

PREFACE

We established in v1 that Paul was probably quoting back to the Corinthians the terminology with which they queried him: “spiritual gifts” (*pneumatikos*); in this the English “gifts” is implied, and inserted by the editors. This is Paul’s usual pattern every time he opens the discussion of a new topic from their letter to him (e.g., 7:1, 8:1). Now in v4 he switches to what he considers a better term to describe the topic at hand: *charismaton*.

gifts = *charismaton* from 5483; **a gift of grace, a free gift:**

To put in human terms the difference between the two words *pneumatikos* and *charismaton*, the first was favored by those in the Corinth church who considered themselves more *spiritual* than others in the church because they could prophesy or speak in tongues. The second, *charismaton*, was favored by Paul because it rightly places the emphasis on God—God’s grace in the giving of the gift.

This is an important distinction: Were these “spiritual” gifts, since they were gifts of the Holy Spirit? Yes. But some of the Corinthians (apparently in keeping with their divisive character) were using this as one more means to create distinct subsets within the church. After all, with what topic did Paul launch this letter? What did he address first?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-12.

That word translated “divisions” is the Greek *schismata*, which means to split, tear, rend, divide. We get our word “schism” from it. If one steps back and squints at what we have studied thus far in the first eleven chapters—and now in chapters twelve through fourteen—one can see that every problem in the church addressed by Paul has stemmed from the same insidious root: one group of people desiring to be distinctive from—and better than—the rest in the church. This is the huge, overarching problem in Corinth: some thought they were better than the others; and if they did not consider themselves *already* better, they wanted to be.

In the immediate passage before us, as well as in the three-chapter treatise, Paul’s emphasis for the church is “diversity *within unity*,” and to illustrate his point he uses the Godhead itself for an example. He begins, in v4, with the Spirit, because that is where he has just drawn them at the end of v3—i.e., none of this is possible without the Spirit. But he emphasizes as well, with his use of *charismaton*, that in none of this can they possibly exalt themselves over others, claiming their gifts are superior, because it is all of and from God through His Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.

vv4-6

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

Since Paul uses the same word in each of the next three verses (vv4-6), we had better look at that word first. The word is the Greek *diairesis* (dee-ay'ee-res-is). All of our versions translate this with either the word “varieties” or a close synonym; all these place the emphasis on the different gifts. David Garland argues that because a word with the same root (a cognate) used in v11 (*diaireo*) means “to distribute”—and is so translated in our versions—that the emphasis should instead be “on the one Spirit who distributes them.” I like the way the NIV2011 covers both bases in its translation of v4: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.” That’s good; as is often the case with the NIV, it borders on paraphrase, but it is helpful.

Once again the Corinthians had a skewed perspective. They were placing the *result* of grace before the *Giver* of grace. B. N. Fisk says it well: “Spiritual gifts are not a badge of spirituality, but a mark of grace.”

Read Ephesians 4:4-7.

Just as he does in his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul here to the Corinthians declares that, as in the Creation, not just the Spirit, but the full Godhead is the giver of such things.

- In v4 he declares that all “grace-gifts” (Garland) come from and are distributed by the same Spirit.
- In v5 it is the same Lord (i.e., Christ) who distributes gifts of service, or ministry.
- In v6 it is the same God (i.e., the Father) who distributes “effects,” or workings.

In vv5-6 Paul takes this opportunity to broaden the Corinthians’ understanding of “spiritual gifts,” beyond the more dramatic, ecstatic gifts they so prized. In v5 he speaks of *service* gifts, using a form of the word from which we get the English “deacon.”

And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.

ministries, service = *diakonai* = from <G1249> (diakonos); **attendance (as a servant, etc.);** figurative (eleemosynary) aid, (official) **service (especially of the Christian teacher, or technical of the diaconate)** :- (ad-) minister (-ing, -tration, -try), office, relief, service (-ing).

This was Paul’s favorite word to describe *his* work for the gospel of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5.

In v6, he speaks of gifts of “workings,” or “effects.”

There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

effects, activities, workings = *energemata* (en-erg'-ay-mah) = from <G1754>

(energeo); **an effect** :- operation, **working**.

energeo = from <G1756> (energes); **to be active, efficient** :- do, (be) effectual (fervent), be mighty in, shew forth self, **work (effectually in)**.

The idea here is that “something is accomplished by the effort put forth” (Fee).

The apostle is not setting hard and fast lines of demarcation among the three members of the Trinity. He is not saying that only Christ apportions service or ministry gifts, or that only God the Father apportions effective workings. Similarly, as he proceeds in this paragraph to list a number of specific gifts of the Spirit, the apostle is not giving us a definitive, exhaustive list of nine gifts of and for the church, but merely offering an *ad hoc* (i.e., without general application) representative list of the diverse ways the Spirit gifts the church for the benefit of all.

I believe we can look on these three verses as an illustration for Paul’s emphasis of *diversity in unity*. He uses the example of the Trinity less to itemize the specific work of each member in the church than to offer a picture of the three working as one. They each can have distinct roles at times, but they are always united as the One God. This Paul reiterates in v12 regarding the many members of the church.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

He is also pointing out to the Corinthians—and to us—in vv4-6 that the church is filled with *many* gifts of the Spirit, few of which are considered sensational or dramatic. In fact, he will go on to say that those gifts deemed the most important and prized in the Corinthian church, the more sensational “charismatic” gifts, such as speaking in tongues, are really the *least* important in the assembly.

but the same God who works all things in all [persons].

God, in His Triunity, is spirit-kind. The second member of the Godhead *became* flesh—was incarnated on earth—for a while, but He is of the same “species” as the Father and Spirit. As Jesus told the woman at the well,

“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24)

Because we are flesh-kind and, even as believers, remain so at least in part, our default focus remains on the physical. When we hear someone who speaks well, even if we might say, “What a gift he has!” we are probably still thinking, “How eloquent he is!” When we see someone with a talent for understanding and explaining God’s word, we may say, “What a gift he has!” but what we are probably thinking is “He must have had good grades at seminary,” or worse, “He must be *really* smart.”

What is so easy for us to forget is that all of this—Paul says “all things in all”—every bit of what we see happening in the church is all of God; it is *God* who works all things in all. So, *Corinthians, you who are so impressed with yourselves, it has nothing to do with you. It is all of God.* Not only are these abilities grace-gifts, they are grace-gifts from God—which is a great equalizer.

David Guzik: It is easy for us to focus on our own “little area” of gifts, ministries, or activities and believe that those who have other gifts, ministries, or activities are not really walking with God. Yet the One God has a glorious diversity in the way He does things. We should never expect it to be all according to our own emphasis and taste.

v7

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

In v7 Paul states the basic thesis for Chapter Twelve (Garland).

- “to each one is given”: vv8-10
- “for the common good”: vv12-26

What is each one given...for the common good? “The manifestation of the Spirit.” (manifestation = something rendered apparent, disclosed)

That is, Paul now combines the three categories or “varieties” of vv4-6 under the title “manifestation(s) of the Spirit.” Any and all of these being played out in the church are not manifestations of personal ability or intrinsic skills, but manifestations of an active, gracious God working by means of His Holy Spirit through (“the channel of an act”) every member of the body. One is given the gift for one thing, another is given the gift for something else.

Instead of being impressed by someone’s talent or abilities, we should rather marvel at the generosity of a gracious God who chooses to work through His people. Because it is *all* of Him.