

**First Corinthians**  
**Chapter Twelve**  
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**Gifts within the Church**

This chapter is an especially revealing portion of the letter by Paul concerning new characteristics of Christianity. In these times it was readily accepted that people who were especially close to some deity would receive some special gifts and often such was manifested by the person whirling around and doing strange things. But the Holy Spirit comes upon every Christian and gives each one gifts to be used for the edification of the church body.

*Rom 8:9 "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."*

*Rom 8:14 "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."*

In this chapter Paul explains this new concept to the Christians at Corinth who might be especially taken by the strange actions of the people active in some cult. But rather than people acting in some bizarre way due to the presence of the Holy Spirit in them, the people would be characterized by the fruits of the Spirit.

*Gal 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

*Gal 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."*

**1Cor 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.**

**1Cor 12:2 You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led.**

**1Cor 12:3 Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.**

The Greek word for spiritual gift is "charisma" so all Christians are charismatic, meaning possessing of at least one spiritual gift. We currently use the word differently and so the world has again redefined an important Christian word. Faith is another very important Christian word that the world has redefined. Before becoming Christians these people were taken to dumb idols, meaning something with no ability to communicate. The idols are nothing as Paul as repeatedly stated but there could be demons behind the idols so we should stay away from them although they indeed are "dumb". Paul then says that the Holy Spirit does not influence anyone to say meaningfully that Jesus is not the son of God. He also says that nobody can declare upon the possibility of martyrdom that Jesus is Lord. Anyone can mutter the words but only those who have been born again can

really mean that Jesus is their personal Lord. Nobody discovers on their own that Jesus is the Son of God and Lord of their lives. Such knowledge is only by revelation from the Holy Spirit.

**1Cor 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.**

**1Cor 12:5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.**

**1Cor 12:6 And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.**

**1Cor 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”**

I have an article on spiritual gifts (<http://livingtheology.com/HolySpiritII.htm>) that would be useful to read and I have extracted some from that article for this discussion. The first extraction is in listing the gifts:

It is not possible to be exhaustive in listing the gifts because some other words in Scripture could also be interpreted as gifts in addition to those listed below. However these are the main spiritual gifts as understood by most theologians.

Romans 12:3-8	1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:9-11
Prophecy	Word of Wisdom	*Apostleship	Hospitality
Ministering (helps)	Word of Knowledge	Prophecy	Speaking
Teaching	Faith	Evangelism	
Exhorting	Healing	Pastoring	
Giving	Miracles	Teaching	
Government ruling	Prophecy		
Showing mercy	Discernment		
Service	Tongues		
	Interpretation		
	*Apostleship		
	Teaching		
	Ministration (helps),		
	Government (ruling)		

Verses 4, 5, and 6 give us some details about the gifts and I like to always list the gift, its ministry, and the effect such as for evangelism:

1. Gift: Evangelism
2. Ministry: church visitation teams, always be on the alert for God to use this gift through you in any situation (plane travel, business associates, interaction with neighbors, family interactions, etc.), travel with professional evangelists to help with their ministry, etc.
3. Empowerment: be open to encouragement from God to use the gift, work with the church administration for needs of the gift.

Verse 7 tells us that gifts are given to each member of the body of Christ and it states the purpose of the gifts that Paul also states clearly for us elsewhere:

*Eph 4:12 "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;"*

**1Cor 12:8 "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;**

**1Cor 12:9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,**

**1Cor 12:10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.**

**1Cor 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.**

Then Paul starts listing some of the gifts given to God's children by the Holy Spirit. A more complete list is given above. Note Paul's insistence that the Holy Spirit does the work of giving out the gifts, He does it individually, and He does it as He wills. He may not work with any of our talents in giving out a gift. He may not give us the gift that we think that we need or deserve. He gives to EACH person what is needed by THAT person to work for the good of the ENTIRE church of Jesus Christ. Note also that these gifts work in addition to what is given to every Christian in some cases. For example, God gives the gift of faith to all His chosen people – remember that Christian faith is God's enabling power. But to some people He gives an extra helping of faith to allow them to do His will in particular circumstances. Also from the first list of gifts above we see giving listed as a gift but we are all to give. Some people are given a special gift of giving and the resources from which to give. Distinguishing of spirits is the special gift of discernment to allow a Christian to determine when a source is from God or from His enemy.

Remember that the purpose of these gifts is for the edification of the church and not for evangelism. All of the gifts are to be used by members to assist other members in their sanctification. The use of tongues is no different in its purpose and of course their must be an interpreter for all to understand the speaking of the person speaking in a language unknown by everyone present. Prophecy here is not foretelling of the future but forth telling the present and would involve applications of the Word of God that they had. Since gifts of healing are plural that would seem to be the ability to heal various kinds of illnesses. Miracles were still used by God in the early church and some were given the gift of miracles to prove that they are speaking the words of God.

**1Cor 12:12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.**

**1Cor 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.**

**1Cor 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many.**

**1Cor 12:15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.**

**1Cor 12:16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.**

**1Cor 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?**

We have to work as one just as Jesus asked of the Father:

*John 17:22 "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one;"*

Paul continues to preach unity in diversity. There are many different functions in the body of Christ but there is only one body and we are all equal spiritually. Implicit in these verses also are the facts that we must not envy any other member and we must not think less of ourselves just because the Spirit has not given us a very visible gift. Evidently the Corinthian Christians had set up some sort of hierarchy of gifts and were setting some people up as more important than others in the church body. Paul is clearly telling them that they are all equally important and if any one of the gifts is not functioning properly the entire body suffers.

**1Cor 12:18 "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.**

**1Cor 12:19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?**

**1Cor 12:20 But now there are many members, but one body.**

**1Cor 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."**

**1Cor 12:22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;**

**1Cor 12:23 and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness,**

**1Cor 12:24 whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,**

**1Cor 12:25 that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another."**

We see here the sovereignty of God in the body of Christ. The parts are not haphazardly arranged but put in a specific order for function of the whole. The more I learn about the physical body with all of its parts that function together the more amazed I am at the complexity and the overall function. It is indeed a miracle that a single human being comes into the world with all of its parts in such a working unit. It is no less a miracle that the church body is also put together by God for its overall function to bring glory to Him. Note the conclusion of verse 25. God has put the individuals each with their own gift(s) so that all would take care of each other and so that there would be no division in the body. If we ever think that we are more important than some other person within the body of Christ then we have already damaged the function of the body.

**1Cor 12:26 “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.**

**1Cor 12:27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.”**

We are the body of Christ but collectively and individually. For anyone to suffer for the sake of someone else we have to all know what is going on in the life of each Christian. We must honor each other and suffer with each other. Suffering shared is suffering diminished individually. Honoring shared is honoring spread rather than building one ego. There is a quarterback on a football team but without a good left tackle (for the right handed quarterback), his work will not be effective. Sports teams are good analogies but still weak for God puts together the church body and only for His glory.

**1Cor 12:28 “And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.**

**1Cor 12:29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?**

**1Cor 12:30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?**

**1Cor 12:31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. ¶ And I show you a still more excellent way.”**

Individuals do not choose these gifts. God appoints these people to be holders of these special gifts. Of course these were functioning in the apostolic age. After the death of the Apostles there are no more such functioning people. Prophets and teachers ranked high on this list because of the importance of more and more people learning the Gospel message. There were not many copies of the Gospels floating about and not many people who knew how to read the Greek or Hebrew texts. Prophets to speak forth the Word of God and teachers to teach the meaning of the words were necessary. Paul makes it clear that all people do not possess all of these gifts but God appoints the people He desires to have those gifts to be functioning in the church to build it up in the truth. To desire gifts that we do not have is to question the wisdom and authority of God. Paul does not condemn someone for desiring one of the “greater” gifts for God may desire to give him that gift and his preparation for receipt might actually help in its use. But in the next chapter we will see that Paul will show them a more excellent way to desire gifts.

## References

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