

Holy Spirit Power: The Gift, The Giver, The Goal, and the Gifts **1 Corinthians 12:1–11**

Holy. Spirit. Power.

When you hear those words what comes to mind?

Maybe you hear the word **Holy** . . . and your eyes glaze over . . . because it is such a churchy word . . . and you're still working thru church – GLAD YOU'RE HERE

Maybe you hear the word **Spirit** . . . and your imagination thinks of something mysterious, something spiritual, something beyond understanding.

Maybe you hear the words **Holy Spirit** and you think of the third member of the Trinity . . . and wonder who he is. What does he do? What's it matter?

Maybe you hear the word **POWER** and your mind jumps to some a TV preacher promising healing for just a few dollars or a church experience where tongues were spoken and prophecies foretold.

Or maybe ... hopefully ... you hear Holy Spirit Power and your mind thinks **Bible**:

Genesis 1 – the Spirit is directly involved in the creation of the world. **He is Creator.**

In the OT – the Spirit of God empowered leaders to build the tabernacle, lead the people, prophecy God's word, strike down God's enemies, and sing God's songs.

In the Gospels – Jesus promised in John 14–16 said he was going away but would send his Spirit to testify about him, convict of sin, and empower saints to serve.

In Acts – the Spirit comes at Pentecost to fulfill this promise and enable the church to be Christ's witnesses on the earth.

And now in the church – the Spirit is the One who brings to effect what X accomplished

Titus 3:5 says the elect are **regenerated by the Spirit** – new creation is his great work; the same Holy Spirit who created the world is an agent of the new creation.

~ **Romans 8:11** affirms the Spirit is the one who raised Jesus from the dead . . . and that he raises Christ's people from the dead, giving us Christ's resurrection life.

AND **1 Corinthians 6:9** says to the redeemed . . . "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and **by the Spirit of our God.**"

These are just few verses that describe Holy Spirit Power.

To be sure . . .

How ever you understand HOLY SPIRIT POWER . . . you will be inclined to interpret them by your own experience.

And that experience may be valid and good and biblical.

But . . . it may also be unbiblical, or unbalanced . . . which questions the validity and the goodness of your experience with the Spirit . . . **if it is not rooted in Scripture.**

So this morning as we come to come to 1 Corinthians 12, the first of 3 chapters on the Holy Spirit in the church . . . there are two errors to avoid:

1. **We must avoid USING the Holy Spirit** to do things the Bible never intended.

We must avoid practices of worship which in the name of the Holy Spirit go beyond the Bible. **We must avoid using the H.S.**

2. **We must avoid quenching the Holy Spirit.** Just as Thessalonians 5:19ff says: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."

While we must not go beyond the Spirit . . . we must not stand opposed to him either.

Rather. . . we must by God's grace look to the Spirit's Scripture, pray for help, and seek to apply all that he says . . . no more, no less.

Which means . . . **for some** . . . you may need to be more open to what the Spirit is doing . . . and how he manifests himself in the world.

And for others . . . it may mean being open to correction, that all that you have seen or done or defended goes beyond the scope of biblical revelation.

With attention drawn to our own imbalances, we need to see what Scripture says.

And what we find in the first 11 verses of 1 Corinthians 12 can be outlined under four headings:

1. The Greatest Spiritual Gift . . . is the Holy Spirit
2. The Giver of the Gift is the Triune God
3. The Goal of Gift is Edification of the Body
4. The Various Gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the Mutual Upbuilding of the Church

Today, we will unpack the first three points from 1 Corinthians 12:1–7 . . .

Then, we will begin the process of thinking about spiritual gifts from verses 8–11.

The Greatest Spiritual Gift IS the Holy Spirit (vv. 1–3)

Verse 1 begins with the words “Now concerning”

These words indicate a new section for Paul, . . . as he responds to another question that the Corinthians had for him.

And this question concerns things Spiritual Gifts.

Or at least that’s how the ESV and many other translations render the word *pneumatikos*.

The trouble with this translation is that it makes it look like Paul is going to be talking about things – “spiritual gifts” – But it is better to see that word is a reference to people.

There are multiple reasons for this . . .

1. Paul uses the “spiritual” 14x in 1 Corinthians and never is it about spiritual gifts.

In fact, three times in chapters 2–3 he speaks of “spiritual persons.”

But the last time, he says “He can’t call them spiritual persons” . . . because of their immaturity . . . so here, he may be addressing these same self-designated spiritual ones.

2. Even more clear though is the way Paul uses the same word in **14:37** – LOOK

In that verse, he says, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, **or spiritual**, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.”

In this instance, the same word is used to speak of those who “think they are a prophet.”

Clearly the referent is to people, not things, and again the focus is on those who think more highly of themselves than they ought.

So I take Paul to be addressing spiritual PERSONS here, those members of the Corinthian church who have asserted themselves as GIFTS to the church . . . **Bless Their Heart.**

It’s important to see how Paul is addressing these people because it frames the way we read his instructions in 1 Corinthians 12.

He is not writing a how-to book on miraculous gifts, tongues, and prophecy.

He is writing to a people who very well may prize the spiritual gifts . . . even over the HS.

Remember, Corinth as a city was devoted to power, prestige, knowledge, and position.

Already, we’ve seen how these immature believers were using X to advance themselves.

Now . . . we find that Paul turns the tables in worship service to say:

The Gift of the Holy Spirit is Greater than the gifts.

This is where he begins in vv 1–3 . . . and we need to anchor ourselves to this truth:

The Gift of the Holy Spirit is the Greatest Gift . . . far above any spiritual gift.

Yes, exercising our gifts glorifies God and amplifies our enjoyment of God,

. . . but it also tempts us to trade him for them . . . to elevate ministry over our Messiah.

And brothers and sisters . . . we can't do that!

On this point, Paul is emphatic.

He says 3x how he wants the Corinthians to understand this truth: . . . **READ vv. 1–3**

This stress on UNDERSTANDING highlights how easily Christians can be spiritually misled.

The Cs think the wedding ring is for impressing other women or buying worldly goods.

They miss that the wedding ring—the Holy Spirit—is the seal of a deep, eternal relationship with God. **He is the prize!**

So . . . Paul re-centers THEM and US on the gift of the Holy Spirit.

He says, “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” (v. 3)

To be sure . . . this confession means more than mouthing the words: **Jesus is Lord.** It is the Spirit-given repentance of a former Gentile and former Jew.

You may say . . . Former Gentiles? Former Jews?

v. 2 speaks of “pagans” in the past tense . . . the word is literally Gentiles . . . Paul is saying M & W who previously worshiped idols are no longer Gentiles.

v. 3 speaks to Jews who no longer judge Jesus according to the flesh. Like Paul who once called “Jesus accursed,” these Jews now themselves with Christ, not Moses.

For Paul, there were 3 kinds of people—Jews, Gentiles, new creations in Christ (10:32)

Therefore, as Paul begins his discussion about Spiritual people, he reminds us all that the Holy Spirit is THE Gift who saves us all and unifies diverse people in the church.

Moreover, he teaches us identification with Christ is marked out by visible repentance:

The one who genuinely says “Jesus is Lord” no longer defines himself as a scholar, a sinner, a lesbian, or a lawyer. **The Gift of the Spirit makes us new creations in Christ.**

This is the primary work of the HS . . . this is the great gift . . . and that’s why Paul starts here.

And he continues his God-ward focus in verses 4–6 . . . as he shows that . . .

The Giver of the Gift is the Triune God (vv. 4–6)

Read what he says in vv. 4–6 . . . READ

Plainly, he speaks of the three persons of the Trinity.

In Paul, “God” usually refers to the Father; Lord refers to Jesus Christ; and the Spirit is shorthand for the Holy Spirit. So here, we find each member of the Trinity.

Importantly, each member works together in outpouring of the Spirit and the gifts given to the church.

In eternity, the triune God predestined Christ to purchase his church and the Spirit to apply Christ’s work to his elect.

In time, the Father and the Son sent the Spirit when Christ had been exalted in glory. This took place at Pentecost, and the Son continues to send the Spirit from the Father to his church, supplying it with all that it needs today.

In short, **1 Corinthians 12:4–6**, with its mention of gifts, services, and activities, is affirming the beautiful doctrine of Inseparable Operations—namely, that in everything that God does . . . every person is one in essence, one in operations.

In creation and redemption, the one God works in perfect unity, because the three are 1.

So here, we see that God the Father (= v. 6) “empowers” every spiritual work, by means of the Son sending the Spirit to give gifts to the church.

More could be said here . . . but don’t miss this: **The Spiritual Gifts are Triune Gifts**

Thus, even when **v. 11** says the Spirit “apportions [gifts] to each one individually as he wills” . . .

. . . the Spirit does not will anything independent of the Son and the Father.

Rather, there is one will among the 3 persons . . .

. . . because for eternity there has always and only been one will, one mind in God,

Therefore, the Spirit who build ups Christ’s church is completing what God designed.

Which brings us to the third observation . . . in v. 7

The Goal of Each Spiritual Gift . . . is the Mutual Edification of the Body (v. 7)

Look at verse 7: **READ**

Negatively, this verse teaches that spiritual gifts are not for yourself, they are given to Christians for the good of the church.

Positively, this verse teaches that every local church is filled with gifted people, given by God for the purpose of mutual upbuilding.

As to words themselves, the word “common good” literally means “to bring together.” For instance, it is used to describe the piling up of books in Acts 19:19.

Thus, we might look at the church as a stockpile of spiritual gifts in service to OA.

Ask . . .

Why should I join a church? Because no other place on earth has the resources that a local church to build you up in Christ.

ATST . . . you should join a church so you can use your gifts for the good of others.

Sure you could use your gifts in another ministry outside of church, but you need to answer two questions:

(1) Where has God intended his gifts to be used? What institution did Jesus found? **It was the church.**

(2) Where can you get a better return on your investment? Where will you find the best opportunities for gospel growth and Xian service? **It should be the church.**

Writing to the church in Corinth . . . all that we will see about spiritual gifts are related to their use and abuse in the local church.

So this is not to say there's not a place for Christian ministry outside the church, but you will have difficulty proving from Scripture the use of spiritual gifts that do not

. . . aim at building up local gatherings of disciples who are . . .

. . . marked out by baptism,

. . . unified by the Lord's Supper,

. . . and commissioned to preach the gospel and make more disciples

. . . who in turn gather in local assemblies called churches.

The problem in Corinth was the fact that the immature believers were impressed with themselves and sought to use God's spiritual gifts to serve themselves.

They thought little about how their gifts were designed to serve others.

It's almost like they looked at their biceps and were amazed at their size & strength.

They failed to realize their spiritual strength was for others.

By contrast Paul says in 10:33 . . . using the same word . . . that in everything he does, he seeks the advantage, the common good of others . . . so that they may be saved.

This is the point of your spiritual gifts—they are given to you by God in order to save others or to secure the salvation of others with the gifts God has given you.

Don't miss this . . . salvation is eternally secure, but in time God secures his saints through the gifted members of his church—**you are your brother's keeper!**

It is worth asking . . . Are you using your gifts? How are you using your gifts?

I remember a year before going to seminary, a good friend pulled me aside and rebuked me for not discipling others.

Since college . . . I had invested my time in the lives of other men, leading Bible studies and personally mentoring others . . .

But for different reasons, I had pulled back from investing in others, and he called me out!

I'm so glad he did!

I repented, pursued two younger men . . . and enjoyed great joy watching them grow in the Lord over the next year.

This is how we should read 1 Corinthians 12 . . .

Paul is giving a personal rebuke to his spiritual children who were misusing their gifts.

And by extension, the Spirit calls you and I to use our gifts for the building up of others.

The gospel does not give us a lawn chair to sit and look at the cross.

Christ died to open our eyes to the beauty of his cross

Christ rose again to give us his Spirit to open the eyes of others to see the same glory

And once we see that as the goal . . . we are ready to tackle the individual gifts themselves.

The Various Gifts of the Spirit are for the Mutual Upbuilding of the Church (vv. 8–10)

In the flow of Paul's argument, verse 8 explains in greater detail the purpose of the gifts.

Verse 7 gives the general purpose – gifts are for the common good.

Verse 8–11 explains in more detail – how each of these nine gifts build up the body.

Next week, we will unpack each of these miraculous gifts.

Today, I want to widen the lens to see what role miraculous gifts play in the church.

And you probably this a debated topic: Among evangelicals, there are two primary positions

The **continuationist** position believes the miraculous gifts have continued throughout church history . . . or that in these last days, they have returned.

By contrast, the **cessationist** position believes miraculous gifts have ceased: "The sign gifts and the revelatory gifts passed away when the foundation stage of the church ended" (*BD*, 804)

This is the stated position of our church.

We believe that the gifts of tongues and their interpretation, the gift of healing and the working of sign miracles have ceased to be necessary in the ministry of the church. These gifts were intended to confirm the message and ministry of the apostles, and that because the Bible was completed at the end of the first century A.D., the purpose of these gifts has been achieved.

Nowhere do we deny the miraculous gifts, we simply believe that from the beginning these gifts were designated for the periods of inspired revelation.

Thus, we are not against the work of the Spirit. We do not deny that God still works in unexpected, powerful ways. God loves to answer prayer and grant miraculous healing.

But our understanding of the Scriptures is that the miraculous gifts are **apostolic gifts** . . . and that God intended these gifts to serve in the founding of the church.

Now, someone with a charismatic background might say, "**You are denying the miraculous.**"

Not at all . . . What is the greatest miracle? Is it not the new creation of child of God? What could be more powerful than raising the dead to life.

As we will see next week, "the working of power" Paul speaks of in v. 10 is meant to shine light on the power of the gospel.

This week, I want to show you from Scripture TWO OBSERVATIONS why we understand the gifts to be historically good and essentially apostolic in nature.

1. **Paul experienced all of these gifts, and we need to affirm their historical reality/goodness.** . . . To do that . . . lets walk through them briefly in Paul's life.

- [a] Paul received words of wisdom and knowledge from Christ himself.

As he describes in 1 Corinthians 2 . . . what was hidden from the foundation of the world was revealed to Paul and the others apostles. God gave him wisdom into the mysteries of the gospel. And thus Paul received words of wisdom and knowledge.

- [b] Next, Paul believed in the miracle working power of God. As is evident from context, the faith described here is not saving faith—a gift given to all God's elect.

And I don't think it is just a large portion of faith—that is, faith to move mountains. Rather, I believe it is the kind of faith necessary to perform healing.

Jesus said that he could not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of unbelief (Matt 13:58). Simultaneously, there are plenty of miracles in the Gospels where faith was present for healing, but we don't know if such faith saved.

Jesus tells of those who have miracle-working faith in Matthew 7, but do not know the Lord. So, I take this faith to be miracle-working faith, which Paul had and more.

- [c] Then clearly from the testimony of Acts we find Paul healing, raising the dead, and preaching the Word of God, accompanied by great works of power.

IOW, the healing and miraculous works he describes were his own apostolic experience.

- [d] Paul also prophesied. We will need to define this more carefully in the weeks ahead, but he clearly received revelation from God and communicated it throughout Acts.

In fact, while in Corinth he received a personal word from God that there were many elect who would believe. This word led him to stay in Corinth for 18 months.

- [e] Finally, Paul spoke in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14 tells of his own experience with that gift.

What kind of tongues he has in mind will be another question we must answer. But for now, we must remember when Paul wrote this letter (AD 55), Acts had not been written. Therefore, Paul is not writing about some later, different experience.

Rather, as Acts records, we know that tongues continued after Paul left Corinth. And it is best to see that his description and Luke's are speaking of the same phenomenon.

All that to say . . . it would make no sense for Paul to write and say "The sign gifts have ended." We should expect him to affirm these miraculous gifts.

In light of his apostolic office and the age of the church, it makes great sense he gives lengthy qualifications re: spiritual gifts and never calls for their disuse.

Therefore, we should affirm the historicity and goodness of these miraculous gifts.

Now that being said . . .

2. **Paul lived and ministered in the apostolic age** – which is not quite the same as our own.

This was the period where Jesus founded his church on the witness of his twelve apostles. We could add, as Paul does in Ephesians 2:20, the apostles were accompanied by certain, inspired prophets too.

This period of apostles and prophets was a time when mighty works were common, when handkerchiefs healed people (Acts 19) and earthquakes set prisoners free (Acts 16).

This period didn't continue past John's death. The apostles were promised the HS to write inspired Scripture. And when John died so did the office, with its attendant spiritual gifts.

What is the nature of this office? Scripture clearly testifies that these miraculous gifts were given to confirm the word of God and to prove the validity of Christ's messengers.

Hebrews 2:4 – “God also bore witness [to the message of his apostles] by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”

The Works of God confirmed the Inspired Word of God.

Just the same . . . the Works of God confirmed the Workers of the Word.

2 Corinthians 12:12 – “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.”

In the apostolic age, like in days of Moses and Elijah and Elisha, when God inspired the prophets, the Lord confirmed his word with mighty works.

God did this with Jesus too: He says in 5:36, “For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.”

Thus . . . the stated purpose of these gifts was to affirm the messengers of God's Word.

Which leads to the question:

Do these gifts continue to this day? If so . . . do they affirm the words of God's messengers as apostles? If that . . . are their divinely inspired messengers today?

These are questions that we'll be facing for the next six weeks.
Next week, I will unpack each of these terms.

Today, I want to say that as we read 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, I understand Paul to be describing 5 'pairs' of “miraculous gifts” that were active in the days of Paul.

And that these gifts are not reproduced in our day . . . but remain as important for us.

That is . . . these apostolic gifts are celebrated today because of the way they confirmed the testimony of Peter, Paul, John and the other New Testament prophets.

Under God, Paul and the NT apostles + prophets were given the task of founding the church.

The church universal and our church local stand on their testimony.

And one vital reason why we trust their words is because God confirmed their testimony with all kinds of mighty works.

They received wisdom and knowledge about God and the gospel.

They healed and demonstrated unparalleled power that no one in the church has ever reproduced.

They had visions and revelations. They prophesied and discerned spirits.

They spoke in tongues and carried the gospel into all nations.

For that reason, we do not take a negative stance against the miraculous works of God.

We loudly and vibrantly celebrate the miraculous gifts God gave them . . .

Because our salvation . . . and the salvation of the world depend on them!

But we just as clearly state . . . that these gifts were given to them . . . not us.

Our faith depends on the gospel they preached, and the Spirit God sends.

It is this gospel message which brings the gift of the Spirit (vv. 1–3)

And the power God today is not seen in miraculous signs and wonders so much as the wonder of God's diverse people walking in holiness, unity, and love.

This is what demonstrates the presence of God in the church today.

In this way . . . we should not look for, seek, or conjure miraculous sign gifts . . .

. . . This only leads to confusion and confuses their purpose.

Rather . . . we should look for Holy Spirit Power in the gospel affirmed and attested by the mighty works of God in the age of the apostles.