

Epiphany Spotlight: Spiritual Gifts

✧ **Receiving Christ by faith (vv. 1-3)**

✧ **Manifesting the Spirit for the common good (vv.4-11)**

Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

They were such a gifted congregation, but so immature and unspiritual. Yet Paul warmly greets them as *“the church of God in Corinth”* and includes us among *“all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours.”* (1:2) In his usual magnanimous way the Lord’s holy Apostle gives thanks to God for the Corinthians, and for us along with them, *“because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.”* From the very beginning of this first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul is talking about spiritual gifts: *“For in him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”* (1:5-7) This is truly a bright and beautiful **Epiphany Spotlight on Spiritual Gifts**.

✧ **Receiving Christ by faith (vv. 1-3)**

But then for eleven chapters Paul has to assess their sins and call for adjustments: *divisions in the church* (1:10-17; 3:1-23); *following worldly wisdom instead of extolling God’s wisdom and power* (1:18 – 2:16); *disrespecting the Lord’s apostles in arrogance and pride* (4:1-2; 9:1-27); *tolerating open, unrepentant sexual immorality in their congregation* (5:1-13); *lawsuits among parishioners* (6:1-11); *sexual immorality and misunderstanding about marriage* (6:12 – 7:40); *eating food sacrificed to idols* (8:1-13); *misusing freedom while ignoring God’s warnings from history* (10:1 – 11:1); *confusing God’s roles for men and women* (11:2-16); *sloppy Communion practices* (11:17-34). Considering these corrections, perhaps our opening verse should be translated: *“Now about spiritual people, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.”* Since we are also going through a Self Assessment and Adjustment (SAA) program, all of us, including pastors and parishioners, need to pray with David for a new heart and a new spirit: *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”* (v.10 NIV84)

Being *“ignorant”* about *“spiritual gifts / people”* does not necessarily mean *stupid*. The Greek word can also mean simply *uninformed*. So now the Lord through His holy apostle will fill in some gaps in our Christian education, make sure all the bricks are in the foundation, all the circuits are wired, all the watts are working for this **Epiphany Spotlight on Spiritual Gifts**.

To help empty us of ourselves he turns back the spiritual clock on our faith to the way we were. By nature we too were *“somehow or other...influenced and led astray by mute idols.”* They maybe weren’t carved of wood and stone; ours are mostly green paper and platinum plastic, credit scores and mortgages, car payments and debts for all our wants which always surpass our needs. This old sinful nature still thinks things can satisfy that black hole of materialism and greed down deep in my heart. My Old Adam still wants to pat himself on the back for coming to faith. But God, the holy and righteous One, won’t even let us take credit for making a decision for Christ. He strips away all pride even in our conversion with these simple words: *“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”* (12:3) *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”* (Ephesians 2:1,3 NIV84) Once our Lord clears that up, we can enjoy His **Epiphany Spotlight on Spiritual Gifts** without being blinded by our own conceit. Ever since we began **Receiving Christ by faith**, we have become God’s children reborn in Zion (Psalm 87:4,6), instead of orphans from Corinth.

✧ Manifesting the Spirit for the common good (vv.4-11)

“Different kinds of gifts...same Spirit...Different kinds of service...same Lord...Different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all people.” The Holy Scriptures of the Bible tell us that God sends His Spirit to create and renew life. (Psalm 104:30) Jesus says, **“The Spirit gives life.”** (John 6:63) People then and now can’t get past mere physical, biological “life” which makes them no better than the animals. And even though their Creator endows them with special gifts, they have **“a form of godliness, but [keep] denying its power.”** (2 Timothy 3:5 NIV84) The dear Holy Spirit teaches us to confess with glad and sincere hearts that **“Jesus Christ is Lord,”** i.e., *my* Lord and *my* God. By His gift of saving faith the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, elevates us to a new existence where we can enjoy life to the full with Jesus. (John 10:10) Then we can appreciate the Holy Spirit working greater gifts in all believers.

Now that the Holy Spirit has washed you in God’s grace by Baptism, now that He has given you a new heart that gladly kneels at the cross for Christ’s body and blood in His Holy Supper, He takes you by the hand and lifts you up. “Look!” He says, “great gifts for all.” Don’t miss the wonder of this, my dear friends in Christ! **“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”** (v.7) No one is left out. Each one of you who trusts in Jesus as your Lord and Savior has received from God the Holy Spirit at least one spiritual gift to use for God’s glory and the good of your neighbor.

Some are listed in Romans 12. We’ll focus briefly on these in these in 1 Corinthians 12. Bible studies on spiritual gifts would give you more details. The dear Holy Spirit gives to some the **word of wisdom** – *applying the facts in helpful ways*. The **word of knowledge** – *digesting the wealth of God’s truth in heart and mind*. **Faith** – but doesn’t every Christian have faith in order to be a Christian? Yes, but some are given that special gift of *enduring confidence in the face of adversity*. The terrorist attack on 9/11 had all of us rattled. But some were able to express their undaunted confidence in God’s grace to get us through. That’s the special gift of **faith**. **Gifts of healing** and **miraculous powers** may not be as evident to us today as for the apostles. But new Christians delivered from the prison of false religions report events that can only be explained by God’s miracles, sometimes even through His special gift to an individual Christian. **Prophecy** is God’s gift of *preaching*. **Distinguishing between spirits** is the ability to *drill down into the pre-suppositions that drive false teachings*. The gift of **tongues** is more accurately the gift of **languages**. Among our Chinese and other Christians worldwide is their ability to study God’s Word in English with us, then go back and explain to others in their heart language. **“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”** (v.11) This is His **Epiphany Spotlight** to keep Christ clearly in view of all and bring us safely to heaven.

Our place and position in the body of Christ as well as the gift(s) we possess to serve our fellow Christians are all determined and granted by the dear Holy Spirit. No Christian is left out. **Each one** has at least one gift specially designed by the Spirit of wisdom to build up the body of Christ and glorify God. New Christians in particular need to learn this wonderful truth and be encouraged to jump in and serve wherever their interests may lie. Generally speaking, a Christian’s interests are one of the best indicators of the nature of the gift(s) the Holy Spirit has granted. Surveys and workshops may help some discover their gifts, but it usually works best to discover by doing. While we serve, we find out where we can do the most good. And we can always ask for more gifts with which to glorify God.

Years ago one adult confirmand agreed to serve as Stewardship Director. After a few months he confessed, “Pastor, I don’t think I have any gifts. I just don’t seem to fit into this work.” “Don’t you know your gift?” I asked him. “You mean you do?” he replied. “Yes, my brother, every time you talk to someone including me, we all feel better. You have the gift of encouragement which the Holy Spirit identifies in Romans 12.” His gift of encouragement served for years as an elder and continues to left up friends and family to this day. It’s one of the perks of my ministry to see God’s gifts to God’s people.

Let’s close with Paul’s advice in 14:1: **“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts...”** that build up Christ’s Church. Then together we can give glory to God. Amen.