

GIFTS ARE GIVEN TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant [1 Cor. 12:1].

Notice that in the text of your Bible the word *gifts* is in italics, which means that word is not in the original. It was added for the sake of clarity; but, very frankly, I don't think adding the word clarified anything. Actually, it has added confusion. In *The Revised Standard Version* it is spiritual gifts; in *The New English Bible* it is gifts of the Spirit; in *The Berkeley Translation* it is spiritual endowments. *The Scofield Reference Bible* has a good footnote about this.

The Greek word is *pneumatika*, which literally means “spiritualities.” It is in contrast to carnalities. One does not need to add the word “gifts.” Back in the third chapter Paul was discussing the divisions among the Corinthian believers, and he wrote, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1). That first section is about carnalities, because their questions were about carnalities and the things that carnal Christians would be interested in. The carnalities had to do with their divisions, their wrangling about different leaders, about adultery, about going to court against a brother, the sex problem, women's dress and men's haircuts, the love feast, gluttony and drunkenness at the Lord's Supper. That is all carnality, and we can find the same things in the church today. The section on carnalities was corrective.

Now we come to the section on spiritualities, and this is constructive. Paul was glad to change the subject; I think he heaved a sigh of relief when he got here to chapter 12. He was willing to discuss the other problems with them, but he really wanted to talk to them about the spiritual-

ities.

The modern church needs to change the same old subjects which are discussed. In a very sophisticated manner Christian educators say that we should tell our young people about sex. Friend, we had better tell them about spiritual things. There are so many programs in the churches that the young people never get anywhere near the Bible. They have conferences on whatever carnality is the popular issue or the fad for the moment. All of that is a sign of carnality.

In this section Paul will touch on three subjects: the unifying Spirit, the law of love, and the triumph the believer has in the Resurrection. The gifts of the Spirit just happen to be one of the spiritualities, by the way.

Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led [1 Cor. 12:2].

The idols were voiceless, dumb idols. Remember that previously Paul said the idols are “nothings.” That is why the meat offered to the idols was not contaminated. The idols were nothing. Unfortunately, everyone doesn’t quite understand that. Back in [Psalm 115:5](#) the psalmist says, “They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not.” This is what Habakkuk wrote: “What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?” ([Hab. 2:18](#)).

The very interesting thing is that he is going to talk about the gifts that the living God gives to believers. So first he reminds them how they formerly were carried away unto these dumb idols.

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by

the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost [1 Cor. 12:3].

Here is a great truth, an absolute verity of the Christian life: the lordship of Jesus Christ. “No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed.” You cannot belittle Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God. It won’t work. Also, “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy [Spirit] Ghost.” Oh, of course we can pronounce the word *Lord*. But remember what the Lord Jesus said: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” ([Matt. 7:21-23](#)). Why will that be? Because their profession is on the surface. The Lord Jesus was not their Lord.

Making Jesus Lord is a conviction of the soul. What is the central truth of the Christian faith? There are those who say it is the cross of Christ, but I rather disagree with that. Although we come to the Cross to be saved, we do not stay at the Cross. We become united to the living Christ. That is the thing which is all important.

Listen to the way Simon Peter concluded his message on the Day of Pentecost: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” ([Acts 2:36](#)). He is the Lord. He is sovereign. His sovereignty is the important thing in the Christian life.

The Holy Spirit commands the soul’s obedience and allegiance to Jesus. The true church is made up of those who have gathered around that truth as interpreted by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit interprets

the lordship of Jesus to my life. Remember the great question which Jesus asked, "... whom say ye that I am?" ([Matt. 16:15](#)). Jesus is still asking that same question. You may be of any occupation, any color, any status in life—whichever you are, wherever you are, however you are—Jesus asks you, "Whom say ye that I am?" He asked His disciples that question, and Simon Peter spoke for the group. He said, "... Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" ([Matt. 16:16](#)). He is the Anointed One. He is the King. He is the Lord. No man is fit to serve Christ's church unless he has been mastered by Jesus Christ. We have seen that earlier in this epistle. Now Paul emphasizes that again.

The *unifying* work of the Holy Spirit today is to reveal the lordship of Jesus to all believers. Within this unity there is *diversity* of gifts.

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit [[1 Cor. 12:4](#)].

There is a distribution of gifts. In order to have the unity, He gives different gifts to different individuals. The Greek word for "gifts" is *charisma*. Some people try to make this word apply to tongues, and they speak of the charismatic movement. This reveals their ignorance, as the word refers to *all* the gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to the believers in the church.

And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord [[1 Cor. 12:5](#)].

That is, there are diversities of ministrations, but the same Lord—the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't make any difference which gift you may have. It is the Lord Jesus who is using that gift, and He is using it for His glory.

And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all [1 Cor. 12:6].

There are diversities of operations—that is, of the energy. But it is the same God who works in all, and He is the One who works in the believer.

This reminds us that there is but one God—but He is a Trinity. The Trinity works together; there is a unity. But there is a diversity in unity. Notice this: The Holy Spirit bestows the gifts; the Lord Jesus Christ administers the gifts—they are under His direction; the Father God supplies the power, and He energizes the gifts. All of this is for the one purpose of exalting and glorifying the lordship of Jesus Christ.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal [1 Cor. 12:7].

First of all, let's define a *gift*. What is a gift of the Spirit? It is a capacity for service. It is a function. This is Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer's definition: "A gift in the spiritual sense means the Holy Spirit doing a particular service through the believer and using the believer to do it." To this I would like to add that it must be done in the power of the Spirit of God. To make this personal: I am nothing, I have nothing, I am of no use to God or man. That is not a pious platitude; it is a fact. But He gave me a gift, and I'm to exercise that gift. That is, I believe, the only way the Spirit of God will manifest Himself in my life.

"The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." "Manifestation of the Spirit"—that is what a gift is. A gift is the manifestation of the Spirit.

This does not necessarily mean the exercise of a natural gift. For example, a woman has a gift of singing. She has a marvelous voice. But if she does not sing in the power of the Holy Spirit, God can't use

it—and He *doesn't* use it. This is the reason that music in the average contemporary church has sunk to such a low level. Musicians think that all they need is talent and training. They think if they have that, they have it made, and the Lord can't get along without them. The fact of the matter is that He can get along *better* without them. I have been in many, many places across the country and have ministered in many pulpits. I have learned much through the years, and I can tell when a musician is adding to the service or detracting from it. I have had the experience of hearing a solo sung immediately before the message that absolutely ruined the message before I even stood to my feet. I have felt like getting up, pronouncing the benediction, and going home. Now let me make it very clear that I believe the Holy Spirit can use the natural ability of a believer if the believer will let Him do it. But natural talent alone is nothing unless it is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

There are those who have no particular natural talent. They say that since they can't sing in the choir or teach in the Sunday school, there is nothing for them to do but to sit in the pew. That is one of the most tragic mistakes made in the church.

This verse tells us that every believer has a gift. *Every* believer! “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”

The word for “man” in the Greek is *anthropōs*, which is a generic term and actually means man or woman, boy or girl. It doesn't make any difference who you are. If you are a child of God, you have a gift. You have been put into the body of believers as a member of the body, and you are to function as a member of the body of Christ.

“The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” What is the purpose of the gift? It is to build up the church, the body of believers. It is not to be exercised selfishly, but is to give spiritual help to other believers.

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit [1 Cor. 12:8].

“Wisdom” means insight into truth. I do not think everyone can come to an understanding of the Bible, which is the reason we need teachers, and the Spirit of God has given us teachers. “Wisdom” is insight into the truth of the Word of God. “Knowledge” means to investigate or to dig into the truth. Many people simply do not have the time to dig into the Word of God, to dig out the nuggets. One man who supports our radio program very generously says, “I’m just paying for the nuggets that you deliver to me.” As a businessman and executive he does not have hours and hours to study. I don’t think God is asking him to do that. He supports the program, and I do the digging for him. I think that is my gift. So he and I are working together as partners, each exercising his own gift. This is very practical.

To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit [1 Cor. 12:9].

Faith, we are told in the Scriptures, is the substance of things hoped for. That is a gift. Some people have the gift of faith.

I have a combination of Scottish and German blood in me. When you get that combination, it’s bad. I have pessimist blood in me, and I look at everything from that point of view. In every church in which I served, God gave me several people who had the gift of faith. Many a time an officer has come and put his arm around my shoulder and said, “Look, preacher, this thing is going to come through just right.” And you know, it did. He had the faith; I didn’t. Faith is a gift of the Spirit.

“To another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.” That means that the sick were healed by the laying on of hands. I believe this was a gift

given to the apostles and to men in the early church. I don't think that gift is needed today. We should take our case directly to the Great Physician. We don't need to go through a man or woman down here and ask them to pray for us or lay their hands on us. Take your case directly to Him.

Remember that the centurion came to Jesus and asked Him to heal his servant. He didn't ask Jesus to lay hands on his servant. He simply asked Jesus to say the word and his servant would be healed. He had faith, such faith that Jesus marveled at him and said, "... I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" ([Luke 7:9](#)). So take your case directly to the Great Physician. It reveals a lack of faith in Him to go to a so-called healer.

I believe that the Holy Spirit gives certain gifts that are peculiar for specific ages. No one today has the same gift that Martin Luther had in his day. I think the Spirit of God gives gifts to the body of Christ so that it might function in the age in which it finds itself in order that the whole body might profit from it.

To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues [[1 Cor. 12:10](#)].

"The working of miracles" is to do supernatural things. There were miracles in the apostolic age, but today we are seeing greater things. When Jesus was here and *He* spoke a word to a person—like the woman at the well or to Nicodemus—and that person was converted, I don't marvel at that. But when *I* speak the Word or *you* speak the Word and somebody is saved, that is a greater work.

To "prophecy" means to declare the will of Christ. That is, to prophesy is to preach the Word of God. We need people today who are willing to

do that. We need people who will speak the Word of God and then trust God to use that Word through His Spirit.

The “discerning of spirits” means the ability to distinguish between the false and the true. I am convinced that I do not have that gift at all. I have been deceived probably more than any preacher ever has been deceived. I have trusted men—certain preachers and certain church officers—and thought they were genuine; yet they have let me down horribly. I have been deceived by liars and dishonest folk whom I thought to be wonderful people. On the other hand, you find some people who have discerning of spirits. My wife has been a great help to me in this connection. She tells me, “Now you be careful there, watch out for that individual,” or, “I think this one is a very wonderful person.” She is generally right, and I am generally wrong. She has the discerning of spirits.

Another gift is “kinds of tongues” (the word *divers* is not in the original). Are these unknown tongues? No, you do not find unknown tongues in Scripture. These are known languages. There are still many, many languages into which the Bible has not been translated. Instead of wasting time trying to invent an unknown language, let’s get the gospel translated into these known languages that don’t have it yet. Some folk have the gift of translating.

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will [1 Cor. 12:11].

The Holy Spirit is sovereign in all this. However, we do have the right to pray for the best gifts, which is what Paul is going to tell these Corinthians. They were carnal Christians, living on a very low spiritual level. They were fascinated by the tongues movement. That is why Paul is discussing it in this epistle. He was trying to correct the things that

were wrong in the Corinthian church, and there were many things wrong. He is showing them that there are many gifts and that the Holy Spirit distributes to each one individually as *He* wills.

MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN BODY COMPARED TO GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ [1 Cor. 12:12].

In the consideration of this passage let us drop down to include two other verses: “But now are they many members, yet but one body” (v. 20) and “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (v. 27). Paul is using a comparison to the human body. As one body has many members performing different functions, so the members of the church need to perform different functions. The human body has many members, hundreds, even thousands of members. In the church, the body of Christ, there are many gifts, hundreds, probably thousands of gifts.

On a hunting trip I stepped off a cliff and hurt my foot. When I went to the doctor, I asked him how many bones were in the foot. He told me there were twenty-seven. I said, “I think I hurt all twenty-seven of them!” “No,” he said, “you hurt only one.” Now I tell you, I may have hurt only one of them, but my whole foot was painful. When one member suffers, they all suffer.

The body is composed of many members. There are the bones and muscles, the glands and the organs, the nerves and the blood vessels. On one occasion, after I had spoken at a baccalaureate service in a prep

school in Atlanta, Georgia, I went to a doctor's home for dinner. He asked me if I knew which was the most important part of my body while I had been speaking. I guessed it was my tongue. "No," he said, "the most important part of your body today was a member that no one was conscious of. It was your big toe. If you didn't have a couple of big toes, you wouldn't have been able to stand up there at all."

I have thought a great deal about that. Suppose when I would go somewhere to preach, my big toe would rebel and say, "Look here, I refuse to go. I've been going with you for years and you have never called attention, to me. People see your lips and tongue and your face, but they don't ever see me. Why don't you ever take off your shoe and sock and let them get a look at me sometime?" Well, now, I don't think folk would be interested in seeing my big toe—it is not very attractive. In fact, it is unattractive, yet it is an important part of my body.

There are many members in the body of Christ. Some of them we don't ever see. Some of the most important members in churches where I have served have been men and women whom the church knew nothing about. They weren't the officers or the Sunday school teachers or the soloist or the preacher. They were quiet, unobtrusive folk who prayed and who exercised their gift of faith.

Now how does a person get into this body of believers?

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit [1 Cor. 12:13].

This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who puts us into the body of believers and who gives a gift to each particular member. We are to function in that body, and we are to use that gift. It may be that we are the "big toes" with an unseen but important ministry. We

each have a gift, and we are each to function.

For the body is not one member, but many.

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? [1 Cor. 12:14-17].

Suppose there would be a return of the gift of tongues such as there was in the apostolic times. It still would be true that not everyone would speak in tongues. The analogy is to our bodies. Our bodies are not all tongue. (I have met a few people who seemed to be all tongue, but they are exceptions!) The Holy Spirit is not going to give the same gift to every person. Like the human body, there need to be eyes and ears and feet and hands. Different people are given different gifts by the Spirit of God so that the body of Christ can function in all its necessary capacities.

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him [1 Cor. 12:18].

God is the One who sovereignty gives the gifts, and He gives them as it pleases Him. He is the One to be pleased, you see. These gifts are in the body so that the body can function.

A man in one of my congregations had an unusual gift. He was not an usher, but he would stand in the back of the church and if there was any kind of disruption or commotion in the service, he would take care of it. If a baby was crying in the church, one of the ushers might ask the

mother to leave and antagonize her by doing so. But this man had a gift. He would go to the mother and play with the baby a few minutes and then say, “By the way, we have a nursery here. Would you like me to take the baby down there or show you where the nursery is?” The mothers always responded. He just had a way of handling people. As I told him, he had a rare gift and one that is needed in the church.

You may be surprised that something like that is a gift. Of course, it is a gift, and so is cooking or baking or sewing.

We can get some idea about gifts from incidents in the Bible. Ananias and Sapphira had gifts, but they had not submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and their gifts were not functioning for the Lord. So they fell down dead before Simon Peter. They couldn't exist in the early church. They had gifts, but they were not exercising them as they should.

There was a woman by the name of Dorcas who had a gift of sewing, and she used that gift under the lordship of Christ. She exercised it in the will of God. When she died, Simon Peter went to Joppa and the widows had a regular fashion show as they showed Peter the dresses that Dorcas had made. The reason they wore them was that these were all that those poor women had to wear. Dorcas and her gift were important in the early church, so much so that Peter raised her from the dead. She had a gift that was still needed.

Simon Peter had a gift. He was the great preacher on the Day of Pentecost. God used him mightily. When God no longer needed his gift, he died—he was not raised from the dead.

My friend, the Spirit of God is sovereign in all this. He is the One who determines what is important and what is not important. If God has called you to bake a cake or to sew a dress, then do it. That is a gift. The Holy Spirit wants us to use our gifts and to bring them under the lord-

ship of Jesus Christ.

And if they were all one member, where were the body?

But now are they many members, yet but one body.

And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary [1 Cor. 12:19-22].

You and I need each other, and the Lord wants to use all of us.

And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another [1 Cor. 12:23-25].

You have seen some little, underdeveloped boy taking exercises and lifting weights. He is trying to develop some muscles and trying to develop some strength. Just so, God pays attention to the body of believers so that the small gifts are developed. I think there are many gifts in the church which need to be developed today.

Perhaps you feel that you are not doing anything for the Lord. One of the most thrilling things in the world, especially if you are a young person, is to find out what God wants you to do and where He wants you to go. What a thrill, what an experience, what an adventure to find out

what gift God has given you!

Paul goes on to say that this should all be done so that there is no schism in the body. The members should all have the same care one for another.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it [1 Cor. 12:26].

My friend, there is no place for jealousy in the church—we all are members of the same body. If one is honored, we all receive that honor. And when one member is suffering, we all suffer with him.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of hearings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues [1 Cor. 12:27-28].

What about the gift of “helps”? Oh, what a wonderful gift that is! If you have it, I hope you are exercising it.

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? [1 Cor. 12:29-30].

Some of these gifts have disappeared. They are not in the church because they are not needed in the church today. There are no longer apostles in the church, nor are there prophets—in the sense of being able to foretell future events.

Paul also makes it very clear that all people do not have all the gifts. Are all apostles? The obvious answer is, “No.” Do all work miracles, or do all have the gift of healing, or do all speak with tongues? The answer is, “No, they do not.”

But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way [1 Cor. 12:31].

Although the Holy Spirit is sovereign in bestowing gifts, we have the right to ask God for the gift we want. He says we are to “covet earnestly the best gifts.”

Not having been brought up in a Christian home, I had no Christian training at all. When I went away to seminary, I didn’t even know the books of the Bible. I had graduated from college where the emphasis was placed on the intellectual and the philosophical, and I was trying to be that kind of preacher. Then I heard Dr. Harry Ironside speak. He explained Scripture in a simple manner. And I heard him make the statement, “Put the cookies on the bottom shelf so the kiddies can get them.” And I remembered that my Lord had said “Feed my sheep” (see [John 21:16](#)). He hadn’t said, “Feed my giraffes.” So I went to God and prayed, “Lord, I want to be *that* kind of preacher.”

Later, I substituted for Dr. Ironside at a Dallas Theological Seminary, and when he passed on, the seminary’s president, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, called me on the phone. He asked, “Would you take Dr. Ironside’s lectures here at the seminary?” I could hardly answer him clearly, and I almost rudely hung up the phone. I dropped to my knees, and confess that I wept as I thanked God. I said “Lord I prayed that You would let me teach like Dr. Ironside, and You have answered my prayer!” I coveted earnestly the best gift, and He answered my prayer. Although I am no Dr. Ironside, how I thrill today at the experience and the privilege of

teaching the Word of God.

My friend, you have the right to ask God for the *best* gift. Several folk have written this to me: “I certainly hope you receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Well, for your information, I have received it, not as an experience or something I received after I was saved, but the Holy Spirit has put me into this body of believers, which is the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit. Also these folk say, “We hope that ye will speak in tongues.” Well, my prayer is that I can speak in the English language a little better. Why? For the simple reason that the gift God gives us is for the profit—the wealth—of the church. Regardless of the gift God gives to you, the purpose of it is to be helpful to other believers, other members of the body.