

# The Gifts of the Spirit

*“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”*

*1 Corinthians 12:7*

It is not a coincidence that Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 mentions expressly the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The congregation at Corinth was blessed with many Spiritual gifts. Paul testifies in 1 Corinthians 1:5 that in Christ Jesus they have been enriched in every way - in all their speaking and in all their knowledge. The gifts of the Spirit of Christ were gloriously manifested in this congregation.

However, it becomes clear from what the apostle writes in the chapters 12-14 that the believers in Corinth did not know how to handle the wealth of these Spiritual gifts in a true Christian manner. The sin of being puffed up in knowledge (cf. 1 Co 8:1, 2) disturbed the communion of saints. Those who had received special gifts of the Spirit looked down with contempt on those who were not as rich in gifts. Especially the gift of speaking in tongues was held in high esteem in Corinth. If one wanted to be counted as a “Spiritual” person, he would certainly have to be able to speak in tongues. They were in hot pursuit of spectacular Spiritual gifts. At the same time haughty individualism reigned supreme.

All this caused Paul to write about “the gifts of the Spirit” as he expresses it in 1 Corinthians 12:1.

The Corinthians have to see the rich gifts of the Spirit in the right light. The Spirit has come to glorify Christ. All the Spirit’s activities in the congregation are aimed at the acknowledgment and experience that Jesus is Lord (cf. 1 Co 12:3). Exactly in the gifts of the Spirit it becomes manifest that Jesus is the living Lord who equips his congregation with everything she needs.

In order to understand 1 Corinthians 12 correctly, we may not lose sight of the difference between the *fruits* of the Spirit the way Paul speaks about them in Galatians 5:22, and the Spirit’s “*gifts of grace*” that he deals with in this chapter. The fruits have to be present in the life of every believer. In Galatians 5:22 Paul uses the singular, “the fruit.” It concerns a necessary pattern of life, a lifestyle that stands in sharp contrast to “the works of the flesh.” With the gifts of the Spirit it is different. In 1 Corinthians 12:11 Paul emphasizes that the Spirit gives to each one individually, *as he wills*, just as he determines. They do not all have the same gifts. The gifts are distributed over the whole congregation, as it is determined by the will of the Holy Spirit.

That is why there is a wide variety of gifted people in the congregation. But there is unity in diversity, the gifts have *one* source: the Holy Spirit. They also have *one* purpose: the upbuilding of the congregation. In our text the apostle says that to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit “for the common good.” No one receives a gift for showing off. Everyone is called to serve the brothers and sisters with his gift. It is remarkable that Paul in verse 5 alternates the word “gifts” with “service.” Paul literally writes “services.” Through his Spirit Christ distributes glorious gifts in the congregation, for service, to be used for the well-being of all.

Paul clarifies this in verse 14 and following by comparing it to the body. Just as in the human body every member has its own place and function, so it is also in the congregation. No one may take an individualistic position. For the congregation is the body of Christ whose members should have equal concern for each other (cf. 1 Co 12:25, 27).

Which gifts of the Spirit does Paul mention here? The verses 8-10 provide the answer. Paul points to an impressive variety: the message of wisdom; the message of knowledge; faith; gifts of healing; miraculous powers; prophecy; distinguishing between spirits; speaking in different kinds of tongues; and the interpretation of tongues.

It is not Paul's intention to give a complete summary. In Romans 12:6-8 he mentions still other gifts of the Spirit. In this summary Paul wants to show how abundantly the Spirit manifests him self in the congregation. Christ proves him self to be the living Lord by adorning his congregation with *many* gifts!

It always draws attention again that in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul mentions a few very spectacular Spiritual gifts: gifts of healing, prophecy, and different kinds of tongues. This begs the question: May we still expect these gifts today?

In our text the apostle typifies the gifts as "the manifestation of the Spirit." This is a significant characteristic.

In the sometimes very spectacular gifts known in the congregation at Corinth, it became manifest that the Spirit of Christ was present and active. Jesus revealed therein his Lordship in a very convincing way.

Calvin said that Christ with these gifts adorned the beginning of his kingdom and used it to confirm the preaching of the Word. I think that Calvin was right. In Mark 16:20 we read that the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. We repeatedly read about these signs in the book of Acts. The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people, as we read in Acts 5:12. The expression "signs and wonders" is unmistakably reminiscent of the signs and wonders that God performed when he led Israel out of Egypt (cf. Acts 7:36). Just as the Lord manifested his presence in mighty wonders and signs at the beginning of Israel's existence as a nation, so he manifests him self at the beginning of his Christian church. With signs and wonders (cf. 2 Co 12:12; Heb 2:4) Christ confirms the preaching of the gospel and gives to his people the proof of his saving presence.

Someone said that these signs and wonders fortified the beginning. Indeed, they can be typified that way. The kingdom of God had to break through powerfully into the world of Jews and Gentiles. Christ saw to it that there was a convincing beginning by confirming the Word of the preaching by mighty signs.

Pentecostal groups who claim that the Spirit still today manifests him self in gifts of healing, prophecy and speaking in tongues, turn back God's clock. These remarkable gifts were placed at the beginning of the Christian church. Whoever wants them back, forgets that Christ has made progress in his work here on earth.

However, even though the Spirit does not manifest him self in this way anymore today, this does not mean that the congregation is devoid of Spiritual gifts. Out of the fullness of Christ the Holy Spirit still pours out gifts of wisdom, knowledge, teaching, service, exhortation and comfort in the congregation. Gifts which the congregation may and should take note of, especially when they have to submit names of brothers deemed suitable for service in the special offices.

The congregation is still a *charismatic* congregation, a congregation supplied by Christ with many Spiritual gifts that are focused on the upbuilding of the congregation. All the gifts of the Spirit are for the "common good." We may never use these gifts selfishly in order to show off. Only in love (1 Corinthians 13!) can we use them according to God's purpose.

When this love for God and the brothers and sisters governs our hearts, we will be obedient to the word of the apostle Peter, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Pet 4:10.)

Arijjan Nicolaas Hendriks