

Text: 1 Cor 12.4-11

As we move through Corinthians, we will keep our place by developing the broad outline we started with.

I. Introduction (1.1-9)**II. Conditions reported to Paul (1.10-6.20)****III. Questions asked of Paul (7.1-16.4)**

1 Cor 7.1 ¶ Now concerning the things about which you wrote...

"The remainder of the body of this epistle deals with questions that the Corinthians had asked Paul in a letter. Paul introduced each of these with the phrase *peri de* ('now concerning,' 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12)."¹

- A. Questions about marriage (7.1-40)
- B. Questions about things sacrificed to idols (8.1-11.1)
- C. Questions about worship services
 - 1. Head coverings (11.2-16)
 - 2. Communion practices (11.17-34)

3. Spiritual Gifts (12-14)

Last week we opened the subject: What were our two main points of emphasis?

1. The main thing at issue is the *attitudes* of the Corinthians: some thought they were more spiritual than others.
2. The cultural context of ecstatic pagan practices confused their understanding of true gifts of the Spirit

Now I have some additional information on this from the *Biblical Archaeological Review*:

According to the Greek philosopher Plato, inspiration took place when humans were possessed by a divine entity, had a divine word breathed into them, and entered a frenzied state:

The third kind of possession and madness comes from the Muses, seizing a delicate, virginal soul, rousing and exciting it to Bacchic frenzy

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Co 7.1.

in lyric and other forms of poetry, and by embellishing countless deeds of men of old it educates their successors. (*Phaedrus 245a*)

For Plato, the process of inspiration first involves the poet being possessed and inspired by a divine being. The inspiration is a divine filling (*entheos*) and a “frenzied” state. The Greek word for frenzy is *mania*, which is where the modern word maniac comes from (but often with a negative connotation). Plato explains how the poet’s mania is like what the Bacchus undergoes. The Bacchi, initiates of the cult of Dionysius (god of wine and ecstasy), were known for shouting during their manic state.*

The most significant part of mania was that the Bacchus and poet were out of their minds. In this state, the poet is possessed by the divine and thereby able to create inspired works that are superior to those composed using their own faculties. This extends not only to poets, but also to prophetic characters, such as the Delphic oracle. For Plato, mania is an elevated state above normal human cognition and viewed as a gift from god.²

* Prophetic moments were sometimes accompanied by musical instruments, which implies a more demonstrative experience (e.g., 1 Samuel 10:5).

The cultural background of the Corinthians **included** ecstatic experiences that involved strange speech, resembling the biblical gift of tongues.

The distribution of the works of God (12.4-7)

What word is repeated in vv. 4-6? **variety**

List the two triads in vv. 4-6 (groups of three)

1. **Gifts**
2. **Ministries**
3. **Effects**

And

1. **Spirit**
2. **Lord**
3. **God**

² Rodney Caruthers, “Inspiration in Biblical Times,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 2023, 64.

What does the divine set of three imply about spiritual gifts?

The Trinity is involved

What does the word *variety* imply about the spiritual gifts?

There is a wide distribution, everyone does not get the same gift

A few observations:

1. The gifts are subject to God's distribution, not human choosing
2. Note the second set of gifts: "ministries"
 - a. **διακονιῶν** noun genitive feminine plural common from **διακονία** (lit. "deaconing" or "serving")
 - b. In Eph 4.11, we have a list of gifts: official gifts, which have a purpose in Eph 4.12 of equipping the saints for *service* (deaconing)
3. The *effects* of God are the **ἐνεργημάτων** (noun genitive neuter plural common from **ἐνέργημα**) — the workings of God

If someone has a gift of service in the church (waiting on tables) is he any less spiritual than the one with the gift of tongues, healing, prophecy, or whatever? **No, God is at work in all the gifts**

What is God's purpose in distributing the various gifts? (7)

The good of the whole church

The Key Passages Listing Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament

1. Romans 12 — The **Ordinary** Gifts
2. 1 Cor 12.8-10 — The **Extra-Ordinary** Gifts
3. 1 Cor 12.28 — The **Hierarchical Ordering** of Gifts
4. Ephesians 4 — The **Ecclesiastical** Gifts
5. 1 Peter 4 — The **Categories** of Gifts

We will discuss these labels later, but I offer it now to distinguish between the kinds of gifts that are in each list.

Today we will concentrate on the second list, found in our passage, 1Cor 12.8-10

To come back to a previous point — what do these terms suggest:

"to each one" (7)

"to one is given" (8)

"to another ..." (8)

“to another ...” (9)

“to another ...” (9)

“to another ...” (10)

“to another ...” (10)

“to another ...” (10)

“to another ...” (10)

“to another ...” (10)

The gifts are distributed to different individuals, everyone doesn't get the same

What makes this list a list of “extra-ordinary” gifts (as compared to the “ordinary” gifts of Rm 12)?

They include miraculous gifts (my term, “at-will” miracles) — healing, for example, not the prayer for the sick, but the laying on of hands and “zap” you are healed

Given the nature of these gifts, did they persist forever and at all times? (In other words, were they temporary or permanent?)

They were temporary: Paul left Trophimus at Miletus sick, temporary even for Paul

“By the time of Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 347-407) the prophetic gift was considered a past phenomenon. Chysostom stated the following concerning the subject of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:1-2 specifically, and chapters 12-14 in general: “This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity has produced us again another question; namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?”(90) Here is a clear statement by a leader of the church in the fourth century that miraculous gifts, like prophecy and tongues, had ceased.(91) Because Chrysostom was well traveled and would most likely know the general status of the church, he signaled a widespread absence of such gifts in his day.”³

³ F. David Farnell, “Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today? Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra: Dallas Theological Seminary* 149, no. 595 (1992): 292.

Notice the emphasis on the Spirit in vv. 7-11: In a sense, the Lord Jesus and the Father are involved in gifts (see vv. 5-6). However, Extra-Ordinary gifts are especially the work of the Spirit.

Since these gifts come from the Spirit, what is the most important consideration for their use? (11)

The will of the Spirit – use them for his purposes, not your own

If the gifts are for “the common good” (7) and “just as He wills” (11), what is the main purpose of the gifts?

The work of God in the church, not the work of self in the ego (*i.e.*, to show how “spiritual” I am, or to demonstrate that I am filled with the Spirit

Last note for today, if the Spirit has a will (11), what does that tell us about Him?

The Spirit isn't merely a force, but a person