

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 12:1-31

Topic

God gave the church the gift of the Holy Spirit,
Who then gives each member a *gift* or *gifts*
in order to manifest Himself to benefit everyone

Title

“The Gift Who Keeps On Giving”

In the Superman origins movies I’ve seen, a young Clark Kent was always frustrated that he couldn’t participate in normal activities, like playing football, on account of his powers. As he matured, he came to understand that his powers were not for himself. They were for the benefit of others.

On the day He ascended to Heaven, Jesus promised His followers, then and now, “you shall receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you“ (Acts 1:8). Not long after that, we read, “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...**” (Acts 2:1-4).

After being filled with the Holy Spirit, a believer is described as being given a *gift* or *gifts* by the Holy Spirit. Earlier in this letter, Paul said, “you come short in no gift...” (1:7).



They had gifts in abundance, but they were abusing their gifts in the public assembly. Instead of benefiting others, they were calling attention to themselves.

It had gotten so out of order that the apostle Paul will say to them regarding visitors to their services, “will they not say that you are out of your mind?” (14:23).

His correction begins in chapter twelve and extends through chapter fourteen. I’ll organize my comments around two points: **#1 God The Holy Spirit Gives You Manifestations To Benefit Others**, and **#2 God The Holy Spirit Sets You As A Member To Benefits Others**.

#1 - God The Holy Spirit Gives You Manifestations To Benefit Others (v1-11)

You can read First Corinthians in about one hour. It’s original recipients heard it all at once. They understood that what we call chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen were one subject: The correct function of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the public assembly.

- In chapter twelve, we are introduced to the gifts of the Holy Spirit being supernatural manifestations of His power and presence given to believers in order to benefit others.
- Chapter thirteen is the oft quoted treatise on love being the controlling influence on our lives - including any use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- In chapter fourteen, Paul will give point-by-point instruction about how to utilize gifts decently and in order to benefit others.

1Co 12:1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

In this case, “ignorant” means *ignoring*. Paul had been with them some eighteen months. During that time, he must have modeled for them the correct way to minister to one another. They were ignoring his example in favor of what they considered to be more spiritual.

1Co 12:2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.



The Gentile believers at Corinth had been saved out of religions in which wild spiritual experiences were considered normal. They would be “led” to do and say things without any restraint or order. The more out of control you were, the more spiritual it was deemed.

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

In context, this verse is a reminder that any manifestation attributed to the Holy Spirit will be consistent with His mission to call attention to, and bring glory to, Jesus. It’s a subtle way of introducing an idea Paul will develop more - that it is necessary to test **all** so-called manifestations of the Holy Spirit according to orthodoxy.

1Co 12:4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

1Co 12:5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.

1Co 12:6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

We worship One God Who has revealed Himself in three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is from the Godhead that gifts originate. It is to the Lord they should bring attention and glory.

- There are a variety of “gifts.” Paul mentions nine in verses eight and nine; in chapter twelve, in verse twenty-eight, he adds three more. There are more gifts listed in Romans chapter twelve; in Ephesians chapter four; and in First Peter chapter four. (Those lists are probably not meant to be exhaustive).
- There are a variety of “ministries.” The NIV Bible translates the word “ministries” as *service*. We each serve the Lord in different ways, depending upon how he has gifted us.
- There are a variety of “activities.” This means that people with the same gift will exercise the gift differently.

1Co 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of *all*:



When you exercise a spiritual gift, it is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, Who indwells you, intended to benefit others; emphasis on others.

1Co 12:8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,

1Co 12:9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,

1Co 12:10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

I think the best way to understand the gifts listed here and elsewhere is to see them manifest in the ministry of Jesus and/or His disciples:

- Jesus was given the word of wisdom all the time. One that comes to mind is when He was seemingly cornered by being asked if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. He responded, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” (Matthew 22:21). It was unassailable wisdom that could only come directly from God. As Stan Lee would say, “Nuff said.”
- A word of knowledge came to Jesus while talking to the woman at the well. After telling the Lord she had no husband, He replied, “You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly” (John 4:17-18). How did He know that? His Father revealed it to Him.
- Peter and John were given a gift of faith, a gift of healing, and the working of miracles, when on their way to prayer they encountered the beggar outside the Temple. Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength” (Acts 3:6-7).
- Jesus gave us many prophecies, e.g., the Olivet Discourse describing the future Great Tribulation and His Second Coming. In the Book of Acts, Phillip's daughters are called prophetesses. And there's a colorful character named Agabus who utters a few prophecies. Peter had a vision on the rooftop that was prophetic, leading him to preach Jesus to the Gentile household of Cornelius. (We will have a lot more to say about prophecy in chapter fourteen).
- After being harassed for a time by a slave girl following him for several days, Paul “turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus

4 of 10

First Corinthians 12:1-31

“The Gift Who Keeps on Giving”



Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour" (Acts 16:18). The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul that a demon was involved - thus the discernment of spirits.

- Tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, will be thoroughly investigated when get to chapter fourteen. I'll just say this to wet your beak: The tongues on the Day of Pentecost were *not* the gift of tongues described in First Corinthians.

One thing to notice: tongues is mentioned last in this list; and in verse twenty-eight.

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

There are three important reminders in this verse:

1. The word "works" is *energeo*, related to our English word, energy. It is a reminder that gifts are the supernatural enabling of the Holy Spirit. It is God working through you, energizing you. They are not merely an enhancement of you own abilities. You can't learn them.
2. The phrase "distributing to each one individually as He wills" is a reminder that the Holy Spirit gives you a *gift* or *gifts* as He chooses, not necessarily as you desire.
3. The word "individually" alerts you that no believer is overlooked. Every Christian is given a *gift* or *gifts*.

The big question, always, is this: "How do I know what spiritual *gift* or *gifts* I have?"

First... To discover gifting, it's important we phrase the question differently. We should ask: "How do I manifest the indwelling Holy Spirit to the benefit of others?"

Second... Think again about some of the examples we looked at:

- Jesus was resting alone by the well when the Samaritan woman came to draw water.
- Peter and John were walking in to the Temple as they had done many times.
- Peter fell into a hunger-trance waiting for food on a rooftop.

5 of 10

First Corinthians 12:1-31
"The Gift Who Keeps on Giving"



- Paul was going about his business sharing the Gospel.

Jesus and His guys simply went about the business of being disciples and God the Holy Spirit manifested His supernatural power through them to benefit others.

Could it really be that simple? Yes.

#2 - God The Holy Spirit Sets You As A Member That Benefits Others (v12-31)

Several B-list horror movies feature an evil, dismembered, crawling hand. One of them, *Severed Ties*, has this tag line: "Horror out on a limb."

Remember Thing? It's full name was Thing T. Thing. Listen to this:

Thing is a fictional character in *The Addams Family* series. Thing was originally conceived as a whole creature (always seen in the background watching the family) that was too horrible to see in person. The only part of it that was tolerable was its human hand (this can be seen in the 1964 television series). The Addamses called it "Thing" because it was something that could not be identified. Thing was changed to a disembodied hand for the 1991 and 1993 Addams Family films.

Dismembered hands, in real life, aren't functional. That might seem obvious. Not in Corinth. By preferring certain gifts over others, and by showcasing them in the public assembly, they were acting like a dismembered body. You might name them Tongues T. Tongues.

1Co 12:12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ.

Paul used the word "body" eighteen times in fourteen verses in this chapter. He intended for you to fully grasp the awesome truth that Jesus considers us His body on the earth today.

It's a great illustration because you already understand how your own physical body should operate. Your head directs your movements and activities so that



there is a cooperation and a coordination between all of the various individual members that comprise your one body.

1Co 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

We have to avoid thinking of water baptism every time we read the word "baptized." "Baptized" simply means *immersed*. This is *not* water baptism. This particular baptism is something spiritual that occurs the moment you believe. This baptism is your immersion into the body of Jesus at the moment of your conversion. You receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and you are immediately spiritually connected to every other believer by the Holy Spirit. Our individual physical differences - ethnic, cultural, social, religious, economic, gender, or otherwise - no longer separate us.

What happens when you drink? What you are drinking goes in you, to refresh you and fill you. We are talking about the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit in every believer.

1Co 12:14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

1Co 12:15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

1Co 12:16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

1Co 12:17 If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling?

This was Paul being funny. Ascribing consciousness to individual body parts and having them talk is humorous. Think of all the TV ads for allergy products that grab your attention because they represent you as a giant talking nose. In Corinth, they were a giant unintelligible tongue.

1Co 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

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

1Co 12:20 But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body.



1Co 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

In the general sense that your physical body is fearfully and wonderfully made and all functions together, there are no superior parts. In a similar way, we should never think certain gifts of the Holy Spirit are superior to others.

1Co 12:22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

Ever kick a bedpost barefoot? Have an ingrown nail? All of a sudden life is about your toes.

1Co 12:23 And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty,

We normally clothe the parts of our bodies that we'd consider unpresentable in polite company. By doing so, we "honor" these unpresentable parts.

1Co 12:24 but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it,

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

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

With regard to the body of believers we are to understand that God also bestows honor on those members whose gifting(s) we might think less honorable. Emphasizing certain gifts as more honorable, or we would say more 'spiritual,' will cause "schism" among God's people. Instead we ought to "care" for one another equally as members of the earthly body of Jesus.

All *gifts* and *giftings* are equally spiritual. If you want to cut a 2x4, would you rather use a circular saw, or hedge clippers? The best tool is the one that will do the job. Same with gifts. Your speaking in tongues is not the appropriate, or best, gift if a person needs healing, for example.



Those listening in Corinth would have understood this as a reproof because they *did* prefer certain gifts as more spiritual - notably, speaking in tongues. It was at the top of their lists, but purposefully on the bottom of Paul's (v10&28).

1Co 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

We are one body AND each individual member has his or her gifting(s) to benefit all.

1Co 12:28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

1. Gifted men established the church - men like the "apostles" and "prophets."
2. A gifted man or men equipped the church - men who are "teachers."
3. Gifts are given to all in order to manifest the Holy Spirit in the life of the church to build it.

We gave an example for "miracles" and for "gifts of healings." Let me add this: *No one who is used this way can exercise a healing or a miracle anytime they want.*

"Teaching" is not a natural ability. It's a gift so that those hearing it have the sense that God is speaking through it to them. A supernatural transaction takes place.

In the Old Testament, Joshua had the gift of "helps" and he ministered to Moses. He was there beside Moses. "So Joshua did as Moses said unto him" (Exodus 17:10).

"Administrations" is tough. This word only appears here in the New Testament. Defined it means *the steering of a ship with skill by a pilot*. It has to do with governing the church, and what we'd call vision. Since it is a gift, it should not be confused with worldly success and leadership.

1Co 12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?



1Co 12:30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

What is the emphatic answer to all those questions? “No.” Thus we can confidently declare: *All do not speak with tongues.*

- In some fellowships, you’re told all do; or can.
- In other fellowships, you’re told it is the outward sign you have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- In some, it is the sign you’ve been saved.

1Co 12:31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Wait - I thought Paul said all are equal and necessary? He did - and that gives us the key to what he meant here. The believers in Corinth thought speaking in tongues to be superior to other gifts. By **their** assessment, and argument, they were “earnestly desir[ing] the best gifts.”

Those groups that elevate tongues today are making this same claim; **and they are making this same error.**

They, and we, ought to take a “more excellent” approach. It is to desire only to benefit others; and that will be guided by selfless love, to be described in chapter thirteen.

Amazing. The church was given the gift of the Holy Spirit; His indwelling, empowering us to serve the Lord. He then gives each of us gifts as He sees fit to manifest Himself to others. As we do, the many members build up our one body.

Instead of focusing on the gifts, and how to find yours:

- Gather together in the assembly of God and listen for the Holy Spirit to direct you.
- Go out into the world and listen for the Holy Spirit to direct you.

The way or ways you find yourself being used will reveal your gifting.

10 of 10

First Corinthians 12:1-31

“The Gift Who Keeps on Giving”

