

Themes Of I Corinthians (Part 7)

Spiritual Gifts

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Among ourselves we often half-seriously joke about just how well Paul's description of the "called out ones" in I Corinthians 1:26-28 fits us. We are not from among the wise, the mighty, or the noble; but most of us admit that we are from among the weak, the base, and the despised of this world. We are the nothings that God will use to bring to nothing the things that are, to paraphrase what Paul said.

I often hear people say that God scraped the bottom of the barrel when He found us and called us out of this world. Or they might say that instead of being the "cream of the crop," we are probably just the "cream of the crud."

In many ways, this is true. Most of us really did come from nothing special. We are not people with status, money, or power in this world. We are just ordinary working people—average, unrecognized, run-of-the-mill, drawn from the very masses of the people. We are "Plain Jane," and "Joe Blow."

We certainly cannot compare to the greats of this world—the truly gifted men and women of history. For example, we certainly are not like Mozart. There was only one Mozart. Though you cannot trust its historical accuracy, the motion picture "*Amadeus*" tried to depict his genius as only cinematographers can.

For those who have seen this picture, maybe you will remember the scene near the end where Mozart is dying in bed, and he is sitting up conducting his "Requiem Mass," actually dictating it to someone at his bedside. In the movie that someone is Salieri, but it would not have worked out that way. That is what I mean about not being able to trust the historical accuracy of it.

That scene, although it never happened that way, depicts a truth about Mozart. Did you know that with every piece—every song, opera, trio, concerto, symphony, and his Requiem Mass—Mozart committed nothing to paper until he had worked the entire composition out in his head. He thought in music.

Some of these pieces are really complicated—well, for me they are complicated. For people who have great musical ability, they are wonderful; they can see how organized it is. It is amazing that a person can do that. I cannot do that with an article. I do not work the whole thing out in my head, and then commit it to paper. I do it the other way

around. I slog through it, typing one word at a time.

Mozart was also a very prodigious worker. However, he worked in spurts. In only three months in 1788, Mozart composed his final three symphonies. Musicologists believe that they are also among his best three symphonies that he ever did. They are, "No. 39 in E Flat," "No. 40 in G Minor," and "No. 41 in C," which is also called his "Jupiter Symphony." He did these three symphonies in three months—one symphony a month!

His musical and compositional talent was just amazing. It is beyond what we average "Joes" and "Janes" can comprehend.

Here is another example—William Shakespeare. Some of his plays are thought to be better than others, but there is not a clunker among them. They are all good. They are all, in some ways, masterpieces. He wrote an average of two plays a year between 1594 and 1613. This is a 19-year time span in which he wrote between 36 and 40 plays. The exact number is not known because some of them were co-written with others. It depends on who is compiling the list whether it is 36 or 40.

The man's mind was amazing. He had a published vocabulary of over 29,000 words. They actually have concordances of William Shakespeare's plays. And they list every word and they are cross-referenced.

We know that he had over 29,000 words in his working vocabulary. That is two or three times the average vocabulary of an educated person. It is normally said that a high school graduate has about a 10,000 word vocabulary at best; a college graduate has about double this if the person has applied himself. William Shakespeare had at least another third or another half onto that which a college graduate might have today.

Analysts say that the secret to his genius was a prodigious memory. Because he was an actor, he had to be able to memorize his lines quickly and be able to recall them at will (a little pun there).

Today's typical theater companies do probably one play per season, and run it as long as it needs to go. But in William Shakespeare's day they ran maybe a half dozen or more plays per season. They would sometimes run one on one night, and another on the next night, and still another on the third night, depending on the season, what they felt would make money, and what the current events were at the time. If they knew that a special guest was going to arrive at the Globe that night, they would change the play in order to honor that person, because perhaps it was a play about that guest's ancestors, or some such thing.

Will and all the other actors—Richard Burbage, Will Kemp, and the others of the "King's Men," or the "Lord Chamberlain's Men"—they had to remember their parts to any play at any time, whenever it was called for.

William Shakespeare seemed to have this ability to do this in spades! He was able to remember things. There is one anecdote that says that he frequented the wharfs and markets and other places where the common people would gather, just so he could listen to them. He would remember the biting comments from one fishwife to another, or somebody's style of hawking his goods, or the banter of the men as they were unloading the ships. These, then, might appear as insults in his works.

There are actually books that you can buy that have the insults of Shakespeare. I have seen a couple of computer programs where they have set up three columns of words. What the program does is at random it picks out one word from each column and spews out an insult.

He was the kind of person who could remember at will just about everything he had ever heard or read. That made him a walking encyclopedia of human expression.

The time is too short to give details on the likes of people such as Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, or Franz Liszt, who happened to be the first rock star. Did you know that? You know how Tom Jones or the Beatles would come on stage and women would throw things, scream and shout because they had come out to perform. They did this for Franz Liszt as well.

I will tell you one little anecdote about Franz Liszt. He is supposed to be the best pianist ever—of all time, hands down. People would try to play tricks on him in the middle of a concert, no less, with a newly composed sheet of music, and ask him to play it. He would proceed to take it and turn it upside down and play it. And then while he was playing it, having never seen it before, he would make commentary on it, telling the composer where he had gone wrong, and what to do to make it better. He was the virtuoso pianist of all time.

To continue this list of great people there were Nicolas Tesla, Leonardo daVinci, and many others. I did not even get to people in politics, or the military. I just picked a couple out from the arts and sciences. Great men and women with prodigious talents and gifts and skills, using them for their own personal fortune and fame; perhaps in an altruistic way, they did it to advance humanity one way or another.

But as far as we know, none of them understood the truth of God. Not a one. To none of

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them did God reveal His way of life. The lives of some of these people were just awful. I do not recommend at all looking them up and studying them. Many of these artists and scientists would be consumed in their particular pursuit, and their families suffered horribly.

Yet, we have this knowledge—the truth of God. God has given to us—Joe Blow and Plain Jane—the knowledge of His way of life. We can access Him through His Spirit.

The feast of Pentecost is a day that memorializes God's giving His Spirit to His disciples in the church of God. It is an appropriate time to consider the gifts of the Spirit, another Theme of I Corinthians. This is part seven. It will end up being a series of eight parts, although the next one will wait until the Feast of Trumpets.

I want to rehearse the first Pentecost of the New Testament Era because it sets the tone for its meaning to us. In a way, the symbolism changes a bit because it goes from the physical reaping of first fruits to a more spiritual plane.

Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Even this is interesting. Note the fact that they were all with one accord in one place.

Acts 2:2-4 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

As soon as they had been given the Holy Spirit, a gift beyond just the Holy Spirit manifested itself in them and they began to speak in other languages. Going down through verses 5 through 11, these are not mysterious unknown languages, but rather actual languages that people were speaking in that day and age. The people who heard them, who were from various parts of the Roman Empire, were able to hear the gospel preached in his own dialect.

Acts 2:12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"

They wanted to understand what was going on. This was strange. Of course, we can ask ourselves, "What does this really mean," too.

Acts 2:14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.

Peter is going to explain what has happened.

Acts 2:15-18 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day [9:00 AM]. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy.

The Day of Pentecost commemorates the founding of the church of God and the bestowal by God of His Holy Spirit. We have to add to that, by His Holy Spirit comes the various gifts. The purpose of the giving of the Holy Spirit and the gifts is for doing His will and for accomplishing His work. He gives them that for those specific reasons—the purpose of doing His will, and for accomplishing His work.

This passage shows us how this works. God sent His Spirit upon the disciples and it empowered them with gifts of speaking in other languages. It was very simple. The Spirit came upon them in great power, and very obviously and immediately there was a reaction in them. They began to use the gift to preach God's message. God poured out His Spirit on those He called and they, having that new gift, preached the gospel.

This chapter, then, has to be the basis for understanding spiritual gifts. Remember I have talked about this idea before of the "first mention" of things found in the Bible. They are critical things. When a thing is first mentioned or first happens, it forms the Biblical foundation for understanding a topic. You have to go forward from there. It is the basis. It is the ground level from which you spring from.

Acts 2 sets the pattern for the proper use of spiritual gifts. God bestows them to enhance the doing of His work. That is it in a nutshell. The apostles were given the Holy Spirit and they preached the life and death of Jesus Christ, and the message of

salvation, and the Kingdom of God.

If we would go through the rest of Acts 2, that is what we would find. This is what Peter did. As soon as he had explained to the people what had happened in the giving of the Holy Spirit, telling them that this was a fulfillment of Joel's prophesy about the Spirit coming upon their sons and daughters, and that they would prophesy—they would preach, what did he do? He launched into preaching the gospel. He began teaching about Jesus Christ, and that they had crucified Him, and He was their Savior.

Of course, once he got to the end, they were pricked in their hearts and said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" This preaching done through the gift of the Spirit to Peter, empowered by God's Holy Spirit, resulted in the calling and baptism of thousands of people. That is how it works.

Acts 2 is a blue-ribbon benchmark on spiritual gifts. It might be the high point in all of New Testament history, from then till now, of the right and proper use of spiritual gifts.

Now that we have laid that foundation, turn to I Corinthians 1. One could say that a central problem in the church of God at Corinth, besides their being carnal, was their attitude toward spiritual gifts.

We have read this section before, but today I want to show them in the light of spiritual gifts. If you have the New King James Version, you might see that they have titled this section, "Spiritual Gifts at Corinth." Right after the greeting by Paul, he gets into spiritual gifts. It is the first thing on his mind.

I Corinthians 1:4-9 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

If you will remember the first time we read that, I highlighted how many times Jesus Christ was mentioned in here. And that is significant. However, the next significant thing is that this is a pat on the back to them about their spiritual gifts. We have to understand that Paul was doing this for a reason. He was using psychology on them because they

were evidently quite proud of the spiritual gifts that they possessed. And this had gotten back to him.

He opens this letter to them by thanking them, telling them he thanks God that they had these spiritual gifts. What he is doing is softening them up for some correction. He did not write this letter to them to tell them how good they were. He mentions that in passing that he was thankful to God that they had what they needed. And that is as far as he goes.

The softening up begins immediately. But, the main portion where he deals with spiritual gifts is not until chapters 12 through 14. He waits a long time before he gets to the correction. But it is on his mind. "Spiritual gifts—you are very proud that you have these." His kind words are designed to make them more amenable to his forthcoming criticism and rebuke.

Let us go through this section. First, he thanks God in verse 5 that God has shown them favor in enriching them (verse 6) with spiritual gifts. The word "enriching" is very well translated because that is what it means. It implies their being given great abundance, bounty, or wealth; that God had really blessed them mightily in His giving of gifts. And these were in all areas of spirituality. But, he specifically draws out two of them.

The first is "utterance," which is not speaking in tongues, but is the Greek word *lagoo* meaning speaking. God gave them gifts in communications. There must have been a fair number of people in that congregation who could speak well and teach. That is what he was commending them for.

The second is "knowledge," which is a kind of catch-all word for what he meant. He is saying that they had a grasp of the Christian *fundamentals*. Understand that they seemed to understand almost nothing beyond the fundamentals. However, it was enough for them to become converted. Paul was saying that God had blessed them with these spiritual gifts of communication, and with enough understanding that they could grasp the basics of true Christianity.

I believe he purposefully used the word "knowledge" because that was another of their big problems. They were very puffed up, if you will remember that sermon from the spring holy days. They were puffed up about their knowledge. Right away he is getting at two major problems that they had.

He tells them, in verse 7, that God's gifts were distributed among them no less than any other church in Europe or Asia that he pastored. Paul felt that God had blessed them

equally to all the other churches, and that these things confirmed their conversion. They had been called out of this world, and God was working with them.

He assures them, as we continue through the section, that God being faithful will continue to provide for their spiritual needs to the very end. He would continue giving them gifts as they needed them until they died or until Jesus Christ came back. God would not just let them go on their own. He would be with them every step of the way.

By this time, giving them pats on the back, and telling them how they are not behind in anything, they must have been feeling quite amiable toward him. He was getting them right where he wanted them.

If we were to read the remainder of the first chapter, we would find that the intervening material before chapter 2 touches on the subject of spiritual gifts, particularly the gifts of knowledge and speaking—communication, wisdom, and rhetoric.

Had we read all of that, we would see that Paul pleads with them to all speak the same thing. Despite their gifts of knowledge and communication, they had divided into factions. They might have divided into factions not only based on ideas, but maybe the "I am of Apollos" group did this because he was a good speaker. They might have been the rhetoric group—the group who liked the Greek way of speaking. Who knows?

Those who were enamored by Greek rhetoric made a great show of human wisdom and learning. They would use those highfalutin words and styles to get this across to the others. They were the motivational speakers of their day. They would use all the tricks in their verbal bag to convince people to their way of thinking.

I Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul says in verse 2 that he deliberately refrained from using any of these showy techniques on them. He deliberately avoided the Greek rhetorical style in order to give them the truth of God. Why?

Part of it was his own psychological state. Remember in part one of this series that Paul had just come from Athens. He had tried to go up against the great Greek speakers—the wise—who gathered on Mars Hill. He had given a good speech. He had preached the gospel to them, using their own methods. He quoted their poets. What did he get out of it?

Only a few names, Acts 17 says, were actually converted. So, he was feeling pretty low. He had a colossal lack of success in Athens. When he came to Corinth, he was retrenching and regrouping. He determined that since fancy speech gained him so little in Athens, he was going to forsake it completely and rely solely on God's inspiration and power. He would speak plainly. He would be himself and allow people to see his weakness, fear, and trembling. He would allow God's Spirit to guide him and inspire him—giving them what they needed to be converted.

As is said in verse 5 of chapter 2, he wanted to make sure that the people whom God called in Corinth would have their faith not in persuasive words, not in any tricks of the trade, but in God alone, and God's power. This is important. We are talking about spiritual gifts, and specifically in the fact that the Corinthians felt that they were especially gifted in speaking in tongues.

It is worth noting that if we would go through the next few chapters all the way to chapter 12, Paul at least twice tells them that we should be working toward glorifying God in body and Spirit. He does this at the end of chapter 1, and again in at the end of chapter 6. He spends considerable time on his own example of preaching and living among them, and why he did so (chapters 4 and 9).

Finally, in chapter 10, verse 31, he directly tells them that whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. This is a third time he mentions that. Then at the beginning of chapter 11, he comes right out and tells them to imitate him just as he imitates Christ.

He sets up these two major guidelines, and they are the setting for his instruction in chapters 12 through 14. He wanted them to understand these two major points: 1) everything we do is to give glory to God; and 2) they are to fall back on Paul's example because he had done this same procedure while with them in Corinth. Paul's example was a reflection of Jesus Christ's example through him.

If we are going to understand spiritual gifts, then we can rely on these two things: glorifying God in everything, and following Christ's example through Paul.

In chapter 12, Paul finally gets to one of the central problems.

I Corinthians 12:1-3 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.

This is a classic set of verses. They have shot up near the top of my favorite verses in I Corinthians. They do not seem like much, especially the first two where the zings are.

Remember that they took a great deal of pride in their gifts. And they had elevated speaking in tongues, in particular, far higher than it deserved. We do not know if they did this because of the prominence of the speaking in tongues in Acts 2, or for some other local reason. What we do know is that not only were they puffed up in knowledge, as shown in chapters 5 and 8, but they were also puffed up in their gifts, especially their gift in speaking in tongues.

This leads to Paul's opening gambit to puncture their pride. He takes out two daggers, and hits them between the eyes with both of them. He uses two pointed put-downs.

In verse 1, he tells them that he does not want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. He is really telling them that presently they are ignorant of about spiritual gifts. When he says, "I do not want you to be ignorant" he is saying, "You guys do not know anything about spiritual gifts, and I am going to have to teach you." That punctured their pride regarding their "knowledge." It also punctured their pride on their spiritual gifts.

In verse 2, it is even more pointed: "You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols however you were led." What is Paul telling them there? He reminds them how gullible they had been before their conversion. They had been led around by the nose by those pagan priests, and carried away in the worship of wood, stone, and metal gods that could not respond to them, could not inspire them, and could not do anything. He particularly talks about the fact that these dumb idols are dumb—they could not speak!

What he is really telling them is that they are still very gullible. The proof is that they had allowed themselves to get carried away with pride in their speaking in tongues. Two insults right away after he had buttered them up in the first chapter; he comes out swinging in chapter 12. "You know nothing. And, you are silly, and gullible."

Paul did not pull any punches. That is why he gives verse 3. Because they are still

carnal, and still ignorant, and still gullible, he decides that he has to give them a simple test of true inspiration. They could not tell one way from the other. They could not tell if the inspiration was from God, from a demon, or just from the human mind. So, he had to give them a simple test.

He says, "A person with God's Spirit will never demean Jesus Christ in any way. Conversely, only those with God's Spirit will submit to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master.

So, if you have God's Spirit, you are not going to bad-mouth Jesus Christ. And if you have God's Spirit, you will obey Jesus' words. That is what Paul is saying here.

Do not get hung up on the fact that Paul uses the words "speaking" and "called" and "say" here. What he is doing is using those speaking aspects to stand for everything—the attitudes, the thoughts, the words, and the actions of a person.

There could be someone without God's Spirit who will say that Jesus Christ is Lord. In fact, we see that every day, certainly every Sunday on television. Many of those televangelists close their messages with, "Jesus is Lord!" Do they have God's Spirit? What are their lives like? Do they really submit to Jesus Christ as Lord? Do they follow His instructions? Do they keep the holy days that Christ kept? You could go on and on.

You can speak the words, but if the actions do not follow the words, then you are not really submitting to Jesus Christ as Lord. This is the test that he gives them. How do they treat Jesus Christ? Do they submit to Him? Those are the two things that are going to make or break the determination on someone's inspiration.

This is not the only place in the Bible with this principle. If you would turn to I John 4, you will see the apostle John did the same thing for the members in Ephesus (who we think he was writing to here).

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God

John uses a slightly different one. He was trying to root out the Gnostics by giving them this test, because the Gnostics at the time believed that Christ may have been God, but

that Jesus was just a man. Somehow they split Jesus Christ into two—a physical and a spiritual person. Supposedly Christ left Jesus on the cross because he could not suffer all those things. So, John gives them this one here. There is also another one in chapter 5:

I John 5:1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God [showing here that Jesus is the Christ, the One and the Same Person], and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

This adds another little test, that if you love Jesus Christ, you are going to love all of those He has called.

The one in I Corinthians is one of these early tests. It is very simple, and very basic. He felt that he needed to give them the very simple and basic because they were still carnal. They were not ready for any of the deeper things. They could not make deeper discernments than that. They were just not ready yet.

I Corinthians 12:4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

He is beginning at ground-zero here.

I Corinthians 12:5-11 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. 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.

This is Paul's real initial teaching on spiritual gifts. We can get it down to one simple sentence, "All spiritual gifts come from the same source: God through His Spirit." That is basically it.

There are some little details, but that is the basic thing that he wants to get across to

these people to start with. God bestows them, Christ directs them, and Their Spirit empowers them. That is what verses 4, 5 and 6 say. I did not keep them in the same order as Paul, but this is the understanding.

Just as an aside, some Protestants see verses 4 through 6 as proof of the Trinity, because you have the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and God the Father mentioned in three successive verses all supposedly working the same thing. This is nothing of the sort. This is not a proof of the Trinity whatsoever.

I will make one comment about this. There is nothing in these three verses, especially in verse 4 that indicates that the Holy Spirit is a Person in the Godhead. All this passage does is list these three—the Spirit, God the Father, and Jesus Christ—in three successive verses. The only thing that you can get out of this is that all three are involved in spiritual gifts. It does not say anything about any "Personhood."

Back to the subject, in these verses 4 through 11, Paul is simply showing that God works in many different ways, and He works through His Spirit. We can also say that the Spirit, or spiritual gifts, can manifest itself in many different ways. That is why Paul lists so many here. He lists wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. That is a pretty good list.

But, they are not confined to just those things. There are people who have a gift of organization—a gift of management. There people with musical talents. There are people who have gifts of literary talents. There are speaking talents, which are probably included with the literary ones.

There are people who are able to serve. There are people who have compassion for others and they can make calls, write notes, or spending time with the sick. We can go on and on talking about ways that the Spirit of God is manifested in the various activities that people do to help one another.

It is not just in church services. It is not just in doing the "work" of God. It is in personal interactions with one another.

The gifts of the Spirit are not limited. Can we limit God to how He wants to give His Spirit and empower a person to help? I do not think so. That is a problem that Israel had and has with God. They tried to limit Him and put Him in a box. It does not work.

We should take a closer look at verses 7 through 11 because there are a few things that

I need to point out here.

I Corinthians 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*:

Basically, spiritual gifts are not for individual gain or glory, but are for the profit of the whole congregation, or the whole church, depending on God's will in the matter. It depends how much God wants that particular person to serve. Actually it could be just for one individual at one time. Who knows?

God has the right and discretion to use His powers in any way that He wants. Perhaps someone at some particular point needs some thing, or needs something said to them. God could then give that person His Spirit and empower them to do that one thing, and it may never happen again.

That gift is not for the profit of that particular giver, but for the person or persons who are receiving the help. Of course, obviously, it will bring glory to God Himself. It will be for His profit.

As already mentioned, before this time there were already three indications by Paul that all the glory goes to God anyway. So what is there to be proud about? This is what he is trying to tell them. "You are taking pride in something there is no reason to be proud of!"

Verses 8 through 10 are the various spiritual gifts that he mentions—wisdom, knowledge, faith, etc. Paul may or may not have put these in somewhat of an order of value to the congregation. He might have felt that being able to give words of wisdom, words of knowledge, and the showing of faith were very important to the church, especially in their present condition. These were the ones which would be the most effective and helpful to everyone.

However, I do believe that he placed the final two last for an obvious reason. Here he runs down several items. And which ones did Paul put last (maybe to bring home the point)? He put last the speaking in tongues, and the interpreting of tongues. He is giving them an idea just where on the list these particular gifts belong—dead last.

I do not think Paul felt that these were not valuable, but that they were put last to make a point about how the Corinthians themselves were thinking about these gifts. He would know that in a congregation in which there were many languages spoken, as in Corinth, an important center of trade, there would be the need for someone who could interpret

from one language to another. I am sure that he had been in certain places where he needed an interpreter to help him with the local people.

Nevertheless, it was still not something to get proud about and glory over. He tries to get them to understand that the things that they thought were really important were not as important as they thought they were. You can say that even though they are not unimportant, he makes the point of showing them to be of lesser importance.

Verse 11 is a concluding statement:

I Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

This summarizes his main point: All spiritual gifts are empowered by the same Holy Spirit, and God the Father Himself determines who gets what. I do want to mention, here, that there is a pronoun in this verse, "He." "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as *He* wills."

Protestants will tell you that this is the Holy Spirit. Wrong! How do I know this? Look in verse 6 again.

I Corinthians 12:6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

What Paul is saying is that the Spirit that works all these things is God the Father's Spirit. He is not saying that the Spirit is a separate entity who works all these things, but the Father sends His Spirit, of Himself to do these things.

Next is the more famous portion of this chapter about the body of Christ, and unity, and the spiritual gifts within it. I will only read through this and make a few comments because the whole passage is, in a sense, an extended explanation of the main points that we have already gone over. Paul is just making an illustration of it here.

I Corinthians 12:12-31 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should

say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased [remember this is an illustration of the same thing using the body as an example]. And if they *were* all one member, where *would* the body *be* [he turns it around]? But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. And 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." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary [tweaking them again]. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. *Are* all apostles? *Are* all prophets? *Are* all teachers? *Are* all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

We can conclude after reading this whole chapter that he had to change their entire way of thinking about such spiritual gifts. They were coming at it from an extreme carnal individualistic perspective. They were thinking, "Wow! God has given me this thing!"

They were focused on themselves. They were focused on what they could get from this, and how far they could climb the ladder. "What is in it for me? How can I make myself look good in the church? What will propel me to the head of the class? What is that one gift that will make me shine?"

It seems to be all, "I, I, I, and me, me, me." Paul had the difficult problem of wrestling their attention off of themselves and trying to make them start thinking as a body—as a unified body of Christ—a community, separate from the world.

He acknowledges several times in the chapter that we retain our individuality. He talks about the members being individuals. There are many members in one body. The body is composed of many members. So he makes that point. But there is a delicate balance between one's individuality and one's place in the body of Christ. We are a part of a whole.

What he is trying to do is to get them to shift their focus of care from inward to outward. See? All they cared about was themselves and what they could get. But, by going at it from this direction, he is trying to get them to shift the importance of these gifts from how it will benefit them to how it can benefit everyone. That is what I mean by shifting the focus of care from inward to outward.

Our gifts, far from bringing personal glory, are to be used to bring glory to God, and to help others. That is what Paul has been saying the whole time—the whole epistle. He is trying to get them to change—to shift.

In Romans 12:1, which is actually the beginning of a very similar section, he says,

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

This is the same type of thing that he is trying to teach the Corinthians. God has called us to be living sacrifices. A living sacrifice is a creature—a person—dedicated to God, and consumed in His service. Where is the "self" in all of that?

Do you see what he is doing? First he made them very humble by insulting them and telling them that they were still carnal, that they did not know a thing about spiritual gifts, and that they were very gullible. He needed to teach them simple things. They needed to be less selfish.

Where does he go? Where does he finally lead them to think about? I Corinthians chapter 13—"And I will show you a more excellent way."

I Corinthians 13:1-8 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the*

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 7) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.

I Corinthians 13:13-14 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love. Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts* . . .

When Paul begins to explain the more excellent way, he starts with their boast in tongues. He chops it down to its knees. Without love, it is just noise. If you are not doing it for the right reason—your speaking or interpreting of tongues—it is just a bunch of gibberish. It does not help anyone to do anything.

Then he goes on to say that even the better gifts—preaching and knowing the mysteries, and understanding, and having faith—if these things are done without love, if they are done in selfishness inward toward the self—they are nothing also.

He then explains (in verses 4 through 8) how a loving person acts and reacts. If this was being read to the Corinthian congregation and they were thinking, following Paul's argument, they were probably lowering themselves into their chairs and trying to hide—especially by the time that he gets to end, and says, "Love is not puffed up." A lot of air was let out of their balloons by that time, I suppose.

He was telling them the opposite of the way they were toward one another. Remember, they were still in at least three factions. There were probably rude words going back and forth. There was probably a lot of impatience, unkindness, envy, pride and self-seeking going on. They were probably provoking each other to offenses. These attitudes, and others, had probably come out in the wars, arguments, and such that these various factions were having.

Paul was telling them that they were behaving exactly the opposite of what they needed to be doing in order to use their gifts properly. No matter what our gifts may be, having them never excuses us from conducting ourselves in love toward one another.

For instance, just because we have some position in the church, or that the church

utilizes one of our talents in service to the congregation, that does not give us any leave to be rude to our fellow members. Just because we are handing out song books does not give us any right to tell somebody that they cannot have one. We are supposed to be serving.

It is the love we have for one another that makes these gifts work properly in the church. Without love, they are mere vanity.

There are very talented people out in the world. There are people we would just love to have to be able to do things for us, to make us better and help us. But, we would not want them among us. Even though they are extremely talented people, without love, their talent would be wasted. It would not work. It would not support the work that God is doing. It would be inward and not outward, simply because they are carnal. It would end up just like the Corinthian church—a bunch of people only in it for themselves.

Paul exhorts them, as he starts chapter 14, to pursue love. Pursue is an interesting verb. That is a positive activity. It requires effort. You cannot pursue something lazily. It does not work. You will never catch it.

It requires movement. You cannot pursue something sitting down. It requires persistence. That thing is going to be moving off in the other direction, and you have to be more dogged than it is (such as a dog and a fox). It has to work. It has to move. It has to be persistent—consistent. You cannot let off. If you do, it will get away.

This is the same way that we have to pursue love. We need to pursue love like it is our next meal.

He then says to desire spiritual gifts. This is a more passive verb. It really is not a passive verb, but compared to pursue, it is passive. You can desire something while sitting there. The difference highlights their relative importance to us. We pursue the thing that really is important. And we desire the thing that is less important.

You can look at spiritual gifts like toys or clothes in a shop window that we gaze at as we walk by. But love is what we go into the store and spend money on. Love is what gets us into the store. It is what we are looking for, and what we need. The implication is that if we pursue love, the spiritual gifts that we desire will follow. Those do not need to be pursued with the same energy as love. If we have love, the things that we need will come.

To conclude today, turn back to Romans 12. This was written just a little bit after I

Corinthians. Paul writes:

Romans 12:3-11 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think [notice how he starts this one—he learned something from the Corinthians], but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. *Let love be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord . . .