirit doesn't distribute his gifts based on maturity or faith.
  2. Some gifts sound a lot more ordinary than others—a lot less... spiritual. For example, administration, encouragement, leadership, showing mercy *sound* like things that you might see anywhere. But the point here is that these things are done by Jesus through us, so they really are not at all like what other people do. These are all equally miraculous when Jesus does them. **Showing mercy like Jesus is as supernatural as healing or speaking tongues.**
  3. Some people suggest that these more astonishing gifts were signs given back then to establish the church's credibility and aren't needed anymore and they have ceased. Well, since the Spirit sovereignly distributes gift they certain can cease, or come and go, as he wills for the glory of Christ. But spiritual gifts have always been first and foremost for the "common good" of the church. It seems self-evident to me that the Holy Spirit doesn't give all the gifts all the time to every church. But it seems equally obvious that the Spirit gives all the

gifts that any church needs to make clear to one another and the watching world that Jesus is Lord.

4. Finally, I don't think it is useful to ask God to give us a particular gift personally. At two different times in my life I earnestly sought the gift of tongues. In both cases I felt the Holy Spirit clearly and gently said 'no'. The amazing fact is that we each already *have* at least one grace-gift from the moment of our new birth. It is the perfect gift for us, and for the purposes of Christ. You could not have a better grace-gift than the one you already have. God the Spirit, Son and Father have gifted, assigned and energized you personally out of their love for you and for the church. We couldn't do better if we picked our own gifts!

## Conclusion

Some of you here do not think you can do anything special. So let me put it to you straight: **Are you going to believe that this passage of Scripture applies to you, or aren't you?** This passage, as well as others, teaches that *each one of us* has a grace-gift from the Holy Spirit, an assigned task from the Lord Jesus, and the energy of God to make it work supernaturally.

Your grace-gift isn't particularly hard to discern. You find it by loving and obeying Jesus. What are you burdened to do? Where do you see a need or opportunity? When God prompts you to do something, do it. Write the letter. Serve on the ministry team. Speak the message that God gives, so long as it is consistent with Scripture. Speak the healing of Jesus if he tells you to. Ask the Holy Spirit to use what you do. Discover your grace-gift and use it every chance you get.

Illus.: Henry Blackaby tells about a woman in one church who was extremely energetic and volunteered for virtually everything. No ministry was beyond the scope of her interest. Among other things, she volunteered to visit the hospital. But the church office started to get complaints. For example, she had visited a woman

awaiting gall bladder surgery and blurted out, “*Yeah, I had an uncle who died from this kind of surgery.*”

But one thing this woman did very well was pray. The pastor had noticed that when she prayed, the hand of God moved. So he asked her to pray for a bunch of unsaved or unchurched people. In a matter of six months, 52 of the 54 people that the pastor asked her to pray for were converted to Christ or joined the church. Her gift *wasn't* encouragement, but it *was* faith, and when she prayed, God worked as if Jesus himself had been praying! [#4598]

Use the grace-gift God has given you. Be humble. Trust Christ to work through you. Live to show and say that Jesus is Lord.