



“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:4).

The Diversity of Spiritual Gifts

Central Truth: Each believer’s spiritual endowments give him a sense of personal worth and identify.

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Topic: Holy Spirit: Gifts of.

“How many and how different!”

That may be your reaction upon reading the list of spiritual gifts recorded in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12. They are many and varied. That is why we refer to the diversity of spiritual gifts.

The differences of the spiritual gifts do not make them adversaries. Each complements the others without competing with them. That makes possible a full ministry that meets all needs.

Consider an orchestra. There are different kinds of stringed instruments, wind instruments, and percussion instruments. Each has its own design, tone, and range. In a concert, each plays its appropriate part even when its notes differ from those of the other instruments. One would expect dissonance and confusion. But under the baton of a skilled conductor, there is harmony and beauty.

Spiritual gifts differ in recipients, function, and purpose. But under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, they operate to meet human needs and to glorify God. Their diversity is divinely ordained. So there is harmony in the diversity.

I. DIVERSITY DEFINED

Diversity means kind or class made up of many distinguishable units. Take apart a ballpoint pen. It has a barrel, an ink cartridge, a spring, and a

cap. Each is distinguished from the others by design and function. Yet they are so designed as to be joined together to make a writing pen.

Spiritual gifts are different. Each is distinguishable from the others. But they are designed of God to be joined together in the church to make one effective ministry for God. No gift is intended to function alone. God set the gifts in the body that each might share the ministry of all the others.

Diversity is seen in the number of persons assigned a gift. Nine times I Corinthians 12:8-10 reads, “*to one is given, . . . to another, . . . to another.*” It is said nine times because nine gifts are listed and each is given to a different person. Your gift may differ from the gift of your relative or friend. But God has chosen and conferred the gift He wished you to have. His blessed gift makes spiritual ministry possible to you.

Even in the midst of diversity there is unity. The term “*diversities*” occurs twice and the term “*differences*” occurs once in I Corinthians 12:4-6. “*The same*” occurs three times also. The same God works through each gift, even though the gifts vary greatly. Perfect harmony prevails as each Christian ministers in his area of work.

II. DIVERSITY ILLUSTRATED

Romans 12:4, 5 and I Corinthians 12:12, 14 illustrate the diversity of spiritual gifts by an analogy with the physical body.

Think about your physical body. You have hands, eyes, ears, feet, and other external organs. Unseen are your heart, lungs, liver, and scores of other organs. Each is distinct. Each is unique in design, location, and function. Yet all those members make up one body. There is no conflict between hand and foot, between eye and ear. Each ministers to the other and on behalf of the other.

How could so many different members operate in harmony? Each is indwelt by the same human spirit. My hand ministers to my eye because my life is in each. My feet respond to nerve impulses sent to the muscles as the brain determines where the body should go. If one member ceases to cooperate with the rest of the body, we know that a serious problem has developed and seek immediate medical help.

That principle is true spiritually. You may have one spiritual gift and I may have another. But since the same Holy Spirit lives in each of us, you and I will serve in harmony under His leading. As members of the body of Christ, we are different and distinct, yet alike and allied. That is the mystery and majesty of spiritual gifts.

III. DIVERSITY DELINEATED

Fifteen spiritual gifts are listed in Romans 12:6-8 and I Corinthians 12:8-11. Observe their nature and function.

A. Prophecy (Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 12:10) — New Testament prophecy is forthtelling more than foretelling, proclamation rather than prediction. A prophet sees events and interprets them in the light of the mind of God. That is one office gift Jesus gave to New Testament churches (Ephesians 4:11). Read a discussion of it in I Corinthians 14.

B. Ministry (Romans 12:7) — This gift does not refer to “the ministry” as distinguished from “the laity.” It is simply the gift of serving. It is willing to do physical labor, encourage, pray, counsel, or anything else to meet the needs of another person. The motto of this gift is “find a need and fill it.” Here is the gift of practical service as seen in Acts 6:1-7.

C. Teaching (Romans 12:7) — A person with this gift has a love for the Word of God and a great desire to know and share its treasures. He enjoys searching out and organizing truths of Holy Scripture. *“His delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night”* (Psalm 1:2). Delight in study is joined to desire to share Bible truths.

D. Exhorting (Romans 12:8) — Someone has called the exhorter a “how-to” person. A person with this gift will see a need and give practical steps in solving the problem. He is concerned with the practical application of Bible truth to the hurts in life. This gift is commonly expressed in counseling today. (See it in Acts 4:36 also.) Pressures of modern life create an increasing need for the exercise of this gift.

E. Giving (Romans 12:8) — There is a ministry of Spirit-led giving. It is not a Christian's giving tithes plus freewill offerings, as each should do. It is giving beyond that as the Spirit of God directs a person to give. Attention is not on the amount given but the motivation which prompted the gift. See such Spirit-led giving described and contrasted in Acts 4:34—5:11.

F. Ruling (Romans 12:8) — This is the God-given ability to lead the people of God. Because that leadership is from the Holy Spirit, God's people are commanded to follow it (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). A person with this gift is able to plan far ahead, to marshal the people of God to their work, and to supervise them in accomplishing their tasks. We call this the gift of administration. We see it illustrated in Acts 6:1-4 and described in I Peter 5:1-5. The person who leads a church by the gifting of the Holy Spirit is a good person to follow.

G. Showing Mercy (Romans 12:8) — Here is the Spirit-given capacity to identify and comfort those who are in distress. Love is the motivation of

this gift, and mercy is its expression. People are attracted to the person who shows mercy. He is not moved by weak sentimentality but by the loving sympathy of God. See the gift at work in Acts 2:44, 45; 4:34, 35.

H. Wisdom (I Corinthians 12:8) — Here is a practical spiritual gift. It enables a person to see the facts and know what to do to get the desired results. It is doing the right thing in the right situation, a practical application of knowledge. The gift of wisdom enabled the apostles to know what to do when the church outgrew her ability to serve (Acts 6:1-4, 10).

I. Knowledge (I Corinthians 12:8) — Knowledge is a true understanding of the facts by the grace of the Holy Spirit. (Wisdom is knowing what to do in view of those facts.) Such knowledge is not based on mere human intellect but on insight given by the Holy Spirit, as shown in Acts 5:1-11. New Testament disciples experienced extra-biblical revelatory knowledge until the Bible was written; then that function of the gift ceased (I Corinthians 13:8-13).

J. Faith (I Corinthians 12:9) — The spiritual gift of faith is more than saving faith or living by faith. It is the ability to trust God (without presumption) for extraordinary things or in unusual situations. See its function in Acts 13:6-12; 27:9-44. The gift of faith is trusting God beyond the ordinary just because the Holy Spirit prompts one to do so.

K. Healings (I Corinthians 12:9, 28) — God intervenes in the natural process of sickness to restore physical or mental health to one who is sick. He heals in some instances and not in others, following principles known to himself alone. First Corinthians 12:28 speaks of the “*gifts of healings*” (notice the plural) because each instance of healing is the gift of healing for that person. He still heals today, but many who claim to be His medium of healing are false. See the gift in Acts 3:1-8.

L. Miracles (I Corinthians 12:10) — A miracle is a work of power which manifests that God is evidently at work. They were common in the founding of the Christian faith but ceased soon after. God is still able to work miracles and does so according to His own will.

M. Discerning of Spirits (I Corinthians 12:10) — Here is the God-given insight which discerns between the motive and power behind one's work. You see the gift manifested in Acts 5:1-10; 8:1-23.

N. Languages (I Corinthians 12:10) — The gift of “*tongues*” was the ability to speak freely in a human language which one had neither known nor spoken before (as in Acts 2:1-47). It was not mere sounds or angelic languages. It was languages and dialects of languages spoken in the world (Acts 2:8).

O. Interpretation of Languages (1 Corinthians 12:10) —

Interpretation means “translation.” The gift was the ability to understand a language which one had not known before and translate it into the language of others. The gift was conveying thought from one human language to another human language by the ability which God gave when one language was unknown.

IV. DIVERSITY UNIFIED

There are so many gifts! They are such different gifts! How can there be any unity among them? First Corinthians 12:11, 12 explains in two statements. (1) The Holy Spirit of God confers each gift, and He unifies them. (2) The physical body has many members which are extremely different, but they are unified because they are members of one body. That is the unity of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ.

There is one spiritual body composed of all the saved. Some call it the family of God, the company of the saved, or the body of Christ. It is a true spiritual body in which we are all joined as one in Christ. (Please distinguish that body from the church as the visible expression of the body of Christ.) The Holy Spirit places the convert into that spiritual body at the moment of conversion. He gives the convert a spiritual gift, the capacity to serve God. He unifies the members of the body so that they function as one body in Christ. Therein is our unity.

We need one another. No gift is sufficient by itself. All gifts are needed. Identify your gift and use it in service to people in the name of God. He has enabled you to serve.

Questions

1. Why are there so many spiritual gifts?
2. How many of the spiritual gifts can you name?
3. What is meant by “the diversity of spiritual gifts”?
4. How is the unity of gifts illustrated in the physical body?
5. How does the indwelling of the Holy Spirit cause that unity?
6. Which of the spiritual gifts do you believe you have?
7. Which are “sign gifts” and which are “serving gifts”?
8. How can you be sure you have a spiritual gift?
9. Which gifts do you consider to be operating today?
10. How can you profit personally by this study?

