

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

For Discussion: How do you know whether what you consider to be your spiritual gifts are really spiritual gifts? What, if anything, do your spiritual gifts have in common with those of someone who is gifted differently?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

For review: In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul confronted the Corinthian church on their conduct when they came together for the Lord's Supper. Rather than gathering in remembrance of all that Jesus had accomplished at the cross and celebrating the unity that was purchased for them there, those who were materially blessed used the occasion to flaunt their wealth before those who had nothing and to exclude them, thus, driving division within the church. Paul warned that those responsible would be guilty of partaking in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner and at risk of coming under God's judgment. Rather, he counseled them to examine themselves carefully so that they might honour Christ rightly whenever they gathered at the Lord's Table. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul moves on from matters of daily living to the topic of spiritual gifts.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-3

The Corinthian church was a spiritually blessed community (1 Cor. 1:4-7). However, having come from a pagan background, they had not received any teaching regarding spiritual gifts and were uninformed about them. In contrast to the living God who speaks through His Word and His Holy Spirit, pagan gods were all mute, unable to give instruction, and therefore inactive and impotent in the guiding of their followers. This reminder of the sad condition from which the Corinthians came sets the stage for Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts.

In verse 3, Paul lays out several broad principles about spiritual gifts using the specific example of speaking in the Spirit of God. What statements does Paul make about the one who is genuinely speaking in the Spirit? From the quotes Paul uses, what can be said about what characterizes a true spiritual gift?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

What is Paul's emphasis in his trio of statements in verses 4-6?

What does Paul's teaching reveal about what issues the Corinthian church was facing (also see verses 1-3)?

What are some of the purposes of spiritual gifts (Rom. 1:11-12)? What is our responsibility when it comes to our own spiritual gifts (1 Pet. 4:10-11)?

In verses 8-10 Paul expands on his statement about the Spirit being the one Giver of all spiritual gifts with an itemized list of a variety of them, including many "miraculous" gifts, those that are often seen as more spectacular and cause greater awe and wonder in the people who witness them. He concludes verse 11 with a restatement of his point from verse 6 that all gifts in every person are empowered by the same God with an additional emphasis that it is solely by God's will and design that the gifts are given to those who have them. Therefore, even those gifts that bring more attention to the individual are given apart from merit and are no less intended for the common good of the church.

What is revealed of your attitude about your gifts in: 1) how you pray about your service? 2) your motivation for your service? 3) what outcomes bring you the greatest joy and gratification? What kind of attitude and focus should govern the practice of your spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 13:1-3)?

Reflection and application

All genuine believers have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 14) and are gifted by Him in various ways. Whether the gifts you possess place you at the forefront of ministries or are practiced in quiet and unseen ways, the Spirit's purposes for them are the same. Spiritual gifts don't stand alone but are given for the benefit of the body and the glory of God. Having a heart of care for others is a more fundamental concern than what gifts we have. The good we are to seek by our gifts is the bolstering of the faith of our fellow brothers and sisters as God's heart for His people is lived out through us. The attention must not be on ourselves or our gifts but rather on the One who gifts and unites us. In the end, giftedness is not the same as maturity. Let us seek to be deliberate and thoughtful in how we use our spiritual gifts so that, as we do so in reliance on God, others may be pointed to Him and helped to rely on Him as well.