

The Problem with Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

Intro: The ways Corinthians selfish

- Personalities
- Physical intimacy
- Idolatry
- Authority
- Self-examination

As in personalities, sexual intimacy, food offered to idols, marriage, singleness, divorce, idolatry, authority, or the Lord's Table, the issue in 1 Cor 12-14 is not simply spiritual gifts, but, as with the previous topics, the Corinthians abuse of any good gift the Lord has given.

1 Cor 12:7 - *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

- Everyone has a spiritual gift
- The Holy Spirit imparts these gifts
- The gifts are given for the good of the entire body

The Corinthian church is abusing spiritual gifts and Paul will invest 3 chapters discussing this issue. The amount of time, effort and words that he invests in correcting the problem, speaks to the seriousness of their abuse of spiritual gifts in the church.

First: Now Concerning Spiritual Gifts. v 1a

a) Now concerning...

Because Paul begins this section with the words, "*Now concerning spiritual gifts...*" we can assume someone wrote to him with concerns about the way the Corinthians were employing spiritual gifts.

7:1 – Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."

7:25 – Now concerning the betrothed...

8:1 – Now concerning food offered to idols...

12:1 – Now concerning spiritual gifts

b) Paul alluded to this topic much earlier in the book -

1:4-7 - *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge – even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

c) *Spiritual gifts = pneumatikos = spirituals* (the word 'gifts' is added by the translator)

Paul and Peter discuss spiritual gifts in

Romans 12:3-8;
1 Cor 12-14;
Eph 4:1-16;
1 Peter 4:10-11.

Spiritual gifts are those qualities and empowerments that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit give to the people of God in order to make them effective in ministry. When God's people use these gifts in service to one another, the entire church is built up in faith, hope, and love. –

R.C. Sproul

In the Old Testament, God gifted individuals for ministry, people like prophets, priests, or kings, but he did not gift everyone.

For instance, when God gifted Eldad and Medad with the gifts of prophecy, someone told Moses to stop them -

Numbers 11:29 - *But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"*

From *pneuma* = *spirit*

It occurs 26 times in the NT, depending on which translation you use.

Romans 15:27b - *For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.*

1 Corinthians 9:11 - *If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?*

All people have material (physical) brains but, without the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit -

1 Corinthians 2:14 - *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

The Corinthians are ‘*brothers*’ (v 1) but, for Paul, the issue is not whether they have spiritual gifts, but their abuse of spiritual gifts.

Second: The Problem – Ignorance. v 2b

v1 - They are ignorant = *agnoeo* = to err or sin by mistake

- *The world is ignorant of God’s righteousness* – Ro 10:3
- (Paul) “*Before I was a Christian, I acted ignorantly*” – 1 Tim 1:13
- *Don’t be ignorant of God’s plan for Israel* – Ro 11:25
- *Don’t be ignorant of spiritual gifts* – 1 Cor 12:1
- *Don’t be ignorant of Satan’s designs* – 2 Cor 2:11
- *Don’t be ignorant about the Second coming of Jesus* – 1 Thess 4:13
- *Blasphemers are ignorant about spiritual matters* – 2 Peter 2:12

To alleviate our natural ignorance God grants us knowledge, which is a gift from God.

Proverbs 2:6 - For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

a) God’s knowledge is infinite

Psalm 19:2 - *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above^[a] proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.*

b) God’s knowledge is absolute

Romans 11:33 - *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

c) Jesus is the embodiment of knowledge

Colossians 2:2-3 – *Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

d) Human knowledge is flawed, in part, because it is not tempered by love

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3 - *But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing*

e) Human knowledge tends to make us proud

1 Corinthians 8:1 – *Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.*

f) Knowledge, for the sake of knowledge amounts to foolishness

Ecclesiastes 1:17-18 – *And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. ¹⁸ For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*

g) Knowledge implies relationship

Genesis 4:1 – *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain,*

John 10:14 – *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me*

John 8:55 – *But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.*

h) Christians are required to grow in knowledge

2 Peter 3:18 – *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

See: Alvin Plantinga – *Warranted Christian Belief* (academic) or *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (popular)

Third: v2 – Legitimate Christian gifting resembled pagan practices

ILL – the Oracle of Delphi –

Dating back to 1400 BC, the Oracle of Delphi was the most important shrine in all of Greece and even considered the center of the ancient world.

Greek mythology taught that Zeus released two eagles, one from each end of the Earth. At the point at which the eagles crossed, he threw down a stone to determine the center of the Earth. The stone landed at Delphi.

People came from all over the Greco-Roman world to have their questions answered by the Pythia, the priestess of Apollo, even though her answers, on behalf of the god Apollo, were so cryptic they were hard to understand. In time, she became known as the most powerful woman in the world.

The Oracle was only available for consultation on only one day of each month. There were no consultations during the three winter months because Apollo hated the cold and vacationed in warmer climates during the winter. This means that consultations were only possible for nine days of the year.

In a world dominated by men, this power belonged to a woman.

(See 1 Cor 11:4). This desire to abuse this gift may give insight to Paul's admonition in 14:33b-35 - *As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*

When asked a question, the Pythian slipped into a trance and uttered words in an unknowable language that were then translated into the language of the seeker (for a price).

"The oracle received a multitude of visitors in the nine days she was available, from farmers desperate to know the outcome of the harvest to emperors asking if they should wage war on their enemies, and her answers were not always clear. Responses, or their translations by the temple priests, often seemed deliberately phrased so that, no matter the outcome, the oracle would always be right. It was essential for the consultant to carefully consider her words, or else risk a bad harvest, or even the defeat of an entire army. When Croesus, the king of Lydia, asked the oracle if he should attack Persia, he received the response: "If you cross the river, a great empire will be destroyed." He viewed this as a good omen and went ahead with the invasion. Unfortunately, the great empire that was destroyed was his own." – Alice Barnes-Brown

Regardless, to question the oracle was to question the gods, and that was unthinkable. Of course, such being the center of the world generated jealousy and copycats. All the Greek world was in love with the Oracle at Delphi and Corinth was no exception, in part, because Delphi was only 122 miles from Corinth.

The word "led astray" is a verb used frequently in the Bible to speak of leading a prisoner or a condemned person away to prison.

Mark 14:44 – Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard."

Mark 15:16 – And the soldiers led him way inside the palace...

Paul doesn't want us to be led away captive...

Ephesians 4:17-18 - Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

"The truly spiritual" - the truly spiritual, pneumatikos – "is not marked by being carried away. It is not marked by being led away. That is precisely the characteristic of your former kind of religion." Now, you get the point? "You used to have a led-away religion. You don't anymore. You used to have a religion where you went there, and the demons just carried you away as a victim into ecstatic, orgiastic kind of activity. That was a former religion, and now you've dragged your fanatical type of religion into the church and created chaos." Listen again, The truly spiritual is not marked by being swept away into trances, and ecstasies, and emotional frenzies. And I'll draw it down to say this: seizure, being out of control is never the Christian's use of his gift. When somebody say, "Well, my brother, I was slain in the Spirit," I say, "You may have been slain, but it is not in the Spirit."

- John MacArthur

As much as the Oracle might speak, she's as good as 'mute' in Paul's thinking.

Fourth: Spiritual Gifts Honor God. v 3

a) Evidently, someone claiming to be speaking by the Spirit cursed Jesus

Jesus made it plain, saying that when the Holy Spirit would come, *"He will testify of me"* (John 15:26) and *"He will glorify me"* (John 16:4). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to endorse and glorify Jesus.

Whoever said this, didn't curse Christ, but Jesus. They were trying to make Jesus just a man and his death of no effect. (This is Gnosticism; to separate the physical from the spiritual, i.e., 'you can't be both,' but Jesus was!) This may be why Paul spends so much time in ch 15 explaining the resurrection in spiritual and physical terms.

b) The first requirement of spiritual gifts is that they are subject to the lordship of Jesus

When somebody curses Jesus, that's sufficient evidence that they're not of the Spirit. When somebody confesses Jesus, that's sufficient evidence they are.

Lord = kurios = OT/Yahweh

Many people will agree that Jesus is human, but few will say that Jesus is God.

Conclusion:

People only counterfeit valuable things. As we will discover, spiritual gifts are valuable. This is one of the reasons we must understand them and utilize them in a context that demonstrates their real value, is of the greatest benefit to the church and honors the Lord.

Community Groups:

1. List the various things over which the Corinthian church has been divided.
2. What is the source of their divisions?
3. What is a spiritual gift?
4. Why did God give spiritual gifts to the church?
5. What makes it different from a natural gift, talent, or skill?
6. Might you know your spiritual gift?
7. How were the Corinthians ignorant of spiritual gifts?
8. Who was the Oracle of Delphi?
9. How might her presence/ministry lead the Corinthians away from God's purposes for gifts?
10. Why might the Corinthian church, in particular, have trouble with tongues/spiritual things like this?
11. Given their history, how might the Corinthians abuse spiritual gifts?
12. What is Paul's particular concern in v 3 and why would he mention this?
13. There's certainly more to saying, 'Jesus is Lord,' than simply saying the words. What does Paul mean?

1 Corinthians 12:1-3 Devotion for the week of July 11-15

Monday the 11th – God has gifted the church with gifted people and people with spiritual gifts. Read Eph 4:11-12 for a list of gifted people. According to v 12, why did God gift the church with these people? For what work are you equipped? How does your gift build up the body? How might you become equipped or better equipped?

Tuesday the 12th – Read Romans 12:4-8. Do you possess one of these spiritual gifts? How are you using it in the body? What spiritual gift(s) can you see in others? Why might, as in 1 Cor 13 and Ro 12:9, love be essential to spiritual gifts? How can spiritual gifts ‘go wrong’ if love does not moderate them?

Wednesday the 13th – Read 1 Peter 4:10-11. According to Peter, who has received a spiritual gift? What is the two-fold purpose of spiritual gifts (v 10 & 11)? How might a person ‘steward’ the gift God has given them? Would this have anything to do with, knowing your gift, using it appropriately, becoming better skilled in your gift? How are you ‘stewarding’ your gift?

Thursday the 14th – 1 Cor 12:2-3. How were the Corinthians led astray in using their gifts? How might the modern church be led astray concerning spiritual gifts? Have you ever witnessed this? Reading ahead in 1 Cor 12-14, what safeguards do you see that Paul has put in place for the church?

Friday the 15th – 1 Cor 12:3. Why might Paul mention this issue? Why is important that Jesus be both human and divine? What does Paul mean by saying, “Jesus is Lord.” How do you daily demonstrate that Jesus is Lord...in your thought life, in your habits, in your marriage, at work, etc.? Where are you tempted to deny Jesus as Lord? What steps are you taking to overcome this potential ‘stronghold’ (2 Cor 10:4) in your life?