

INTRODUCTION
Opening Your Spiritual Gifts
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Tonight we begin a series on opening spiritual gifts. We're going to look especially at 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. Tonight will be an introductory night and look at the first seven verses. Then in succeeding three messages we'll look at three gifts together in each group. The gifts naturally and normally divide – the nine gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12. That's not all of the gifts there are but the nine we'll be looking at naturally divide into three categories. We'll look at a different category each evening.

In tonight's message as we look at the first seven verses of 1 Corinthians 12, we'll look at four different components at opening spiritual gifts. I'll use four different words as an outline for these seven verses. The first word I'd simply like to use is the word "ignorance." "For there are many who are unaware or ignorant of spiritual gifts."

I do not use the word "ignorant" in a deprecatory sense at all. That's not the way Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 12:1. It's simply the word in the Greek *agnostic* meaning "without knowledge." "Now about spiritual gifts [or about spirituality – the word here is *pneumatica* not *charismata*] brothers I do not want you to be ignorant."

Let's focus for a moment on that statement. It's surprising that Paul would make a statement like that in the Corinthian church for in terms of the presence of the gifts of the Spirit they had no lack. But in terms of the knowledge of how those gifts divided and how they functioned and operated there appears to have been a great deal of lack. There are many today in the world and especially in the body of Christ who do not really themselves know about the gifts of the Spirit. They are ignorant of the gifts of the Spirit. There may be a number of reasons for that ignorance to exist in the body of Christ. Let me briefly review some of them.

One reason why there is ignorance today about spiritual gifts is that the view is they are not for today. There are some who would say the Lord withdrew these manifestations of the Spirit at the close of the apostolic age.

Isn't it interesting as we read the New Testament that the apostles never talked anything about the close of the apostolic age? The only age that they envisioned is the age they live in. Which is the day of the Lord's blessing and the day of the Lord's coming when the Lord will return. They're not saying, There's certain things happening now that are going to close when the apostolic age ends.

Those who cite the gifts as ending with the apostolic age will frequently quote 1 Corinthians 13:8 "Where there are prophecies they will cease, where there are tongues, they will be stilled, where there is knowledge it will pass away." It's obvious however in continuing to read that passage Paul is talking about these gifts not being needed when we see Christ face to face for then we will not know in part but we will fully know.

The way in which the church is meant to operate today is seen in 1 Corinthians 1:7 "Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." You do not lack any spiritual gift. That is meant not only to be a byword for the Corinthian church but it's meant to be a watchword, a characteristic, for the entire body of Christ, every

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local assembly in every place. You don't lack any gift until the Lord Himself is revealed from heaven.

There are some who say that the gifts are not for today because they hold the view of we haven't seen the gifts much in plentitude since the apostolic age. I sometimes don't know where these people are currently living!

I visited a church in downtown Los Angeles and they had a guest speaker that morning whom I greatly admired. He's now with the Lord. He's a great scholar from Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. Merrill Unger. Dr. Unger has written a Bible dictionary, he's written a classic work on demon possession. He was a man who had much writing gifts, great scholarly skill. The morning message happened to be an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. A great part of his sermon was taken up with asserting that basically certain things disappeared with the apostolic age. Among them the gift of tongues. And people who speak in tongues today are not doing it in either a biblical way or else he said you must be careful that Satan is at the back of people who are speaking in tongues and things come in the form of the spiritual that seem to draw people closer to the Lord but actually there's an operation of the enemy through that. He was kind in saying that, not thumping the pulpit or hostile.

After the service I had the opportunity to talk with Dr. Unger. I introduced myself, told him where I was from and what denomination I was with and what school I had graduated from and told him how much I appreciated him. How much his writing had meant to me. I went on to say I could not help to take exception of some of the things he said this morning about spiritual gifts and especially about speaking in other tongues. I cited some recent works that had been developed by Pentecostal scholars and asked if he had read them. I said "It seems that what you're reacting to is the kind of reaction of certain things that occurred twenty years or so ago but does not reflect the current engagement of what is being written at a scholarly level." He was not aware of some of the writers I noted. I said, "You mentioned the church in Korea, the Presbyterian Church in Soul. Are you aware also of the Full Gospel Central church in Soul, Korea and what God is doing there? How can the greatest missionary church and the largest church in the world be growing and be committed to the exercise of spiritual gifts and yet be operating by demonic influence? It seems an inherent contradiction."

I was not trying to pick an argument or anything. I just thought I should go talk to him. He said "We have to be careful because Satan can infiltrate these things." I grant that he can. But that's no cause for wiping the whole thing off the slate. I've looked up some people who aren't regarded as being in the charismatic camp and what they've said about the close of the apostolic age and spiritual gifts.

John Wesley says this about spiritual gifts "Because of the love of many, almost all Christians **was waxed cold this was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer found in the Christian church." The love of many had waxed cold.

H.A. Ironside, non-charismatic pastor, Moody Church in Chicago says, "Some insist that some of the gifts have absolutely disappeared. But I do not know of any scripture that tells us that. I do not know of any scripture that says the age of miracles is past. I would not dare to say that the sign gifts all ended with Paul's imprisonment. I know from early church history that this is not true. These Corinthians came behind in no gift we are told. It seems to me we can see in the

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book of Acts. That as time went on and the church began to drift a little and as dissention and other things came in there was more reserve on His part in bestowing the gifts. That I believe explains the lack of these gifts today. The church has gotten so far away and there is so much strife, division, worldliness and carnality that he no longer delights to lavish his gifts upon her as he did in the beginning.”

Some have believed that the spiritual gifts have disappeared because the New Testament canon is completed and the spiritual gifts were only needed so long as the New Testament was in the process of writing. But once the perfect came then the incomplete is done away with. The problem with this is as we look at the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 none of them was ever used as a means by which the scripture was used in the first place. There was a special operation of the gift of the Spirit. Holy men spoke as they were born along by the Holy Spirit. But in no stretch of the imagination can you associate these nine gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 with the writing of scripture. It's a totally different function, a totally different operation of the Holy Spirit.

There are some that hold that gifts aren't in operation in the church because they're not needed today. We have a kind of Christian society and the gifts were only needed at the beginning to establish the church. It sort of began with a great earthquake and since then we've just felt the tremors, the ripples. It's the big bolder in the pond theory. There was the big drop of the early church and the ripples have been going on ever since then. We don't need to see the actual things happen any more because once the gospel is presented then people can respond to the gospel simply on the basis of the ethics of the gospel and the truth of the gospel. They can see the change in our lifestyle and they don't need any special sign gifts in operation.

The problem with that is it assumes again several wrong things. It assumes everybody knows about Jesus Christ all over the world. That's not the case because there's many pioneering situations for the gospel today as there were back in the apostolic days. I never read anywhere in scripture that once you become a believer, miracles cease in operation in the body or in the church and the gifts are to cease because we don't need them anymore. If anything we need all that God has to offer for us.

If the gifts are not in operation today why do not then enough Christians manifest them? I would isolate several reasons why the gifts are not manifested.

Let me talk to the young people here in terms of spiritual gifts. That perhaps the reason why you have never exercised your spiritual gift is you do not yet feel sufficiently confident to do so. As a result of not feeling confident, what I'm saying may just go over you without being taken in by you. Let me say that the scripture very clearly says that in the last days God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh and upon sons and daughters and upon young men and young women. I would encourage you, when we talk about the exercise of spiritual gifts, not to see that as something that happens to the older people, but to see it as an opportunity for you to begin developing in an area where God may be wanting to use you.

Another reason why gifts may not be used is lack of teaching. We need to be taught on the spiritual gifts and their meaning so we can be comfortable in operating with them.

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Sometimes the gifts are not put in operation because we simply lack faith. We do not see ourselves as being persons within whom God can work in these ways. That's one of the struggles in exercising spiritual gifts. One of the struggles I've had. You have to overcome that fear, that maybe I'm doing the wrong thing.

There are some also that view the spiritual gifts simply as a manifestation of natural talents. That is if you're naturally inclined in a particular direction then you're especially fitted to the gifts. There may be some truth to that. But I'm not sure that I know anybody that is naturally inclined to the gift of miracles. Or naturally inclined to the gift of faith. So you need to recognize there are touching points between natural abilities and the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts. But at the same time there can be much difference as the Holy Spirit uniquely comes upon persons to do his work.

Paul says, "I do not want you to be ignorant." So some there and some today in the body of Christ are ignorant of the spiritual gifts because they do not consider them as a serious possibility in the church today or in their lives personally.

I might note also that the church might be ignorant of the gifts because many times spiritual gifts have been misused. Therefore our ignorance in respect to their usage. We've seen gifts in operation but we've seen them misused. Or misused them ourselves. We need to be informed in that regard.

Anyone for example, who considers the gifts as competitive rather than complimentary is misusing the gifts. Some I think do a terrible job of misquoting 1 Corinthians 12:31. "But eagerly desire the greater gifts." Often the assumption is made the greater gifts are prophecy and knowledge and perhaps miracles could be included in that. But the lesser gifts are stuff like tongues and interpretation and things like that.

But that view depends on an interpretation of verse 31 that doesn't necessarily hold. It's not necessarily an imperative sentence. "But eagerly desire the greater gifts," that could be an indicative sentence: you are desiring the greater gifts and all nine of these gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12 are the greater gifts. But even beyond them is a more excellent way. The way of love.

The gifts are not competitive. They're complimentary.

The gifts can be misused if we do not consider that love is essential to insure the proper operation of the gifts. Love must be a part of it. The vital part of the functioning of the gifts. It is so easy in our lives when God is doing a special work to turn around and look at someone else who may be at that moment not as open as we are, not as under the fount as we are and disdain that person. Spiritual gifts must operate from a function of love and we love people in spiritual gifts. We never love them *into* spiritual experience. We never bring them into spiritual experience by manifesting spiritual pride.

Another misuse of spiritual gifts that may create ignorance of spiritual gifts is the gifts are not regulated by proper order. We have found it necessary as the gifts function in a verbal way to explain the gifts so that all can understand.

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Sometimes there is misuse of a spiritual gift because the appropriateness and the exercise of the gift is not regarded.

Paul says to us that we're not to be ignorant of the spiritual gifts and to correct our ignorance he goes on to tell us about their proper functioning. He tells us how to validate their gifts and he tells us about the variety of the gifts. Verses 2 and 3 tell us how to validate any spiritual gift. "You know that when you were pagans somehow or another you were influenced and led astray to dumb idols. Therefore I tell you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says 'Jesus be cursed.' And no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

When spiritual gifts happen, how can we know they are truly from God? Spiritual gifts can be imitated. Tongues is the most easy of all spiritual gifts to fake. Anybody can fake the gift of tongues. It's not surprising because tongues is kind of an interesting gift. It's where we get the springboard to step into other gifts. That's why tongues is part and parcel of the baptism in the Spirit. It's sort of entry level. But it can easily be faked. The spirit of it can't but the manifestation of it. People can just make up sounds and jabber away.

But that's not the only spiritual gift that can be faked. That is not the only spiritual gift that can be imitated.

I learned well in the experience mom and dad had on the mission field where there was miraculous manifestations apart from the name of Christ. My dad has in his possession a thighbone, a human thighbone. It came to him through a converted Tibetan priest. The Tibetians had a practice, for example when there was a drought or famine and all the prayers given up to their gods had not worked. As a last resort some girl, virgin girl in the people would come to the priests – volunteer. It could not be coercion. Volunteered to go up to a mountaintop and jump off. In the process of that fall, of course killing herself, the priest was stationed at the bottom. When her body slumped against the stone it was his task to go cut out the thighbone. It was specially prepared and then in a certain ceremonial day when all the people were gathered together that thighbone was used as a horn to summon the aide of god to break the drought or the famine. It is said that within Tibetan practice there has never been an occasion where with that in operation there has not been a breaking of a drought or a famine.

We know in our own culture that people using Christian Science methodology have had genuine healings. That doesn't surprise me either because Simon Magus in Acts 9 did great wonders through his magic. The Egyptian magicians of Exodus 7 and 8 did mighty miracles. Jesus says in the last day false christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive if possible even the very elect.

So gifts can be imitated. That doesn't mean we quit using them because other religions are experiencing phenomenal power. Tapping into the subconscious world.

If gifts can be imitated why then bother with them at all? That's like say, if money can be counterfeited, why use it? Some of the Corinthians were concerned about spiritual gifts happening and they didn't want to be led astray. Spiritual gifts if they center upon Jesus Christ and if they witness to his Lordship are the genuine article. That's why Paul says "No one speaking by the Spirit of God says 'Jesus be cursed.'"

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That's an intriguing phrase. How in the world in a meeting of the so called faith could anyone ever stand up and say "Jesus be cursed!" There's been all kinds of theories to try to explain this. I could go through a long list of reasons. But I think what was happening was there was some of those people that said there's a difference between the Jesus in the flesh and the Christian, the spirit. Just like the Christian scientists do today. The human Jesus is immaterial. It's the Christ consciousness. Paul says any spirit like that cannot be received, cannot be accepted.

The positive aspect is that when we say Jesus is Lord and we really mean it with our hearts, when we are exercising a spiritual gift in conscious confession of Jesus Christ's Lordship. We can rest on the security of that gift.

There is a need for validity in checking out the gifts. The validity is what witness it bears to Jesus Christ. If the gift is truly being exercised in a biblical way it will always bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ.

The only other two ways that a gift would be exercised that would not be in a Christian sense is if someone would use a miracle kind of manifestation in occult sense or another religion kind of sense. Or secondly if somebody in the body of Christ purportedly operates with the gift of the Spirit maybe even the gift of healing but the end result is they are using their gift to enhance their own position in the Christian community and maybe their own financial standing. When that happens the gift again is not properly being used because it is not bringing proper credit and glory to Jesus Christ.

A variety of the gifts should be noted. Verses 4-5 "There are different kinds of *charismata*, but the same *Spirit*. There are different kinds of deacons but the same Lord. And there are different kinds of energies [or workings] but the same God who works them all, all of them in all men." Paul indicates a variety in the spiritual gifts, a variety in the service, and a variety of the energy or workings. Let's look at each of those.

A variety of *charismata*. *Charismata* is plural of *charis*, spiritual gift. All Christians, by the way, are charismatics whether they own up to it or not because eternal life itself is the *charisma* of God. So all of us in the body of Christ are charismatic. The word "present", a gift, really presents the idea of what a spiritual gift is. God is giving us a present that we are to open and it fulfills some purpose or usage. There are several things about the variety of *charisms* or the *charismata*, something about the variety we should know.

First of all no present from God will ever be bad for you. I say this especially in reference to the gift of tongues, which many people say, "I'm not sure I should go ahead and exercise this gift in my personal life because it may not be good for me. It may not build me up." That is a false emotional idea of that gift. The scriptures deliberately say it is edifying, it is a building up gift and I cannot imagine God giving us ever a gift that would be harmful to us.

We can harmfully use it, if we use it for ends that are not approved by Christ. But the gift itself is a pure gift. It's a present from God. And he, the Holy Spirit is a healthy Spirit, and the gifts he gives us will be good for us. To look down, therefore on a gift and regard it kind of as a lesser gift or an inferior gift is to ultimately insult the Spirit who gave them in the first place.

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If you think of gifts under the Christmas tree – all the gifts are different but they're all of the same exquisite price and character. Spiritual gifts are like that.

Paul says there are variety of services to the gifts. The word is the word we use for deacon. The way in which a gift becomes real in action may differ. Varieties of the gift serving. Some examples of this from scripture – Paul when he is exercising the gift of discernment in Acts 13:9 immediately discerns that Elymas the sorcerer is from the enemy and he immediately rebukes him. But the next time we see him functioning in the gift of discernment we find a different service to the gift. That is Acts 16:17-18 where a demon possessed girl follows him day after day and he doesn't do anything about it. Until a right moment comes along.

The gifts do not always function the same way in service to the body of Christ. Prophecy may function differently in its service. Sometime a word of prophecy may come and it is a general exhortation. Sometimes it may be an individual exhortation. Sometimes it may be a general prediction. Sometimes it may be an individual prediction.

The gifts of healing may vary in service. I look at Acts 8 and I find Phillip when he goes to Samaria that two kinds of miracles are described as happening to his ministry. One is that lame people are being healed and the other is demons are being cast out. I've wondered if Phillip was the first one who had a specialized healing ministry. The apostles seemed to have a whole variety of healings happening through them but with Phillip it's limited to the lame were being healed and demons were being cast out.

I've looked at the operation of special gifts of healing in the body of Christ today and I find that some people in the operation of the gift of healing tend to have more faith in a specialized area than others.

Speaking gifts differ in styles. Some prophetic persons have a tremendous exercise of the gift of prophecy in serving the body by warning the body, by calling it and alerting it to danger. Others use the gift of prophecy in the sense as they give tremendous encouragement. Varieties of service.

There are varieties of workings. Energizings. Different effects happen when the gifts are used. There's a variety of effects. For example in some services an utterance of tongues may come and an interpretation may occur. Some will be really moved upon by what happens and others it will have very little effect. There are variety of effects.

I have noticed as a spiritual gift like a word of prophecy might function that there appear to be in the functioning of that gift someone has absolutely gotten a hot telegraph from God! They knew it. But another person is wondering what is that about. There is sometimes in operation of a spiritual gift and we say, It wasn't that overpowering but it wasn't necessarily wrong either. It was weak. Have you ever seen a weak operation of the gift of the Spirit? Especially this is noticeable in vocal gifts. Variety of energy.

One of the views we ought to take on spiritual gifts is that they are developmental. Are such perfections? We expect the first time a person exercises a gift, it ought to come to us perfectly wrapped but God works through weak human flesh. All learning is developmental in character. I knew more in the twelfth grade than I knew in the first grade. If I keep exercising gifts I'll

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know more about how to exercise those gifts than I did when I began. We ought not to put a crunch on a person who is learning to express a spiritual gift to see in some areas that the exercise of that gift would be at the same level of skill or manifestation as someone who has been doing this for some period of time. Different energies.

Look at Peter's gift of knowledge. Acts 5, this act of knowledge effects a death – the death of Ananias and Sapphira. But that same gift of knowledge in operation in its effect with Simon Magus in Acts 8 involves a call to repentance. Variety.

One other thing I'll note, a fourth thing in looking at 1 Corinthians 12:1-7 is the visibility of the Spirit. "Now to each one the manifestation or the visibility of the Spirit is given for the common good." In the list of spiritual gifts that follow each one of those is a means by which the Spirit's presence is made manifest or visible. When we gather together for worship, Jesus has plainly told us that "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst." He's always here. The Spirit is always with us when we worship. But the Spirit is not always manifest. Theologically he's there but you and I have both gone away from services we knew theologically God was there but we did not feel God's presence. Paul says that when these gifts are in operation they exist for the manifestation of the Spirit. The Spirit's personality is coming through them.

Spiritual gifts as they flow in operation make the presence of Jesus manifest. People go away knowing that their heart and mind and emotions and attitudes have been deeply touched and lives have been changed by the Spirit of God.

That's kind of an introduction in the Opening of Spiritual Gifts.

The Lord I feel is speaking to us about simplicity, honesty in our relationship with Him, taking a moment to inventory that relationship with Him letting the Holy Spirit put his hand upon any hardening of our spiritual arteries, any calluses we may be acquiring, anything that's clogging up the vein system and to bring it to him and ask to restore the joy of our salvation, the joy of our walk with him.

We take these words, Lord, to heart. There are people who have said hard things to one another this week. There are people in this room with hurts, who have been hurt by others. Yet at the same time those same people have a desire to be simple and loving, to be healing rather than hurting, to be caring rather than distant in our relationships of life. Lord, help us with soft words and gentle tones to repair and to heal and speak words of love and healing to one another. To not take our husband, our wife, our parent, our friend for granted. But to see a freshness of caring in verbal greetings that reflect an inner heart that is a fire with love. Then Lord as we look at our relationship with you, restore to all of us Lord the joy of salvation, the innocence of children, lost in the wonder of your presence. Bring healing where we have allowed ourselves to become dominated by attitudes and perspectives that are cruel and hurting. Break those away from us. Help us to be your loving bride, your splendid people. We ask this Lord in your name. Amen.