

29. Learning Why Christ Gives Us Different Spiritual Gifts

In the first eleven chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul talked to the Corinthians about the problems they were having because of sin in their relationships with one another. The Corinthians also had problems related to their understanding of their spiritual gifts and how to serve and worship the Lord. Paul began to talk about those topics as we come to 1 Corinthians 12. Today, we will be looking at the first of several topics that demonstrate how to practice the unity and ministry that we have in Christ as Christians. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand many practical ways that we show this unity and ministry in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12:1-3, we read, “Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” The Corinthian Christians had been saved out of idol worship. In Chapter 10, Paul explained that they did not worship the Lord the same way that they had worshiped demons. 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 says, “Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.” As a result, Paul had to explain that godly service and demonic service are also very different because the way that the Corinthian Christians were serving the Lord showed that they did not understand this.

Paul began by explaining what they did when they worshiped idols as Gentiles. The word that is translated “carried away” was usually translated to “lead away” and was usually used of a prisoner being led away to trial or to death. This word is used several times to speak about the way that they led Christ first to be tried and later to be crucified. Mark 14:53 says, “And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes.” Then, Matthew 27:31 says, “And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His *own* clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.” Paul said that when the Corinthians were still following idols that they were being led away to death by demons. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to understand the clear contrast between worshiping Christ and worshiping demons.

Paul said that anyone speaking by the Spirit of God could not call Jesus accursed. It is possible that some of the Corinthians who claimed to be Christians were deceiving the Corinthian Christians by saying that they were speaking by the Spirit of God when they said that Jesus was accursed. Paul makes it clear here that any person who says that Jesus was accursed was not a true believer. Those who were saying that Jesus is Lord were true Christians that were speaking by the Holy Spirit. Here, we see that because of their lack of spiritual maturity that many of the Corinthian Christians could not discern between false teachers and true teachers. Since the Ephesians also came out of a background of idol worship, Paul said in Ephesians 4:14, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”

The word that Paul used for children in Ephesians 4:14 is the same word that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 where it is translated “babes” and speaks of young children that cannot speak clearly or toddlers. That was why Paul had to make it clear to the Corinthians that they could not worship the true and living God in the same way that they worshiped idols or demons. A true teacher will say that Jesus is Lord because He will be led by the Holy Spirit instead of speaking through demonic influence. We will see that Paul actually takes three chapters to explain how this difference affects every area of Christian service.

He begins this explanation by saying in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.” The word that is translated “diversities or differences” is used three times in these verses and means differences. These are the only uses of this word in the New Testament. First, we see that there are different kinds of spiritual gifts. However, all true spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. This reminds us of the fact that all true spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit and cannot come from demonic spirits. Spiritual gifts are given to each Christian at the moment of salvation and their purpose is to help us build up other Christians. 1 Peter 4:10 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Here, we see that we are to use our gift or gifts to serve others.

Second, we see that there are different kinds of ministries given to each Christian. We also see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of any ministry that we are given. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Every Christian is now free to serve. However, we are to carry out that service through love.

Third, we see that in our service for the Lord we will have different activities or ways that we serve but they are all given by God. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Here, we see that each Christian has received at least one gift. If our gift is a speaking gift, we are to speak the very Word of God. If our gift is a serving gift, we are to serve in the ability which God supplies. The purpose of all gifts, ministries and ways of carrying out those ministries is to bring glory to God through the way that Christ works in our lives.

Paul carefully defined the purpose of spiritual gifts as he wrote to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 says, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” Here, we see that spiritual gifts are not given to us for our own benefit. Instead, the Holy Spirit gives each Christian one or

more spiritual gifts for the benefit of all Christians so we are to use our gift to serve others.

The “word of wisdom” is a speaking gift that helps a person to understand and apply the Word of God so that the one with this gift can help Christians make progress in their growth to spiritual maturity. The “word of knowledge” is a speaking gift that helps a person to discover through study the full meaning of the text, context, words, phrases, related passages and truths and then, help provide that understanding to others. The gift of faith is different than saving faith and speaks of the ability to trust God in difficult and demanding ways in spite of overwhelming obstacles and human impossibilities. Such faith is exercised through persistent prayer.

The gifts of healings and miracles are explained in Hebrews 2:3-4 where we read, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” Here, we see that God confirmed the message of the apostles by bearing witness through healings and miracles. James 5:13-16 explains that God hears and answers the prayers of the elders for healing today but that is not the gifts of healings or miracles mentioned here but God answering the prayers of those who serve Him.

Technically, the gift of prophecy is the gift that was given to the prophets as they gave us the written Word of God. 2 Peter 1:21 says, “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.” The Lord also gives some people great ability to speak forth the Word of God that is already written down. We see that Apollos had this gift as Acts 18:28 says, “For he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.” The gift of discerning of spirits is the special ability to recognize those ideas, philosophies and teachings which are not in agreement with the Bible but have their source in Satan. This gift helps people to correct these false teachings with the Word of God.

God gives some Christians a gift to easily learn various languages so that they can share the Word of God with people of other languages. He gives other Christians the gift to accurately translate the Word of God into other languages. All of these gifts and others are given by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives the gifts that He gives to each person according to the will of God so that every Christian is gifted to serve the Lord. This is what helps to give every Christian a purpose in life because every Christian is given one or more gifts so that we can serve others and make our lives count for eternity. As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand and explain the purpose of spiritual gifts, we equip them to serve other Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand that God gave them spiritual gifts to serve others.