

1 Corinthians 12:1-7 – “Spiritual Gifts: Unity Among Diversity”

Paul has been addressing issues in the church at Corinth where they have been getting out of order. This disorder has led to disunity and as a result this church was not functioning in a very healthy manner. We’ve seen the area of authority and headship addressed in the first part of Ch. 11 and it led to disorder in their gatherings. We saw the area of selfishness at the Lord’s supper and again it led to disorder and disunity in their fellowship. Here in Ch. 12 Paul addresses another area where the people have not been functioning in a unified, or orderly manner. This time it centers around **spiritual gifts**.

We’re going to be over the next several weeks taking a look at what this is all about. It’s an area that still brings confusion, uncertainty, disorder today, and we want to get a good biblical perspective on these things.

1. Dealing with Ignorance – 12:1-3

12:1 - *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:*

Again, Paul seems to be answering questions that people had brought to his attention regarding various issues. Throughout 1st Corinthians we see that phrase repeatedly, ***now concerning***, which was Paul’s transitional phrase into dealing with these questions and concerns. There were lots of questions and concerns when it came to spiritual gifts.

What’s interesting though is that the word *gifts* is in italics in the NKJV which means it’s not in the original text. We know the context of this chapter centers around this and so it’s implied here. But the proper reading of this then is: *now concerning spirituals...*

That’s important because these Corinthians had lots of experience with spiritual things. Not all of it was good. We’re talking about good spirits and bad spirits. Remember they’ve already been addressed to flee from idolatry (10:14).

- **1 Corinthians 10:20**, *"Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons."*
- There’s a very real spiritual force that is not on the side you want to be on.

Paul’s plea here is that they won’t be ignorant about these things. They’ve been lacking a proper understanding of what is healthy regarding spiritual things, and what is not healthy.

Remember, he's speaking to believers (**brethren**). This is for the church. And he's saying they should be different than they once were. Yet there was still confusion, or at the least, a reaction from what they had previously encountered.

For many today there is still confusion when it comes to the role and the working of the Holy Spirit. To some He's kind of like the mysterious entity of the Trinity. But He's not some impersonable force, He's a personable God, equal among the Trinity. And we desperately need Him.

The late Dr. A. W. Tozer, author and pastor, said, "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. But if the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."

So let's briefly look at the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Believer today. Jesus revealed a 3-fold working of the Spirit and it's described through 3 key Greek Words: Para - En - Epi

- i. **Para** = with; alongside. The Holy Spirit comes alongside a person to woo him and draw Him to the Savior.
 - **John 14:16–17**, *"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."*
- ii. **En** = in. After we have responded to His drawing and have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit is now in us.
 - **Ephesians 1:13–14**, *"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."*
 - **John 20:22** - Jesus breathed on His disciples and said receive the Holy Spirit. This was the moment of true conversion in the disciples and regeneration began.
- iii. **Epi** = the coming upon (filling or overflowing). This is a subsequent work of the Spirit in the life of the believer.
 - **Acts 1:8**, *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

- **Luke 3:22**, *"And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him..."*
- It was at this point that the public ministry of Jesus really began.
- If we want to be making an impact in the world around us and live a Christ-like life, it is paramount that we are having this epi - the coming upon of the Holy Spirit, being filled fresh and anew daily!

Paul showed us in Ephesians 1:13 that we were given the Holy Spirit at conversion. He is in the believer. But then in **Ephesians 5:18** he says: *"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,"*

This reveals this subsequent work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

- The words *"be filled"* are an imperative, it is a command. It's not an option in the Christian life.
- The words *"be filled"* are in the present tense. It's not a one time event. It's a daily need in the Christian life.
- The words *"be filled"* are in the passive tense. It means you can't fill yourself up. It is something God does for you and to you.

D.L. Moody showed the need to be filled again and again with the Holy Spirit by saying, "I believe in refilling's of the Holy Spirit for the simple reason that D.L. Moody leaks."

We don't accomplish the Christian life by trying harder. It's not about attempting to do more, it's recognizing the need for more of Jesus in our everyday lives and crying out to God to fill us up to overflowing. Being filled with the Spirit is an act of God's grace in our lives, unmerited favor.

I love how Jesus explains it and the imagery that He uses. Just like our salvation, being filled with the Holy Spirit is received by faith.

- **Luke 11:9–13**, *"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

Like I said, Jesus initially breathed on His disciples and said, *"Receive the Holy Spirit."* (**John 20:22**). This was their initial born-again experience.

But then He later instructed them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father – this was the filling, the epi, of the Holy Spirit.

- **Acts 1:8**, *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*
- This is what that subsequent filling and overflowing of the Spirit does in our lives – He gives us power to live as witnesses of Jesus Christ.
- That’s the word *dunamis* – dynamite! This is explosive stuff here.

So, we have an incredible blessing. The Holy Spirit in us at salvation, sealing us, and the Holy Spirit coming upon us to empower us for His work. The question is, are you filled or baptized with the Holy Spirit today? And this becomes more about our relationship to the Holy Spirit characterized by surrender and abandonment to the Spirit.

- Though the Holy Spirit is present in all believers, in some He is not preeminent. Though He is resident in all believers, in some He is not president.
- That’s a difference maker!

12:2 - *You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.*

These believers used to follow the ways of the pagans. They were wrapped up in all sorts of idolatry and spiritual practices. But again, this was being driven by evil spirits.

They previously were carried away to dumb idols. Now this was dumb because there was no life in these idols, but that’s now how Paul uses the term dumb. He means that these idols couldn’t talk. There was nothing they could get out of these things. They were worthless, empty. They were ignorantly following after these things.

- Listen, ignorance can be bliss if we’re dealing with not being aware of how many calories are in that fudge brownie dessert you’re enjoying. But ignorance is not bliss when dealing with things that are out of line with the Word.

So these Corinthians were familiar with spiritual things, but it wasn’t all good. Their experiences now with spiritual things as believers should look very different than it did when they were carried away into pagan practices.

So how would they know what was now a right and true move of the Holy Spirit verses the counterfeit experiences they had previously encountered? Verse 3 gives some help...

Before we get into that, it seems quite apparent by the focus Paul will have over the next 2 chapters, that a lot of the confusion centered around speaking in tongues. This will get brought up a lot. It would seem that this was something that the Corinthians had witnessed, or even practised, back in their pagan parties. So these utterances in other tongues were known to come from other sources other than the Holy Spirit. Now that they were hearing tongues in their church gatherings, how would they know if this was genuinely of God? What if someone unknowingly was speaking under the influence of the devil? This is why Paul says:

12:3 - *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*

The litmus test of the genuineness of the gifts is: does it honor Christ? Nobody who was under the influence of an evil force would elevate or promote Jesus. In the same way, nobody who is under the influence of the Holy Spirit would curse Christ.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to testify of Jesus; to illuminate Him!

- **John 15:26**, *"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."*
- **John 16:13–15**, *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."*

We've probably all seen examples of Christians who have appeared to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit, but who have not reflected, nor glorified, Jesus. I've certainly witnessed a lot of abuses in this area and it grieves my heart. But nor should we be quick to throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater on account of these things. I mean, I've seen some Christians that give Christianity

a bad name, but it hasn't caused me to give up on Christ. Don't let people who abuse the gifts of the Spirit to cause you to give up on the working of the Spirit.

Here's a couple good guidelines for weighing a genuine move of the Holy Spirit:

1) Is it Biblical? The Holy Spirit, as Jesus said, will *guide you into all truth*.

Thus if you're seeing something happening that's not in the Word, I'd stay clear of it. Some may say, *oh you can't put God in a box*, or, *you're just grieving the Spirit by not being open*. Well, in a sense, God's put Himself in a box when He gave us the Word. Now that doesn't mean God's limited, but I don't think He will do something to contradict His Word or go outside of His Word. I want to be in line with what I know is true, and not be open to the subjectivity of feelings. Even on Pentecost, Peter was able to say, *"This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel"* (**Acts 1:16**).

2) Does it represent Jesus? Again, some people will say, the Spirit is really 'moving', and it's a license to just act crazy. I've been in such church gatherings where people are rolling on the ground, shaking, looking unconscious, or making animal noises. Listen, I know Jesus was born in a barn, but we don't need to keep things that way! None of these things represent Jesus, it more reflects something you'd encounter in the New Age.

Now remember in **Romans 8:9**, *"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."*

It's the *Spirit of Christ*, in other words, the work of the Holy Spirit is going to look like Jesus and reflect Him! Much of what we see today in the name of the Holy Spirit does not look like Jesus to me. In fact, it can often be a selfish acting out that glorifies the flesh rather than glorifying Jesus Christ, which again is what the ministry of the Holy Spirit is all about. So, you need to ask yourself, is this bringing attention to an individual, or is it bringing attention to Jesus? If it's a genuine move or work of the Holy Spirit, it will bring attention to Jesus!

2. Dealing with Individualism – 12:4-7

12:4-6 - *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.*

2 main views when it comes to gifts today:

- i. **Cessationism** – This is the belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased with the end of the apostolic age. They still see the work of the Holy Spirit going on in the world today, but that He does not need to use human vessels to accomplish this. Some of the gifts that we read about in the early church and in the book of Acts (i.e. healings, miracles, tongues) were “sign gifts” and were simply to be a sign to authenticate and approve the apostles ministry and message.
- ii. **Continuationism** – This simply is the belief that gifts have continued today and are to be used for the building up of the Church.

Within continuists, we see a few camps:

- Charismatics – believe the gifts are for today, but need to operate in a biblical manner.
- Charismaniacs – believe all gifts are for today, but don’t believe the bible should regulate these things. Anything goes because you can’t put God in a box.
- Pentecostals – believe all gifts are for today, but they see speaking in tongues as the proof that you have, or are filled with, the Holy Spirit.

Again, you may have come out of one of these camps and are now very gun shy of any kind of moving of the Spirit. But we need to be careful not to swing to extremes in any one direction.

- Chuck Smith used to say, if you don’t have the Holy Spirit you’ll **dry up**. If you have too much of the Holy Spirit (overly focussed) you will **blow up**. But if you have the right balance, you will **grow up**!

The word **gifts** is the Greek word *charisma*. That’s why people that believe in the use of gifts today are called charismatics. It’s similar to the Greek word for grace = *charis*. These gifts are a grace of God. They’re given to the individual for the benefit of the church.

They’re not selected by the individual. They’re not manufactured by the individual – they’re gifts. Not natural abilities or talents, they are a gift from God.

Now again, Paul has been contending for the unity in the church. Things have been getting out of order, people have been more interested in promoting themselves than they have in building up one another. And it would seem that this area of spiritual gifts was another area that people were trying to out due one another. They were using these gifts to try and show how spiritual they were, and they gravitated to those gifts that really seemed to set them apart, like speaking

in tongues. There was competition and pride and in no way was it reflecting of the Spirit.

So Paul says, there's **diversities of gifts**... There's a variety of differing gifts that are meant to be exercised for the common good.

There are **differences of ministries**... Not only are there various kinds of gifts, but there are various ministries [Gk=*diakonia*; service] that some will operate in. Paul will mention some in vs. 28. We also see a list in **Ephesians 4:11–12**, "*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,*"

People don't all have to do the same thing. That's not the way the body works. Both our physical body and the body of Christ – the Church.

And there are **diversities of activities**... This speaks of differing outcomes. The word for activities is *energēmata* [en·erg·ay·mah·tah]. It speaks of the effects or results, which might be different from the same gift. You might have someone who's operating in the ministry or gift of evangelism. One person may lead a person to the Lord in a coffee shop, while another person holds a crusade and thousands repent and are saved. Same gift, different outcome or activity from it. The one is not a failure, he's using the gift in the way that God directed. It's God that's powering the gift in both and giving the energy to use it to produce the intended outcome.

Now notice something here, we're going to see a word emphasized a lot - **same** (vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9-2x, 11). Paul's point is to show that though there are diversities of gifts, there is a sameness in the purpose and the source. And these gifts are meant to build up the body and grow them in the Lord and in unity together.

The gifts come from the **same Spirit**. The ministries have the **same Lord** that they're done unto. The activities have the **same God** that's carrying out the work. In fact the Trinity gives us a wonderful illustration of the unity that is found in diversity. We have one God, yet this one God is eternally existent in three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Even though they are all equally God, they have different roles and functions.

The Father sends the Son into the world to save us from our sin. The Son comes into the world to do the will of the Father. The Son sends the Spirit into the world who points people to Jesus and fills each believer.

The Father adopts us, the Son intercedes for us, the Spirit empowers us. The three working in complete harmony, united as God, yet carrying out diversity of roles.

- In the same way, we as the body of Christ are to see this equality among us, even though we may be functioning in different ways. It's all meant to promote unity between us. Especially as we see the purpose of these gifts...

12:7 - *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:*

The Spirit distributes gifts to each person. Every believer has something that the Holy Spirit has endued upon them, but notice, this is not for the individual, it's **for the profit of all** !

- Gifts aren't meant to showcase the individuals spirituality, but to help the church to grow in spiritual things. It is always for the growth and benefit of the church as a whole.
- This is something the church at Corinth was having problems with.
- Gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with.

It's ok to be different and do different things. But if it's of the Spirit it will always have a unifying effect among the church in building her up in the likeness of Jesus!