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1 Corinthians

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

Paul moves to the third precept which governs our Christian life. The first was "gifts," the second was "ministries," and the third is that there are "diversities of activities." Some translations call these "operations" or "administrations." According to Vincent's Word Studies, they are the "Outward manifestations and results of spiritual gifts."

If someone has the gift of preaching, the manifestation of that is the weaving of words together to build up and edify others. If they have the gift of tongues, they will be able to either speak or translate a language in order to build up others through the impartation of that language. If they have the gift of giving, their activity will be seen perhaps in what they give in order for the ministry to continue to grow and meet its needs.

It should be noted that for the most part, the gifts which are given to believers are not unique to the church. Non-Christians have oratory skills and speak to build up and edify others. People around the world are able to speak in a multitude of languages. And likewise, there are people who give to charities to help others in almost every culture and nation on earth. This is true with the vast majority of gifts and types of ministries and the activities derived from them.

The difference is that for the Christian, the gift moves from a world-centered perspective to a Christ-centered one. The true spiritual gift is one which is used to

glorify God as opposed to self or something less than God. This is an important distinction that should not be missed because many claim that they have a certain gift of God and yet it is not used for His glory. The book of Acts shows this on several occasions.

For the Christian though, "there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all." When the activity is used appropriately, it will bring honor to Jesus Christ and thus honor God the Father. It is God "who works all in all" for that very purpose. This is confirmed by Jesus' words which say, "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." John 5:23

Life application: You have been given a gift. As a Christian, it is intended to bring glory to God. And so allow God to work through you and your gift to bring Him the glory that He is due.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*:

1 Corinthians 12:7

The word "but" which begins this sentence does not mean a contrast. It may be more properly thought of as "and" or "now" or some other word that various translations have chosen. Rather than a contrast, we are being given a further explanation of verses 4-6. Taken together they read -

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*:..."

These "diversities of gifts" are made manifest in individuals not for the self to revel in or to be unduly self-pleased with, but to profit everyone as they partake of what the Spirit has granted through that person. Paul will explain in the coming

verses to the Corinthians that most of the gifts are gifts which are geared specifically for Christians. However, there are those people that possess these same talents and abilities who are not Christians. Paul isn't speaking about them. It is true that God formed all men, and who we are was given by God whether we acknowledge it or not, but until the gift or ability is directed towards Christ, it cannot be considered under this verse.

Paul is speaking of those gifts which benefit the church and the people of the church. As each of us bears abilities from God and as they were given by His wisdom, then we shouldn't feel elevated over others because we have a gift which is perceived as "better" than others. Nor should we feel depressed because we feel our gift is less than others. We should be thankful and satisfied in that which was given by God.

Life application: Our use of who we are as individuals is to be for the glory of the Lord. So let us use our gifts to His honor. No matter what gift we possess, if it was given by God, it must be an honorable gift because it is intended to bring Him honor.

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

This verse begins the list of gifts given by the Spirit and it builds upon the thought of the previous verse. The "for" which opens the verse shows this. Verse 7, with the added "for" of verse 8, will relay how Paul is directing us -

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: For..."

This then intends for us to look at this list from that context. We can note the following:

- 1) The gifts to be mentioned have an external Source (the Spirit).
- 2) They are given to believers and thus boasting, or feelings of unworthiness over lacking a particular gift should be excluded.
- 3) The gifts are intended to profit all, and are not merely intended for private gain.

And so, Paul begins the list with "to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit." Wisdom is more than mere knowledge concerning an issue. Wisdom involves the proper handling and application of knowledge. Miriam-Webster Dictionary defines wisdom as:

Knowledge that is gained by having many experiences in life

- the natural ability to understand things that most other people cannot understand
- knowledge of what is proper or reasonable: good sense or judgment

The Bible speaks in great length about wisdom. It is a timeless, endless gift that finds its Source in the Creator itself. Therefore, for created man there must be a starting point to true wisdom. Discerning what that starting point is will lead to a right application of all knowledge. The Bible records this starting point on several occasions when it states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 110:10).

All knowledge which is possessed by man must be evaluated through "the fear of the Lord." For example, to evaluate life without this fear has led to the theory of evolution, a doctrine contrary to the Bible which was given by the Lord. To evaluate morality without a fear of the Lord will inevitably lead to faulted morals. This then is a high and noble gift which is granted to those in the body.

After noting the gift of wisdom, Paul next says that, "to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit." Knowledge logically precedes wisdom. It involves experiential awareness and then processing that awareness in a way

which it is cataloged and retained. Again, Miriam-Webster Dictionary provides a definition of knowledge -

- information, understanding, or skill that you get from experience or education
- awareness of something : the state of being aware of something

Even though knowledge is required for wisdom, the Source is the same. There can be no experience without something to be experienced. Therefore the gift of knowledge in created man must have a starting point as well. For right knowledge, the same Source is for that of wisdom just as the Bible tells us -

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 1:7

The word used by Solomon for knowledge, *daat*, is the same word used for the first time in Genesis 2:9 which concerned the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man lacked proper knowledge until he ate of the fruit. The experience is what brought him to the state he was in, but it was knowledge which was acquired by failing to consider the Lord in the decision he made. He was deceived and man fell. The gaining of knowledge apart from the Lord will inevitably lead to pride followed by disaster. Paul speaks of this concept in 1 Corinthians 8:1-3.

Such gifts then, must be used in accord with the Giver or they will be harmful rather than helpful.

Life application: In proverbs, Solomon gives us a great life application -

"Wisdom *is* the principal thing;
Therefore get wisdom.
And in all your getting, get understanding." Proverbs 4:7

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

Paul continues his list of gifts of the Spirit. Here in verse 9, he notes that "to another faith by the same Spirit" is given. This is obviously not speaking of saving faith because anyone who is in Christ has exercised faith in order to be saved. At that time he was sealed with the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1:13, 14). Therefore, this must be speaking of the great faith that carries individuals and even congregations through the difficult times; that builds them up in hopes of meeting and overcoming obstacles; that can "move mountains" in order to smooth the path ahead; and which says, "It will all be ok because the Lord is with us."

Such faith is seen at times where it is most needed and it is to such individuals that people turn for reassurance and edification.

In his next thought, Paul notes that "to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit" are passed out. It should be understood that the same preposition for "faith" is given for "healings." In the previous verse and in this verse, the prepositions are listed as follows:

wisdom - *dia* (through)

knowledge - *kata* (according to)

faith - *en* (in, by)

healings - *en* (in, by)

Where wisdom comes through the Spirit and knowledge is given according to the Spirit, faith and healings are both in or by the Spirit. Therefore, faith and healings come about in the same fashion according to Paul's description. This then must be healings which are beyond the normal "go to your doctor for a cure" healings. They are those healings which come by faith and through prayer.

Having said this, there is no reason to accept the overly ostentatious (and quite profitable!) displays of supposed healings which permeate the charismatic churches of today. Sickness and disability can be as much a gift or learning experience from God as being healthy is. To suppose that one can "claim" healing in Jesus' name is to usurp God's right to leave someone sick for His good purposes. A few sicknesses of note will verify this:

- 1) In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul suffered with a "thorn in the flesh" which he begged the Lord to remove. Instead of doing so, he was told that the Lord's grace was sufficient for Him through his sickness. He was told by the Lord that His "strength is made perfect in weakness."
- 2) In Philippians 2:25-30, Paul writes in detail about the sickness which almost resulted in the death of Epaphroditus; a sickness he had no control over.
- 3) In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul wrote to Timothy that he should, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities."
- 4) Paul wrote to Timothy that he left Trophimus sick in Miletus in 2 Timothy 4:20.

In these and other instances of infirmity found in the New Testament, there was no arrogant display of "claiming" healing. It was understood that the Lord had determined for these people to suffer through the sickness. Many verses are ripped out of context in order to justify that healing can and should be expected. Such misuse can only lead to dissatisfaction in one's walk with the Lord.

A good example of such a verse is from 1 Peter 2:24 which says, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." This verse has nothing to do with physical healing. The context in which Peter writes is healing from sin. Without proper doctrine and right dividing of the word of God, the supposed "gift" of healing used by many people only brings discredit, not honor, on the Lord.

Life application: Ensure context is always considered when quoting Scripture.

...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. 1 Corinthians 12:10

Paul continues with his list of spiritual gifts in verse 10. The first is "the working of miracles." This is a separate category than "healings" which has already been mentioned. It could be a reference to Jesus' words in Mark 16:18 -

"...they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Whatever the miracles are, they are above and beyond what would normally be expected from a person; exceeding general capabilities. However, there are those who have unusual abilities and who will claim their "gift" is from the Spirit. People can do an astonishing array of unique things, but this doesn't mean that their ability is a true spiritual gift. It can only be considered as such if its intent is to bring glory to God.

Paul next says that "to another prophecy" is given. There are two types of prophecy in Scripture. The first is "foretelling." This is speaking of something future and which is otherwise unknowable. There are instances of this recorded in Acts. However, this is such an abused practice in modern times that the only word which can be used for such utterances is "false." People "prophecy" over others about prosperity, deliverance from sickness, marital issues, etc. These are not God-centered, but man-centered and have nothing to do with true prophecy. Foretelling ended with the word "Amen" at the end of the book of Revelation.

The other type of prophecy is "forth-telling." This is the speaking forth and explanation of Scripture. Pastors who rightly divide the word of God, speaking from the pulpit or in teaching classes, are forth-telling the word of God. It is an on-going gift which will last throughout the church age.

Paul next states that "to another discerning of spirits" is given. This is an immensely valuable gift. There are true preachers and there are false ones. There are people who can actually speak in tongues and there are those who utter nonsense. There are those who really have the gift of healing others through prayer and intercession, and then there are charlatans who stand on stage and mock the Lord through supposed healings.

To be able to recognize the difference between what is true and what is false takes discernment, and that discernment is only certain when based on a knowledge of Scripture. One cannot support a "feeling" of discernment without backing up that "feeling" with knowledge. Otherwise, there may be lacking of discernment about one's own feelings. John writes about the use of this gift in his first epistle -

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1

How can one "test the spirits" unless they know what is false? The answer is that they can only know what is false through knowing the word of God. The word was breathed out by the Spirit and therefore the word will provide right discernment concerning that which is false.

Paul's next item in the list is that "to another *different* kinds of tongues" have come. He will later show that this is a lesser-gift and a most abused one, even during his time. He will spend an immense amount of effort explaining it because of this. The word "tongues" is the Greek *glossa*. It literally means "tongue," such as the tongue in the mouth. It also is figuratively used to describe a tongue, such as "tongues of fire." The fire looks like a tongue and therefore it is called a tongue. And, it is used to describe that which a tongue is used for - to speak or make sound. Therefore language and sound is called a "tongue."

There is no verse in Scripture that shows these to be anything more than known, spoken languages. In fact, in Acts 2, all of the "tongues" are explained as known languages -

"And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." Acts 2:8-11

This is consistently the case throughout the rest of the New Testament. It is always referring to a known language and one must insert their own presupposition to come to the conclusion that these "tongues" are either ecstatic or incoherent. Paul, for example, says in 1 Corinthians 14 that he spoke in more tongues than all of those in Corinth. This doesn't mean in frequency, but rather in acquired languages. He knew Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and probably Latin, and his native dialect as well. He may have known others languages too.

And he finishes with "to another the interpretation of tongues" is given. Later, Paul will show that if someone speaks a tongue (a known language) in a congregation, there must be an interpreter. Therefore, if a person speaks a language and yet doesn't understand that language, they must have someone interpret what is spoken.

This is not at all unusual. Many people, for example, learn biblical Hebrew and Greek in college and yet they cannot speak it. Rather, they can only understand it in writing. On the other hand are people who can speak those languages, but who do not understand what they are speaking because they have never been trained in the language structure. Some speak languages in acting or sing them in songs and yet they have no idea what they are saying. Paul says that if someone speaks in a tongue, they must have an interpreter to explain the words that are uttered.

Life application: Paul's list today has been taken to such unhealthy extremes in churches that only self-aggrandizement and humiliation of the name of Christ is the result. A gift, if properly exercised, will have the purpose of edifying others, building up the church, and bringing glory to God. The showy use of supposed "gifts" which call attention to someone are to be shunned. A church is to be conducted in an orderly and harmonious way.

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

From verses 5-10, a list of the different workings and gifts of the Spirit were provided. However and despite this, they all have the same divine Source. Thus Paul states "but" to show that regardless of the gift or ministry, they have a common value because of their common Source. It is noted that "one and the same Spirit works all these things." Logically, if one boasts in his particular gift over that of another, then they are boasting over what was determined by the Spirit of God; a tenuous position to say the least!

The same is true from the other angle. If a saved person possesses a particular gift and yet they are displeased with that gift, then their unhappiness is implicitly showing disdain for what God apportioned to them. There is nothing wrong with desiring the best gifts (as will be noted by Paul) but there is something wrong with not being satisfied with what one has at the same time. This is because it is the Spirit who is working out these things and "distributing to each one individually as He wills."

Who can charge God with wrongdoing? It is absurd to even contemplate it. The Spirit knows each person's abilities and capabilities and makes His distributions according to that superior knowledge.

In this there is an implicit confirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Spirit is described as possessing personal traits that only an individual could possess. Further, the omniscience of the Spirit is noted in the way His workings are

depicted. And His sovereignty is also seen in His will to choose the appropriate distribution of gifts. As this is so, the decisions made by the Spirit are decisions in accord with the will of God. Therefore, let us be thankful for our gifts and be pleased to strive for more or better gifts as we develop in Christ.

Life application: Whatever gift you possess, use it well and in a way which brings glory to the Lord. A gift given and yet unused is a wasted gift.

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. 1 Corinthians 12:12

Paul now introduces a metaphor to help us grasp our position in the body and the gifts we have received from the Spirit. In doing this he will make a somewhat complicated issue more easily understood. God fashioned man as a soul/body unity. In our body, there are "many members." We have arms, legs, fingers, toes, eyes, ears, internal organs, a covering of skin, bones, and so on.

Despite each being an individual thing, together they comprise a single unit; as Paul says, they are "all the members of that one body." None are independent of the body, but are a part of the whole. As noted, they "being many, are one body." The finger on your right hand isn't independent of the hand and the hand isn't independent of the arm, etc. Each member is dependent on the whole. If a finger gets cut off, it is no longer a part of the body and it cannot continue to function. The same is true with any part of the body. If it is removed, it simply ceases to function.

In the human form then, there is a united existence where every part of the body has a particular function and without which the body will not be able to function properly. Understanding this, Paul says, "so also *is* Christ." The body of Christ, meaning the individual believers who have been given individual gifts, are not independent of the body. Instead, they are "all the members of that one body, being many" and yet they "are one body."

Life application: If someone is saved, they are a part of the body of Christ. In that body, they are assigned a particular gift which is intended to meet the needs of the body. This is why the Spirit gives gifts according to His wisdom. It is a specific gift to meet a specific need. If God fashioned man to be a marvelous organism which functions properly, how much more will He fashion the members of the body of Christ to function properly! Whatever your gift, use it with this in mind.