

We will come back to the passage about the Lord's Supper later, when we have The Lord's Supper.

Today we move to chapter 12, where Paul begins with two words "*Now concerning...*" which signal Paul's answer to another question the Corinthians had asked him.

Here the question is spirituality of a worship service, such as speaking in tongues. Paul saw an opportunity to teach, so his response is three chapters long – chapters 12-14.

Step by step, Paul shares his reasoning with his readers, demonstrating how Christians approach complex issues.

Legalism oversimplifies and takes a position. But Paul graciously and patiently provides the understanding that is needed for Christians to adopt their own position. The first point Paul teaches about spirituality is that...

**Everyone benefits from the gifts that God gives to the church.**

### **1. Pure gifts: not deserved, rather given...under the Lordship of Christ. (v.1-6)**

Verse 1, Paul wrote, "*I do not want you to be uninformed...*" There is no reference to tongues speaking in Galatians or Thessalonians. Perhaps this is why Paul here devotes 3 chapters to this topic.

Verse 2, Paul starts them off with something about which they are informed. The Spirit's role in their own conversion! Verse 2 reads, "...*you know that when you were pagans, you were led astray...*"

Since Paul will be writing about the role of the Spirit, it was important for them first to be reminded of the work of the Spirit to change their whole lives. They used to be in bondage to idols that could not speak. Paul is uncovering irony – that the people who could speak, were being led around by idols that cannot speak. That was spiritual bondage, and they knew it. Paul went on to build on their knowledge in verse 3, where Paul wrote, "*I want you to understand that...*" They knew that it takes the Spirit to convert, but what else did they need to grasp? They needed to grasp two opposite truths. 1) "*no one speaking in the Spirit ever says, 'Jesus is accursed'*" and 2) "...*no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit.*"

When they were pagans in the temples of idols they had probably heard with their own ears the statement, 'Jesus is accursed.' Paul was helping them to interpret their own past experiences. Whenever they heard that, what must they now conclude? The warranted conclusion is that the person who made that statement was not speaking in the Spirit of God. Instead, those people were giving clear

evidence that they were speaking on the side of demonic opposition to Jesus. Paul was uncovering in verse 3, what they heard in verse 2, when they were pagans. Maybe some of these believers in Corinth were themselves the ones who shouted curses on the Lord previously!

Here is Paul's point. They did not decide themselves. They did not survey the options in the area of religion and worldview, study them all, and arrive at an informed and intellectual decision to follow Christ, of which they can be proud. No, that is not how it worked at all. There is no such thing as becoming a Christian by personal research and the achievement of knowledge. The fundamental identity of a Christian is these 3 words "Jesus is Lord." How do you get there? No one got there by their own efforts or smarts. Every single person who ever identifies as a Christian, got that way by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 4 gifts, and in verse 5 service, and in verse 6 activities are all given by God. Verse 6 says quote, "*God empowers them all in everyone.*"

No boasting. No pride. No ego. Never basing your Christian identity on your abilities, skills, intellect, education, training, or degrees.

All are gifts.

Paul was calling for a complete change of thinking about spiritual gifts.

Even our saving faith is a gift. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8, "...by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul wrote a few chapters earlier, "*What do you have, that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*"

The first correction is to remember that spiritual gifts are pure gifts from the Spirit, not something that they can be led to receive from false idols.

Spiritual gifts are gifts of grace from the Spirit of Christ. These are not skills we work hard to develop. These are gifts. Things given. We cannot earn it. You do not deserve it. You have not acquired it.

Spiritual gifts are pure gifts.

Students graduating high school get a graduation gift. But that is not a pure gift. There is something the student had to do as a prerequisite, they studied and passed and graduated. If that student had NOT graduated, would you still get them a gift? No.

Wedding gifts are given only when people get married, birthday gifts only on your birthday, and retirement gifts not until you retire. Those are not pure gifts.

But Spiritual gifts from God the Spirit are pure gifts.

Paul called on the Corinthians to think not just of their spiritual gifts as pure gifts, but also to remember that their spiritual identity itself is a gift. The whole reason that they are children of God at all, is a pure gift. Since our inclusion in the

Kingdom of God at all is based on a pure gift, we start by remembering that.

## **2. Group gifts: distributed to each person, yet for the common good. (v.7)**

What is the purpose of the gifts that God has given us?

For us to become givers, and give to everyone else.

Your spiritual gifts are for giving away.

Listen again to verse 7, *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*

When a person in the church has a spiritual gift, everyone in the church benefits from that gift. That is the nature of spiritual gifts.

You have something to contribute to the whole church, and to everyone in it.

Your spiritual gift is not to build up yourself, but rather to build up others.

If you are saying “I am not gifted” then you need to focus on the first four words of verse 7, *“To each is given...”*

Every single believer has a gift that is intended to be used for the common good.

This is the encouragement.

Here is the challenge – if Christians are not exercising their gifts for the common good, then they are depriving the rest of the body of Christ. We could say that those Christians are withholding and being stingy with their gifts.

Each has a responsibility to bless the community with his gift mix, so that everyone benefits.

## **3. Various gifts: assorted abilities apportioned individually, as God wills. (v.8-11)**

Verse 8 – the gifts of utterances of wisdom and knowledge

Verse 9 – the gifts of faith and gifts of healing.

Verse 10 – the gifts of miracles, of prophecy, of the ability to distinguish between spirits, and gift of various kinds of tongues, and the gift of interpretation of tongues.

This is not a complete list. The point is that there are an assortment of gifts that God gives. The gifts of God extend beyond all the lists of spiritual gifts that we find in the Bible.

Everyone has common grace from the creator to possess abilities, talents and competency.

But every Christian, in addition, has spiritual gifts to use spiritually.

Jesus is Lord over every aspect of life, including the spiritual world, and when the Lords wants someone to receive spiritual encouragement, the Lord sends a person with the spiritual gift of encouragement to lift that person up.

In the spiritual realm, no one is just a consumer of services, but everyone is a distributor.

How can you find your gift?

First, it helps that the gifts come in 3 categories, Prophet, priest, and king.

Prophetic gifts are gifts to understand and articulate truth.

Priestly gifts are spiritually perceiving and supplying certain basic needs.

Kingly gifts are abilities to see the direction we are going, and providing leading that a group needs.

To discover our gifts, we serve. Where should you serve? Well, what do you love, and what are you good at?

Problems come when people try to take over, and push themselves forward wanting positions and attention. Meanwhile, other people cop out and do not serve, not using their gifts.

Who organizes all of us? The Spirit of Christ. Verse 4, varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. Verse 5, varieties of service, but the same Lord. Verse 6, varieties of activities, but the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

In order to maintain a gift culture, the Lord slows down and stops the people who are always trying to compete and outdo others and push themselves forward, and at the same time the Lord activates, launches, motivates the people who are always holding themselves back.

How does a church tamp down the self-promoters, and raise up the self-demoters? The answer to both is found in our last verse. Verse 11 repeats and emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in managing the use of spiritual gifts, "*All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.*"

As who wills? The Spirit.

Distributed according to whose desire? The Spirit.

Empowered by whom? One and the same Spirit.

Where did each person get their gifts? The Spirit.

Who has a master plan for the church, that sees how each person has a contribution to make? The Spirit.

Who is interested in stopping the people who squelch others? The Spirit.

Who is interested in activating the inactive church members? The Spirit.

### **Conclusion:**

God is a giver and everyone benefits. The community of God's people is intended to reflect the self-giving nature of God, and within that community, everyone benefits.

Consider this – how does the Spirit interact with God the Father and God the Son? Do they get along?

Yes, our example is God. In verse 4, it was the Spirit, in verse 5, it is Christ Jesus the Lord, and in verse 6 it is God the Father. The Spirit gives, the Son

serves, and the Father energizes people with great power to serve the people of God. We get along with each other in great teamwork because the persons of the Trinity get along with each other in great teamwork.

Remember how we get our salvation and our spiritual gifts. The Father sends the Son. Both the Father and the Son send the Spirit. The Spirit gives life and gifts spiritual gifts.

At the center of it all, Jesus gave up His life for the church.

Jesus created the church culture of giving. Give of self.

A person who is giving of self is not trying to take over, and not trying to remain a spectator.

We receive from God. We receive forgiveness and eternal life. We receive our identity as children of God who are deeply loved. We are freed up from the attempts to find our identity or earn our status or fight for a position. Because we receive from God, we don't need to take from others. Since we receive from God, we become givers to others.

After Jesus gave up His life, rose again, and ascended to heaven. Jesus was coronated as King and Lord of the Church. Then Jesus gave again. Jesus poured out the Spirit. Then, the Spirit gives and gives.

God is a giver. And everyone benefits.

The people of God are givers, and everyone benefits.