



A FRESH CONSIDERATION
OF
THE TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE
AS REGARDS
THE FUNCTIONING OF GIFTS
IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT LOCAL ASSEMBLY
by
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Introduction

In the past, I wrote a booklet, *Discovery Your Spiritual Gifts - A Fresh Consideration of the Teaching of Scripture as Regards the Functioning of Gifts in the New Testament Local assembly.*

It is approximately one hundred pages explaining a Biblical concept that is very different from what believers - and I, myself - had previously held. This is a condensed version, but the other fuller version is still available for anyone interested.

When I was asked to participate in Bible studies in Mt. Sterling, Wisconsin, I was responsible for Romans 12. That forced me to begin a serious study of Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, and a few other related passages.

At that time, I read the exposition on Rom. 12 by Dr. James D. G Dunn in the *Word Bible Commentary* and was amazed that for the first time in my life I was reading exactly what I had thought for so long. His commentary on Romans 12 on gifts made perfect sense. As I continued my preparation for the Bible studies, I began to see that many writers on the subject had missed important considerations that he had noted.

The same was true of translators. I checked over forty English versions in the seventeen places where the word “charisma” is found and noted *only five* had consistently employed a variety of English words *according to the context.*

After speaking on “gifts” many times since then, I have received positive feedback most of the time. Some older believers have stated that it was a relief

to hear the subject explained as I did because they have spent a lifetime wondering what their “gift” was. As a result, I decided to put it in print for the benefit of a wider audience.

I have found since I was not alone in my view on gifts. For example: In his article in Westminster Seminary Journal on “*Gifts and Ministries in the Apostolic Fathers*,” Dr. Kenneth Berding observed:

But one apprehension has repeatedly surfaced as I have lectured and corresponded with others on this topic, a concern that this article is designed to address. Namely, it seems to be widely assumed among many contemporary readers of the Bible that Christians throughout history have everywhere and always viewed the items found in Paul’s ministry lists simply as special God-given abilities. Some with whom I have dialogued on this topic look askance at me—as though I am someone who relishes overturning established consensuses of church history when I suggest that this is not correct. That is, in their minds Christians have always tried to discover their hidden spiritual talents so they can use them in ministry since Christians have always viewed the items in Paul’s ministry lists simply as God-given abilities. But one looks in vain for evidence of such a consensus until recent times.¹

¹ Kenneth Berding, “‘Gifts’ and Ministries in the Apostolic Fathers,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 78, no. 1 (2016): 135.

In order to answer questions and possible objections appendices in the booklet that are not included in the body of this article. There are fuller explanations in the original booklet and a number of appendices. Copies of this larger booklet are still available.

I am also using the word “assembly” instead of the word “church” for both a local company of Christians or the dispensational assembly that is not yet complete because it expresses accurately the Greek as a company of Christians called out from the world. The King James Version will be the default version. When other versions are used, I will note that.

Spiritual Gifts - My Perplexity

Shortly after I had become a Christian in January, 1958, I was exercised about God’s will for my life. I wondered what my gift might be and how I would know. When I asked older godly believers, who were near the end of a long life of devotion to God, how I might know, their answers were vague and indefinite. The whole subject seemed as hazy to them as it was to me. It is no exaggeration to say that most didn't know what their gift was so they could offer me no path of discovery.

The Change In My Thinking

While I was engaged in in evangelism and in some Bible teaching, believers asked me the same questions I had asked others so many times in the past. I had no answers. Finally, I decided to take a serious look at the major passages relating to gifts: Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4, and some smaller passages: 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6..

The questions I asked are delineated in the larger booklet and will not be

recorded here.

Priesthood is not Gift

Before addressing the question of gifts, I will mention that priesthood is not the same as gift. Every believer (brother and sister) is a priest. The apostle Peter speaks of a holy priesthood, saying, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 2:5-6). And the writer to the Hebrews exhorted believers: “to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb. 13:15). Two Greek Words

In 1 Cor. 12 two Greek words have caused difficulty in the understanding of this chapter: the word translated “spiritual gifts” in verse 1; the other translated “gifts” in verses 4, 9, 28, 30, and 31. Hence we are not addressing priesthood, but gift.

What are Gifts?

The First Word Translated “Gifts”

In verse 1, the expression “spiritual gifts” is a translation of a single Greek word “pneumatikos” (Strong’s #G4152) which doesn’t have the word “gift” in it (nor is it implied in the root meaning of the Greek word itself). (See #1, Greek Words Appendix) The King James Version and about twenty-five other English versions also translated the word as “gifts.”. But all of these are “interpretations” not “translations” of the Greek word. The outcome is that believers have been left with the impression that they have a particular, specific gift that they should be able to identify and use.

The literal translation of the word is “spirituals” which doesn’t convey much to most readers. A few translations do give the meaning as “spirituals,” others “spiritual matters,” or “spiritual things.” Darby’s translation has “But concerning spiritual *manifestations*, brethren, I do not wish you to be ignorant” (italics are his).

In this section of 1 Cor. (chs. 12-14), the word “pneumatikos” is found three times: ch. 12:1, ch. 14:1, and ch. 14:37. The last use of the word concerns spiritual persons: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” So, even in this section of 1 Corinthians, the word *is not limited* to the concept of “gifts.”

The Other Word “Gifts”

In this section of the letter (chs. 12-14) the other word “gifts,” “charisma” (Strong’s #G5486) is found only in chapter 12: verses 4, 9, 28, 30, and 31 (See #3, Greek Words Appendix). In the seventeen times it is found in the New Testament it has a range of meanings and the basic underlying concept is the grace of God bestowing some blessing. Friberg’s Lexicon states that it denotes “*what has been given, gift...as the result of a gracious act of God, gift of grace, favor bestowed, benefit, with the meaning varying according to the context.*” [all italics are mine in the quotation]. Strong’s Dictionary defines it as: “a (divine) gratuity, that is, deliverance (from danger or passion); (specifically) a (spiritual) endowment, that is, (subjectively) religious qualification, or (objectively) miraculous faculty.”

Thus the concept of “gift” is *secondary* and the gracious act of God in the

life or activity of believers is *primary*.

It is vital to understand that word is generic, non-specific, and can be used in a variety of contexts. This is the only way to avoid the confusion that has been the outcome both in Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, and in clarifying the passages where it is used in Paul's exhortations to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:3, 6) and in 1 Pe. 4:10.

The word "charisma" is the *concrete* result of an action. It is an outcome; *it is not an ability*. It is an enablement bestowed by the grace of God.

Thoughts of a Greek Scholar

In *Word Biblical Commentary*, the Greek scholar, Dr. James G. Dunn, seems to have the clearest understanding of the meaning of the word "charisma," the second word "gift" in 1 Cor. 12:4. He writes that

[It] can be used of any act or utterance which is a means of divine grace, a medium through which God's graciousness is experienced, whether the thought is of the totality of what God has given by means of Christ...or more often of particular ministries, occasional or regular (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30-31; cf. 1 Peter 4:10).²

Accordingly, in the first Greek word, "pneumatikos," the root concept is something "spiritual" and in the second, "charisma," the root concept is "grace." The first has *no tendency toward "gift" at all* and the second does have *a secondary underlying tendency toward "gift"* in which the Spirit of

² James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary 38A, (Romans 1-8)* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 30

God gave some enablement for the blessing of others.

Yet the second is emphasizing both the grace of God that gives and the outcome of what is given. Regardless, *there is no thought of permanence embedded in either word.* Context alone must decide. This is why there is variety of meanings in different contexts in the New Testament. The word “endowment” or a similar word is to be preferred over “gift” because “gift” has been misapplied and misunderstood for so long.

The Greek Article - Anarthrous or Articular

An important grammar consideration is whether a noun *has* or *has not* the definite article. It is important to note that the Greek language has no indefinite article. In English we have “a” or “an” for the indefinite. Greek has no such corresponding article. Greek grammarians use the term “anarthrous” when there is no article and “articular” when there is. This is not to say there are no indefinite statements in the Greek language. There are many. One example will suffice. “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews” (John 3:1). There is no article before the word “man,” but clearly there is indefinite thought. It would not make sense to say “there was man.” The Greek means “there was a man.”

In verses 1 Cor. 12:8-10 is a series of “indefinites.” In the Greek it is not “*the* word of wisdom” but “a word of wisdom;” it is not “*the* word of knowledge” but “a word of knowledge;” etc. Clearly all believers have faith so this must be an occasion when there was some special need of faith supplied by the Spirit of God.

I suggest it is a spontaneous prophecy in verse 10. It is an anarthrous noun

here and could be translated “a prophecy.” It is likely that ch. 14:30 is referring to a *spontaneous revelation* to someone *who is a gifted prophet* (such as 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). But it could also be a brother who was endowed with a revelation at some moment by the Holy Spirit for the blessing of others in an assembly gathering.

Even those with the prophetic gift in Corinth seemed to be out of control. Paul limits their exercise to two or three. Other prophets were to judge the validity of what was spoken. Additionally, when the apostle writes “ye may all prophesy,” he is not saying every believer can prophesy. Verses 29-32 in ch. 14 are addressing those who are gifted prophets. This is seen in that verse 29 begins with “the prophets” and verse 32 ends with “the prophets.” The context is instruction to prophets.

While a prophet had the gift of prophesy (Eph. 4:11), he had to wait for the Spirit of God to supply a revelation. When one was speaking, a revelation might be given to another prophet. Hence Paul’s instruction: “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other [prophets] judge. If any thing be revealed to another [prophet] that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace” (ch. 14:29-30). It is therefore a “charisma” of prophecy: “to another *a* prophecy” (ch. 12:10).

Concerning ch. 12:28, Dr. Gilbert B. Weaver states that in this verse and following “Paul repeats the list with modifications, placing them in order of importance. He also presents them in terms of the person (e.g., prophet) instead of the gift itself (prophecy) in at least the first three cases: (1) Apostles (apostolous) (2) Prophets (prophētas) (3) Teachers (didaskalous)”³ (See #20,

³ Gilbert B. Weaver, *Tongues Shall Cease*, Grace Theological Journal, 14 #1, Winter 1973 15.

21, 22, Greek Words Appendix).

Other persons, however, are given some endowment. They are given a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge for an appropriate moment in a gathering of an assembly or even in a private conversation.

As a result, I suggest that believers in a local assembly are like a body - as is taught in the rest of ch. 12:12-31. The parts of our body are not members with *a single function*. Rather they are *multifunctional*. Thus I say that believers in a local assembly don't have "gifts." Rather they are enabled to function in a variety of ways as the need arises by the prompting of the Spirit of God. Clearly the activity in the local assembly is energized and directed by the Spirit of God as ch. 12:3-12 indicate.

What Is My Gift and When Do I Receive It?

Understanding this removes the unnecessary question: "What is my gift?" It replaces it with the question: "Am I in a spiritual state so the Holy Spirit could manifest Himself through me for whatever need exists?"

It also answers the question: "When do Christians receive their gift?" They don't; They receive "charismas."

Various suggestions have been put forward about a moment in time when a believer "receives" his gift, but clear solid answers have been lacking. One suggestion has been that we receive a gift at the moment of salvation.

Some commentaries and journals simply state that the moment a person becomes a believer, he or she is given a spiritual gift that becomes his or her lifetime work. It is suggested that this needs to be developed as the believer grows in the Christian life, but the latent gift has been given and will manifest

itself in time. No proof is offered from Scripture; it is simply stated as a fact or misunderstood based on a misunderstanding of Greek grammar.

In the *What the Bible Teaches* commentary, Mr. Stallan states:

The aorist tense of “given” signifies that a point of time is involved. The gift is given at conversion and the necessary grace is given with it. It may take time for the gift with its accompanying grace to become manifest, but it is there potentially and given time it should come out in display.⁴

With all due respect, I don’t see this is the case. It comes from a misunderstanding of the verbal aspect of the Greek Aorist..

During my the sixty-five years as a believer, I have heard it stated regularly that the Greek aorist is a point tense (This aspect of the aorist is called *The Immediate Past Aorist or Dramatic Aorist*). It can be, but this is *only one* of seven basic nuances of the Greek aorist and there are subsets of those. In *Basics of Biblical Greek*, Dr. Bill Mounce points out that “the aorist is always undefined. It tells you that an action happened, but nothing more about the aspect of the action.”⁵

It could be that we have misunderstood Mr. Newberry’s view of the aorist in his *Englishman’s Study Bible* and have taken the aorist always as a point tense (meaning a definite point in time). In any case, Rom. 12:6 does not even say a gift was given, but that *grace was given*. (Note that the aorist is used for “the grace that is given” and not for the gift given).

⁴ Fred Stallan, Romans, *What the Bible Teaches* (John Ritchie, 1998), 290

⁵ Mounce, William D. (2009) *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. p. 195

Charisma - An Explanation and Illustration

Returning to the word “charisma,” the suffix “μα” (ma) will help us in our understanding of the meaning of this word.

In the textbook for students of Greek, *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament* by Dr. Warren C. Trenchard, he gives a list of suffixes in the early pages of the book. Concerning the suffix “μα” (ma) in the word *χαρις-μα* (charis-ma), his book indicates that is an “object, result.”⁶

I spoke with Dr. Trenchard by phone asking for a further explanation of the word “charisma” found seventeen times in the Greek New Testament. He very graciously took time to go over it with me, expanding on the very brief notation he had in his book.⁷ He stated that the suffix ending “μα” (ma) at the end of Greek word indicates an outcome or result of an action. He gave the illustration of a batter at the plate in a baseball game. The batter swings and hits the ball (that is the action). The ball travels into the field, that is the result. We say, “the batter had a hit.” The hit is the outcome of the action.

It is not an activity, *but the result of one*. The batter's action of swinging and hitting is like the “charis” of 1 Cor. 1:3 (See #2, Greek Words Appendix) “*Grace* be unto you” and it is the root of the word “charisma,” which is a gracious attitude and activity that bestows the “charisma.” In “charisma” the “ma” suffix is the result of the gracious action of “charis.”

⁶ Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament, Revised edition., Warren C. Trenchard, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530, 1998 p. 2

⁷ Phone call with Warren C. Trenchard, PhD, Director, Graduate Programs, LaSierra.edu; La Sierra University, 4500 Riverwalk Parkway, Riverside, California, 92505

Dr. Trenchard's illustration of a "charisma" explains both Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12. The spirit of God acts in grace toward a individual and the individual receives some benefit either for himself or others. It is not "an ability." It is a result of an activity of grace on the part of the Spirit of God.

Accordingly, whatever we do under the guidance of the Spirit of God is what is meant by "Having then gifts [charismas] differing according to the grace [charis] that is given to us" (Rom. 12:6).

Failure to grasp this has resulted in perhaps the greatest confusion in passages where the word "charisma" is found. There is no indication whatever of *permanence* in the lexical meaning of the word. Only the context can determine this. Thus in Rom. 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," the word "gift" is "charisma." What is given is permanent because it is *eternal* life. The word "charisma" does not indicate permanence, however; the word "eternal" in "eternal life" does.

The various contexts show it is a word with a broad semantic range. It is found once in Romans 12 where the subject is participation in the local assembly. (verse 6). Yet in this chapter, it broadens out to private gracious activities empowered by the Spirit of God. (verses 8, 13).

"Charisma" is found five times in 1 Cor. 12 where again the subject is participation in the local assembly.

As we have already stated, these are "manifestations of the Spirit" as 1 Cor. 12:7 states: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."

The concept of grace in Rom. 1:11 is linked with some blessing that Paul would impart to the Christians. This is similar to the spiritual blessing believers can bring to another believer by encouraging or helping them in some spiritual way. Paul had no ability to impart gift. We address that later under Timothy's Gifts.

In chs. 5 and 6 it is linked with justification and eternal life.

In ch. 11 it is linked with God graciously calling the nation of Israel to a special purpose.

This is also true in Peter's exhortation in 1 Pe. 4:10. The Greek language does not support the translation "*the* gift." There is no definite article here. It should be translated "a gift" or even better "a gracious endowment." In 2 Cor. ch. 1 it is linked with Paul's personal preservation from danger. Yet the variety of uses show that "charisma" is not a *specialized* technical term meaning "gift."

In 1 Cor. 12, the word is found in the following:

v. 4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

v. 9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.

v. 28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

v. 30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

v. 31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more

excellent way.

Thus the later verses of the chapter have become the deciding factor in translating the earlier word in verse 1. It has led to the misconception that the believers in Corinth were being taught they had specific gifts they were to exercise. Some passages in chs. 12-14 need to be given alternate translations in order to give the word “charisma” a fresh understanding. This will be handled later in the booklet.

Berding notes that:

Even if a technical use is limited to the five appearances in 1 Cor. 12, there are some problems. Paul has failed to make it clear that his key word is *χαρίσματα* [charismata] in the context of 1 Cor. 12. He uses *πνευματικά*, [pneumatika] not *χαρίσματα*,⁸ [charismata] as his head word both in 1 Cor 12:1 and in 1 Cor 14:1.⁹ The word *χαρίσματα* [charismata] does not appear at all in 1 Cor. 14. Three of the five appearances in 1 Cor. 12 are in the phrase “*χαρίσματα* [charismata] of healing“ (12:9, 28, 30), which has a narrow referent.¹⁰ This leaves 12:4 and 12:31 as the only

⁸ Πνευματικά is probably better understood more broadly as spiritual issues or “spirit matters.” See Gordon D. Fee, “Gifts of the Spirit,” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993) 341. It should not be equated with *χάρισμα*. (Note that Fee covers much of the same material as in “Gifts of the Spirit“ 339–341 in *God’s Empowering Presence* 32–35.)

⁹ It is, of course, possible that this could be a term preferred by the Corinthians and disliked by Paul.

¹⁰ Fee views *χαρίσματα* as being used in a broad sense in 1 Cor 12:4 (= manifestations of the Spirit in 12:7) and an even broader sense in 12:31, but more narrowly applied to healings three times in 1 Corinthians 12 (“Gifts of the Spirit” 340).

two possible instances where *χαρίσματα* [charismata] is being used with a technical meaning and encompasses all the items in the lists of 1 Cor. 12.¹¹

Charisma and Pneumatikos

The translation of charisma as “gift” seems to have influenced the translation of “pneumatikos” in verse 1 giving it a very specific technical use, whereas the Greek word is not technical. It is used in a variety of contexts. Hence it should not be given more than a general definition, allowing the context to clarify the nuance in each case. The Greek word does not have the connotation of “gift” at all. It has the basic concept of that which is spiritual in contrast to that which is material or carnal.

Mr. Jack Hunter has a very helpful suggestion in his commentary on 1 Cor. in the *What the Bible Teaches* series. He states:

The word “gifts” is italicised in the Authorised Version, intimating that the word does not appear in the original text. Most translators insert the word “gifts” because the adjective “spiritual” (pneumatikos) is in the plural number, and the subject of gifts commences at 1 Cor. 12:4. Young translates “spiritual things”; Darby “spiritual manifestations.”¹²

Mr. Hunter states that “possibly ‘spiritual realities’ best fits the passage.” I would agree with that.

¹¹ Kenneth Berding, “Confusing Word and Concept in ‘Spiritual Gifts’: Have We Forgotten James Barr’s Exhortations?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 1 (2000): 41.

¹² J. Hunter, “1 Corinthians,” in *1 and 2 Corinthians, What the Bible Teaches* (John Ritchie, 2015), 136.

Clarifying the Word “Pneumatikos“

To understand the use of the word “gifts” (pneumatikos Strong’s #G4152) in ch. 12:1 we need to look closely the variety of the ways it is used in the New Testament.

We find it twenty-six times: fifteen are in 1 Corinthians alone; and occur eight times before we come to 1 Cor. 12. Looking at these, we see that the meaning “gift” *could not fit* most contexts.

Here are the twelve places where it is found in the New Testament as a modifier:

1. Rom. 1:11 - with the word “gift” - some spiritual blessing
2. 1 Cor. 10:3 - spiritual food
3. 1 Cor. 10:4 - spiritual drink
4. 1 Cor. 10:4 - a spiritual Rock
5. 1 Cor. 15:44 - a spiritual body (twice)
6. Eph. 1:3 - spiritual blessings
7. Eph. 5:19 - spiritual songs
8. Eph. 6:12 - wicked spirits
9. Col. 1:9 - spiritual understanding
10. Col. 3:16 - spiritual songs
11. 1 Pe. 2:5 - a spiritual house
12. 1 Pe. 2:5 - spiritual sacrifices

In the following eleven places it is not used as a modifier. These must be defined by context. If we were to insert the term “spiritual gift” into every occurrence where the word is used, clearly it would not work. They are as

follows:

1. Rom. 7:14 - the law is spiritual in character - (implied)
2. Rom. 15:27 - Gentiles partakers of something spiritual
3. 1 Cor. 2:13 - comparison of things spiritual - perhaps by spiritual means (twice in the verse)
4. 1 Cor. 2:15 - a spiritual person (implied)
5. 1 Cor. 3:1 - carnal believers - not spiritual believers (implied)
6. 1 Cor. 9:11 - sowing spiritual blessings contrasted to reaping blessings
7. 1 Cor. 12:1 - something spiritual
8. 1 Cor. 14:1 - something spiritual
9. 1 Cor. 14:37 - a spiritual person like a prophet (implied)
10. 1 Cor. 15:46 - natural order is first; spiritual order is second (implied); twice in the verse
11. Gal. 6:1 - spiritual persons (implied)

So we conclude that the word “spiritual” indicates a state or condition that is spiritual. Thus we should remove the word “gift” from 1 Cor. 12:1. If we remove the concept of “gift” from other words in this section of 1 Corinthians, it would eliminate the need for translating “pneumatikos” as “gift” at the head of the chapter. There is no need to address the word “pneumatikos” further.

Manifestations of the Spirit

We should note that the Corinthians had an inordinate desire for the visible and demonstrative manifestations. So much so that Paul warned them that they could fall into the trap of demonic influences of former days (1 Cor. 12:1-3). Primarily, the apostle is not instructing the believers in

the *use* of gifts but the *abuse* of gifts and especially tongues. (I am allowing the use of the word “gifts” here although technically it is not correct.)

This is clear from the immediate context of verses 1-3 where Paul gives the Corinthians a reminder and a warning at the head of this section about their past involvement in demonic activities. It is very likely demonic influence was involved in the present activities of the Corinthian assembly.

Corrective exhortation in any book in the New Testament has the added benefit of giving personal and collective instruction and guidelines for future generations, yet that should not be allowed to blur our understanding of the original intent and thrust of a passage. 1 Cor. chs. 12-14 do give instruction as regards function in a local assembly. Even so, this was not the original aim of the apostle. I repeat it is not the use of gifts but the abuse of gifts, that is in view. Especially, Paul has in mind the abuse of “tongues.”

H. Wayne House observes:

...there is good evidence that the Corinthian church included members who were affected by their pagan past. Paul prefaced his answer to the Corinthians’ question about “spirituals” (περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν) [now concerning spirituals] with a reference to their religious history. He did not want them to be ignorant of the spirituals, “because you know that when you were led away toward speechless idols as you would be unconsciously led” (1 Cor. 12:21, author’s translation). Since the Corinthians had a background of ecstatic (and so-called “spiritual”) religion, the apostle felt it necessary to instruct them that the spirituals of which

he would be writing were not of the same class.¹³

Frederick Dale Bruner states:

The very characteristic of the Corinthians' heathen past, [Paul] argues, was the sense of being overpowered and carried away by spiritual forces.... "There is no doubt at all," Schrenk comments, "that Paul intends to say here,[that] the truly spiritual is not marked by a being swept away ... that was precisely the characteristic of your previous fanatical religion." It is important to notice that Paul places this valuation of the spiritually "sweeping" at the very outset of his treatment of "spiritual things" in Corinth. As the superscription to his essay in chapters twelve to fourteen Paul has written: Seizure is not necessarily Christian or paramourly spiritual.¹⁴

H. Wayne House further states:

That the Corinthians leaned toward their pagan past in the mysteries as a means of spiritual expression may be also seen in 1 Cor. 14:12, "Since you are zealous of spiritual gifts" (lit., "spirits," πνευμάτων) [pneumatōn]. Gerlicher rightly observes, "This implies that their present devotion was to spiritual matters per se, independent of Christ-centered worship and congregational-

¹³ H. Wayne House, "Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983): 145.

¹⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 286–87.

oriented edification.”¹⁵

Did the apostle recognize any of the tongues-speaking at Corinth as being genuine? Was there, in other words, a genuine gift of tongues distinguishable from the counterfeit manifestations (that were demonic in nature)?¹⁶

Hence it is possible that verse 12:31 is a warning rather than an exhortation.

I discuss this in detail in Appendix 2

On 1 Cor. 12:1-3, Dr. F. David Farnell comments:

First Cor. 12:1–3 sheds additional light on the situation addressed in 1 Cor. 14:29. Apparently false prophets had preached that Jesus was “accursed” (12:3) even though they professed to be true prophets. The person making such a startling statement must have been a professed Christian. Otherwise his statement would not have been tolerated in a Christian assembly and would not have been attributed to the Holy Spirit, as apparently claimed (“No one speaking by the Spirit of God [ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ] [en pneumati theou] says, ‘Jesus is accursed,’ v. 3). In the face of such starkly erroneous prophesying, Paul warned the congregation to evaluate each prophecy carefully to ensure that a genuine prophet was speaking. Some recognized voice was needed to declare that the Holy Spirit was not the source of such a statement and that the

¹⁵ John Stanley Gerlicher, “An Exegetical Approach to First Corinthians Twelve to Fourteen” (Th.M. thesis, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1966), pp. 24–25.

¹⁶ H. Wayne House, “Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983): 145.

person voicing it was a false prophet.¹⁷

So the emphasis of the chapter is not on gifts as much as it is a warning against “manifestations” that are not “the manifestation of the Spirit” (verse 7).

As we have already pointed out, the Greek word “pneumatikos” is generic and has a wide semantic range. The immediate context is spirit or spiritual activity (verses 1-3). In verse 4 the context is enlarged upon to the local assembly. But we must see the word “pneumatikos” in its immediate context first of all. The italicized word “gifts” has amplified the misunderstanding further. In the minds of most, the word “gifts” in verse 4 is linked with the same English word “gifts” in verse 1. But the Greek words are not the same. I have pointed out that this is an interpretation, not a translation of Greek at all. The King James Version translators understood that they were offering a possibility, hence they carefully italicized the word “gifts” to give a caution to English readers. But to a great extent we have not grasped this and have based our whole understanding of the passage on this word. Paul does not speak of everyone having a gift, but he states in verse 7 that “... the manifestation of the Spirit is given *to every man* to profit withal.” (italics mine).

The Greek word is “phanerosis” (Strong’s #G5321), a noun from “phaneroo” (Strong’s #G5319), to make manifest (See #12, Greek Words Appendix), A manifestation, a making visible or observable, action making public, clear announcement.

Returning to 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Berding notes:

¹⁷ F. David Farnell, “Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today? Part 2 (of 4 Parts): The Gift of Prophecy in the Old and New Testaments,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 403–404.

...when we look at 12:4–6, we see three terms, not one: “χαρίσματα [charismata]... διακονίαι [diakonai]... (See #4, Greek Words Appendix) ἐνεργήματα [energemata]...” (See #5, Greek Words Appendix) It is true that these verses are “deliberately parallel formation,” as Dunn has pointed out. It is not necessary, however, as Dunn concludes, that each term on its own is a general descriptive term of the list that follows. But neither are they distinct categories.¹⁸

Carson comments,

The parallelism does not of course make the words strictly synonymous, any more than Spirit, Lord, and God are strictly synonymous; but because none of the three terms can be associated with only certain spiritual gifts and not with others, it is clear that Paul uses the three terms to describe the full range of what might be called spiritual-gift phenomena.¹⁹

It appears that Paul considered all three terms to be needed as a description of the items which appear in the lists of 1 Cor. 12. This argues against the idea of a technical force for χαρίσματα [charismata].

It is commonplace to assume that what is termed “manifestations of the Spirit” is a subset or equally inclusive to the category described by the term χαρίσματα [charismata]. But this only works if χαρίσματα [charismata] is

¹⁸ Kenneth Berding, “Confusing Word and Concept in ‘Spiritual Gifts’: Have We Forgotten James Barr’s Exhortations?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 1 (2000): 42

²⁰ D. A. Carson, “Showing the Spirit” Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, (2019)

assumed to stand as a head word for all the items in the lists (or at least the list immediately to follow). The parallel construction of 12:4–6 instead argues that the three terms together make an adequate summary in Paul’s mind of the concept he is discussing in 1 Cor. 12.²⁰

What Produces the Needed Manifestation?

Looking at this phenomenon in ch. 12:4-6, we note that this is an Old Testament style of poetry. The apostle Paul would have been immersed in this style of writing so characteristic of the Psalms and other Old Testament writings because of his Jewish background. Hence I suggest that we have a “synthetic parallelism“ of three lines (a tricolon) with the fourth line the culmination of the three.

We have a beautiful example of this in Psalm 1:1-2:

Blessed is the man

- that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
 - [walking]
- nor standeth in the way of sinners,
 - [standing]
- nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
 - [sitting]
- The Outcome: verse 2 “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

²⁰ Kenneth Berding, “Confusing Word and Concept in ‘Spiritual Gifts’: Have We Forgotten James Barr’s Exhortations?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 1 (2000): 42.

We see the identical formation in 1 Cor. 12:4-7

- 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 which worketh all in all.
- (Outcome: verse 7 “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”)

It is the same Greek word translated “diversity/differences” in all three statements: “diaíresis” (Strong’s # G1243). The KJV blurs this. (See #18, Greek Words Appendix).

In both cases (Psalm 1 and 1 Cor. 12) we have a tricolon followed by a concluding statement.

In both, the tricolon is necessary to produce the conclusion in the fourth statement. They are *not* three independent statements. Thus the charisma is only one third of “the manifestation of the spirit.”

The first statement informs us that the Spirit of God has graciously given an endowment to a believer: a “charisma” (Strong’s #G5486).

The second statement informs us that some service (ministering) is in view: a “diakonia” (Strong’s #G1248). (See #4, Greek Words Appendix)

The third statement informs us of the energy supplied by God to carry out the service of the endowment: an “energema” (Strong’s #G1755). (See #5, Greek Words Appendix)

The outcome is a visible result: “the manifestation of the Spirit:” “phanerosis” (Strong’s #G5321).

Concerning “manifestation,” the Complete Word Study Dictionary entry states: “noun form phaneroo (Strong’s #G5319), to make manifest. A manifestation, a making visible or observable.”²¹ The charisma is not observable! it is the Holy Spirit’s operation upon a believer.

Hence, in assembly gatherings believers must come together in the power of the Holy Spirit to participate as the Spirit endows; and as the Lord ministers through the endowment; and as God gives the power to accomplish His purposes. All three Persons work together to meet the needs of the gathered company.

This is demonstrated each Lord’s Day in the Remembrance gathering if we are in a good spiritual condition. Nevertheless it is not limited to this gathering, and *it is not limited solely to public gatherings*. The passage, Rom. 12:6-21, begins with what are likely public activities, but it moves into what certainly are private activities. This was the case of Dorcas: Acts 9:36 “Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms deeds which she did.” The prophesy of Agabus was also a private activity when he prophesied that Paul would be bound and delivered to the Gentiles (Acts 21:10-11).

Undoubtedly, the principles for participation of believers in the local assembly are given in 1 Cor. 12-14. Accordingly, we can be thankful that the

²¹ Zodhiates, Spiros, Baker, Warren The Complete Word Study: Old & New Testament electronic ed. (2 vols.), AMG, Chattanooga, TN 37421, 1994

confusion in the Corinthian assembly gave rise to the writing of the invaluable guiding principles for gatherings of God's people today.

But this brings us back to the meaning of the word translated as "spiritual gifts" in verse 1. It is not "gifts" but some kind of spiritual manifestations that Paul is going to expand on. Thus Darby's translation is very likely the best translation and most closely aligned with the thought Paul is seeking to convey. "But concerning spiritual *manifestations*, brethren, I do not wish you to be ignorant" (italics his). Looking at the verse this way directs our thinking away from the misconception of believers "having gifts."

There are two words in Eph. 4 as regards gift where the emphasis is on the concrete concept of "gift." It is *the person with ability* who is the gift. It is not the ability alone. Neither of these words is found in 1 Corinthians and one is found only in 2 Cor. 9:15: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" "dorea" (Strong's #G1431), (See #7, Greek Words Appendix) The word "dorea" is found in Ephesians concerning the Lord Jesus giving gifts: "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (ch. 4:7). The other word is found in ch. 4:8: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" "doma" (Strong's #G1390), (See #6, Greek Words Appendix) Both of these have the concrete concept of "gift" in the way we usually think of a gift. This is not the case with either word in 1 Cor. 12. And the words in Eph. 4 *are not found in Romans nor in 1 Corinthians at all.*

The men of Eph. 4 are not looked at as within the body, although they are. Rather they are looked at as building up the dispensational assembly. Thus

they are seen largely as gifts to the dispensational body rather than gifts functioning in the local assembly.

Elders and teachers in the local assembly may also be persons (the gifts) of Eph. 4. It is significant that evangelists are not mentioned in 1 Cor. 12. While they certainly can work with a local assembly, their work is in the world of the lost. In Rom. 12 and in 1 Cor. 12 each individual is seen functioning within the local assembly and it is body-like function that is in view in both passages. Moreover, in Rom. 12:5, the believers are looked at as “every one members one of another.” This is not the emphasis in Eph. 4.

Rom. 12 is similar to 1 Cor. 12 in its dealing with functions in the local assembly where it speaks of “many members in one body” (verse 5). The body-like concept of a local assembly is evident in both chapters. I suggest the reason for this in Rom. 12 is because there were a number of assemblies in the city of Rome. Paul ends ch. 12, pointing the believers to love, the pinnacle of Christian virtues. He points them to a better way. In verse 31 he shows them “a more excellent way” “hodos” (Strong’s #G3598), (See #19, Greek Words Appendix)

Paul offers a far superior occupation: the love of ch. 13. He states that speaking with tongues without love is like the irritating sound of “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (ch. 13:1). In ch. 13 we have a parenthetical section before he returns to further teaching in ch. 14.

I would suggest that the first statement of ch. 14:1: “Follow after charity” actually belongs to the end of chapter 13. It is the concluding exhortation of the whole chapter. “Follow” is a strong word (dioko Strong’s

#G1377). The same word is used by Paul in Galatians 1:13 where he states that “beyond measure I *persecuted* the church of God and wasted it.” (See #23, Greek Words Appendix)

Because of the state of the Corinthians in their carnal condition, they were not in the position to judge what were “the best gifts.” Only the Holy Spirit distributes “as He will.” Besides, they were already too enamoured with spectacular public display. Hence there would be no point in the apostle exhorting them to pursue such.

This is why the abuses had taken place and caused the confusion and disorder in the assembly gatherings. Furthermore, by linking the “Follow after charity” with ch. 13, we are free to introduce ch. 14, making the second statement the first and translating it as a question: “Are you zealously desiring spiritual manifestations?”

(For any who are interested in considering it further, I address this fully in Appendix 2, *Understanding Verb forms* etc.)

From there he elevates prophesy as a superior activity. We should keep in mind that there are two kinds of prophecies. There was the teaching of the gifted prophet, but also there could be a prophetic word that the Holy Spirit could endow on any believer. Ch. 12:10 speaks of “a prophecy” but verse 28 speaks of prophets. We still experience the manifestations of the Spirit in assembly gatherings where, in a healthy assembly, we have gifted teachers, but we have other brethren who give insights in Bible Studies and other gatherings - brethren who are not gifted teachers, but have received insights into the passage under consideration.

The word “spiritual *gifts*” (KJV translation) is the same Greek word “pneumatikos” that is the head word of both ch.12 and ch. 14. This suggests that priority is given to this word rather than “charisma.” Besides, as we have pointed out, a “charisma” is only one part of the manifestation of the Spirit and it is not a “gift.” It is an endowment for some service to be carried out in the energy supplied by God (ch. 12:4-7).

The Work of Sisters

Over the years I have wondered about the commending of sisters to the work of the Lord. My present view of gifts has settled that for me. Moreover, it clarifies the commendation of Phebe in Rom. 16:1, 2. The Greek word for “business,” “pragma” (Strong’s #G4229) in verse 2 is a word with a broad semantic range that fits easily into the concept we are applying to the word “gift.” (See #8, Greek Words Appendix). Any spiritual work that Phebe would be engaged in would come under the category of Rom. 12 or 1 Cor. 12.

Rom. 16:1, 2 indicate that Phebe was active in serving others. Consequently Paul writes: “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”

I would add the instructions for older women of Tit. 2: 3-5 “that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at

home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

Titus was ministering in a decadent culture on the island of Crete. Paul reminded him that “One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, ‘The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.’” (Titus 1:12). Thus older Christian women would need to teach the very foundational principles of family living.

The Work of Sisters is a Domestic Ministry

In keeping with the concept I am suggesting, the New Testament clearly envisages sisters having many opportunities to serve these younger believers. The passage in Titus 2:3-5 is encouraging older sisters to minister in the homes of younger believers on a daily basis, training them in domestic responsibilities. A private, not a public work, is in view.

This again fits with the concept of some kind of spiritual manifestation of the Holy Spirit that sisters can engage in within their God-given sphere and experience. This would also include the commending of sisters to foreign fields to work in various capacities such as nursing, orphanages, shelters for abused women and other places where their skills could be used or in environments where men would not be free to work because of cultural norms or compromising circumstances.

It is very significant that in the list of the parts of the body in 1 Cor. 12:14 - 31 there is no mention of the mouth or the tongue. And though public speaking has a very significant part in a local assembly, there is a great variety and amount of work to be done apart from that. The work of sisters is not in

public speaking.

The Gift of Tongues (Languages)

The gift of tongues was for a sign to the nation of Israel. I prefer to use the word “language” because the word “tongues” (Strong’s #G1100) gives the false impression that these were legitimate ecstatic sounds. Yet I do believe that the Corinthians were engaging in both genuine languages and false utterances.

The history of the nation of Israel was marked by signs, beginning with the signs of Moses in the land of Egypt. Gentile nations did not need this. Thus Paul writes that “... the Jews require a sign, and (or “but”) the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:22). Once God ceased to deal with Israel nationally, the signs ceased.

Divinely given by the Spirit of God and properly used these were known languages. Thus the “Jews dwelling at Jerusalem...were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilean's? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (Act. 2:7-8).

It appears that the Corinthians allowed themselves to be carried away into ecstatic expressions in their obsession with visible display. It is possible Paul is referring to these kinds of utterances when he speaks of the tongues “of angels.” Perhaps some were claiming heavenly language when they muttered incoherent sounds. That would certainly suit their ego.

Paul confirms the use of language as a sign to Israel and quotes Isa. 28:11 saying: “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other

lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:21).

Thus when Paul says that “tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not” (v. 22), he is thinking of Jewish unbelievers. Otherwise, it would seem that there are two contradictory statements in this section.

First he says that tongues are for a sign to unbelievers. Then he says if unbelievers come in and the believers speak in tongues, they will think the Corinthians are out of their mind. In this passage it would seem he has both Jewish and Gentile unbelievers in mind.

Moving on to another passage that has bearing on “tongues” we need to consider ch. 13:8-10. Three important words in this section should help us understand the ceasing of tongues. Verse 8 states “Love never fails; but whether prophecies, they shall be *done away*; or tongues, they *shall cease*; or knowledge, it shall be *done away*” (Darby’s translation, italics mine).

The words “done away” “katargeo” (Strong’s #G2673) are identical in the Greek. The word “cease” “pauo” (Strong’s #G3973) is different.

Strong states that “katargeo” means to “(render) entirely idle (useless).” Frieberg’s lexicon confirms this stating that the sense of “katargeo” is “to be idle or useless, the term always denotes a nonphysical destruction by means of a superior force coming in to replace the force previously in effect.”

This fits with the reality that as the New Testament Scriptures were being completed, this “superior force” gradually replaced the need for the prophet and prophecies. Similarly “knowledge” was a manifestation of

knowledge of ch. 12:8 that was needed for some particular moment in the local assembly. Obviously there was a gradual diminishing of this special revelation in the history of early assembly life.

It also accords with “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (ch. 13:12). This verse has often been an enigma. Was Paul speaking of the present time in contrast to the future day when we will see the Lord Jesus face to face? I would suggest that the “now” *is not* the whole dispensational period. I believe Paul was speaking of the now of that time in the early church history before the completion of the Scriptures.

So thinking of some permanent revelation that had already been given, he says: “We know in part.” Thinking of the need of unwritten revelation, he says “and we prophesy in part.” Then thinking of the completion of Holy Scripture, he adds “But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (ch. 13:9-10).

This is not the case with the word “cease” (pauo Strong’s #G3973). Strong’s lexicon states that it means “to stop” (transitive or intransitive), i.e. restrain, quit, desist, come to an end.” It has the concept of resisting further activity. Here are some examples of other lexicons confirming this.

- Thayer’s lexicon: “to make to cease or desist, to restrain a thing or a person from something”
- Liddel-Scott lexicon: “to make to rest, stop, hinder, keep back from a thing”
- Frieberg: “(cause to) stop, restrain, keep something from something”

It was not gradual; it was a sudden end to whatever activity was being engaged in. Thus I see that the moment Paul makes the declaration of Act. 28:28, indicates that God's collective dealings with the nation of Israel was over for the present. Thus the sign of tongues and all other sign "gifts" ceased immediately. They were a sign to the Jews: "For the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22).

This accords with what Paul wrote in Rom. 11:25 "that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" and what he stated in Act. 28:25-28.

I would judge that Paul's statement at the end of the book of Acts was a divine judicial declaration: "Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." (Act. 28:28 NAS). I would suggest that at that very moment the gift of tongues (actually languages) ceased.

Thus, we have no need to concern ourselves about "tongues" no matter how we see other matters in Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12-14, Eph. 4, and other places we have been considering.

Timothy's Gifts

Questions have been raised about the use of the Greek word "gift" "charisma" (Strong's # G5486) in relation to Timothy where it is used twice:

1 Tim. 4:14 Neglect not the **gift** that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

2 Tim. 1:6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the **gift**

of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

The word “charisma” would simply tells us that God graciously endowed Timothy with some blessings. Were they of short duration or permanent? The word “charisma“ is a general word that does not give any further information. Reading elsewhere we discover that those endowments were in fact the permanent gifts of Eph. 4: evangelist, pastor, and teacher.

How were these gifts to be recognized? Since qualifications for the gifts of Eph. 4 had not yet been documented. They were, in fact, being documented in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 for the first time. Thus it was necessary for apostles and prophets and elders to confirm a person's qualifications and fitness for these. This was done by prophesy and the laying on of hands. Prophecy is mentioned as regards Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:18 that would seem to be related to ch. 4:14.

“This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18). The prophecies would reveal that Timothy had the fitness and qualifications for the work of God.

The other matter is the laying on of hands.

In *What the Bible teaches*, Mr. J Anderson states:

Four separate uses for the laying on of hands can be identified in the Bible.

If the first use of the laying on of hands in the Bible is peculiar to the OT, then the second is to be found in both Testaments...Moses laid his hands on Joshua (Deut. 34:9)...Paul did something similar to Timothy according to 2 Tim 1:6. This was more of an act of

identification...for Paul as an apostle had no successor. This is the second time that such laying on of hands had been practised on the young man. The eldership of his assembly had obviously done this too, identifying themselves with the work to which his gift was leading him (1 Tim 4:14).²²

The laying on of their hands did not impart some “gift“ to Timothy; they simply *assigned* to him the responsibility that the prophecy had placed upon him.

What we know is that two actions took place at some points in Timothy’s experience:

- there was the laying on of the hands of elders
- there was the laying on of the hands of Paul

The Concern and Conclusion

Naturally there is a concern that, by suggesting that only a few - those of Eph. 4:11: the evangelists, pastors, and teachers are the ones with a gift, (including local assembly: elders, overseers, shepherds) - we fall into the trap of agreeing with one-man ministry, a pastoral or clergy system. Hence there might be a strong reaction if we appear to be suggesting that believers in a local assembly do not have a gift. We want to be clear that we are not advocating a pastoral system and one-man ministry found in most denominations.

We are saying that believers are multifunctional and will manifest a *variety*

²² J. Anderson, “Acts,” in Acts and James, What the Bible Teaches (John Ritchie, 2000), 136.

of “*charismas*” at different times in local assembly life. Hence, it is vital that they are in a healthy spiritual condition and in attendance at the gatherings of the assembly as much as possible to be available to engage in whatever manifestation the Spirit of God would initiate through them. Paul states that every believer is necessary to the function of the whole and “...the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (1 Cor. 12:21). And no believer should adopt the attitude “They can get along fine without me!” “They can’t!”

With these thoughts in mind, we come to two conclusions: Firstly, the idea of believers having “gifts” in the early part of in 1 Cor. 12 *is not being taught*. What is being presented is some spiritual manifestation. At the end of the chapter some are temporary and will cease as ch. 13:8-10 explains.

Secondly, the tricolon of vs. 6-8 results in the “manifestation of the Spirit.” In other words, the Holy Spirit is manifesting Himself through prompting a believer to some activity at some moment in the local assembly gathering and “charisma” cannot be divorced from the other two parts of the tricolon.

Thus it underscores that in 1 Cor. 12-14 the leading of the Holy Spirit is in view prompting activity in a believer for the present need of the gathered assembly.

Therefore, we must seek to be in a spiritual state to be sensitive to the prompting - the manifestation - of the Spirit. Then we will be able to function for the blessing of the assembly of believers with whom we are associated. This is also true at every collective gathering of an assembly, whether it be at

the Breaking of Bread or any other gatherings and also in private life. Rom 12:6-16 seems to move from public manifestations to private activity.

To Summarize

In a local assembly we simply need to maintain a healthy spiritual state, seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and be ready to be promoted by Him to meet the need of the moment in a variety of ways. Moreover, we no longer need to be concerned about trying to find out what our gift is. We don't have "a gift." We are multifunctional and each occasion will provide an opportunity to function at the prompting of the Spirit of God.

This approach removes confusion and answers the questions that perplexed me. It also explained why older believers told me: "I just help where I can." And it should cause us to focus on how the Lord would use us to be a blessing to others instead of wondering what "our gift" might be.

Appendix 1 - Greek Words and Definitions

Words and Definitions from James Strong, The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996). I have condensed this definitions to exclude technicalities.

1. πνευματικός, pneumatikos, (Strong's #G4152) non-carnal, that is concretely, or divinely supernatural, regenerate, religious: spiritual.
2. χάρις charis, (Strong's #G5485) graciousness of manner or act literal., figurative., or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude, grace
3. χάρισμα charisma, (Strong's #G5486) a (divine) gratuity, i.e. deliverance (from danger or passion); subjectively a spiritual endowment, i.e. religious qualification, or objectively miraculous faculty. Note also the suffix μα (ma) that is vital to understanding "charisma,"
4. διακονία diakonia, (Strong's #G1248) from 1249; attendance (as a servant, etc.); figuratively aid, (official) service minister (ministering, ministration, ministry), office, relief, service
5. ἐνέργηα energema, (Strong's #G1755) from 1754; an effect:operation, working.
6. δόμα doma, (Strong's #G1390) from the base of 1325; a present, gift.
7. δωρεά dorea, (Strong's #G1431) from 1435; a gratuity, gift.

8. πρᾶγμα pragma, (Strong's #G4229) from 4238; a deed, business, matter, thing, work.
9. ὀρίζω horizo, (Strong's #G3724) from 3725; to mark out or bound ("horizon"), i.e. (figuratively.) to appoint, decree, specify: declare, determine, limit, ordain.
10. ὄριον horion, (Strong's #G3725) a derivative. of ὄρος horos (a bound or limit); a boundary-line, i.e. (by implication) a frontier (region): border, coast.
11. εὐλογέω eulogeo, (Strong's #G2127) from a compound of 2095 and 3056; to speak well of, i.e. to bless (thank or invoke a benediction upon, prosper):— bless, praise.
12. φανέρωσις phanerosis (Strong's #G5321) from 5319; exhibition, i.e. (figuratively) expression, (by extension.) a bestowment, manifestation.
13. καταργέω katargeo, (Strong's #G2673) from 2596 and 691; to be (render) entirely idle (useless), lit. or fig.:— abolish, cease, cumber, deliver, destroy, do away, become (make) of no (none, without) effect, fail, loose, bring (come) to nought, put away (down), vanish away, make void.
14. παύω pauo, (Strong's #G3973) a primary verb ("pause"); to stop (transitive or intransitive), i.e. restrain, quit, desist, come to an end, cease, leave, refrain.

15. δέ de, (Strong's #G1161) a particle standing after one or two words in a clause, strictly adversative, but more frequently denoting transition or conversion, and serving to introduce something else, whether opposed to what precedes or simply continuative or explanatory. Generally it has the meaning of but, and, or also, namely.
16. γλῶσσα glossa, (Strong's #G1100) the tongue; implication a language (specifically., one naturally unacquired)
17. ζηλόω zeloo, (Strong's #G2206) from 2205; to have warmth of feeling for or against:— affect, covet (earnestly), (have) desire, (move with) envy, be jealous over, (be) zealous (-ly affect).
- 18 διαίρεσις diairesis, (Strong's #G1243) (1) what is apportioned out division, allotment, distribution (possibly 1C 12.4-6); (2) as a state of difference in the nature of things variety, diversity, distinction (probably 1C 12.4-6)
19. ὁδός, οἷ, ἡ hodos, (Strong's #G3598) (1) literally; (a) as any place along which one travels, translated according to the context
20. ἀπόστολος, apostolos, (Strong's #G652) one who is sent on a mission with full authority apostle, messenger, envoy
21. προφήτης, prophētēs (Strong's #G4396) generally one who speaks for God, proclaiming what God wants to make known
22. διδάσκαλος, didaskalos (Strong's #G1320) teacher; as a title of

dignity and respect master, teacher

23. διώκω diōkō (Strong's #G1377) to pursue (literally or figuratively);
by implication to persecute: - ensue, follow (after), given to, (suffer)
persecute, press toward.

Appendix 2

Understanding Identical Verb Forms

There are times in language where grammatical forms are identical and context must determine how to understand the meaning of a passage in a document. This is equally true of the Greek language.

So, depending on what a translator believes what Paul is seeking to say in the section of 1 Cor. 12-14 will determine how he translates words that have more than one possible translation.

The chart following shows the verbs forms that we are concerned about in this section.

Even if we can't read a word of Greek, we can see that the forms are identical. Thus it is the interpretation, not translation, that is the issue.

I suggest they are *not* being exhorted to covet the best gifts In ch 14:1, rather they are being asked: “Are you zealous of spirituals? Prophecy is preferable.” This fits with fact that they were overzealous already about their perceived abilities. It is similar to ch. 12:31. I would also treat ch. 12:31 as a question. “Are you zealous of spirituals? I will show you something better.”

In page 312, section 33.9 of Mounce’s grammar, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, he cautions: “Do not be fooled by the imperative second person plural (active and middle) endings. . . They are the same as the indicative.

In the present [tense] context will usually decide whether a particular form is a statement or a command.”²³

²³ Mounce, William D. (2009) *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. p. 312

Thus in 1 Cor. 12:31 and ch. 14:1 the word “covet” is translated in the KJV as an imperative (and so do many other versions). But they could just as easily be a simple present indicative.

This gives us two possibilities:

1. It could be a statement, or
2. It could be a question.

Again in Mounce, at the beginning of chapter 4 of his text under the heading “*Exegetical Insight,*” it is noted that “When the New Testament was first written there were no punctuation marks.”²⁴ As we know from English and many other languages, the pitch of the voice in spoken words can determine if a statement is a simple statement or a question. So in written language, context will decide if the words produce a statement or a question. As has been noted already, in the second person plural, the Greek text will not tell us if it an imperative, a statement, or a question.

With that in mind, I suggest that Paul would not tell the Corinthians to earnestly desire the “best” gifts. They were already doing that in their puffed up condition.

Indicative can be: “You are zealous” OR “Are you zealous?” Imperative will be: “Be zealous!”

Since both the present indicative and the present imperative have identical spelling, it becomes a judgment call on the part of the translator (an *interpretive* decision) as to whether or not translate into English as an indicative active or an imperative active. And that leaves us with various

²⁴ *ibid* p.12

possibilities:

Note that the 2nd Person plural is identical in form in both Active and Imperative as highlighted

Conjugation of the Contract Verb ζηλώω (Transliteration: zēlōō) “earnestly desire”		
INDICATIVE		
Number	Present Indicative	Translation
Ist Sing.	ζηλω	I earnestly desire
2nd Sing.	ζηλοῖς	you (sing.) earnestly desire
3rd Sing.	ζηλοῖ	he, she, it earnestly desires
1st Plural	ζηλούμεν	we earnestly desire
2nd Plural	ζηλοῦτε	you (plural) earnestly desire
3rd Plural	ζηλοῦσιν	they are earnestly desiring
IMPERATIVE		
Number	Present Imperative	Translation
Ist Sing.		
2nd Sing.	ζηλου	earnestly desire (sing.)
3rd Sing.	ζηλουτω	let her, him, it earnestly desire
1st Plural		
2nd Plural	ζηλοῦτε	earnestly desire (plural)
3rd Plural	ζηλουτωσαν	let them earnestly desire

← IDENTICAL

1. The imperative is just that.
2. If we decide for the indicative, however, we have several possible translations.
 - a. It could be just a statement of fact, or
 - b. It could be a question.

If it is a question, it could be taken one of two ways:

- c. It could be simply a question, or
- d. it could be a question of “really...?” in an expression of surprise.

Since Greek had no punctuation, the context has to be the deciding factor.

The reason why most versions translate the same as the KJV is because they took it that Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to desire “spiritual gifts.”

While some translators might not translate the verse the way I have suggested above, they could not object to my translation. It is within the legitimate possibilities of the Greek text and grammar.

Barnes commentary notes that the expression “covet earnestly” 1 Cor 12:31, can be considered as follows:

But covet earnestly. Gr. “Be zealous for” (Ζηλοῦτε) [Zeloute]. This word, however, may be either in the indicative mood (ye do covet earnestly), or in the imperative, as in our translation. Doddridge contends that it should be rendered in the indicative mood, for he says it seems to be a contradiction that after the apostle had been showing that

these gifts were not at their own option, and that they ought not to emulate the gifts of another, or aspire to superiority, to undo all again, and give them such contrary advice.²⁵

On ch. 12:31 John Gill notes the possibility of the interrogative:

But covet earnestly the best gifts,... Which may be rendered either indicatively as an assertion, “ye do covet earnestly the best gifts”: of prophesying and teaching, of doing miracles, healing diseases, speaking with, and interpreting, different tongues and languages;

but I can, and do show you something that is better, and more excellent than these: or, by way of interrogation, “do ye covet earnestly the best gifts?”²⁶

Thus another perfectly legitimate way to translate ch. 12:31 is as follows:

“Are you coveting earnestly the best gifts, rather I will show you a more excellent way.” Ch. 14:1 has a similar thrust.

If the Corinthians heed the exhortation to pursue love, they will not be seeking spiritual experiences, but seek the edification of the company rather than their own edification and will seek to prophesy.

The Placing of “Follow After Charity”

Since I have placed “Follow after charity” (ch. 14:1) as part of ch. 13, there is no further need to consider the grammatical form of this verb. I suggest that

²⁸ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: I Corinthians*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 240.

²⁶ John Gill in eSword Bible Programme: 1 Corinthians 11:31

“follow after charity” is the closing exhortation of ch. 13. Thus ch. 14.1 begins with the question, already mentioned, “Are you zealous of spirituals? Prophecy is preferable.”

To reinforce moving this exhortation to the end of ch. 13, I would point out the difference between two Greek words that both can be translated “and.” One word is “δέ” de (Strong’s #G1161). This is the Greek word “and” in ch. 14:1. To give an example of the difference, we will look at the word “now” in ch. 12:1. There is a *change of subject* from ch. 11:31 to ch. 12:1. In verse 1: “Now concerning spiritual gifts,” the Greek word translated “now” is “δέ” (de Strong’s #G1161). Concerning this word, *The Complete Word study Old and New Testament* states:

δέ “de” (Strong’s #G1161) a particle standing after one or two words in a clause, strictly adversative [expressing the opposite], but more frequently denoting transition or conversion, and *serving to introduce something else*, (italics mine) whether opposed to what precedes or simply continuative or explanatory. Generally it has the meaning of but, and, or also, namely.²⁷

Strong’s Dictionary states: “G1161 δέ dě; a primary particle (adversative or continuative); but, and, etc., also, and, but, moreover, now [often unexpressed in English].”²⁸

If the particle “de,” found 211 times in 1 Corinthians is checked, it will be seen that it is used in the *vast majority of times* as an “adversative” i.e.

²⁷ Zodhiates, Spiros, Baker, Warren The Complete Word Study: Old & New Testament electronic ed. (2 vols.), AMG, Chattanooga, TN 37421, 1994

²⁸ James Strong, The New Strong’s Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

indicating a change of subject. This can easily be checked with an interlinear Greek New Testament.

The other word “καί” “kai” (Strong’s #2532) is found in ch. 14:3.

Strong’s Dictionary states:

G2532 καί kai; apparently a primary particle, having a copulative [connecting words or clauses linked in their sense] and sometimes also a cumulative force [meaning successive additions in a list], and, also, even, so, then, too, etc.; often used in connection (or composition) with other particles or small words:— and, also, both, but, even, for, if, indeed, likewise, moreover, or, so, that, then, therefore, when, yet.²⁹

If we were to leave the first statement in ch. 14:1, “follow after charity” as part of ch. 14:1, we would need to consider it continuative and thus translate both verbs in the same form: either imperative or indicative (statements or questions). But the particle “de” between the two verbs tends to be “adversative” suggesting a change and not a continuation.

If we look at it as a continuation, however, we do have to maintain the verbal forms the same, giving us three possible translations:

1. Imperative, as the KJV and many other translations: “Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts...” We have already pointed out that Paul is seeking to dissuade them from pursuing “gifts.” He is not encouraging it so it is unlikely that word “desire” would be an exhortation.

2. Indicative: “You are following charity (love) and you are desiring spiritual gifts.” The fact is they weren’t following love. Hence the reason for

²⁹ *ibid.*

ch. 13. Additionally, (as already noted), they were overzealous about “gifts.” That was so obvious that there was no need to state it.

3. Interrogative, “Are you following love and are you following spiritual gifts?” He knew they weren’t following love. I suppose he could be asking that to remind them that they weren’t. But again it would be redundant to ask them if they desired spiritual gifts when it was clear they were.

Consequently, for translation purposes, it seems best to make “follow after charity” the concluding exhortation of ch. 13 and the “de” (and) as adversative, separating the two verbs. Thus “follow” is an exhortation and “earnestly desire” is a question, asking “are you seeking spiritual gifts, well I would rather that you prophesy.” Paul’s desire was that they should seek to edify the assembly by prophecy because the one prophesying “speaketh unto men to edification [building up], and exhortation [stirring up], and comfort [binding up]” (ch. 14:3).

To summarize: I suggest separating the first statement of ch. 14:1 and place it as the concluding exhortation of the chapter on love.

Then make the second statement of ch. ch. 14:1 the first. Then translate it as a question so as not to leave the impression that Paul is exhorting them to desire spiritual gifts. They were too zealous about gifts already.

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