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The Source and Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

12: 4-7

The source and purpose of spiritual gifts DIG: What is the source of our spiritual gifts? What is the purpose of our spiritual gifts? How is the Trinity seen in these verses? Since the Corinthians tended towards spiritual pride, how might these verses surprise them?

REFLECT: What is the source of our spiritual gifts? What do you think is God's purpose in giving the Church spiritual gifts? How have you seen spiritual gifts abused? What is the position on spiritual gifts where you worship? How can you best use your spiritual gift?

ADONAI is the source, and building up the Body of Messiah is the purpose of spiritual gifts.



After reminding **the Corinthians** of **the pagan** and **idolatrous** lives most of **them** had once lived, **Paul** gave two tests, one negative and one positive, for determining if what was being said in public worship was of **the Spirit**, or of **the flesh** (**to see link click [Cg - The Source and Testing of Counterfeit Spiritual Gifts](#)**). Because **the Corinthian** believers were behaving in response to **the flesh** rather than to **the Spirit**, **they** quarreled, became divisive, took each other to court, fell back to immoral and idolatrous practices, corrupted marriage relationships, abused **their** freedom in **Messiah**, and became self-centered, overconfident, and worldly. **Their** misunderstanding and misuse of **spiritual gifts** was a major result of **their** carnal divisiveness.

The Ruach Ha’Kodesh gives **gifts** (capacities for spiritual ministry) to **believers** to express and strengthen the unity **they** have in **the Lord Yeshua Messiah**. But misuse of those **gifts** shatters unity, divides **believers**, ruins **their** testimony before the world, and short-circuits **their** growth and effectiveness in **the Lord’s** service. There can be no doubt that **Paul** had fully instructed **the Corinthians** about **spiritual gifts** when **he** ministered among **them** for a year-and-a-half. But **they** had forgotten or perverted much of what **he** had taught. So, **he** now reiterated and reinforced what **they** already should have known.³⁵⁴



The word “**Trinity**” is never used in the B’rit Chadashah, but the elements which led to the early Church fathers to develop such a concept are seen in passages like this one, where **Spirit, Lord** and **God** refer respectively to **the Ruach, Messiah, and the Father**. There seems to be less significance in the three activities seen here - **the giving of the Spirit, being served by the Lord, and the working of God (the Father)** - than in the oversight of all the activities by **the same God**.³⁵⁵ Just as there is a unity and a diversity in **the Trinity**, there is also a unity (source) and a diversity in our spiritual **gifts** (purpose). Therefore, although we tend to talk only about **gifts of the Spirit, they** are fundamentally **the gifts of the Trinity**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** great love! **You** not only forgive the sins of those who love **You** (**Psalms 103:11-12**), **You** also live within them (**Romans 8:9-11**), and are preparing an eternal **home** in heaven (**John 14:1-6**) for them! **Gifts** bring joy. What a comforting and joyful thought that **the Trinity** gives **gifts** to all believers to build up the community of believers. How thoughtful **You** are to guide the growth of **Your** children by giving so many different **gifts** and also by living within each believer to guide them how to build with that **gift**. Thank you for **Your** example of how each member of **the Trinity** has different functions, yet **You** all work perfectly together in love. May each believer follow **Your** example and use **His** gifts for the benefit of others to build them up. In **Yeshua’s** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

The Corinthians, it seems, had been disputing about the relative value of the different gifts and valued some of them, such as speaking in tongues (languages), more highly than others. In his response to those disputes, **Paul** deliberately lumps all **the gifts** together, and to describe **them**, **he** uses **four different** Greek **words** as though **they** were synonyms. Each of the words is used to describe all **the gifts** given by **the Ruach** for building up the community. Each of the words brings out a different characteristic of one same reality. In this passage, **gifts**, **serving** and **working** are all different synonyms for *pneumatikon*, **the spiritual gifts** which build up **the Body of Messiah. And Spirit, Lord, and God are the one source of all the gifts.**³⁵⁶

Different kinds of gifts: Now concerning spiritual (Greek: *pneumatikon*) **gifts (12:1), there are different kinds of gifts** (Greek: *charismata*, *the word is from the same root as charis, or grace*), **but the same Spirit gives them (12:4).** Some in the charismatic movement try to make this word apply to tongues. But this is not the case, as the word refers to *all the gifts* which **the Ruach** gives to believers. **The Corinthians** had evidently regarded the possession of such **gifts** as a matter of pride and had set one believer against another on the basis of the possession of this **gift** or that **gift**. They had created division. Paul insists that this is the wrong attitude. **There are different kinds of gifts, but it is the same Spirit that gives them, and the Spirit does not fight against Himself, for God is not a God of confusion (14:33a).**

Paul picks up on the problem that the Church faced, created by the seeming disparity in the nature of the gifts. Some of the gifts were quite spectacular, and those who possessed them had a tendency to be proud and show them off. Those gifts that were exercised in the context of public worship give high visibility and prominence to those who possessed them, and it is easy to see, knowing the very human tendency to put self forward, how these people might begin to think that they were more important than the others. On the other hand, some of the members were given gifts that were exercised in less dramatic ways - in a servant role, for example - and it is easy to see how because of the quiet and unseen way in which they did their part that they might wonder if their gift was important and if they were really needed in the church. This continues to be a problem in the Church today.³⁵⁷

Different ways of serving: Also, there are different ways of serving (Greek: *diakonia*), **but it is the same Lord being served (12:5).** God gives **His gifts** to be used in **different ways**. Even believers with the same basic gift may be led to display it in a variety of ways. One teacher may be especially gifted in teaching young children; another may have special ability with the original biblical languages and be highly qualified to teach in bible colleges and seminaries. One evangelist may be able to powerfully address large crowds, while

another's strength is in one-on-one witnessing. One person's service of teaching may emphasize exhortation and doctrine, while others may focus on comfort and mercy. The emphasis here is on variety.³⁵⁸

Different modes of working: And there are different modes of working (Greek: *energemata*, meaning *what is worked out*, or *energized*), but it is the same God who inspires **them all in everyone (12:6)**. The One who provides the spiritual gifts also provides the energy and power, as well as the faith (Romans 12:3b), to make them effective. Just as spiritual gifts are given supernaturally, they are also energized supernaturally. Believers, no matter how well trained and experienced, or how unselfishly motivated, cannot exercise their gifts in their own power. We may exercise our talents, skills, intelligence, and other natural abilities in our own power, but only the Giver of spiritual gifts can empower them and make them effective. Just as God gives no commands for which He does not also give the ability to obey, He does not give spiritual gifts for which He does not also give the power to use. A "self-made" believer is a self-contradiction. Such a one harms himself and he harms those to whom he tries to minister. More importantly, he harms the Lord's work. For the third time, Paul brings out his point that there can be no division among believers on the ground of spiritual gifts because it is the same God who provides the gifts in the first place.³⁵⁹

One source and one purpose: Moreover, to each person is given the particular manifestation of the Spirit, or a spiritual gift, that will be for the common good (12:7). This is the key verse in this section, which contains three main points. First, if you are a child of God, you have a spiritual gift. This does not mean that everyone has recognized his or her gift, but it is there and ready to be used. Nor does it mean that we are limited to only one gift. People normally have one primary spiritual gift and secondly a gift that's not quite as strong. God has a place in His Church where your specialties can shine and you can make a difference. It's up to you to find that place.

Second, the gift(s) we have received are not for personal benefit but are for the common good. They have been given for the benefit of others. Those believers who proudly display their gifts for their own glory rather than for the glory of God are misusing their gifts. It is for this reason that Paul will shortly digress into his lengthy section on the Body of Messiah and how it should function (see Cs - **Interdependence, Not Independence**).

Third, these gifts are given. This is a passive voice, an example of what is known as the divine passive. These gifts are not necessarily innate abilities or occupations that we have, but specifically things that the Ruach Ha'Kodesh has given to us. There are several lists of

spiritual gifts in the Bible (see **Romans 12:4-8; First Corinthians 12:8-31a; Ephesians 4:8-15; and First Peter 4:10-11**).³⁶⁰ They are there to guide us to **the gift** that has been given to us. No other **gifts** exist. People do not get to make up their own **gifts**, and that is exactly what would happen if the **gifts** were expanded beyond what is in the Bible. For example, a woman might say, "I am a counselor, my **spiritual gift** is counseling." But counseling is nowhere to be found in the list of **spiritual gifts**. Counseling would be her occupation. **Spiritual gifts** are for **the Body of Messiah**. Now, it is possible for a teacher in a high school to have **the gift** of teaching in the church, but not all teachers have **the spiritual gift** of teaching. The danger of people making up their own **spiritual gift** outside of what the Bible describes as **the gifts of the Spirit**, is that they are actually deceiving themselves and are not really ministering to other believers. This cannot be stressed enough; you cannot **add** more **spiritual gifts** than are written in Scripture. For **the inspired author himself** would write: **I warn everyone hearing the words of the prophecy of this book that if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues written in this book (Revelation 22:18)**.