

1 Corinthians

Bible Study

Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1–11

The Corinthians church is consistent in their actions, but only in the worst way. They are a bad example for how we are to hold to the grace doctrine, and bad examples for how believers are to treat one another. Instead of following Paul and his doctrine, they were following personalities. Paul is writing to the Corinthians to push the members of the church to grow spiritually. They were stunted because they ignored Pauline doctrine. Ignoring the application of the proper doctrine resulted in them being carnal Christians. Instead of edifying one another, they were all looking out for their own selves. This behavior was evident in every aspect, including the application of spiritual gifts.

What are spiritual gifts?

Spiritual gifts are abilities given to believers by God and enabled through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual gift is not possible to use outside of the enabling of the Holy Spirit, which is why they are called spiritual gifts. The spiritual gifts are enumerated in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians. No believer had all of the gifts, and every believer had at least one (1 Corinthians 12:7). Following is the list of gifts along with a brief description.

1. Word of wisdom—A God-given wisdom beyond human understanding, exemplified in Solomon.
2. Word of Knowledge—A God-given knowledge that would be impossible for a man to know on his own, like Peter knowing what Ananias and Sapphira did in Acts 5:1–11.
3. Faith—Having an unwavering faith that God will do something, like move a mountain, or cast out demons (Matthew 17:14–20). It is not God giving a person faith so that they will get saved.
4. Healing—To heal all who are sick of diseases, physical abnormalities and demon possession, without fail.
5. Miracles—Along with signs and wonders, they were generally given for the benefit of Israel so that they would recognize God’s work and purpose (Matthew 12:38; 1 Corinthians 1:22; Psalm 74:9).
6. Prophecy—Given to a person who would then speak God’s word on His behalf.
7. Discerning of spirits—The ability to judge if a person is speaking from God or from Satan.
8. Tongues—Miraculously speaking in a foreign language without prior training.
9. Interpretation of tongues—Miraculously interpreting a foreign language, without prior training, that was spoken by someone who had been given the gift of tongues.

Misusing spiritual gifts

The Corinthians were misusing their spiritual gifts. From verses 1–3 we can surmise that they were mixing the use of spiritual gifts with idol worship that was brought in from their former way of life. It seems that there were those within the congregation who were using the spiritual gift of tongues to curse Jesus Christ. Any time the Holy Spirit worked supernaturally among believers Satan was also given the freedom to work in imitating God. It appears that there were false ministers within the Corinthian congregation who were mimicking the Holy Spirit’s function through the power of Satan. This was perhaps why Paul warned them that Satan can appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:12–14). There were people in the congregation who appeared to be apostles but were actually doing Satan’s work by destroying the congregation from within.

It seems that the Corinthians were abusing spiritual gifts by using them as they would in pagan worship practices. The gifts became more important than worshipping God, replacing true spirituality with an outward form of worship. It is quite possible that the Corinthians were imitating the true exhibition of gifts using human means. Even worse, it seems Satan was bringing supernatural manifestations of the true godly gifts into their worship. Apparently there were those who claimed they had the gift of tongues but were uttering curses against God in their foreign language.

They were also apparently using their spiritual gifts to benefit themselves instead of for the edification of the body. This would be constant behavior with how they were celebrating the Lord's Supper where some would overindulge while others go hungry (1 Corinthians 11:23–34). These gifts were given for the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ, not to benefit any one individual. Unfortunately, their lack of spiritual growth prevented them from understanding the true purpose and proper use of the gifts.

It is also important to understand that these gifts were given to people as the Spirit deemed necessary. Individuals did not need to practice using these gifts, nor was it necessary to pray to receive a gift since the Holy Spirit was the Person in control of who received what gift or gifts. The person with the gift of prophecy would be able to perform that gift perfectly without practicing. Same for the person who was chosen to do miracles, healing, or speaking in tongues, etc. This runs contrary to most church groups who practice these spiritual gifts today by encouraging people to speak in tongues, prophecy, or heal. There are even prophet schools that teach how to hear the voice of God and learn to interpret dreams and visions, and healing schools that teach how to be a faith healer. Paul makes it clear that these gifts are given and that they will pass away with the completion of Scripture. Imagine how confusing it would be if we listened to all those who say they were speaking for God today. Thankfully, we now have God's completed word speaking clearly to us. It is understandable why the spiritual gifts of wisdom and the discerning of spirits was so important before the completion of God's word.

God's word

Today, we are not depending upon the supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit because we have God's written word. Scripture contains everything we need in order to live a life pleasing to God. Scripture has now replaced the need for supernatural spiritual gifts. It was once necessary to gain God's wisdom through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit (Exodus 28:3; 31:3), now we receive wisdom through Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:17; Colossians 1:9; 3:16). Before Scripture was complete, knowledge was given to man by God, now we receive that knowledge through His word (Ephesians 1:9; 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:20–21). Instead of God giving us faith, our faith is strengthened through reading God's word (Romans 10:8, 17; Galatians 3:5; Colossians 1:23). There is no longer the promise of physical healing, but we can reach out to those who are physically, mentally, and emotionally hurting. Scripture is a great comfort to us in our darkest hour (2 Corinthians 2:3–7; 7:6–7; Philippians 4:4–7).

The word for miracle is translated from the Greek word *dynamis* and means mighty power. Miracles were displays of God's mighty power and usually were used as a sign for Israel. Today, we can also see God's mighty power at work. Everyone who is saved has seen this power at work through the gospel (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18). His power is also at work in us through the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13; Ephesians 1:19).

Prophecy is about God revealing truth to mankind. This is now being done through Scripture, and we are authorized to speak for God according to what Scripture says. Connected to prophecy is discernment. Our discernment comes from God's word. When listening to preachers and teachers, we need to be able to discern if it is right or wrong and we can do that only by comparing what is said to Scripture, rightly divided. The special gift of being able to discern spirits is no longer necessary because we now have the completed word of God.

Speaking in tongues is considered in some circles to be the one defining characteristic that a believer has the Holy Spirit, however, Paul lists this the least of all the gifts. The gift of tongues was used as a sign to Israel, for unbelievers. A foreign tongue was a sign that judgment was coming upon Israel and was related to their hardened hearts. This gift, and the interpretation of tongues, has passed away as God has temporarily set Israel aside. Scripture is God's word to the world and is all-sufficient.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit www.MidActsTruths.com