

VI. Spiritual Gifts in Biblical Perspective  
Discovering, Developing and Deploying our Spiritual Gifts  
“Understanding the Stewardship of Spiritual Gifts—Part 4”

1 Corinthians 12:12–31

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This is God’s Word. It is inspired, inerrant, infallible, reliable and sufficient. It is God’s only Word for us in faith and practice. I Corinthians 12:1-11 says [1] *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed (ignorant, agnostic).* [2] *You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.* [3] *Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one **can** say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.*

[4] *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;* [5] *and there are varieties of service (ministries), but the same Lord;* [6] *and there are varieties of activities (effects), but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.* [7] *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* [8] *For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,* [9] *to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,* [10] *to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.* [11] *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

By my count and I don’t claim fallibility on it, in the New Testament there are ten major metaphors or word pictures for the church. The church is called God’s temple, God’s field, God’s building, God’s bride, and those are some. All of them but one have either their origin or affirmation in the Old Testament. That one that is unique to the New Testament is known as the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul is the one that uses and it’s his favorite term to speak of the church. When Paul uses this one, he usually uses it for two reasons.

Over 2,000 years ago Jesus comes into the world on a mission from the Father and to accomplish this mission He has to become what He never was while maintaining what He always has been. He always has been the Son of God and 2,000 years ago He adds to that humiliation by addition for He doesn’t quit being God, a full human soul and body. I Corinthians 15:21 says [21] *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* So we have the Incarnation – the Son of God in flesh. Immanuel – God with us, God one of us, God among us. God comes to take our place.

Now, He then bears our sins in that body, dying an atoning death on a cross and that body is buried and raised on the third day. Then 40 days later He ascends to the right hand of the Father whereby He is going to intercede on behalf of His people and in that body He will return. He will not return until in body number two takes this glorious work of redemption He accomplished in body number one throughout all of the world to bring all of His people to Himself with the Gospel preached to all the nations. When that Gospel is preached to all of the nations and all of His people have been brought then He will return in that glorified, Incarnate body but until then we are body number two.

Now His indwelt body – His gathered people, His come together people – those He indwells now have a mission, a message and a ministry that they are to carry forth into the world. The Gospel of Luke, the biographical Holy Spirit testimony, was about the life of Christ in His Incarnate body and His second body is in Acts. Acts 1:1 says *[1] In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.* The first book Luke wrote was the Gospel of Luke which is what he is referring to here and the second volume Luke wrote is Acts which contains all that Jesus continues to do and teach in body number two, His church. Paul loves to speak of the body of Christ.

When Paul speaks of the body of Christ he does so for two reasons. Whenever he uses the phrase body of Christ is usually focused on Christ's church carrying out Christ's mission and proclaiming Christ's message to the world or he uses to emphasize our absolute unity in our multi-faceted diversity. We are one body by the power of the Spirit with many members and each one unique in how they are gifted. Every member has a Spirit given gift that is to be used as a resource.

Our theme this year is discovering, developing and deploying our spiritual gifts and this comes from four key texts – I Peter 4, Ephesians 4, I Corinthians 12, and Romans 12. We are using these texts to draw out what the Bible is telling us about spiritual gifts. These texts come from two key authors – Peter and Paul. Here is our working definition concerning spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is a God-designed and God-delivered ministry resource to be used in concert with other believers, enabling Christ's church to effectively exalt Christ by staying on mission, on message, in ministry for the glory of God in the midst of adversity. In other words, these multi-faceted spiritual gifts in the body of Christ are joined together in one body, guided by the Word of God to the headship of Christ, the head of His church.

The reason I have been taking my time with this is because I know this is relevant. Every believer has a spiritual gift and God called you to use it. The church is in need of you using it so that we can be more faithful, more effective and more productive in serving our Savior by His grace. The Spirit born presence of Christ, through the gifts of His people work together for His glory and this is so glorious as everyone participates and it is so exhilarating when it is put into practice. Do you not think Satan sees that? It is a feeding ground for himself. In something like spiritual gifts, if Satan can twist the Scriptures or twist the way we look at it or twist our embracing of it so that he can cause confusion, chaos, division and if you go back in church history you can see how Satan has taken a Biblical doctrine like spiritual gifts and used it divisively, as he has twisted it into chaos and confusion which has caused devastating results in dividing churches.

What's the answer? It is for us to do what we confess constantly where Scripture alone is our only rule for faith and practice. These aren't the only texts in the Bible that talk about spiritual gifts but they are key texts on spiritual gifts. Peter has given us five framing principles in I Peter 4:10-11 which says *[10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: [11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

The first principle is that Christians have spiritual talents/gifts. Everyone has natural talents by creation design. Number two, spiritual gifts are not invented or personally originated, but are given to us by the Lord. We can discover, develop and deploy them by the power of the Spirit but we don't originate or design our spiritual gifts, we receive them. Number three,

Christians are to steward their gifts and invest them for the Savior. We own nothing in this world. Number four, there are two interdependent categories that spiritual gifts fit into – serving or speaking. There are speaking gifts and serving gifts and those with speaking gifts are to serve and those with serving gifts are to speak and they both need each other. The ministry is word and deed. Number five, there are two indispensable resources in the ministry of spiritual gifts – we need the Word of God and the Spirit of God. As I Peter 4:11 says let him who serves, serve by the strength that God supplies and let him who speaks, speak the oracles of God.

Then the Apostle Paul who had been ministering for 18 months in Corinth had gone away, paganism had crept back into the church at Corinth. They were blaspheming God with the way they were doing the Lord's Supper. There were factions in the church as they were following men instead of Jesus. Sexual immorality had started being practiced in the name of spirituality within the church. There were constant problems so they wrote to Paul with seven concerns and one of them is how paganism had crept into the practice of spiritual gifts. Paul begins to disciple them and discipleship begins at the pulpit ministry as it cascades the Word of God and the Spirit of God upon the people of God as it moves into smaller groups in the church and it can even go to one on one, life on life.

In I Corinthians 12 Paul sends them this sermon on what they need to be aware of and how they ought to be using their spiritual gifts. He doesn't want them to be ignorant. The Christian life is not to be lived by reflex, intuition or human reasoning but it is lived by Divine revelation. *Let God be true though everyone were a liar* (Romans 3:4). In the Word of God there are these ten principles of understanding that Paul lays out for them concerning spiritual gifts.

Number one, is conversion clarity. You can't have a spiritual gift until you have been born again. You have to be spiritual. We are born dead in our sins and until you are born again you don't have spiritual gifts. You must be brought by the power of the Spirit of God to say 'Christ is my Lord and Savior' and when you do that same Spirit that gave you life is the One who gives you a spiritual gift.

Secondly, is discipleship necessity. If you are a believer then you have a new record, a new heart, a new life, a new family and a new home but you don't have a new mind and that's discipleship – the renewing of the mind. So you need Spirit-filled, Christ-centered, Bible-saturated, Gospel directed discipleship in your life from a pulpit, small group and in relationships one on one as well.

Number three, spiritual gifts only flourish when this basic principle is in place; God-glorifying and self-denying humility. It is all about God and all about dying to ourselves. I Corinthians 6:19-20 says [19] *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.* Probably the greatest example is the one who used his gift to fulfill his ministry and that is John the Baptist. John the Baptist says in John 3:30, [30] *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

Number four, the ministry of spiritual gifts is just like everything else in life – it's Trinitarian. The Gospel is Trinitarian. The Father authored your salvation. The Son accomplished it and the Spirit applies it. Your prayer life is Trinitarian. You pray to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. Worship is Trinitarian. The Father seeks true worshippers who worship in Christ, by the power of the Spirit. The Triatic Christian faith is to be present and it's true in spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit delivers the spiritual gifts to you and they are to be used in

ministry with the ministries being designed by Christ and the effects that are decreed through the gifts are from the Father.

Number five, spiritual gifts are God delivered, God designed and God directed. God's sovereign hand has provided us our unique gift. Each Christian has a unique, not-duplicated, spiritual gift that is not static but dynamic.

Number, six, spiritual gifts are given to be used – not unused, abused or misused. Again, it's not about us. It's about Him. This leads to the next principle.

Number seven, spiritual gifts are given for God's glory ultimately and the common good functionally. Spiritual gifts are not given to us for our fulfillment. Spiritual gifts are given to us to fulfill the ministry and that's what fills us up. We get joyful because it's more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35) but how are we to enter into ministry? We are to enter into ministry as drink offerings – pouring ourselves out for God's glory and the common good serving one another in the Lord together. If you use your spiritual gifts looking for feedback, applause and affirmation you won't stay in it long. This is too broken of a world. Our applause is from heaven, not here.

Number eight, spiritual gifts are sovereignly given and empowered by God. God's Spirit gives them and empowers them. They must not be ignored, neglected or idolized (worshipped). Now, that sets us up for the last two principles. Let's look again at I Corinthians 12.

I Corinthians 12:12-13 says *[12] For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. [13] For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

One of the things you will never hear me say is that I pastor here at Briarwood for the body of Christ. Briarwood is not *the* body of Christ – we are a testimony of the body of Christ. We participate in the body of Christ. The body of Christ is referring to Christ's church universal. The body of Christ has all of the gifts in it. Why do we work with other churches if we had all the gifts of the body of Christ at Briarwood? All the gifts are never in any one local church. We are a manifestation of the body of Christ. God has measured out gifts not only in each individual Christian but in each church and then we are to serve the Lord together as we use those gifts in the Lord. Christ's church is one. Christ's church knows no ethnic division before Christ.

We certainly go to the ethnic nations with the gifts to Christ but in Christ there is not Jew nor Gentile. In Christ, we don't go by pigmentation or culture yet we have to take those things into account when doing evangelism and understanding what people's backgrounds are when they are coming but when in Christ, we are one. We belong to Christ together. We all have one Savior, one God and Father. We have one Gospel and been redeemed by One shed blood. We have been filled by the same Spirit by Christ and the Spirit has baptized us to Christ and the body of Christ. We are signed, sealed and delivered by the Triune God as one people before the Lord and that's how we are to see each other.

That's why James says this notion of discrimination and partiality is wrong on two counts. In creation we all have the same Daddy and his name was Adam and in redemption we all have the same Redeemer – the Second Adam, Christ. We are one in Christ our Lord. Let's continue in I Corinthians 12.

I Corinthians 12:14-21 says *[14] For the body does not consist of one member but of many. [15] If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. [17] If*

*the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? [18] But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose. (This is the sovereign hand of God in creation, redemption and providence, for He gave you your spiritual gift just as He chose.) [19] If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many part, yet one body.*

We see unity and diversity. It is unity in diversity, not in spite of diversity, as all of the gifts come from the same God for the same purpose in the same body whereby we serve together in the cause of Christ. Let's continue in the text.

*I Corinthians 12:21-26 says [21] The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." [22] On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [23] and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, [24] which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, [25] that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. [26] If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

Not only has God put some parts of the body as important so crucial, unobservable and there are some that are crucial that He tells you to cover up so that they don't get more attention than they should so that every part of the body is properly honored because every gift is necessary. Let's keep going in the text.

*I Corinthians 12:27-31 says [27] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. [28] And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. [29] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? [30] Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? [31] But earnestly desire the higher gifts.*

*And I will show you a still more excellent way.*

You get saved personally but you do not live independently. Individualism is unknown in the body of Christ. We are saved personally but we are united together to serve Christ in His church which He gave Himself for and purchased with His blood. We are united together in the Lord for the common good. When we see those rhetorical questions here in this text, why do we divide up with these exotic movements claiming that that ought to be true? He has already told us there are different gifts, different times in the life of the church for different purposes, but one body. Here are your takeaways for this study – the next two principles.

Number nine, concerning spiritual gifts – pride and arrogance, jealous and envy – are devastating to the body life of the church. An example of this is someone saying something like this; if I can't be an ear I'm not going to show up. It's amazing how much the church suffers from independency, individualism, isolation and idolatry in spiritual gifts. Instead of embracing gifts with modesty whether yours or others, begin to flaunt it. What are we supposed to do in those honorable gifts? We minister them with modesty. We don't embrace any pride or arrogance with any spiritual gift and secondly we don't live in jealousy or envy. People who do this cause nothing but problems in the body of Christ. Arrogance, pride, jealousy and envy are condemned in the text, because they are devastating to the life of the body of Christ.

Number ten, the spiritual gifts that are the least visible are actually or the most crucial, the most vital. How many of you have looked in the mirror today? My guess, is that the last thing you looked at was your hair or the lack there of. How many looked in the mirror and saw

your liver, kidneys or heart? If your hair falls out today, are you going to be okay? If your liver falls, kidneys or heart fall out today are you going to be okay? No. It's interesting to note that the things most vital in our body we don't see. Those things that are vital that you can see we are to treat with modesty because we want everything to be about the Lord and not about us. That is what God calls us to.

There are no little people and no little gifts in the body of Christ. Every one of them are crucial and the ones you think less of are even more crucial. When I wrestled with the call to the ministry my grandfather asked me to read an early biography of Billy Graham by John Pollock and I read it. I was praying through it as I read it and one of the things I will never forget is after Billy's ministry took off in the late 1950's and into the 1960s, John asked him 'Billy, what do you think it is that God has used to grant you so much favor for Christ's sake in these days?' John thought he was going to attribute it to when George Beverly Shae joined or Cliff Barrows or the alter call but it wasn't. Billy named the lady who had retired and in her retirement took Billy's crusade schedule and would go to the city he was going to be in the week before his crusade would be there and organize prayer team as she would pray all through the week before the crusade. During the crusade she would have prayer teams each day to join her in her hotel room, praying for the crusade as it was going on and then she would stay one more week to pray for the follow up of the churches who followed up with those who prayed to receive Christ. Who knows about her? The less physical many times is the most crucial.

Don't envy and don't hold the ministry with arrogance. If God is blessing your ministry then cover it with modesty. If God has given someone else other ministry then don't envy or be jealous of it but give praise to God for it.

When I was a kid, my mother during the winter to keep my busy would give me a dollar bill which was a big deal, I would take the bus into the city and buy an orange drink, a pack of Raisinets and a box of popcorn as I went to the movie. It had to be a mother approved movie. When the movie was over I would go to the bathroom until they finished cleaning the theater and I would go back in and watch the movie again. Then I would go and meet my mother who would then be ready to go home from her job in the city. Sometimes she would let me get a round trip on the bus and I loved to go home on the bus because I usually had a nickel left over in which I could get a pea shooter with a packet of peas to shoot at people from the bus who had rolled down windows. That was so much fun!

I would always pass this hamburger place known as White Castle and this is embedded in my memory because there was always a man out front that had no legs. He built a leather saddle to put under his stumps and because he didn't just want a hand out, he played a harmonica so that people would drop money in his box. Sometimes people would throw carelessly and miss the box but I remember watching him take two blocks of wood with a strap and put them on his hands so he could walk on his hands to get what change that didn't make it into his box. Then he would walk back, pick up his harmonica and play again. I don't know how many years he was there but I watch him every time I passed that burger place. He was able to get it done for he found a way for his arms to work for his legs. Ask him if he would rather have had his legs.

Christ is going to get his work done in His church but there are many time we have arms doing the work of legs because the legs are isolated or independent or apathetic and don't show up. Maybe it's jealousy, envy, pride or arrogance or they think they don't need the church. I don't know what it might be but oh what would it look like if all the members in the power of the Spirit, exalting Christ, got their gifts exalting Christ were on the move speaking and serving for the glory of Christ on mission, on message and in ministry. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Holy Spirit, speak to the hearts of those reading this today. Father, there may be some reading this who You are calling today, not to the spiritual gift but to life in Christ. Bring them to Yourself. If you would like to pray with someone about this decision to follow Christ please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 770-5200 for we'd love to pray with you. God, there are those who are Your people who have spiritual gifts, please let us participate in the body of Christ, not only in the Lord's Day worship but day after day as together for the common good we accomplish that You have given to body number two, the indwelt body of Christ with its multi-faceted members. Please God liberate us and protect us from arrogance and pride of our gifts, of jealousy and envy of others and their gifts in ministry. May Christ be all, in all and through all, in Jesus' Name, Amen.