

## ***THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11***

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### **Introduction**

- 1) The focus of our topic will be the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit described by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:7-11, gifts which are called in Greek *charismata*, and defined by the Greek expert Joseph Thayer in his Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament as denoting “extraordinary powers, distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating in their souls by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>
- 2) Briefly, the above gifts all differ from those described in Rom. 12:6-9, where those gifts seem to be given by God the Father and have routinely been described by theologians as “service” gifts (prophecy is the only gift in common with those described in 1 Cor. 12:7-11).
- 3) The gifts given in Eph. 4:7-11 are given by Christ – not by the Holy Spirit – and are different from the *charismata* in that they are permanent gifts of leadership (*domata*), as opposed to the gifts of grace (*charismata*) in 1 Cor. 12:7-11, which are given for power to edify and to evangelize. We’ll discuss the distinction on this matter later in this study.
- 4) It is important in our study to note that it is the Holy Spirit who operates the gifts (v.11), thus stressing His deity. But this operation is not to bring glory to Himself but as always, to Jesus, where Gordon Fee points out that “The ultimate criterion of the Spirit’s activity is the exaltation of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> This truth can be seen in 1 Cor. 12:3.
- 5) The background for Paul’s discussion is to clarify and *bring to order* to these gifts that the Corinthians were quite familiar with (1 Cor. 1:5-7); Paul’s purpose is *not to shut the gifts down!* And it is instructive for us that the Corinthians were an educated, sophisticated people. This is important to point out because one pastor once told me the gifts of the Spirit were only needed in uneducated countries with high illiteracy rates (he couldn’t cite chapter-and-verse, however, to prove his point)!
- 6) Furthermore, we should also note that *it was among the normal Christians themselves that God moved in great power*; His supernatural works were not limited merely to the apostles, as so many theologians, pastors and Christians have believed for so long.
- 7) Continuing in this vein, J. Rodman Williams argues that “the truth of the matter is that a lack of significant experience of the pneumatic *charismata* results in the efforts of some people to distance themselves from the gifts because of not really knowing how to cope with them.”<sup>3</sup>
- 8) I strongly agree with Dr. Williams’ assessment of the great need of the gifts of the Spirit in the Church today: “Let it be firmly said that the church cannot be fully or freely the church without the presence and operation of the gifts of the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> J. Rodman Williams, Renewal Theology, Volume Two, p. 323, footnote 1.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. p. 582.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, p. 327.

Spirit. What is depicted therefore in 1 Corinthians – and recurring in our day – is in no sense a peripheral matter but is crucial to the life of the church.”<sup>4</sup>

### *The Nine-fold Manifestation of the Holy Spirit*

- 9) Paul has just described the unity and diversity of the Godhead in 12:4-6 as the pattern for the health of the church: unity and diversity. That is, it is God’s desire and will to ensure that all within the body of Christ be able to contribute to its health and to the evangelization of the lost.
- 10) Thus, we should immediately see the importance of the words “to each one is given” in v.7 (note the present tense and its significance). This means that ***any or all may partner together with God to bring forth the manifestation of the Spirit and such a verse must guard against one person dominating the usage of the gifts*** (I have sadly seen this happen all too often).
- 11) Secondly, what is given is “the manifestation of the Holy Spirit” (v.7). Williams puts it well: “The Spirit who is invisible now manifests Himself visibly and audibly.”<sup>5</sup>
- 12) Moreover, it is not merely the manifestation of the Holy Spirit but the entire Godhead at work: the Father ministering in and to His people (v.6) and the Son continuing the work He did on earth, through His Church (v.5).
- 13) Truly, the significance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit cannot be emphasized enough, ***insofar as they operate in an orderly manner and through the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit, found in Gal. 5:22-23.***
- 14) We should also by now have clearly seen the partnership of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: in the expression of the gifts there is both divine (cf. v.11) and human activity (v.7).
- 15) ***Therefore, while we understand God does not make mistakes, let us take heed to the fact of our own fallibility and hence to the order and proper boundaries of the gifts Paul lays down for us in this chapter!***
- 16) It will be helpful to clarify from vv.7, 11 the question of whether the gifts enumerated are offices or spontaneous gifts and the answer to that question is that it may be both.
- 17) Again, v.11 shows the sovereignty and spontaneity of the Spirit and 14:26, 31 reinforce this, while at the same time reminding us of the unity and diversity of these gifts.
- 18) At the same time, it is normal for believers to frequently operate in one particular area in the charismata, as seen, for example, in Rom. 12:6b and 1 Cor. 12:28-30, where “appointed” also means “to place,” and has the idea of permanence.
- 19) To illustrate personally, I have moved for years in the prophetic and in healing, but very rarely in the other gifts (the word of knowledge and the giving of a tongue with interpretation, in descending order), though I always want to be available and ready to move in those other gifts. That desire is good, ***as long as it is tempered with the recognition that God wants to use others in those same gifts, to the extent that they are willing and available.***

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

- 20) Because of the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit – who alone knows the hearts of men, women and children – *Williams notes that when believers gather together, “there is a lively expectation of fresh, perhaps different, manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Also, since one may not know ahead of time what gift the Spirit will impart, each person may come with keen anticipation, even excitement, about what the Spirit will do through him. All this means that the gathered community becomes the arena of God’s mighty and wondrous activity in the Holy Spirit.”*<sup>6</sup>
- 21) Finally in v.7, we should note carefully the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit: they are “for the common good.” Elsewhere, Paul says they are for the edification of the church (14:12, 26).
- 22) Hence, when done “properly and in an orderly manner” (14:40), these gifts are healthy and powerful. Realizing the truth of these past two paragraphs, I hasten to add at this point that it is therefore imperative for the people of God to come to any gathering of worshiping believers with an attitude of faith and expectation for God to edify His church *through them*.
- 23) I have long observed that fear holds people back from “stepping out in faith” in the gifts, but when they realize that if God has something for them to give and that such a gift has the power to edify, they are much more willing to indeed step out in faith.
- 24) Along these lines, it is very important for the leader of the gathering to engender faith in the church by reminding them of these things and encouraging them to indeed step out in faith to exercise the gifts (recall that the gifts of the Spirit are a partnership between God and man; God initiates and man responds in faith).
- 25) A word here needs to be said about the importance of spiritual gifts and love. The entire reason for 1 Cor. 13 is not poetic; it is not to be admired for its beautiful prose or to be used only in wedding ceremonies! On the contrary, in the broader context of the letter, Paul wrote this chapter as a corrective measure against the selfishness of the Corinthians in boasting about their use of the gifts of the Spirit!
- 26) Furthermore, Paul’s description in chapter 13 of faith, hope and love serve as an explanation of how the gifts must operate. But these three are not gifts but fruits of the Spirit and they connect Paul’s discussion of the gifts in 1 Cor. 12:31 and 14:1. The “greater gifts” (12:31) are those that edify, and of course, Paul makes clear that prophecy is at the top of that list (14:1).
- 27) Donald Gee writes, “Ministry on the line of the natural gifts...often draws attention to the brilliance of the individual and glorifies man. But true ministry of the spiritual gifts leaves man in the background and glorifies God.”<sup>7</sup>
- 28) A clear word here about “the perfect” of 13:10 is in order here, for non-Charismatic writers routinely argue that the “perfect” is the Bible. However, they have absolutely no exegetical grounds whatsoever to stand on in this argument, for the context determines the definition of “the perfect.”
- 29) That contextual explanation comes in v.12 in Paul’s exclamation of the event or time when he sees Christ “face to face.” That is, the gifts of the Spirit are related

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Gee, Concerning Spiritual Gifts, p. 16.

- to this age, wherein in the absence of Christ on earth and before His millennial reign we need them.
- 30) But in heaven and during the millennial reign – in His manifest presence and glory – we will most certainly not need the gifts. Thus, while we must certainly heartily agree that the Bible is indeed perfect, the “perfect” Paul is discussing (in the neuter voice) is eschatological; it is the event of the return of Christ, as 1 Cor. 15 makes abundantly clear.
  - 31) Finally on this subject, to deny the present-day manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit is to outrageously deny 2,000 years of the miraculous of God in church history. In this case, experience affirms Scripture (for further reading, see Eddie Hyatt’s 2,000 Years of Charismatic Christianity).
  - 32) We now come to 1 Cor. 12:8-10 and Paul’s listing of the nine-fold manifestation of the Holy Spirit and we begin with “the word of wisdom” (v.8). The Greek word translated “word” is *logos*, or that which is spoken.
  - 33) Thus, what is given is not mere wisdom, but a *special* wisdom from the Holy Spirit; a manifestation of His wisdom, given for the common good, and beyond human wisdom, which is precisely what Paul sought to avoid (1:17; 2:1, 5). That it is supernatural wisdom can be easily seen from the nine-fold category: these manifestations are clearly supernatural in nature.
  - 34) The best way for us to understand this gift of supernatural wisdom can be seen from the unusually wise answer Solomon gave to two women arguing over who the real mother was of a disputed child and the manner in which the people responded to this powerful answer (1 Kings 3:16-28).
  - 35) A NT example of the word of wisdom can be seen in our Lord’s response to the trap set for Him by the Pharisees from Mt. 22:15-22. Note once again from v.22 the result of this powerful answer: they “marveled.” ***And consider that Jesus did His work through the power of the Holy Spirit*** (Lk. 4:16-21; Mt. 12:18, 28), the same way you and I must do the work of God!
  - 36) The same definitions given in paragraphs 32 and 33 apply with “the word of knowledge” (v.8), and it is certainly clear both here in v.8 as well as in 1 Cor. 2:8 (where the Greek word translated “understood” is this same word for “knowledge”) and Col. 2:3 that both gifts seem to work together in close conjunction.
  - 37) Fee defines the word as a “spiritual utterance” of some revelatory kind.<sup>8</sup> OT examples of the word of knowledge can be seen from Elisha’s ministry (2 Kings 6:8-12, 32 and that of Samuel (1 Sam. 9:3-10:2) in finding Saul’s father’s lost donkeys.
  - 38) It is also seen in the ministry of Jesus (John 4:16-18) and that of Peter before Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
  - 39) “Faith” in v.9 is certainly a gift or manifestation of the Holy Spirit and because it is supernatural, it can be said to be the kind of faith that moves mountains (13:2). Fee writes that “It probably refers to a supernatural conviction that God will reveal His power or mercy in a special way in a specific instance.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Fee, p. 593.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

- 40) Williams thinks the gift of faith “may be the immediate background for the exercise of the two ministry gifts that follow: gifts of healing and effecting of miracles. Faith is the atmosphere in which healings occur; it is likewise the basic precondition for the working of miracles.”<sup>10</sup> Coming just after the speaking gifts of the words of wisdom and knowledge, ***it will be of major help for the person operating in the gift of faith to speak it out to the congregation so that others may have faith for more of God’s miraculous power!***
- 41) OT examples of the gift of faith may include Elijah against the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) and Daniel in the lion’s den (6:23), while Paul likely operated in the gift of faith in Acts 27:25 in assuring his shipmates that they would not lose their lives in the midst of such a fierce storm that only supernatural intervention could possibly save them.
- 42) The Greek in v.9 literally reads “to another gifts of healings,” and of course, the OT and NT are replete with instances of supernatural healings, especially in the Gospels and Acts.
- 43) Just as there are varieties of healings, *so there are varieties of ways people can be healed (e.g. through the laying on of hands, the anointing with oil in the name of the Lord, or simple prayer).*
- 44) ***The point to keep in mind is that the Lord Jesus is the healer and He heals out of compassion, to meet needs, to save souls and to bring glory to Himself and to the Father. In the process, the church is edified!***
- 45) The question we all have, of course, is why we do not see more people healed! First, let it be said that even Paul, who moved in incredible healing power and miracles, saw neither Timothy nor Trophimus healed (1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20).
- 46) In addition, I have noted that although Elisha moved in incredible power (I have counted about 18 listed instances of him moving in prophecy, miracles, healings, a word of knowledge and discernment of spirits), he died from an illness and the Bible gives no explanation of why he died (2 Kings 13:14).
- 47) Thus, we do well to keep in mind Rom. 8:23 when considering the mystery of why not all people are healed, though it can be said that some people are not healed due to lack of faith in God (Mk. 6:5; James 1:6-8) or due to sin (James 5:16), **while at the same time it must be urged that not all illness or tragedy can definitely be ascribed to sin (John 9:3).**
- 48) What, then, are we to say about Ps. 103:3? Williams may have helpful insight on this question: He cautions that “this is no guarantee of freedom from all disease.”<sup>11</sup>
- 49) In addition, he adds in a footnote to this discussion that “One will not be free of all ailment any more than one will be free of all sin. God in Christ does bring salvation from sin, yet sin remains in even the most holy life. Only in the world to come will we know perfect holiness. The same is true of perfect health.”<sup>12</sup>
- 50) Given both sides of the above issue, how ought we to proceed? There is only one option: let us therefore move forward and pray boldly in the name of the Lord,

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<sup>10</sup> Williams, p. 359.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., footnote 129.

- believing God for the healing of others and not worrying about *apparent* success or *apparent* lack thereof.
- 51) Sometimes people are healed immediately and sometimes it takes perseverance to pray for them (even Jesus had to do this; Mk. 8:22-25). In the same way, some people we witness to are saved while others are not. But the fact that some will not come to faith in Christ should never keep us from sharing the good news *that they may be saved!*
  - 52) The “effecting” or “working of miracles” (v.10) can be seen in the miracles (the ten plagues) done by God through Moses (Ex. 7:14-12:36) or those done by Elisha (2 Kings 2:13-4:44; 5:15-6:23; 13:20-21) in the OT or in the NT, the water turned to wine by Jesus (John 2), His giving of sight to one *born* blind (Jn. 9), or the several people He raised from the dead (e.g. Lazarus in Jn. 11).
  - 53) Lest we think that miracles can only come through unusually gifted people, we must remind ourselves that they took place in Corinth through ordinary believers and they occurred in the Galatian churches as well (Gal. 3:5).
  - 54) The above is consistent with what our Lord said we would do (Jn. 14:12, where “works” include healings or miracles).
  - 55) Prophecy – inspired utterance from God working through an individual for the “edification and exhortation and consolation” of others (1 Cor. 14:3) -- appears to be the most important gift of all, according to Paul (1 Cor. 14:1-4).
  - 56) Prophecy itself (a gift available to all believers, according to 1 Cor. 14:24) is a highly significant sign that we are living in the last days, as Peter made clear in Acts 2:17-18.
  - 57) As a matter of fact, those who argue that the gifts of the Holy Spirit ended after the apostolic age would have to also argue that we are no longer living in the last days to be consistent in both their logic and in their exegesis, for Peter makes it abundantly clear that this gift is to be employed by all.
  - 58) According to Paul’s definition of prophecy above, this gift is primarily forthtelling and confirmational as opposed to a foretelling, though Agabus certainly is an example of how prophecy in the NT era can indeed be predictive (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11).
  - 59) However, this gift can be subject to great abuse if its attempt is to be given in a directional manner. It does not appear from the NT that prophecy is given in an authoritative, directive manner or spirit.
  - 60) In addition, prophecy must never contradict Scripture or even purport to add to Scripture, because the prophet himself cannot claim to be infallible (1 Cor. 13:9). In addition, when given in church, it must be done in an orderly manner (1 Cor. 14:29-33).
  - 61) Though this gift is primarily for believers, it is also powerful enough to be used by God evangelistically (1 Cor. 14:24-25). Thus, to avoid, disallow or explain away this awesome gift as if somehow the unsaved would be deterred by it is not even biblical (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19-21, where “despise” can also mean to “consider as nothing” or to “downgrade”).
  - 62) How should someone prophesy? First, according to his level of faith (Rom. 12:6). Second, the prophetic word ought to have Scripture in it whenever possible or it should point to or be biblically based.

- 63) Third, while some may use the phrase “The Lord says” or “Thus says the Lord,” or “The Lord is showing me,” the person prophesying ought to convey that such a word is given in humility and without claim to perfection.
- 64) In addition, the person receiving the prophetic word may tend to think the word will come to pass immediately or in a manner in which he or she thinks it will come to pass, but this may not necessarily be the case!
- 65) Finally, due to the powerful nature of this gift, others present are called upon by Paul to assess the accuracy of the word (“pass judgment,” 1 Cor. 14:29).
- 66) “The distinguishing of spirits” (1 Cor. 12:10) is literally “a judging through.” This gift isn’t discernment in general but rather it is a discerning of “spirits.” Again, this is a gift of the Holy Spirit, given for the edification of the body or even the winning of the lost to Christ.
- 67) In NT language, “spirits” can relate to the human, demonic and angelic realms. First, a “distinguishing of spirits” can discern, through the Holy Spirit, someone who enters with a heavy, anxious, proud or bitter spirit and perhaps not even be aware of it until another points it out (this happened recently in our church; when the word was spoken that there were several present with bitterness, many raised their hands, were prayed for and repented and released that bitterness. This happened spontaneously and had not occurred before or since – the point being that it was not contrived).
- 68) It is at this point that the Holy Spirit can then make the person in need aware of his or her need, so that he or she can be ministered to, repent of sin or respond accordingly to whatever the situation calls for. In effect, this gift can quickly get to the root of a human problem.
- 69) As for the existence of demonic spirits, we can understand that it is not always readily apparent that someone is demon-possessed, oppressed, influenced, under attack or demonic deception or even whether an illness has been caused by a demon (e.g. Mk. 9:25).
- 70) The Apostle Paul recognized a “spirit of divination” controlling a woman who spoke truthful and flattering words (Acts 16:16-18). Not all good and pleasing words come from the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Kings 22:12-23).
- 71) Finally, the distinguishing of spirits can be given by the Holy Spirit to detect the presence of God’s angels, something we should expect anyway (Heb. 1:14; cf. 2 Kings 6:15-17). Angels, of course, even ministered to our Lord (Mt. 4:11; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 22:43).
- 72) We come now to the last two gifts of the Spirit in v.10, tongues and the interpretation of tongues. It should be clear from the NT that tongues remains *consistent* as a result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see my teaching on Part One of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit), whether they are discussed among the Christians at Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, or among the believers to whom Jude wrote.
- 73) We will learn in this study from both Paul and Jude the purpose of tongues: as a prayer language and part of an individual’s prayer life for help and edification (the “*devotional*” use of tongues ) and the *ministerial* use of tongues (where tongues come forth as a gift of the Spirit and which must be accompanied by

- interpretation). ***It will be crucial to see and understand that there is a clear distinction between the two usages of tongues!***
- 74) First, we look at the *devotional* use of tongues, which is also called “praying in the Spirit” and done for the edification, upbuilding, strength and help of the believer. First, recall that tongues, or prayer in the Spirit is a language of the Spirit (Acts 2:4).
- 75) Next, we see from 1 Cor. 14:14-15 that the believer controls this prayer language, yet still in dependence upon the Spirit (just as he or she is in any aspect of prayer). Again, we should see that praying in tongues or praying in the Spirit ***is a spiritual – not a mental exercise***. Put another way, Christians at times are led by the Holy Spirit to pray in tongues or to pray with their understanding (i.e. in the human language they speak).
- 76) For additional insight into why Paul says he doesn’t understand what it is that he is praying when he prays in the Spirit, note Rom. 8:26-27 (where the immediate background is “we do not know how to pray as we should”) and Jude 20-21, where the purpose of this language is for help and edification. Eph. 6:18 includes praying in the Spirit as part of a *normative* prayer life.
- 77) In addition, see 1 Cor. 14:1-5, 16-20, which leads us into a discussion of the *ministerial* use of tongues as one of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1, 7-11), which must always be accompanied by the gift of interpretation and which is done in a gathering of believers.
- 78) The usage of these “twin” gifts will result in edification (v.5; 14:12-13) and a sign for unbelievers (14:21-23) when exercised properly (i.e. with an interpretation and ***not with believers in a church gathering praying in tongues***).
- 79) ***The classic misunderstanding of some*** – that tongues are not for everyone – comes in 1 Cor. 12:30. But in context (vv.28-31), Paul is clearly describing the *ministerial* use of tongues as a gift of the Holy Spirit – not the *devotional use* of tongues ***as part of one’s prayer life***.
- 80) Incidentally, 1 Cor. 13 is a discussion of how the church ought to exercise the gifts of the Spirit: in love. Love is not a gift but a fruit of the Spirit. Tongues are necessary for this age, but not the next (vv.8-11).
- 81) The “greater gifts” are those Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 12:31 and the other seven gifts of the Holy Spirit already described in 12:7-11 (and especially prophecy;14:1).
- 82) We also need a word here about Paul’s use of “the perfect” in v.8, which many evangelicals have held to be the Bible. While I earnestly agree the Bible is perfect – it is inspired by God and thus inerrant and infallible – proper exegesis sees “the perfect” in its context (cf. v.11 and chapter 15 for the broader context) as the return of Christ, inaugurating the millennium.
- 83) This event accords well with the neuter case of the Greek for “perfect”; it relates to the event of the return of Christ, when the gifts will no longer be necessary, since “the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea” (Is. 11:9).
- 84) Remember, the baptism of the Holy Spirit ***is for all believers*** (Acts 2:39), and one of its powerful results is the beauty of the language of the Spirit for help and strengthening. The baptism and prayer language is received by simply asking God, in faith (Lk. 11:13).



85) We receive the baptism by faith just as we received Jesus by faith. As for our prayer language, remember that we trust God with that as well and we begin to speak in faith, as the Spirit gives the utterance, and resist fearing what we may not be able to logically figure out with our finite minds, though we've received quite rational teaching from the Word of God.