

1Corinthians 12:4-7 "The Source and Purpose of Spiritual Gifts"

1CO 12:4-7 "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

Paul is about to explain to these Corinthian believers how unity works itself out in the body of Christ through diversity. And it is a diversity, which is designed by God Himself, so that unity prospers in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God.

It is painfully obvious that these particular Christians in Corinth understood a carnal aspect of this diversity but couldn't practice a proper biblical diversity to promote unity. They had become fleshly. And the Spirit of God does not give gifts to His people to walk in the flesh, but rather to exercise those gifts in the Spirit.

And so, Paul wants to make the point that each member in the Corinthian church must consider his walk with Christ, according to His word, as that walk regards others as they use their gifts to serve others.

Now, granted we might wonder at times how so many different people with so many backgrounds and differing gifts in the body can work together, but it's not unlike what we see in sports. There may be many members on a team, but none of them have exactly the same abilities or the same exact job at the same time.

And yet, when each is doing his or her job on the field the results are first and foremost a unity which is designed to accomplish a task, be that scoring a touchdown or getting a base hit.

Every member on that team is essential and yet not every member on that team has the exact same job, nor the exact same abilities.

When it comes to the church of Jesus Christ we have been placed on the same team by none other than God Himself. And, with Christ as our Head, He is in the process of taking this team and gifting it in such a way where, when each member is doing its job, the work goes forward and our Lord is magnified.

And so, Paul places these gifts into perspective and reminds his readers that since they come from God, they also have the purpose

of being used by God in the lives of His people; not unlike how an employer might give you certain tools to be used at work.

No one would ever question his employer's intentions when that employer spent the time and the money to equip an employee to perform a particular task. No one would ever consider it strange that if we are hired for a job that we must therefore accomplish that job with the talents and tools we have.

Can you imagine someone being hired at Sprint here in town and given the training to fix phones and given the specific tools to actually service those phones, and then come time to do the job the employee turns to his employer and says, "Oh you really want me to service these phones?"

And yet, it seems in the church world-wide, where we have been given the greatest privilege to serve the Creator of this world, who has gifted each one of us, that there is often the attitude, "oh, you mean you really want me to use those gifts in service to others?"

But Paul is not only encouraging the body of Christ to use the gifts God has given, but to use them properly. Again, a screw gun was never designed to be a hammer, and a hammer was never designed to make intricate adjustments to your computer, though at times that may feel like the right tool for the job.

And what some of the people in the church at Corinth were trying to do was to take their "hammer gift" and use it as a scalpel, or take whatever gift they had and assume it was "the" most important gift without understanding that if God gave the gift every one of them was important.

1CO 12:4 "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit."

The NASB and NKJV put it respectively, "there are varieties or diversities of gifts." The idea here is that God distributes a wide range of gifts to meet the needs of a wide range of people. No two people are exactly alike and no two people will ever be able to meet the needs of everyone with their particular gifts in the exact same way.

What's interesting though about the way God gifts His people is that the gifts are always given in the context of the local church. Those Christians in Corinth, for example, were to use their gifts first and foremost among those in their local body.

It would be difficult to expect the people in Corinth to actively minister to people in another church 300 miles away. It can certainly be done, but it was not expected on a daily basis, nor could it be.

I as a Pastor, for example, may be able to minister to other people outside of this body, but to devote my time to those people would end up neglecting you, which defeats the whole purpose of having a local church like Corinth which was supposed to meet the needs of those who were local to that body.

It's true that we all belong to the church of Jesus Christ universal. In other words, you and I are part of the same family of Christ with those believers who live in Taiwan or Texas. But we are not an intimate part of the unique family of believers in those areas, any more than I am an intimate part of your biological family simply because we all belong to the human race.

God has designed mankind to live in units in the midst of masses. And so, we have local units of believers amidst the larger church worldwide. This is where the diversity comes into a larger setting, and this is where the need for a variety of gifts from God is seen to be wise and beneficial.

A church in San Diego may have people with gifts specifically suited for ministries in that region. It doesn't mean someone from San Diego couldn't use their gifts here in Port Charlotte, it simply means that God puts people together in a way that is unique for that local group at that particular time.

This is why the people in this church are so important to each other and this community. God has placed us together for a reason and has gifted each one of us to complement each other, and to bless each other, as He uses us with the gifts He has given us here in this area.

But the operative word in all of this, as it regards spiritual gifts, is the word, gift. These spiritual abilities are extended to us from the very hand of God. It's not as though God throws them up into the air and whatever falls on you is yours. From all of eternity God purposed to give you the gift or gifts which would be best suited for you and for the benefit of the local body in which the Lord placed you.

Now again, it's important to keep in mind that spiritual gifts are not talents which we all possess as human beings. It doesn't mean

that these talents couldn't be used by God, but they are separate in the sense that you did not possess spiritual gifts until you came to Christ and were given spiritual life.

Spiritual gifts are meant to be used in a spiritual environment in the body of Christ. Outside of Christ we were spiritually dead. Outside of Christ the things of God were foolishness to us, because we did not have spiritual eyes to see or spiritual ears to hear.

When the Spirit of God opened our eyes and ears and gave us life in Christ, He also gave us everything we would need to live that spiritual life and be used of God to be a part of the spiritual family as we edify the body with those gifts from Him that He gave us after we came to faith.

And so, spiritual gifts are a very special present from God that He only gives to His people. And He personally chooses which gift or gifts you or I will have. And then His Spirit begins to develop those gifts so that we might be a blessing to each other and the world.

Now, when we talk about varieties of gifts that would certainly include the list which is given in other portions of the New Testament; those found in Romans and Ephesians as well as here in our text. But we would be hard pressed to limit God in the wide range of gifts He gives, or the diversity among similar gifts.

For example, two different people may be given the gift of teaching by God. But one uses his gift in teaching children as he conveys the truths of God's word to little ones on their level. Another person may use his gift of teaching instructing a group of seminary students as his desire is to expound in greater depth the truths of God's word.

Both have the gift of teaching, but both are using those gifts in different ways with different groups; keeping in mind that it is God who is doing the work through them. This is precisely why Paul says, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit."

Just because the same type of gift can be used in such a different way doesn't mean the same Spirit is not the one harmonizing those gifts in different people for different roles and purposes.

But then Paul goes on to say, "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." (1CO 12:5)

A more literal rendering would be, "there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord." (NASB)

Different kinds of service intimates ministry. And all of service unto the Lord is ministry. Those with the gift of hospitality, who love getting their home ready for guests, and love using their home to meet the needs of people in the body, are serving the Lord with their gift, and by definition that is ministry.

We mistakenly think of ministry as being that which the Pastor does, or that which the evangelist or missionary does. Yes, that is ministry, but so is coming along-side a brother or sister in Christ with a word of encouragement as that brother or sister may be using their gift of mercy.

Ministry is nothing more than being used by God with the gifts God has given each of us. This is why every believer in the body of Christ is to be involved in ministry. That can be a formal recognized service as teaching a bible study, or it can be a service which no one but you and God sees as you practice a gift which might be interceding through prayer on behalf of others in the body.

But whatever service it is, it must be service or ministry which still submits to the Lord as we desire to do it as unto Him according to His word. Every gift and every ministry still must come under the Lordship of Christ.

"There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." As Lord He knows what gifts to give and He knows how to direct our lives so that those gifts can be used most effectively. And as we submit to Him not only will the gifts be used effectively, but more important the Gift-Giver will be glorified in our lives.

To use a gift without coming under the Lordship of Christ is what these people in Corinth were apparently trying to accomplish. They were taking these spiritual gifts from God as though they were natural talents and concluding that, "I can use them any way I see fit in my own power, since they belong to me now."

And in many cases they were using, or attempting to use these gifts, simply for their own edification. When we discuss gifts of the Holy Spirit, this line of thought is a contradiction in terms because the Spirit gave us these gifts to be used for others.

1PE 4:10 "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

That last part, "faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms", tells us that when God gifts us it is His grace which is at work. But, along with the grace of God we must still be found faithful in utilizing that grace. This is exactly what Paul told these Corinthians later in this letter to them.

1CO 15:10 "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them -yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

So, the gifts are given as a result of God's grace. We see the result of this grace in Paul's ministry. The Lord used the faithfulness of Paul and allowed him to continue in ministry through the Lord's strength. But all of this is the result of God's grace in his life. It's all of God and yet it is worked out in the lives of people willing to submit to God.

1CO 12:6 "There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men."

This could also be translated, 'there are varieties of activities or effects, but it is the same God who works all in all.'

This is important to keep in mind whenever we serve the Lord because there is often the misconception that if I use my gift in a particular way that God will always give it the same working or effect as He does with someone else who might have the same gift.

Paul, for example, certainly had the gift of evangelism and yet nowhere are we told that when he preached at any time did 3,000 people come to Christ in one day as happened when Peter preached on the day of Pentecost.

Now, we would all come to Paul's defense and say, yes, but it was the Lord who accomplished that on Pentecost, adding 3,000 to the church in one day. And yet, when we arrive at these types of conclusions, where the same Spirit worked differently through the same gift of evangelism, why is it that we somehow expect that doesn't apply across the board?

I'm always amazed when people conclude that because we're small at this particular time that somehow the Spirit of God isn't at

work. "There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men", and in all churches for that matter.

I don't know why Paul had relatively little success as an evangelist, compared to Peter, or as a Pastor for that matter, when he had the privilege of being with a church for an extended period of time. But I do know that God was with him and blessed him tremendously in his ministry in ways you and I are now reaping as a result of his letters to the church.

As I've said before, Paul would never pass the test of a church board searching for a Pastor these days. How many churches would want a man who was beat up or stoned or caused a riot every time he went in to a town to preach the gospel? How many churches would want a man whose claim to fame in preaching was to put a boy to sleep at a service one night in which the boy fell out of the window and died?

Of course, they would probably have overlooked the fact that God used Paul to bring the boy back to life.

What church today would want a man whose impact on Pastoring a church seemed to result in nothing but "division, quarreling, some people falling back into immorality, corrupted marriage relationships, abused Christian liberty, people becoming self-centered, over confident, and worldly, along with their misuse of the gifts of the Spirit?" (John MacArthur)

This was Paul's church, if you will, and now he's having to write them and rebuke and correct them. And yet, you'll look at other churches in the New Testament where Paul didn't Pastor them and they look as though they're prospering wonderfully.

But, it wasn't about Paul. Paul was faithful to use his gifts and his ministry and his life to the glory of God, but for whatever reason, the Lord chose to work differently in his ministry regarding the Corinthians, than He did in the ministry of other churches who were faithfully using their gifts.

In fact, I've seen the apparent success of churches where the gifts of people in those churches were not being used properly. But despite that the Lord chose to bless in ways that helped get some of those people back on track and using their gifts properly.

The bottom line is, it's all about God and the way in which the Spirit of God decides to use the gifts He has given in an effectual

way. We are not carbon copies of other believers and neither are the workings of the gifts in our lives.

Again, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't expect the Spirit to use our gifts in a way that sees people come to Christ and the church being added to.

But whether it's 3,000 or 3 it's still the Spirit of God who has to do the ultimate work in the heart of a person. But, we must never take the attitude that we can somehow slack off in our responsibilities to use our gifts as God intended them to be used.

And so, whether it's the gift of evangelism or the gift of helps, it is God who is at work and ministering to others through us. And it is God who must always get the glory for any blessing which results from our faithfulness to use the gifts He's given us, again with the understanding that we have been given the responsibility to exercise our gifts for the common good of the rest of the body.

1CO 12:7 "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

Whatever gift we have, as it is being used for the Lord, it is the Spirit who is using it for the common good of the body of Christ for which our Lord died.

And notice in this verse that Paul makes it very clear that to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given. There is not a believer on the face of this planet who does not have a gift or gifts specifically chosen for him or her by God Himself, and given to that person to be used for God's glory.

Now, we might wonder what those gifts are, but what we'll find is that as we are willing to simply be used in any way in the body of Christ, in ministry or service, the Lord will begin to show us what our gifts are. If one doesn't serve in any capacity, it's difficult to see how our gifts begin to come to the surface.

But we must never forget that when God gives a gift it is really something which belongs to Him, which is then given to us for a time to be used, not buried. And even in the parable of the talents we get a glimpse of this.

MAT 25:14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them."

Our Lord has entrusted to us His property, if you will, and expects us to use what He has given us. And by the way, what is

interesting here in our text is that Paul shows us that the gifts which we usually associate only with the Spirit of God, as we usually define them as the gifts "of the Spirit", are really gifts which each person in the Godhead is actively involved in. Notice how Paul puts it.

1CO 12:4-6 "There are different kinds of gifts, but *the same Spirit*. 5 There are different kinds of service, but *the same Lord*. 6 There are different kinds of working, but *the same God* works all of them in all men."

The Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father are all involved in playing an active role in our lives with the gifts God gives us, and the power He gives us to use these gifts to His honor and glory.

What an awesome privilege to have the very Creator God come to us, and having each person in the Godhead counsel together from eternity past to conclude that this child of His will have and use the gift of evangelism. This other child of His will receive and use the gift of mercy.

And in His infinite wisdom and knowledge He knows what's best for each one of us and what is best for those around us as they get a chance to be blessed by the gifts God has given to each of us. It's for the common good of the body.

And as we each consider the gift or gifts we have, or even wonder what we might have, we can know that if God has given us these gifts than God most certainly wants us to know what they are and how they are to be best used for His glory. That is why it's so important to come to the Lord and rely on Him for all aspects of life, including our gifts.

And as we step out in faith and begin to stretch our spiritual wings, in some form of service in the body, the Lord will not only show us what our gifts are but will actually empower us to use those gifts in the Spirit in the love of Christ. This is where Corinth fell short. Many of them knew what gifts they had, but they weren't willing to use them in love for the common good of the body.

1CO 13:1-3 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor

and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

And then Paul goes on to tell these Corinthians how this love will actually work itself out in the gifts the Lord has given His people.

1CO 13:4-7 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails..."

If we know that love never fails and we use our gifts in the love of Christ, then no matter what the outcome of our ministries may be, we know that the Spirit of God has done His work as Christ is lifted up and people taste and see that the Lord is good.

May we just remain faithful to do the work God has called us to, with the gifts He has given each of us. I'll close with an encouragement from the writer of Hebrews.

HEB 6:10-11 "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure."