

# SPIRITUAL GIFTS

## A Scriptural look at Tongues, Prophecy, and others

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I CORINTHIANS chapters 12-14 explain much about the spiritual gifts which many hold differing viewpoints on in Christendom today. Christ wants all believers to fully and completely understand the truth regarding these gifts. The assembly at Corinth was evidently experiencing quite a bit of internal division amongst themselves because of their perception and maybe even their improper application of gifts, tongues in particular. This treatise will go through these 3 chapters of I Corinthians to bring forward their instruction and to hopefully aid in the understanding of the relationship between these spiritual gifts and believers today.

It is ironic that these gifts of the Spirit are still causing division within the Body of Christ, not so much within individual assemblies but within the Body of Christ as a whole. God's work on the cross brings peace between God and man which also is to be experienced between believers. The agape love of God revealed at the cross is to be the foundation of life for all believers. These chapters will now show us how God views the believer's life as well as the proclamation of His Word through the gifts apart from it.

Chapter 12 teaches that God had purposed the spiritual gifts to be profitable to all. Verses 8-10 record the variety of gifts prepared by God which were commonplace in Paul's day. We begin a comparison of the value to be placed upon the manifestation of these gifts of the Spirit coupled either with or without God's agape love, a thought which continues into chapter 13.

At the time of the writing of I Corinthians the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit were evidently commonplace in the assemblies, these being the early assemblies of the Body of Christ which believers today also belong to. As you read verses 4-6 in chapter 12 observe the Trinity of God at work. The distributions of gifts came by means of the Holy Spirit, the distribution of ways to serve came by means of Jesus Christ, and the distribution of the results of these works by means of the Father who oversees all. We find verses 7-11 teaching that the purpose of the Spirit's work was always to benefit EVERYONE. The BELIEVER'S edification was the single goal in view. The believers in

Corinth sorely needed instruction from God, especially in view of their stagnant state of carnality. (See I Cor 3:1-3)

The Apostle Paul continues with some thoughts and teaching about unity in the assembly. The carnality which was so prevalent caused some who were manifesting these gifts to let it “go to their heads.” These individuals were placing a higher value upon themselves than the others of the assembly. Those who did not manifest the gifts of the Spirit were considered “less important”, creating division. Those who exhibited the gifts were not exhibiting the agape love of God, the main point and concern which is present in the context of the discussion.

Verses 28 – 31 bring us back to God’s gifts but then introduce us to a more excellent way. We are going to receive “perspective”. What could be greater than the manifestation of God’s gifts in the lives of the believers who communicated the Word and will of God to others? Verse 1 of chapter 13 hits this question straight on. The Apostle Paul names a few of the gifts he had mentioned in 12:8-10 as examples and presents perspective here.

Paul states that if he speaks with [the gift of] languages (tongues in the scriptures are always a real language) but he does not have agape love, he is just making a lot of irritating and senseless noise. If he engages in prophesy, or all knowledge, and has all faith, but does not have agape love, he is nothing. The Apostle Paul takes this point further by stating that if he personally gave away all his possessions to help feed the poor or if he sacrificed his very life for some cause but was not driven by the principle of agape love, it would be a total loss to himself and would be of no profit whatsoever.

We are learning about the motivation behind all these actions – we can call it perspective. If all these things were accomplished without the basis being God’s unconditional love, it is valueless in God’s eyes. We are exposed here to two different qualities of action, one motivated by love for others and one concerned more with self. The unselfish and unconditional agape love of God exhibited on the cross through the actions taken for us there is our pattern here in I Corinthians. This is perspective. Let’s gain the perspective of God and do things right. Verse 4 of chapter 13 begins an explanation about how this superior agape love looks.

Agape love is love in action APART FROM FEELINGS OR EMOTIONS. Intellect and reason are the driving force behind this love in action. How else would we be able to love our enemies? This same love is to be the foundation of all we accomplish in our Christian life, even applied here to the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit. We learn here that the gifts were given to individuals as God saw fit in order to benefit others. Some of these Corinthians who received these gifts were wrongfully allowing it to become an emotionally-based experience for themselves – something which God never intended – and it became more and more self-edifying. These people may have sought these gifts more and more for the experience rather than to benefit others through them. The gift became a perversion of its original intent because of the Corinthian's carnality. Paul wrote these three chapters to correct that.

Look at this love which is so important in the believer's life. Verses 4-7 show a comparison between a love motivated by emotions and a love motivated by intellect. Verse 4: Agape love is patient and kind (because it is an intellectually driven unselfish love. It is a choice and not a feeling). It is not an envious, jealous, bragging, or vain glorious love. (That would be emotionally based and selfish). Agape love is not puffed up and arrogant. Verse 5: Agape love does not act unseemly or unbecomingly in an inappropriate manner, it does not seek the things of its own, it is not easily provoked (notice it does not say it is never provoked) and does not take into account a wrong suffered.

Notice how unselfish this love is. It is a choice and a decision. It is not an emotional reaction. It is a love for others and not for self. This is the love which was shown to us by Christ on the cross.

Verse 6 & 7 sum this all up. Agape love rejoices with the truth and bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. This intellectually-based unconditional "love in action" is to be the foundation which the gifts of the Spirit are to be set upon.

Verse 8 begins to explain the reason this agape love should be desired so much more than the gifts of the Spirit which the carnal Corinthians were clamoring after. God's agape love has a superior value and a far greater level of excellence than His gifts of the Spirit which were given to these believers.

How can this be and what is the basis of this truth? Verse 8 explains that God's agape love will never ever fall from its superior level of excellence – it will never fail. Contrast this with the truth that God's gifts of the Spirit will fail. This should have been a sobering thought to the Corinthian believers. We learn here that the gift of prophesy will be cancelled and removed from use. The gift of tongues will simply stop occurring and become non-existent. The gift of knowledge will be cancelled and removed from its use also. We now would naturally ask the question, why and when?

The answer to the question of why and when are in verses 9 and 10. The spiritual gifts are going to be displaced by “the perfect thing” when it comes. “Perfect” (Gk, ‘to teleion’) is defined as ‘completely and fully developed; matured’ and it is vitally important to note that it is in the neuter tense. We are taught that this perfect thing is the end product of the process of “maturing and growing up”, moving from an immature and incomplete state to one of being complete and fully developed.

Verses 11 and 12 add three examples to further explain this progression and, when kept in context, also teach us what the perfect thing is. Let's gather a general overview of them and then go back for more detail. Verse 11 records our first example of God's teaching about His move from partial to complete. It is the foundation upon which the two examples in verse 12 are built upon. Verse 11 speaks of a level of ability to communicate things to others. God used gifts to communicate His Word to believers as taught in vss. 9 and 10. This first example brings further insight into the subject of God's communication to believers. The second example reveals the seeing and understanding aspect associated with the developing level of communication taught in verse 11. The third example reveals the extent of completeness associated with its finished growth to maturity. Never lose sight of the idea of progression and growth of communication presented in these verses, for it is written all over them. This context is critical for an accurate understanding.

Now we go back into these examples more thoroughly. Verse 11: The speech, the level of thought and understanding, and the level of reasoning of a child is compared to the speech, the level of thought and understanding, and the level of reasoning OF THE SAME INDIVIDUAL when full grown and mature (“when ‘I’ was a child...”, “but when ‘I’ became a man..”) The partial, incomplete, and noted immature communication skills of a child are compared to those of the same individual when grown up and matured into

manhood. The childish things are put away and are done away with because they are displaced with the 'teleion', the perfect thing – the full grown thing.

The second example as presented in verse 12a teaches us of a level of understanding and “seeing” of what God wants to communicate to us. God uses the example of a person’s reflection to teach about the clearness and completeness of what we can see of God’s Word as it progresses from dim and partial to crystal clear. Some background information would be quite helpful at this point.

The “glass” or “mirror” spoken of here was usually made out of polished metal in this time period and earlier. (Exodus 38:8; Job 37:18). The city of Corinth was well known for their high quality polished metal mirrors. [It figures that a very carnal culture as was in Corinth would consider this very important. I believe if they would have had cell phones they would have been taking ‘selfies’ A LOT!] Certain metals were very finely polished to become quite reflective producing a fairly good reflection of the beholder but in a dim or darkened state. It was not the crystal clear reflection we consider the norm of our modern day mirrors.

The Apostle Paul states, “FOR NOW (when Paul sent this letter) we see by means of a glass or mirror obscurely, BUT THEN (when the ‘teleion’ [perfect] comes) face to face.” You cannot see anyone any more clearly than when you are looking directly at them, face to face – in fullness.

The third example is presented in verse 12b. Here the Apostle Paul states again that “NOW (when Paul sent this letter) he only knows IN PART, but then (when the ‘teleion’ [perfect] comes) PAUL WILL KNOW FULLY even as he is also known”.

The growth of completeness and perfection is soundly seen here, for he states there is a day coming in his life when he will have a complete and full knowledge which will displace his condition of only knowing in part. The “perfect” thing which was to come to take the place of the “partial” spiritual gifts was to come IN PAUL’S LIFETIME! Just think about the ramifications of that statement from a God who cannot lie.

This third example provides the “slam dunk” of proof for what the ‘teleion’ is and when it would be coming to displace the spiritual gifts. We will now go farther into the original language of this scripture to show two ways which reveal Christ’s attention to detail and prove His thoroughness regarding this truth, unlocking the details to verify the fact that

the Apostle Paul knew that he would see the 'teleion' come in his lifetime, a fact which many teachers fail to recognize today.

- 1) We find the English word "know" or "known" three times in verse 12b but also find that they are all not translated from the same Greek word. There are two different Greek words translated 'know' or 'known' in verse 12. The first is 'ginosko' and the second is 'epiginosko'. The prefix 'epi' which is added to 'ginosko' changes the emphasis and meaning of 'ginosko' in a remarkable way. 'Ginosko' means to perceive, observe; to obtain a general knowledge of or insight into. When "epi" is prefixed to this word it indicates a change in meaning to an especially high degree BEYOND the basic meaning. "Epi" indicates "superposition". The general idea of simply obtaining and perceiving a knowledge of some sort suddenly becomes more precise and specific to that of actually knowing a thing fully and thoroughly. In addition, when Paul states "now I know in part" he uses the present tense which he also uses in verse 9. This simply means he only had a general knowing and perception when he wrote the words, the same general knowing and perception assigned to any knowledge that came by way of spiritual gifts (verse 9). The Apostle Paul states, 'now I presently 'ginosko' (have a general perception and knowing) in part, but then (which is pointing to the time when the 'teleion', the full grown and mature thing comes) I shall know 'epiginosko'. Paul used the future tense with 'epiginosko', stating that there is coming a time in the future when 'I shall know fully and thoroughly what I presently only know in part'. In fact, he states that he will personally 'epiginosko' this full grown and mature thing, even as he also is 'epiginosko'.
- 2) 'Ginosko' is in what is called the durative present form. 'Durative' notes or pertains to a verb aspect (the verb here being "know") expressing incomplete or continuing action. It describes the presence of a past action still in progress (A.T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 879). 'Epiginosko' ('ginosko' with the preposition 'epi' prefixed) is found in the future perfective form here. The 'perfective' aspect intensifies or completes the idea of the verb (A. T. Robertson, pp. 563, 600; Moulton, J.H., The Christian Religion in the Study and the Street, Prol., p.113) and indicates final completion of the action or

state described by the verb. The move from durative to perfective which we see here is the movement of the verb action from partial and ongoing knowing to complete knowing (the perfect thing).

At the time the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle he 'ginosko' – durative present – knew God's Word concerning the Body of Christ in an incomplete but continually increasing way. He was coming to more revelations as Christ gave them to him. But when the mature, full grown, and complete would come he 'epiginosko' – perfective future – he would know perfectly, fully and completely God's Word concerning the Body of Christ. This is supported by the fact that Paul was the apostle belonging to the Gentiles, made a servant for the sake of the church which is His body according to the administration of God which was given to him for us, to complete the Word of God (Col 1:24,25).

Here is a fuller translation of vs 12b which incorporates the finer points of the Greek language which we have shown above.

“Now I (Paul) generally and presently perceive a knowledge (ginosko) of God's Word in part (verse 9) but then, in the future when the full grown and mature thing comes (verse 11) I shall know (at a future point in my life) to an especially higher degree the Word of God in fullness and completeness (epiginosko) just as I have been fully (epiginosko) known.”

This translation from Greek to English is a bit wordy, yes, but a word for word translation cannot clearly and completely capture the fine points of this teaching. The Greek language, which I believe most teachers do not take enough time to sincerely reference in their studies, would clear up the controversy surrounding spiritual gifts which is so evident today.

This process from 'in part' to 'complete' all occurred within the Apostle Paul's lifetime. The 'perfect' which we read of in I Corinthians 13:10 came in the Apostle Paul's lifetime at which point God's use of the gifts ended. His full grown, clear, and complete Word came then and is here today.

So what can we conclude from verses 8-12 and other related verses? We know that the mode of God's communication to the members of the Body of Christ at the time when Corinthians was written was maybe a few of Paul's letters in tandem with spiritual gifts. The gifts were only temporary, being partial in content, likened as a childish means of communication when compared to the completed communication which was to displace it. God put the childish things away when his communication was complete (mature) like adults put childish things away when they grow mature. What do you think of an adult who tries to act, think, and behave immaturely?

The Word of God communicated to believers through the means of spiritual gifts was also likened to looking at an appearance by means of a polished metal mirror. It is partial and incomplete seeing but when the fully matured, complete, and perfect means of communication of God's Word comes it is as if you are seeing the appearance clearly (face to face).

When the Apostle Paul wrote Corinthians the truth Christ was revealing to him concerning the Body of Christ was not yet completely revealed (II Cor 12:1). Paul's knowledge was still "in part". The Body of Truth for us was originally ALL HID IN GOD up to the day that God called Paul as an apostle to begin revealing it to the world. Paul stated that the day was coming when he would fully know the previously hidden truth concerning the Body of Christ. (Eph 3:2,3,9; Col 1:26; Rom 16:25,26; I Cor 13:12b).

Until fully revealed, God's council was provided to assemblies in partial fashion through the spiritual gifts. We learn that when the revelations given to Paul were complete God's Word to believers would be 'teleion'. Complete written Word through Paul would displace the partial verbal form through spiritual gifts which had been active up to its completion. Gifts would cease because their purpose was gone. The 'teleion' will be here.

Colossians 1:9 states that, even before the Apostle's life was taken, all believers could be completely filled with the clear and exact knowledge ('epignosin') of God's will in all (every bit of) wisdom and spiritual understanding. This was never possible through spiritual gifts. They were always partial and incomplete.

The fullness of God's written Word is now set before us! It is the 'teleion' which was foretold would come in I Corinthians 13:8-12. It meets all the criteria set forth in verses



11 and 12, it is the full revelation of truth to guide and instruct believers (which the gifts did partially), and it is superior to and has taken the place of the spiritual gifts.

So why do some sincere believers still desire the partial and incomplete gifts, often creating confusion, discontentment and frustration in their lives and the lives of others? I believe they are unaware of the truth.

There is a belief that the “perfect” may refer to Jesus Christ at His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. There are some obvious inconsistencies with this belief. For one, Christ is not something which has gone through a process of beginning in a state of being “in part and incomplete” to become completely developed and fully mature as the examples in I Corinthians 13:11,12 teach. Christ always has been and always will be perfect. He is the perfect “ONE” and not the perfect thing. In addition, references to HIM would be in the masculine tense rather than the neuter tense and always in fullness – past, present, and future.

These spiritual gifts were used by God to communicate His will to early believers in the Body of Christ. The growth and maturation of God’s communication are in view here. The spiritual gifts were God’s means of communication in the early church but were eventually replaced by the fully grown means, His written Word.

The truth for the Church which is Christ’s Body (separate and distinct from the nation of Israel and God’s purpose with them) was not revealed to the world through God’s Old Testament Prophets nor to anyone else until God chose to reveal it to the world through the Apostle Paul. Romans 16:25,26 states that this knowledge was kept secret for long ages past, but now, (through Paul) is being manifested, and by the prophetic scriptures (Paul’s written record of what was revealed to him). Ephesians 3:1,5,8,9 states that the administration of God’s grace was given to him to be given to us, revealed to Him by Christ, truth that was not made known to anyone in all past ages nor to any men of those ages but at that time had been hidden in Himself. God unveiled it when He chose to and did so through His new Apostle, Paul. Our text of I Corinthians 13:8-12 reveals the process of God revealing His truth to the believers in the Body of Christ from start to finish. The apostle of the Gentiles could only preach this hidden truth as he received it, partially at first but eventually in totality. (Rom 11:13, II Cor 12:1, I Tim 2:7, Col 1:25).

Paul could not be everywhere at all times and God used the partial gifts of the Spirit to aid these first believers as they assembled together. It wasn't perfect nor was it complete but it was of God and addressed issues within the assemblies I am sure. God distributed these gifts wherever they were needed to benefit and edify believers of that day.

There did come a time when the revelation of Truth for the Body of Christ was complete. Even Paul knew that day had come (II Tim 4:7). The revelations of God's previously secret truth about the Body of Christ was complete, matured, and perfect. All this truth is recorded in Paul's epistles for believers. Colossians 1:25, 26 teach us that Paul was made a minister according to the administration from God bestowed on him for the benefit of all believers, "SO THAT I MIGHT FULFILL AND COMPLETE THE WORD OF GOD". Fulfill here means to make full and complete. It also includes the idea of preaching that complete, fully matured, and perfect truth. Verse 26 states this Truth is the mystery which had been hidden (kept secret) from the past ages (all past time) and past generations (the men who lived in those past ages) but has now been revealed to His saints (through Paul).

It was in Paul's day, after receiving the revelation of the mystery in its fullness and perfection, that God ceased from using the partial gifts of His Spirit to bring His Word to believers because, through Paul, God finished, perfected, and completed that work. He now presents to us the "perfect thing", the complete record of the truth needed for believers in the Body of Christ. The gifts now have run their course and are made obsolete by God. It could even be considered a slight against God's complete written Word to desire partial gifts instead.

I Corinthians 13:10: "When the perfect and complete [Word of God] comes, the partial Word of God [revealed through the gifts - vss.8,9] will be done away or cease". The complete will take the place of the partial [and it happened already in the Apostles Paul's lifetime (verse 12b)] BUT...this had not yet taken place at the time this epistle was written. Therefore Christ was now going to clarify the purpose, meaning and management of some of the gifts to correct the abuses which were experienced in that day. We continue with chapter 14.

Believers were again reminded to follow after and pursue God's agape love as previously discussed. Note again, the gifts coupled with agape love. Chapter 13 began with the gift of tongues being discouraged because of its abuse and here in chapter 14 we see the gift of prophesy elevated above all. Verses 1-12 compare the superiority of the gift of prophesy to that of tongues. Tongues were more prone to edify the speaker while prophesy edified the hearers.

The gift of prophesy was not specifically foretelling the future. An Old Testament prophet may have done that at times but typically prophesy was like a teaching. It was used in the Old Testament to warn the children of Israel of the error of their ways and was used in the New Testament to simply provide edification to those who heard.

The city of Corinth was comprised of people from many nations – a majority just passing through – so at any given time many different languages (tongues) were within the city. This was a good reason to allow different languages to be spoken in the assembly though the gospel message needed to be understood by all the listeners even if they did not know that particular language (or tongue) which was being spoken. The message was pointless if a language was not interpreted for these people who were unfamiliar with it. For this reason the gifts of knowledge, prophesy, and teaching were much more desirable than tongues.

Recall the distinction mentioned earlier regarding intellectually-driven versus emotionally-driven love? Here we see how these two distinctive impetuses, drivers, or motivational forces also have a distinctive and different effect on the subject at hand. The human spirit and human mind are brought forward in this discussion. Paul states that if he prays in a tongue, his spirit prays but his mind is unfruitful. Man's mind participates in his intellectual sphere and his spirit participates in his emotional sphere. Tongues, typically a part of praise and worship, were emotionally based with little learning attached to them. There was no solid edification for the mind. Self-edification had become prevalent in the Corinthian assembly.

The Apostle Paul knew many languages and used that as a tool to proclaim the gospel to the nations (Gentiles). He was God's Apostle sent to the Gentiles. Paul stated it was better to speak five words with his mind than to speak ten thousand words in a tongue.

So, why is that many in some of our present day churches are so zealous to be speaking in tongues?

Verse 20 could be considered abrasive to some. Paul here tells the Corinthians to “grow up”. Tongues were originally meant to be a sign to God’s rebellious, disobedient, proud, and favored nation of Israel. Isaiah 28:11, 12 will give you some context on these foreign languages called tongues. Even in Acts 2 languages were used to bring unbelieving Israel back to God. When God cast His favored nation and His purpose with them temporarily aside, tongues were included in the spiritual gifts He used to bring edification to the believers in His newly revealed but previously secret purpose connected to the Body of Christ, where there is no Jew or Gentile.

Verses 27-32 give solid directives to believers of that day. This, remember, was during the time when the complete word of God was not yet in existence. God was still using His partial gifts for edification of believers. What I find quite interesting is that someone who wanted to speak in a tongue was to know ahead of time if there was an interpreter present. How else is verse 28 to be understood? If there was no interpreter, the tongue speaker was to remain silent and keep it between himself and God. This was to be determined before he spoke and not after. These verses teach that the assemblies of Paul’s day which manifested these gifts were to do so in a way which allowed absolutely no confusion to enter (vs. 33).

Let’s rest upon God’s written Word. The perfect replaced the partial. It is all here for us right now. God’s written Word is powerful, changes lives, and reveals His complete will to all. The world rejects it but believers can use it to be made PERFECT and COMPLETELY EQUIPPED for EVERY good work. II Timothy 3:16,17. It is the perfect thing which has come. ~