

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Spiritual Gifts: Based on God's Will, Not Man's

*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 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 divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. (1 Corinthians 12:7–11, KJV 1900)*

I recall on occasion hearing a preacher tell his "Experience" regarding his call to preach, his realization of a spiritual gift. Some men described an intense struggle to resist the idea of preaching, often sounding as if their rebellion became a merit badge instead of an act of disobedience. It seemed from their perspective that the more fiercely they rebelled the more powerfully God worked in them. Occasionally these men would quite seriously describe this experience as their own "Jonah School." Did they ever stop to think that the only many who ever truly attended "Jonah School" failed? Read the last chapter of the Book of Jonah. The book ends with Jonah being mad at God, not serving God. If you reduce the Book of Jonah to a brief thematic title, it would be "I won't go. I will go. I wish I hadn't gone." The book closes with Jonah isolating himself and angry at God, not obeying and praising God. I cherish the first time I heard a preacher say that, when he felt the sense that the Lord had called him to preach, he talked with his pastor and started preaching. How refreshing.

The range of unbiblical ideas regarding spiritual gifts is long and varied. I have occasionally heard people describe preaching in this way. There is no calling or spiritual gift. You just stand up, read a passage from the Bible, and say whatever comes to your mind, as if God poured sermons into the preacher's brain with little or no thought on the part of the preacher. Most men who enter the pulpit having given little or no thought to their topic or Bible passage quickly prove and sadly demonstrate that fact by their non-edifying words. God revealed Jesus' true nature to Peter. (Matthew 16:18) He also revealed the truth of Jesus to Paul. (Ephesians 3:4) However, Scripture does not teach that every believer receives such a revelation. In Ephesians 3:5, Paul underscores this truth. The Ephesians did not come to the truth that Paul taught by revelation, "...when ye read, ye may understand...." Paul does not write to Timothy that the young preacher should wait for his own revelation.

*Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (2 Timothy 2:7)*

*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)*

The Lord does not reveal His truth to believers today by revelation, but by prayerful study and consideration of the teachings of Scripture. When a believer wrongly concludes that he has received a revelation of truth directly from the Lord, he will arrogantly ignore any suggestion that he might be wrong and thereby isolate himself from the godly and Biblical counsel of others. If the Lord reveals truth to His children today, such a person should—but often never does—consider that he is not the only believer in the world. If the Lord revealed His truth to you and to me, you and I would be wholly agreed. He doesn't reveal one idea to one believer and a contradictory idea to another believer. The belief that one has received absolute truth by revelation from the Lord often fosters novice pride and arrogance in a believer that Paul describes as the snare of the devil, not the Lord's flawless revelation. The wrong-headed idea that "The Lord revealed this to me, so I can't be wrong" in fact relies wholly on our personal interpretation of our experience and not at all on Scripture.

As we shift from the subjective world of a believer's mind to the objective truth of Scripture, we enter a world where we may study together, learn together, and grow together as united believers together in the Lord's house. Our study passage identifies nine spiritual gifts as examples, but Paul's emphatic point appears in the repeated truth of the passage. All true spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit of God. In fact, the Lord gives every spiritual gift "...severally as he will." The Lord doesn't bestow a spiritual gift based on a believer's intellect, winsome personality, family identity, personal ambition, or any other factor in the believer. The unifying factor in every spiritual gift is its source. We may see evidence of a spiritual gift in various ways, but, given the common origin of every spiritual gift, a key identifying mark of a true spiritual gift appears in a believer's unity with other believers. If the Lord gave you and me a spiritual

gift, and if you and I are faithful to that gift, you and I will believe alike. We will not live in constant conflict because of a false presumption that either of us is wholly right because of a false supposition of direct revelation. The Lord calls us in the Spirit to unity in the faith, not to endless conflict and debate (A word that appears in Scripture dealing with the carnal works of sin).

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; **Endeavoring to keep** the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*(Ephesians 4:1-7; emphasis added)

How do we walk “worthy of the vocation where with” we are called? The answer to the question is not mystical or subject to an individual’s private interpretation. Paul quite clearly shows the way. We walk worthy of our calling or vocation by consistently practicing what he teaches us in this context. Study each behavior and attitude that Paul lists in these verses.

1. *With all lowliness and meekness.* Not with all arrogance and smug pride. We cannot attain to these twin traits apart from a humbling and profound respect for our brothers and sisters in the faith.
2. *With longsuffering.* In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul writes, “*Charity suffers long, and is kind.*” We affirm our spiritual gift by our conduct toward the Lord’s family. Any attitude that conveys any state of mind other than love fails to communicate in harmony with your spiritual gift. Paul does not indicate that we are to walk worthy by one isolated act of longsuffering which we performed twenty years ago. The actions that he requires are all perfect tense verbs. They communicate a constant, habitual behavior, a true lifestyle.
3. *Forbearing one another in love.* To forbear another believer means that you work to live close to your brother or sister. When he stumbles, you are there to hold him up and prevent him from falling. You do not forbear your brother with a grudge and constantly remind him that you held him up when he would otherwise have fallen. You hold him up in love. You regard him with grace above yourself.
4. *Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* The Lord didn’t call His people or His church in discord or endless wrangling. He called His church, including each and every

member in that church, in unity. When a church or individual members in a church foster or promote dissension or discord in the church, they are not walking worthy of the vocation with which the Lord has called them. In calling us, bestowing His spiritual gifts in the church according to His will, He called us in unity. He didn’t gift or call one believer to promote discord with another believer. He called all in unity. Paul commands us to endeavor to maintain that unity in the bond of peace. Are we walking worthy of the vocation with which the Lord called us?

5. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.* This verse serves to reinforce and thereby to underscore the point already made by repetition. The Lord didn’t call out or create multiple bodies of the church. There is only one body for each individual believer. A believer who is a member of a local church should not also join or serve as a member of any other church or quasi-church. Paul drives the point harder. There is also one and only one Spirit who bestowed spiritual gifts “*severally as he will,*” and who leads each believer to the same truth, resulting in harmony within the body, not discord.
6. *One Lord.* Folks who do not understand or believe in the doctrine of the Trinity occasionally accuse those of us who do believe this Bible truth of believing in three gods. This argument is pathetic straw man logical fallacy. We see the revelation of Father, Son or Word, and Holy Spirit in Scripture. Scripture carefully identifies each as unique and individual. For example, notice that Paul refers in our study passage to the Holy Spirit distributing spiritual gifts “*as he will.*” The Holy Spirit has a will, one of several distinctions in Scripture that defines Him as unique. However, Scripture also defines God in Trinity as one God, not three. (1 John 5:7). When we move from the bedrock doctrine to the practical implications of this truth, we find passages such as the one now before us. If there is one and only one Lord, no believer has a Biblical right to promote discord with other members of the church body.
7. *One faith.* In Scripture “faith” can refer to that union of belief and communication that the Lord gives His child in the new birth, or it can refer to the body of truth set forth in Scripture. In the context of our vocation and harmony, this reference to faith logically refers to a commonly held or believed body of truth. I recall an extended conversation many years ago with a man who was an active member of his church, but he held to several major ideas that contradicted the beliefs of his church. When I asked, if his beliefs were so true, why his church’s articles of faith wholly omitted any reference to them? He had no good answer.

Wise believers look for reasons to hold to the "One faith," not reasons to ignore that faith and cling to their own private ideas.

8. *One baptism.* Similar to the "One faith," although Scripture at times uses "Baptism" to refer to things other than water baptism, in this context the work likely does refer to water baptism. Baptism becomes a uniting link to the body of the church only when the person being baptized and the person administering baptism hold to the one faith and serve the one Lord, endeavoring to keep the unity bestowed by the Spirit in the bond of peace. In this setting, all of the items listed build to the united lifestyle that is worthy of the vocation of a faithful believer.
9. *One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* The God of Scripture is not the result of one man's imaginative fancy. He is not the fabrication of a twisted sinful man's image. Men create gods in their twisted fallen image. Their gods compete fiercely with each other, fight each other, indulge in base sins with each other, all in the image of their sinful human creator. The God of the Bible created man in His image, so that every righteous and worthy trait in man stems from that image. The God of Scripture is also not an aloof being who ever hides in the shadows out of sight and out of reach. He is the mirror opposite. While being above all, He is also "in you all." Dwelling within each of His children means that each believer belongs to the family of God and is therefore subject to the Lord's teachings. One of the clearest and most repeated in Scripture of all His teachings is this commandment to live in peaceful harmony and hold to a common faith.
10. *But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.* Paul takes us gently by the hand and leads us to the obvious point. If we have a spiritual gift, any spiritual gift, that gift was given by the Lord out of His grace, not in any way based on our meriting that gift. This realization should lead us to a life-changing mindset. If the Lord gave me a spiritual gift out of His grace, the only way I can use that gift so as to honor Him is to use it with grace. I must show that God-kind of grace to every believer with whom I interact.

This theme of spiritual gifts grows as we study Paul's teaching in these three chapters of First Corinthians. We receive every true spiritual gift according to the Holy Spirit's will, not ours. We receive those gifts based on His grace, not our merit. And we are thereby "Gifted" by those gifts with the requirement from the Lord that we show the same kind of grace as we use our spiritual gifts in service to the Lord's people.

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Worship service each Sunday  
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10:30 A. M.  
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