

12:1-14:40 This section focuses on spiritual gifts in the church, dealing with a vital, but controversial subject. The false religion situation in Corinth caused counterfeit spiritual manifestations that had to be confronted. The church was being informed on this subject by Paul and its behavior would be regulated by the truth and the Spirit.

12:1 spiritual gifts. The **NKJV** translators italicized “*gifts*” to indicate that the word is not in the original but is implied by the context (cf. vv. 4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 14:1). The Gr. *lit.* means “pertaining to the Spirit,” referring to that which has spiritual qualities or characteristics or is under some form of spiritual control. Spiritual gifts are divine enablements for ministry that the Holy Spirit gives in some measure to all believers and that are to be completely under His control and used for the building of the church to Christ’s glory (see notes on **Rom. 12:4-8**). These had to be distinguished from the mystical experiences called “ecstasy” (supernatural, sensuous communion with a deity) and “enthusiasm” (divination, dreams, revelations, visions) that were found in the pagan religions of Corinth.

12:2 Gentiles. That is, non-Christian pagans (**1 Thess. 4:5**; **1 Pet. 2:12**). **carried away.** Incredibly, some church members were mimicking certain dramatic and bizarre practices of the mystery religions in which they had been formerly involved. The practice of ecstasy, considered to be the highest expression of religious experience, involved supposed supernatural interaction with a deity, induced through frenzied hypnotic chants and ceremonies. The practice frequently included drunkenness (cf. **Eph. 5:18**) and sexual orgies, to which the devotees willfully yielded themselves to be led into gross sin.

12:3 accursed. This is the most severe kind of condemnation. Some of the Corinthians were fleshly and given over to ecstasies that were controlled by demons. In that condition, they actually claimed to be

prophesying or teaching in the Spirit while demonically blaspheming the name of the Lord whom they were supposed to be worshiping. They had been judging the use of gifts on the basis of experience and not content. Satan always assaults the person of Christ. It is possible that the curser of Christ was a Gentile claiming to be a Christian, but holding to a philosophy that all matter was evil, including the human Jesus (i.e., pre-gnosticism). They might have said that the Christ spirit left the human Jesus before His death, and therefore Jesus died a cursed death as a mere man. **Jesus is Lord.** Cf. [Acts 2:36](#); [Rom. 10:9, 10](#); [Eph. 1:20, 21](#); [Phil. 2:9–11](#). The validity of any speaking exercise is determined by the truthfulness of it. If the speaker affirms the lordship of Jesus, it is the truth from the Holy Spirit. What a person believes and says about Jesus Christ is the test of whether he speaks from the Holy Spirit. He always leads people to Christ's lordship (cf. [2:8–14](#); [John 15:26](#); [1 John 5:6–8](#)).

12:4 gifts. These categories of giftedness are not natural talents, skills, or abilities, such as are possessed by believers and unbelievers alike. They are sovereignly and supernaturally bestowed by the Holy Spirit on all believers (vv. [7, 11](#)), enabling them to spiritually edify each other effectively and thus honor the Lord. The varieties of gifts fall into two general types, speaking and serving (see vv. [8–10](#); cf. [Rom. 12:6–8](#); [1 Pet. 4:10, 11](#)). The speaking, or verbal, gifts (prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, teaching, and exhortation) and the serving, nonverbal gifts (leadership, helps, giving, mercy, faith, and discernment) are all permanent gifts that will operate throughout the church age. Their purpose is to edify the church and glorify God. The list here and in [Rom. 12:3–8](#) is best seen as representative of categories of giftedness which the Holy Spirit draws from to give each believer whatever kind or combination of kinds He chooses (v. [11](#)). Some believers may be gifted categorically similar to others but are personally unique as the Spirit suits each grace gift to the

individual. Miracles, healing, languages, and the interpretation of languages were temporary sign gifts limited to the apostolic age and have, therefore, ceased. Their purpose was to authenticate the apostles and their message as the true Word of God, until God's written Word was completed and became self-authenticating. *See notes on vv. 9, 10.*

12:5, 6 differences of ministries ... diversities of activities. The Lord gives believers unique ministry arenas in which to fulfill their giftedness, and provides varieties of power to energize and accomplish them (cf. [Rom. 12:6](#)).

12:7 manifestation of the Spirit. No matter what the gift, ministry, or effect, all spiritual gifts are from the Holy Spirit. They make Him known, understood, and evident in the church and in the world, by spiritually profiting all who receive their ministry.

12:8 the word of wisdom. "Word" indicates a speaking gift (*see note on v. 4*; cf. [1 Pet. 4:11](#)). In the NT, "wisdom" is most often used of the ability to understand God's Word and His will, and to skillfully apply that understanding to life (cf. [Matt. 11:19](#); [13:54](#); [Mark 6:2](#); [Luke 7:35](#); [Acts 6:10](#); [James 1:5](#); [3:13, 17](#); [2 Pet. 3:15](#)). **the word of knowledge.** This gift may have been revelatory in the first century, but it is today the ability to understand and speak God's truth, with insight into the mysteries of His Word, that cannot be known apart from God's revelation ([Rom. 16:25](#); [Eph. 3:3](#); [Col. 1:26](#); [2:2](#); [4:3](#); cf. [13:2](#)). Knowledge majors on grasping the meaning of the truth; wisdom emphasizes the practical conviction and conduct that applies it.

12:9 faith. Distinct from saving faith or persevering faith, both of which all believers possess, this gift is exercised in persistent prayer and endurance in intercession, along with a strong trust in God in the midst of difficult circumstances (cf. [Matt. 17:20](#)). **healings.** A temporary sign gift used by Christ ([Matt. 8:16, 17](#)), the apostles ([Matt. 10:1](#)), the sev-

enty ([Luke 10:1](#)), and a few associates of the apostles, such as Philip ([Acts 8:5-7](#)). This ability was identified as a gift belonging to the apostles (cf. [2 Cor. 12:12](#)). Although Christians today do not have the gift of healings, God certainly still hears and answers the faithful prayers of His children (see [James 5:13-16](#)). Some people feel that healing should be common and expected in every era, but this is not the case. Physical healings are very rare throughout the OT record. Only a few are recorded. There was never a time before the coming of Christ when healings were common. Only in His lifetime and that of His apostles was there a veritable explosion of healing. This was due to the unique need to accredit the Messiah and to authenticate the first miracles of the gospel. Jesus and His apostles temporarily banished disease from Palestine, but that was the most monumental era of redemptive history and called for such authentication. To normalize healing would be to normalize the arrival of the Savior. This gift belonged to the sign gifts for that era only. The gift of healings were never used solely for bringing people physical health. Paul was sick but never healed himself or asked another human to heal him. His friend Epaphroditus was near death ([Phil. 2:27](#)), and Paul did not heal him. God intervened. When Timothy was sick, Paul did not heal him, but told him to take some wine ([1 Tim. 5:23](#)). Paul left Trophimus “sick at Miletus” ([2 Tim. 4:20](#)). Healings were not the everyday norm in Paul’s ministry, but did occur when he entered a new region, e.g., Malta, where the gospel and its preacher needed authentication (see [Acts 28:8, 9](#)). That healing was the first mention of healing since the lame man was healed in Lystra ([Acts 14:9](#)) in connection with the arrival of Paul and the gospel there. Prior to that, the nearest healing was by Peter in [Acts 9:34](#), and the resurrection of Tabitha in [9:41](#), so that people would believe the gospel Peter preached ([9:42](#)).

12:10 miracles. This temporary sign gift was for the working of

divine acts contrary to nature, so that there was no explanation for the action except that it was by the power of God. This, too, was to authenticate Christ and the apostolic preachers of the gospel. [John 2:11](#) notes that Jesus did His first miracle at Cana to “manifest His glory,” not enhance the party (cf. John’s purpose for recording the miracles of Jesus in this gospel, [20:30, 31](#)). [Acts 2:22](#) affirms that Jesus did miracles to “attest” that God was working through Him, so that people would believe in Him as Lord and Savior. Jesus performed miracles and healed only for the 3 years of His ministry, not at all in the 30 years before. His miracles began when His ministry began. Though Jesus did miracles related to nature (made wine, created food, walked on water with Peter, ascended), no apostle ever is reported to have done a miracle in the natural realm. What miracle did the apostles do? The answer is in the word “miracles,” meaning “power,” and is frequently connected to casting out demons ([Luke 4:36; 6:18; 9:42](#)). It is precisely that power that the Lord gave the disciples ([Luke 9:1; 10:17–19](#); cf. [Acts 6:8; 8:7; 13:6–12](#)). See notes on [Acts 19:14–16](#). **prophecy.** The meaning is simply that of “speaking forth,” or “proclaiming publicly” to which the connotation of prediction was added sometime in the Middle Ages. Since the completion of Scripture, prophecy has not been a means of new revelation, but is limited to proclaiming what has already been revealed in the written Word. Even the biblical prophets were preachers, proclaimers of God’s truth both by revelation and reiteration. Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel spent lifetimes proclaiming God’s Word. Only a comparatively small amount of what they preached is recorded in the Bible as God’s direct revelation. They must have continually repeated and re-emphasized those truths, as preachers today repeat, explain, and re-emphasize the Word of God in Scripture. The best definition for this gift is given in [14:3](#). The importance of this gift is given in [14:1, 39](#). Its

supremacy to other gifts, especially tongues, is the theme of chap. 14. See notes on [1 Thess. 5:20](#); [Rev. 19:10](#). **discerning of spirits.** Satan is the great deceiver ([John 8:44](#)) and his demons counterfeit God's message and work. Christians with the gift of discernment have the God-given ability to recognize lying spirits and to identify deceptive and erroneous doctrine (cf. [Acts 17:11](#); [1 John 4:1](#)). Paul illustrated the use of this gift in [Acts 16:16–18](#), as Peter had exercised it in [Acts 5:3](#). When it was not being exercised in the Corinthian church, grave distortion of the truth occurred (see v. 3; [14:29](#)). Though its operation has changed since apostolic times, because of the completion of Scripture, it is still essential to have people in the church who are discerning. They are the guardians, the watchmen who protect the church from demonic lies, false doctrines, perverted cults, and fleshly elements. As it requires diligent study of the Word to exercise gifts of knowledge, wisdom, preaching, and teaching, so it does with discernment. See notes on [1 Thess. 5:20–22](#); [Acts 17:11](#). **tongues ... interpretation.** These temporary sign gifts, using the normal words for speaking a foreign language and translating it, like the others (miracles, healings) were for the authentication of the truth and those who preached it. This true gift was clearly identified in [Acts 2:5–12](#) as languages, which validated the gospel as divine. They were, however, because of their counterfeit in the culture, disproportionately exalted and seriously abused in Corinth. Here, Paul identified them, but throughout chap. 14 he discussed them in detail. See notes on [14:1–29](#).

12:11 one and the same Spirit. While stressing the diversity of gifts (vv. 4–11), Paul also stressed the singular source in the Spirit (cf. vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9.) This is the fifth mention, in this chapter, of the source of gifts being the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes that gifts are not something to seek, but to be received from the Spirit “as He wills.” It is He alone who

“works” or energizes (v. 6) all gifts as He chooses.

12:12 body ... members. Paul used the human body as an analogy (cf. 10:17) for the unity of the church in Christ. From this point on to v. 27, he used “body” 18 times (cf. Rom. 12:5; Eph. 1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; Col. 1:18).

12:13 baptized. The church, the spiritual body of Christ, is formed as believers are immersed by Christ with the Holy Spirit. Christ is the baptizer (see note on Matt. 3:11) who immerses each believer with the Spirit into unity with all other believers. Paul is not writing of water baptism. That outward sign depicts the believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection (see notes on Rom. 6:3–5). Similarly, all believers are also immersed into the body of Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s point is to emphasize the unity of believers. There cannot be any believer who has not been Spirit-baptized, nor can there be more than one Spirit baptism or the whole point of unity in the body of Christ is convoluted. Believers have all been Spirit-baptized and thus are all in one body. See notes on Eph. 4:4–6. This is not an experience to seek, but a reality to acknowledge. See also notes on Acts 8:17; 10:44, 45; 11:15–17.

drink into one Spirit. At salvation, all believers not only become full members of Christ’s body, the church, but the Holy Spirit is placed within each of them (Rom. 8:9; cf. 6:19; Col. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:3, 4). There is no need (or divine provision) for any such thing as a second blessing, a triumphalistic experience of a deeper life, or a formula for instantly increased spirituality (cf. John 3:34). Christ’s salvation provision is perfect and He calls only for obedience and trust in what has already been given (Heb. 10:14).

12:14–20 By his illustration of how every part of a human body is essential to the function of that body, Paul showed that unity is an indispensable need of the church; but divinely-provided diversity within that unity is also necessary. His words additionally implied that some

selfish members were discontent with their gifts, wanting the gifts they had not been given (v. 11). With that attitude, they in effect questioned God's wisdom and implied He had made a mistake in assignments (cf. v. 3; Rom. 9:20, 21). In seeking showy abilities and power, they also became vulnerable to carnal, demonically counterfeited gifts.

12:18 Here again, as in v. 11, Paul dealt with the foolish and carnal Corinthians who were discontent with what had been given them sovereignly for the edification of the church and the glory of its Lord. *See note on v. 31.*

12:21 no need. While some in Corinth were bemoaning the fact that they did not have the showy gifts (*see note on vv. 14-20*), those who did were belittling those with the more quiet and less prominent gifts. The “eye” and the “head,” which are highly visible and the focus of all who engage each other, represent the people with public gifts. They so overestimated their own importance that they disdained those whom they perceived as less gifted and less significant. They were apparently indifferent (“I have no need”) and self-sufficient.

12:22-24 Paul's answer to the pride of the more visibly gifted was to engage his analogy again and remind them that the more fragile and less lovely, in fact, ugly parts of the body which are not publicly “presentable” (v. 24) are given the greater respect for their necessity. He spoke of the internal organs.

12:25 God has designed visible, public gifts to have a crucial place, but equally designed and more vital to life are the hidden gifts, thus maintaining the perspective of unity—all are essential to the working of the body of Christ.

12:26, 27 This is a call to mutual love and concern in the fellowship of believers (cf. Phil. 2:1-4) which maintains the unity that honors the Lord. There is one body in which all function, yet never do they lose

their personal identity and the essential necessity of ministry as God has designed them to do it.

12:28–30 God has appointed. Again emphasizing the sovereignty of God (cf. vv. 7, 11, 18), Paul illustrates the individuality and unity of the body by a repeat of the representative categories of ministries, callings, and giftedness.

12:28 apostles ... prophets. See notes on *Eph. 4:11*. Their purpose was: 1) to lay the foundation of the church (*Eph. 2:20*); 2) to receive and declare the revelation of God's Word (*Acts 11:28; 21:10, 11; Eph. 3:5*); and 3) to give confirmation of that Word through signs, wonders, and miracles (*2 Cor. 12:12*; cf. *Acts 8:6, 7; Heb. 2:3, 4*). "Apostles" refers, primarily, to those 12 chosen by our Lord plus Paul and Matthias (*Acts 1:26*). See note on *Rom. 1:1*. In a secondary sense, others served as messengers of the church: Barnabas (*Acts 14:14*) Silas and Timothy (*1 Thess. 2:6*) and others (*Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25*). Apostles of Christ were the source of the church's doctrine (*Acts 2:42*); apostles of the church (*2 Cor. 8:23*) were its early leaders. "Prophets" were especially gifted men in the local churches, who preached God's Word (*Acts 11:21–28; 13:1*). Any message preached by a prophet had to be judged by the word of the apostles (see note on *14:36, 37*). **teachers.** Could be the same as pastor-teachers (see note on *Eph. 4:11*), but probably should be broadened to include all who are gifted for teaching in the church, whether they have the office of pastor or not. **miracles ... healings ... tongues.** See notes on vv. 9, 10. **helps, administration.** These less public gifts are mingled with the more public manifestations of the Spirit to show their vital necessity (v. 22). "Helps" is an ability for service; in fact, the gift of ministry ("service") in *Rom. 12:7* is in the same category. "Administration" is leadership. The word comes from the Gr., meaning "to pilot a ship" (*Acts 27:11*) and speaks of one who can lead ministries of the church efficiently and

effectively.

12:29, 30 Each of these rhetorical queries expects a “no” answer. The body of Christ is diverse and God sovereignly designs it that way.

12:31 earnestly desire. In context, this could not mean that believers should desire the more prominent gifts, when the whole chapter has just been confronting the fact that they have sinfully been doing just that. Desiring a gift for selfish reasons is wrong, since they are sovereignly given by God as He wills (vv. **7, 11, 18, 28**). Therefore, this must be rendered not as an imperative (command), but, as the verb form allows, as an indicative (statement of fact), “You are desiring the showy gifts, wrongly.” The real imperative is to stop doing that and learn the “more excellent way,” the way of love, which Paul will explain in chap. **13**.