

# Concerning Spiritual Gifts: Foundation Facts About Spiritual Gifts

by Warren Wiersbe

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*Spiritual gifts are important to the individual Christian, to the church, to the world, and to God, and they are governed by the Word of God.*

**Duration:** 36:48

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 12:1

**Topics:** "Spiritual Gifts"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of spiritual gifts as discussed in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. He emphasizes that if spiritual gifts were not important, Paul would not have dedicated three chapters to discussing them. The speaker also highlights the need to study the Word of God thoroughly and not to overlook any part of it. He mentions the significance of spiritual gifts being controlled by the Word of God and the fact that they come in various forms.

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## Transcript

Beginning this evening and continuing for oh five or six evenings, I'd like us to consider 1st Corinthians chapters 12, 13, and 14 concerning spiritual gifts. It's unfortunate when sections of the Word of God become a battleground but we are called upon to defend the faith as well as to spread the faith. As you know, 1st Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul to correct some problems and some abuses in the Corinthian church.

Paul had spent 18 months in Corinth and he'd established a church there under great difficulty. After he left the church, he got word that there were some serious problems there and so he wrote this letter. 1st Corinthians really can be divided into two parts.

In chapters 1 through 6, Paul is dealing with abuses in the church, the problem of division, the problem of rivalry, immorality, the difficulties they were having with reference to keeping their lives clean. But then in chapter 7, he says, now concerning the things that you wrote to me about, and he starts dealing with their concerns. Apparently they had sent to him a list of questions.

He says, now concerning the matter of marriage and concerning the matter of food offered to idols. Over in chapter 16, now concerning the offering. It's always wonderful when a church asks about the offering.

But in verse 1 of chapter 12, now concerning spiritual gifts. You'll notice that the word gifts is in italics in our authorized version. This means it was added by the translators.

It's not in the original. Concerning spirituals, Campbell Morgan says very beautifully in the first half of the book, he's been talking about the carnals. Now he's going to talk about the spirituals, and I think he's right.

Because one of the problems in the Corinthian church was the abuse of spiritual gifts. It's interesting as you go to different places to minister, you can always tell the group you're in by the questions they ask. How many missionaries are you supporting? How many buses are you running? How many souls did you win last week? There's one group that comes up and says, what is your gift? That's an interesting question to hear from somebody after you've preached.

It has happened to me. It gives you pause. Now Paul's going to be dealing in chapters 12, 13, and 14 with the matter of spiritual gifts.

I'm going to read the first 11 verses because in these verses Paul lays the foundation. Now dear friends, when you study the Word of God, whether you're studying spiritual gifts or the resurrection or regeneration or whatever it may be, don't dive into the middle of a verse. When Paul wrote this letter inspired by the Holy Spirit, he put the thing together in a beautiful way.

In recent days I have been reading and rereading these chapters. It just amazes me how much the Lord says to me apart from reading the books people have written about these things. I have shelves of books on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts in general, tongues in particular.

It's just amazing what you can prove from the Word of God if you don't take the whole thing. Now concerning spirituals, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. It's interesting how many times he says that in 1 Corinthians and how often he says, don't you know? Know ye not? Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as you were led.

Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed, and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit. Now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are differences of administrations but the same Lord, and there are diversities of operations but it is the same God who worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit, that is, for the profit of every man.

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one and the very same Spirit dividing to every man severally as he will. Now in these 11 verses Paul gives to us four foundation facts to help us understand spiritual gifts.

Everything he says after verse 11 is based on these four foundation facts. Fact number one, spiritual gifts are important. Now if they were not important, Paul would have told us, but instead he devotes what we have made three chapters discussing this.

I realize that there are many parts of the Bible discussing things that are no longer with us. Chapter after chapter back in Exodus talks about the tabernacle. I seriously doubt that any of us is going to erect a tabernacle, though we might want to make a model.

But of course those tabernacle instructions talk to us about the Lord Jesus, so they are not unimportant. Paul said, I'm going to talk to you now about the spirituals. And spiritual gifts are important.

Now they are important to at least four different persons. First of all, spiritual gifts are important to the individual Christian. I meet in my ministry, my preaching ministry, my pastoral ministry, my correspondence ministry, I meet people who are greatly discouraged.

They read Christian magazines and newspapers, they go to big meetings, they come home and say, who am I? I'll never have my name on a marquee of some big meeting. I'm not a preacher, I'm not a Sunday school teacher, I'm just a great big blah. I'm just an evangelical blah, that's all I am.

And so because I don't win 25 people to Christ every week, I've never written any best-selling books, the pastors never come and ask me to have any important place in the church, therefore I guess the Lord doesn't need me. I meet more people who have religious inferiority complexes than almost any other problem. You see, most of us are rather ordinary.

There are very few geniuses running around. I thank God for the geniuses, they make my work a lot easier. I read their books.

The individual Christian needs to know the importance of spiritual gifts because every Christian has one or more spiritual gifts and God has a plan for our ministry and our lives that nobody else can really fulfill like us. The time has come for us to quit being envious of other people and to realize God has made us the way we are. We were born with certain abilities.

We were born again with certain gifts to match our abilities. And God is not expecting us to be something that we are not. All the advertising in the books notwithstanding.

Spiritual gifts are important to the believer. The time has come for many Christians to look into the mirror of God's Word and say, Lord, thank you for saving me. Thank you for giving me a gift.

Help me now to use this gift in the way that will glorify your name. Whether anybody knows about it or not, you know about it. And God, you know what? I'm important to you.

The devil loves a saint who is sitting licking his wounds, looking in the mirror and saying, Oh, you big hunk of no talent. You have been... The devil loves that. He'll come along and say, that's the smartest thing you've ever said.

And before you know it, you get discouraged and backslidden. And then you've lost the victory. Secondly, spiritual gifts are important not only to the individual Christian, but spiritual gifts are important to the church.

We have the idea that Moody Church or any other church operates because there is a pastoral staff and there are officers, but everybody else is just a group of spectators. The average church really ought to be built like an arena with bleachers for the spectators, you know, and then the participants are down there. But that's not true at Moody Church.

You would be amazed at the ministry of the people of Moody Church whose names you don't even know. One of the blessings of being the pastor of this church is finding out week by week how somebody has done this and God has used somebody to do that. Things I could never have done.

If you have the idea that the ministry of Moody Church is effective, if it is, because of the man in the pulpit or the men behind him, there's much more to it than that. I thank God for gifted people in this church who can do everything from cooking meals to handling finances and everything in between. This church wouldn't be here were it not for that.

You see, when the individual in the local church does not know who he is or what he can do, there's a weakness in the body. But when a person knows his gifts and is able to work together with other gifted people, then things begin to happen. When the local church is not functioning by spiritual gifts, it's functioning on natural abilities.

And a church cannot function very long on natural abilities. It gets hollow, it gets weak, and it just fades away. That's why we have to keep praying for the Holy Spirit to minister.

And you know, one of the joys in recent months in my ministry has been to see how the Holy Spirit is calling out this one and calling out that one and laying hold of this couple and laying hold of that person and endowing them to fulfill ministries. And this is what makes things go and makes things grow, which leads to a third consideration. Spiritual gifts are important to the individual believer, to the church as a whole, and they're important to the world.

You say, what do you mean by that? The world knows nothing about spiritual gifts. That's true. But if we're going to make any kind of an impact on the world, it has to be through the Holy Spirit giving gifts and ministering.

It's amazing when you read the book of Acts, and we're just about to finish the book of Acts on Sunday mornings, it's amazing when you read the book of Acts how much they got done without a mimeograph machine, or a telephone, or a PA system, or even a constitution. It's remarkable. No, it isn't remarkable.

When you have the Holy Spirit of God giving gifts to men, and then He gives these gifted people to the church, and they function in the power of the Spirit, things happen. I don't think it's necessary for us to do extraordinary things to attract the world. I read in some of the books about the Holy Spirit that unless we're calling fire down from heaven, unless we're having ecstatic things happening, the world won't pay any attention.

I don't think that's necessarily so. I find here at Moody Church, and perhaps we're different, I don't know, perhaps Chicago's different, our people exercising their ministry where they are in love are winning people to Jesus Christ. And so spiritual gifts are important to the world.

We're not going to have any ministry to the city of Chicago unless each one of us is doing the work God called him to do. Which leads finally to this consideration, spiritual gifts are important to God. Did you notice that the whole Trinity is involved in this matter of the gifts? Don't ever just talk about the gifts of the Spirit, because God the Father is involved, and God the Son is involved, and God the Holy Spirit is involved.

I notice this here in verse 4, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit, that's the Holy Spirit. There are differences of administrations, but the same Lord, that's the Lord Jesus. There are diversities of operations, it's the same God, that's God the Father.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit work together in the giving, the administering, and the operating of gifts. This means that if I am not functioning the way I should, I grieve the Holy Spirit. God

the Father gave His Son that I might have the Holy Spirit.

God the Son gave His life that I might have the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit came to this earth. He's been living in me now these several years.

That takes some love and patience. The price that God paid that I might have these gifts, that you might have your gifts, and for us not to exercise these gifts means to grieve God. Let's begin then with foundation fact number one.

Spiritual gifts are important. Let no one ever say, I'm not interested. You have to be interested.

Now, foundation fact number two. Spiritual gifts are governed by the Word of God. Paul did not write, now concerning spiritual gifts, you've all had experiences, so there's no need for me to write to you.

He says just the opposite. Paul is saying here, the reason the Corinthian church is in the mess that it's in is because they are not following the instructions of the Word of God. He said, I'm going to give them to you.

Now, when you start talking about this, somebody gets critical. You say, Pastor, don't you really believe in experiences? Of course, I believe in experiences. I've had some wonderful experiences with the Lord.

But you don't base your theology on experience. You test your experience by the Word of God. You see, experience is subjective and it changes.

The Word of God is objective. It never changes. And the Word of God is the great test of my experience.

My experience is not the test of the Word of God. This is why in verse two, Paul reminds them of their former life. I said before you were saved, when you were a bunch of unsaved Gentiles, you went down to the idols' temples and you were carried away.

Carried away by what? Well, he tells us in Corinthians that idol worship is demon worship. They had experiences. I think one reason why the Corinthians were confused about gifts is because they were trying to duplicate in their spiritual walk some of the experiences they'd had before they were saved.

They were very experience-centered people. And Paul is saying, now look, whatever experiences you had when you were worshiping those dumb idols, it's a whole new ballgame now. It has to be governed by the Word of God.

This is why he talks about confessing that Jesus is Lord. If you miss everything else I say tonight, please get this. Paul is saying in verse three that the most spiritual thing the Holy Spirit can do in your life and mine is to bring about the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Oh, you say, I wish I could sing. I wish I could preach. I wish I could teach.

Oh, I wish I were somebody important. Now, wait just a minute. In God's church, everybody is important.

I was chatting with a young pastor recently who was a little bit discouraged, and he said, well, he said, I'm in such a little place. I said, sir, in God's plan, there are no little places. Every place is a big place, and every job is a big job.

And Paul is saying here to me and to you, totally apart from gifts, the most important thing the Holy Spirit can do in my life is to bring about the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Now, obviously, Paul's not talking about

saying the words, Jesus is Lord. Anybody can say that.

In fact, our Lord himself back in Matthew chapter seven said, not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. I heard about a missionary who was talking to a man of another faith in a different culture. And this man said to the missionary, well, anybody can say Jesus is Lord.

I'll say it right now. Jesus is Lord. Just then a friend went by and the missionary said to this unsaved friend, hey, I want you to hear what he just said.

And the man ran away. You see, you get an unsaved person to go to some unsaved person and say Jesus is Lord and really mean it. He won't do it.

Paul is saying here from the heart, if thou shall confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead. Now, who does this? The Holy Spirit. We sometimes forget this.

He says, when you were unsaved, you were carried away. But in your Christian condition, you aren't carried away. You're controlled by the Lordship of Christ.

When you're on the radio preaching, as we are often, you get all kinds of mail. And particularly if in some message you have dealt with one of these topics. I'll share some of the mail with you in future messages.

People have sent me pamphlets with annotations in the margin. All sorts of notes. I recall one that a lady wrote.

She was talking about praying in tongues. She said, when I pray in tongues, it bypasses my mind completely. Paul said in the Word of God, I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with the understanding.

I will sing with the Spirit and I will sing with the understanding. Paul says the Holy Spirit doesn't bypass your mind. He becomes the Lord of your mind.

When you say Jesus Christ is Lord. So fact number two, spiritual gifts are governed by the Word of God. Now, having said that, let me make a request of you.

It's not necessary for all of us to agree on all of these details. I've never made spiritual gifts a test of fellowship. It's the deity of Jesus Christ that's the test of fellowship.

Believe not every spirit, for many false prophets are gone out into the world. John warns us in 1 John chapter 4, if a person doesn't confess that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, he's antichrist. That's the test of fellowship.

All I ask is that whatever your position is, back it up by the Word of God. Please don't come and say, well, pastor, I had this experience. Wonderful, but can you back it up by the Word of God? You see, there are counterfeit experiences.

I'd be deathly afraid of one like that. Fact number three, spiritual gifts are varied. First, spiritual gifts are important.

Spiritual gifts are governed by the Word of God. Fact number three, spiritual gifts are varied. Now, people say to me, are you charismatic? I have to answer, yes.

If by that you mean I believe in the gifts of the Spirit, because there are gifts listed here in verses 8, 9, 10, and then over at the end of the chapter, there are gifts listed in Ephesians 4. He gave some to be apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. They are listed over in Romans 12. But Leslie Flynn has come to the conclusion that there are 19 basic gifts of the Spirit.

Many people believe they all aren't listed, that there are other gifts that the Lord gives. But you see, Paul uses five different words in describing these gifts. For example, in verse 1 of chapter 12, now concerning spirituals, the word pneumatic comes from that Greek word.

Now concerning the spirituals, the word pneuma is the word for spirit, breath, air. And so you say, I'm charismatic. So I'll say to you, I'm pneumatic.

You say, I knew that, you're full of air. No, I didn't mean that at all. And then in verse 4, he uses the word for charismatic.

Verse 4, there are diversities of gifts. The word grace, charis, grace, charismatic, the gracious gifts. So we have spirituals in verse 1. We have gifts, charisma in verse 4. We have administrations in verse 5. It's the word for deacon, ministries.

In other words, these gifts of the Holy Spirit are graciously given to us for ministry. That's the word that's used in verse 5. In verse 6, you have the word operations. Our word energy comes from that.

God the Holy Spirit gives the gift. God the Son administers the gift. He's the head of the church.

He's the one building the church. And God the Father provides the energy for the operation of the gift. Now, please don't come to me and talk only about the Holy Spirit.

Let's not forget God the Son and God the Father. And please don't just use charismatic. We have four other words that are used.

Verse 7, he uses the word manifestation. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit. That is to profit the whole church.

This is just simply the word for a revelation, a manifestation. What is a spiritual gift? It's a working of God through the Holy Spirit that glorifies Christ and builds the church. So here are five different words that are used.

Now, in some future messages, we'll take some of these gifts in detail. But I must point out to you that the gifts are varied because there are many different ministries to be performed. Now, later on, Paul is going to use the illustration of the human body.

When you were saved, the Holy Spirit of God made you a member of the body of Christ. And is the whole body an eye? No. Is the whole body an ear? No.

Is the whole body a tongue? No. In fact, he closes this chapter by showing us the variety of the gifts and the variety of people who have received the gifts. Verse 28, And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps.

That's a great gift. Governments, diversities of tongues are all apostles. Now, you Greek students know that when a question is asked like that in the Greek language, the answer is no.

In other words, you can translate verse 28. All are not apostles, are they? No. Are all prophets, are all teachers, are all workers of miracles, have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? There are varieties of spiritual gifts.

Why? Because the Lord knows just exactly what he wants us to do. Used to bother me. I confess to you as your pastor, it used to bother me and burden me that I did not have a gift of evangelism.

I remember once when I was in Youth for Christ being called to conduct a tent meeting. It was the best kept secret in town. And I preached my head off.

I had the best sermons money could buy. I preached my head off and not very much happened. And I was licking my wounds one day and the Lord said, Why did you even bother to go to that meeting? That's not your gift.

I have a friend whom I consider to be one of the finest local church evangelists in the world. He's just tremendous. I've had him at my previous church, I suppose, four or five times.

He's not selling any trips to the Holy Land. He's not just comes in and preaches. He gets simplest messages, just simple gospel messages with a few personal stories, gives a simple invitation and people get saved.

I'd sit there and say, why don't I have that gift? God didn't give it to me. I'm smart enough to know I don't have it and smart enough to call a man in who does have it. That's what the church is all about.

Spiritual gifts are important. Spiritual gifts are controlled by the word of God and spiritual gifts are varied. We don't complain.

We don't compare. We don't criticize. We say, thank you, Father, for what you've given me.

Now help me to use it and help my brother to use it. Use his gift to the glory of God. Finally, spiritual gifts are for the good of the whole church.

As we progress through these chapters, we're going to discover that there's one thing Paul is criticizing and judging, and rightly so. It's the individual taking his gift and magnifying his gift above everybody else's gift. It's a dangerous thing.

I used to come away from some conventions and seminars so utterly beat. I'd say, am I just well resigned? My, oh my, look at this man, what he can do. Look at that man, what he can do.

Then the Lord says, you just do what I've called you to do. When you're through doing what I've called you to do, I've got somebody else to come along and do what he's supposed to do. You just do what I've called you to do.

Spiritual gifts are for the good of the whole church, not for the magnifying of any individual. Now in the Corinthian church, they were using their spiritual gifts in two wrong ways. You see, spiritual gifts are tools to build with.

But they were using them as toys to play with. And they were using them as weapons to fight with. And Paul said, that's why you've got division.

That's why you have all these problems. This is why God cannot bless you. You're not using spiritual gifts as they should be used.

Let me just quickly summarize for you how you can tell when spiritual gifts are being used for the good of the whole church. Number one, there is humility, not pride. Now, if God has given to you a gift of soul winning, don't brag about it.

And don't compare yourself with everybody else. If God's given you a gift of teaching the Word, don't brag about it. Paul writes to them and says, what do you have that you haven't received? And why do you brag about it as though you didn't receive it? Everything we have, we got from God.

And nobody can stand up and say, well, I'm better than somebody else because I have this gift. You see, when spiritual gifts are being used the right way, there is humility. There's not criticism.

There's not comparing, condemning. Secondly, there's harmony. Now, when spiritual gifts are not being used the right way, there is conflict.

There's competition. But in the local church, when spiritual gifts are being used, when people know what they can do and they do it in the glory to the glory of God, there's harmony. Things just begin to work together.

And nobody says, well, he's better than I am or I'm better than he is. There's humility and there's harmony. Thirdly, there's growth.

When my body is functioning the way it ought to function, when every part's doing its part, there's growth. There's health. And the local church is a healthy church.

There is proper growth and there's proper balance and there's proper enthusiasm and there's proper strength when spiritual gifts are being used properly. But alas, my friends, when spiritual gifts are being used in a carnal way, and that's what they were doing in Corinth, they were using spiritual gifts in a carnal way. Instead of having humility, you have pride.

Instead of having harmony, you've got division. Instead of having health and growth and balance, you're out of balance. There's no growth.

A lot of spiritual sickness. Now, on the basis of these four facts, spiritual gifts are important. Spiritual gifts must be governed by the word, not by tradition and not by experience.

Spiritual gifts are varied. Each one has his own. And spiritual gifts are given for the good of the whole church.

On the basis of these four facts, I have just three questions to ask you. Number one, have you received the gift of the Spirit? I mean, by that, are you saved? There's a difference between the gift of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Have you received the gift of the Spirit? Do you know that you're saved? I feel sorry for unsaved people.

They have no power to operate on. They have to live on soul power. They have to live on flesh power.

They've got to live on their own self-determination. We Christians have the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit belong to us.

And the power of the Holy Spirit is in the church. That's why we don't need substitutes. Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess.

Be filled with the Spirit. Have you received the gift of the Spirit? Now, if you've never trusted Christ, you don't have the Holy Spirit. You have an unholy spirit.

The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Question number two, if you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, have you discovered and developed your spiritual gifts? That's why the church is here. The church is not a group of spectators to cheer the pastor.

The church is made up of members of a body. And in the church fellowship, you discover your gift and you develop your gift and you discipline your gift. And you dedicate your gift.

This is why so often people who are outside the church fellowship go off into tangents. They get unbalanced. In the local church, the body works together.

Have you discovered and developed your gift? Now, if not, begin to pray about it. Ask what God wants you to do in the body. Thirdly, are you willing to use your gift for the good of everybody? And the glory of God.

Oh, Lord, give me gifts so that I'll be somebody important. He won't do it. Everybody's important.

Are you willing to use your gift behind the scenes? Are you willing for your name never to be in the bulletin? Are you willing for your body never to be at a microphone? I'm not saying God won't put you there. I'm just simply saying, are you willing for God to use your gift for the good of others? And for the glory of God. Now, if you're trying to use your gift and you're finding there's some problem, it's one of two things.

Either you're trying to use a gift you don't have. And by the way, it's amazing how often we think we have gifts we don't have. Or there's something wrong with the fellowship.

There's some jealousy or there's some problem there. This is why I believe in the local church. I thank God for the discipline and the encouragement of the local church.

I just wonder where I would be today if a local church had not helped me to discover and develop the few gifts that I have. I had a man in my Sunday school class this morning who helped me get started in my publishing and my writing ministry. First article I ever wrote, he purchased from me.

It was published in Moody Monthly. And I just thank God that he encouraged me in this way. Now, I don't know what your gifts are.

You've got some. Let's find out. Let's begin to work together governed by the word of God to see what God wants us to do.

Let's pray together. Now, Father, we're thankful that our salvation enriches us. We don't just have eternal life.

We have abundant life. We've not been left alone. The spirit and the gifts are ours.

And Father, we ask that individually and as a church collectively, we might be spiritual, governed by the word of God. I pray for any here today who have never trusted our Savior. Oh, that they might trust him.

For any who may be rebelling. Oh, God, that they may surrender. We pray for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen.

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