



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

1 Corinthians

"Gifts for the Greater Good"

TRANSCRIPT

It's good to be back, and back in 1 Corinthians, which we are this morning. We begin a new chapter, chapter 12, and we're going to look at verses 1 through 11.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed;' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study of it together. Let's seek His blessing upon us. Let's pray.

Father, we do that. We come before You and seek Your blessing upon us as we look to You to guide us in the understanding of the things that we have read. What we acknowledge that by ourselves, we would not understand what we've read not only here, but anywhere in the Scriptures. It's all plainly put before us; a basic message of the Gospel is there. It's to be seen, and it's simple. We're sinners. We

need a Savior. A Savior is Your Son who is the eternal Son of God who became a man and died in our place. And we don't have eyes to see that, spiritual eyes to see that apart from Your grace, apart from the work of the Spirit to open our eyes to it.

And having done that, in giving us a new heart, we still need the guidance and the instruction that the Spirit gives. What a blessing it is to know that we have, as believers in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit within us, the third person of the Trinity within us. We're reminded of His work in our passage, a great deal of attention is given to that here and in the chapters to follow. But we give You the praise for it, and we begin by acknowledging that of ourselves, we cannot comprehend the things that we've just read. We need You to teach us, and we pray for that. So, bless us spiritually in this hour and build us up in the faith. May everything that's done in this hour be to our edification and Your glory.

So, we look to You to bless, Lord, and we pray Your blessings upon us in the material things of life as well. Lord, we are completely dependent upon You. We depend upon You for every breath of life that we receive. We depend upon You for every beat of our heart. It's a gift from moment to moment. As basic as that is, that's the truth.

So, we depend upon You for all things in life, everything in this world. Our employment, our health, our friendships. All of it, Lord is a gift from You, and so we give You the praise and the thanks for all that You've given us, because all of us have far more than we could deserve or even ask. Paul tells us that. You gave exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. That's true even in the privations of life. Those aren't the things we want, and yet those very often are the things we need. So, we need to recognize that everything comes from You. And when it is Your people that receive them, everything is for our good. We certainly give You the praise for the things of life that we know are good: the health, the employment. We praise You for that. But Lord, we pray for those who are without it. We pray for those who are recovering from health issues, from surgery, from sickness. We pray for them. Those who are without employment, bless them, and give them employment. Father, those who are weighed down by the cares of life, we pray that You give them encouragement. Life can be very difficult, but we have a sovereign God who rules over everything, and You are faithful, and You bless us. So Father, we pray Your blessings upon us. Bless us in this hour. Bless us as we sing our next hymn. We

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pray that this will be a rich hour of worship and learning. We commit to You. I pray these things in Christ's name, Amen. [End of Prayer]

[Message] If you have a nickel in your pocket, or a penny, or a dollar bill, then you have a Latin phrase that defines our country. "*E pluribus unum.*" Out of many, one. That motto is inscribed on our money and it's inscribed across the great Seal of the United States to say that this one nation was formed out of many states and races. We are many, but we are one. I mention that because that's true of the church as well. In fact, it's even truer of the church than it is of a nation. The church is one body made up of many members. The church has unity as well as diversity. There are many different people in the local church, and in that local body, in that local church, there are many different gifts.

But we don't go many different ways. We are united, and that is Paul's lesson in 1 Corinthians 12 where he gives a list of the gifts in the church, which were given to help us be one and the strong. It's a new subject, but really also a continuation of the instruction that he began back in verse 17 of chapter 11 where he started explaining the meeting of the church beginning with the Lord's supper. The instruction was necessary because the people weren't worshipping correctly. In fact, they were behaving shamefully. They observed the supper in the Agape or the Love feast, in which the church would meet for a common meal. And at the end of it, they would take the bread and the wine.

But instead of meeting as a group, they formed cliques. Some were eating everything and leaving nothing for the poor. They were treating the supper like an ordinary meal. They were actually treating the Lord's supper like their own supper. It was irreverent, it was disruptive, so Paul reminds them of the sacredness of the supper and tells them to wait for one-another. In other words, be united. Look out for each other.

That concern carries over here into chapter 12, and it continues through chapter 14. In the middle of that is chapter 13, Paul's great chapter on love in which he exhorts us to love one another. We are to love the brethren. We are not to separate from them. Love doesn't seek its own, he says. It endures all things. And, that is what the spiritual gifts were given to in order to influence, in order to produce. They were to help us to do that.

Paul says they were given for the common good. There are lots of different

gifts, but the variety of the gifts shouldn't divide us into parties. They should unite us. We are all to be working together to strengthen one another in our service for Christ in the world. God has equipped us with gifts for that purpose, given us a great purpose, given us a noble purpose and one that really, as we reflect upon it, is beyond our capability. We're to represent Him in this world. We're to be a blessing to each other. We are to be light in the darkness. That's a tall order. As we reflect upon it, it's really beyond us, but He's equipped us to do that. He has given us special gifts to enable us to carry out His design and purpose.

Again, that's Paul's topic in chapter 12. But before he gives a lesson on the gifts, he gives instruction on discernment. After all, we need to know who the gifted people really are. Some self-proclaimed ministers may simply be talented people trying to gain some influence over us and lead us astray. That happens. That happened in the 1st century; that happens in the 21st century. So we need discernment. Evidently, some impressive people had come to the church there in Corinth and they had made some remarkable claims. That was possible in the early church because there was a lot of freedom in the church meeting.

Later, in chapter 14 of verse 26, Paul indicates how the meeting of the church occurs. It's very different than the way most church meetings occur in modern times. The early church met in a way that was formatted and patterned after the ancient synagogue. And that gave a variety of people opportunities to speak. Different people were free to stand and minister in the meeting. From all of the attention that Paul now gives to the spiritual gifts in explaining them, it's evident from that that those gifts had been abused in the meeting of the church, especially the gift of tongues. Puts a great deal of attention on that. The gift of tongues was the supernatural ability to speak foreign languages. And I can see why that would be such an impressive gift to people. It'd be very impressive to me.

People were so impressed with it that they considered those who had that gift to be inspired, and they elevated them to great importance. So, there was some conflict within the church or with this, and the Corinthians wanted Paul's thoughts on it. They had written him a letter. We've talked about this in the past. This letter of 1 Corinthians is really a response to the letter that the Corinthians had written to him. They had a number of questions. Each answer Paul gives is introduced with a special phrase. We know these. He's answering a question, and he's going on to a new

subject when he introduces it, with the words "now concerning." Chapter 7 begins:

"Now concerning the things about which you wrote." And then he answers them on the subject of marriage. They had questions about marriage. In chapter 8, he begins: "Now concerning the things sacrificed to idols." And then he gives answers about that.

Here, chapter 12 begins: "Now concerning spiritual gifts." The church was divided over this. People had become overly impressed with the gift of tongues, and those who were using it had become overly impressed with themselves. So, Paul now answers this, and his answer is lengthy. It covers chapters 12 through 14. But he begins here with the warning that not everyone who is inspiring or who seems to be inspired, is. And the proof of that was the Corinthians' own past. He reminds them of it. Before becoming Christians, they were pagans. They were influenced by idols. He calls them mute or dumb idols. They're just blocks of wood or stone. They were inanimate. They couldn't give revelation. They couldn't impart wisdom. They couldn't give any direction to life. They couldn't help. They were really nothing.

Nevertheless, the Gentile Corinthians were enamored of them. They had been led about by the error of idolatry. There were different reasons for that, different reasons for the influence upon them. One of them was satanic. Paul said that earlier, back in chapter 10. He said that while an idol is nothing, there is something behind the idols. There is something spiritual. They spoke of the demons that are behind them. They exert influence on people. There's an invisible war going on in this world in which we live. We don't see it, we don't feel it, but it's there, and it's exerting an influence, and there was an influence exerted on these people to idolatry, and they were enamored of the idols. Corinthians had been victims of that, so they needed to use discernment.

And I think his point is something like this: look, if you were influenced by blocks of stone then, you can certainly be influenced by people today who are effective in speaking. Not everything he's saying, though, that glitters is gold. And not everyone who is impressive is inspired, at least not inspired by God.

Paul had a formula for distinguishing the true from the false. He gives it in verse 3. "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed;' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy

Spirit." Now, at a meeting with the kind of freedom that they had in the early church where various people could stand and speak publically, it's conceivable that someone stood up on an occasion and he said, "Jesus is accursed." Our Sunday evening meeting is structured with that kind of freedom. And over the years, we've had people who have taught some strange things. Not that strange, and really not often, but I've been attending that meeting for 40 plus years, and I've heard some things said that weren't quite right, and watched the elders stand up at various times and make correction. It happens. As I say, not here very often, and what does take place isn't very serious in its error. But I can imagine that in Corinth, someone, say from the local synagogue, might have visited in the hope of winning back some converted Jews and used that format, that opportunity to do it, and he spoke against the doctrine of the Trinity, and he might've done so very persuasively, very knowledgeable Jewish rabbi might've come and expounded Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4. Great monotheistic declaration of faith and said that the idea that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is God the Son, is blasphemy. And he used that text to prove his point. The very notion that Jesus could be ascribed deity is something that is accursed. And he could've spoke with knowledge and conviction, which made everything that he said seem very credible, and made himself seem very credible. He's expounding the Scriptures.

Oh, it's certainly possible that false teachers had come who denied grace, or denied the person and work of Christ and taught that Jesus is a mere man or maybe more than that. Maybe he's something of an angel. That was gnostic heresy in the early 2nd century. So, these things could very easily have happened.

But, all of that, in effect, whether it's saying the word "accursed" directly or not, all of that, by denying the truth, by advocating a different Christ, He's simply a man, a good man, a great teacher, an angel, something of that kind. But anything that falls short of ascribing full deity to Him, to say He is the eternal Son of God, that is in effect saying that Jesus is accursed, and it's promoting a false gospel. Paul's answer here is significant. He says it doesn't matter how charismatic or magnetic or charming a teacher is. If he doesn't confess Jesus is Lord, that is that Jesus is God, that He is the eternal Son of God, they thought God the Father is God the Son. But if he doesn't confess that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is divine, that He is God, then he is false. He's a false teacher. In other words, the standard for what is genuine and real

is truth. It isn't style, and I'm not deprecating style. That's very good. We want teachers who speak fluently and well and engagingly. That's good. That's a good method and means to communicating the truth, but style, effectiveness in teaching, isn't the standard. Or, what we get out of it, what we feel from it isn't the standard. We may feel very good and warm as a result of some teaching. That's not the standard.

The standard is something quite objective. It is doctrinal truth, and we need to know it. Paul says in these first three verses, "I do not want you to be unaware." And, "I make known to you." He appeals to their intellect. He appeals to our minds, to our reason. Ignorance is deadly for the church. Ignorance is the seedbed of heresy. It's always been that. Hosea said: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." We live in an age of a great lack of knowledge.

Now, that's kind of and ironical statement because we also live in an age of an explosion of knowledge. Knowledge is increasing exponentially because of computers and all of the discoveries we make, and they lead to more discoveries. So, on the one hand, that there's never been more knowledge in the world than there is today, and yet when it comes to the Scriptures, when it comes to the Bible, there's a lack of knowledge, a lack of interest.

I read a book a few months ago titled "Pen of Iron," by Robert Alter, a Jewish professor at the University of California Berkeley, who is a well-known scholar in Hebrew and literature. He's a Jewish professor, so it's not a Christian book; in fact, it's not even a book about theology or so much the Bible as it is about the influence of the King James version of the Bible on American literature. And so, he does things like take Herman Melville and analyze "Moby Dick," and the influence of the King James version on Melville, who wasn't a believing man at all. he had some very interesting things to say. I thought it illuminated things. He wrote that or reminded us that in the year, it is the 400th anniversary of the publishing of the King James version. And he pointed out that in 1911, there was a great celebration for the 300th anniversary. Leading public figures like Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson. Extolled the King James version as America's national book, and the text had more than any other, had affected the life of English-speaking peoples. That's a quote.

But in the century that has followed, the use of the King James Bible, really all Bible reading for that matter, has drastically diminished. We're coming to the

year 2011. I doubt that we're going to see the kind of celebration that we saw 100 years ago. This nation has become biblically illiterate, just generally. We might understand that, that society as a whole is not biblically literate as it had once been, but the great problem is, that that's true among evangelicals as well as a result of not having a devotion to the word of God, of understanding it in so-called Bible-believing churches. They are open to all kinds of influences, and we see that taking place. Emotionalism, mysticism, and all kinds of error creep in because there's not a firm grounding in the Word of God. That's why it's so important, as Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he did, and that we do preach the whole counsel of God. Preach the word of God. Where there is no depth, there is no defense. We need a strong defense. We need depth of knowledge of the Word of God.

The greatest heretics in the church had been charismatic people. I mean by that intelligent, persuasive, and likeable, attractive people. That doesn't prove genuineness. Likeability, persuasiveness. Doctrine does. Paul says: no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. That's the touchstone. That's the acid test.

The Corinthians needed discernment. So, they needed to use the right standard, and that is, first of all, sound doctrine. Secondly, the standard for whether the gifts are being used properly and are in use by the proper people is brotherly love. Does the use of the gifts help people or harm them? Does it unite them or divide them? Is it producing harmony in the church or is it causing more of the parting spirit that plagued Corinth?

As Paul shows in verses 4 through 6, the gifts should unite God's people, make them one, because they are all given by the one God, by the Triune God. Verse 4. Now, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

Now, that too is a doctrinal test, very much like the formula there in verse 3, which states the deity of Christ and the existence of the Holy Spirit. Here, there is an even clearer Trinitarian formula which the British commentator and scholar, CK Barrett, called the "more persuasive," because it seems to be artless and unconscious. What he means by that is: Paul doesn't need to develop this in order to prove it, in order to prove the trinity. He simply lays it out as he does, the three persons of the Godhead, in a very, almost casual way because it's assumed. They all understood

what he was saying. And what it indicates is orthodoxy, the Christian faith, the Gospel, is based on the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity. Where that is doubted, there is only heresy.

So this, in one sense, is another test of whether one is genuine. But Paul uses it here, not so much as a test, but to prove our unity. There are many differences in the people of God. Natural differences, like race, and sex, and intelligence, and spiritual differences with our gifts. There's all kinds of differences among us. We aren't expected to be the same. God doesn't want some bland uniformity. He created us with variety. That's good. Our experiences are different. All of that comes to play in our life together and what we contribute. We all have something unique to give and to use in God's work.

But God does desire that we be united in that work. And our unity lies in Him, in the Spirit who gives the gifts, the Son whom we serve, and in the Father who is at work and producing various effects. You can go back to chapter 3 and verse 7 and see, I think what Paul means by that, where he speaks about he casts down seed and, Apollos waters. One does that one, and one does the other. But it's God who gives the fruit. God gives the effect. God produces the results. And they vary from one person to another in a variety of ways. God's the one who does it.

So, just as there is diversity and unity in the Trinity, one God who subsists in three persons, there is to be the same in the church. We are many on the one hand, but we are to be one. We are to be united.

Paul develops that further in verse 7 where he states that each one of us has been given a gift, but all the gifts are for the purpose of helping others, or for the purpose of helping the church. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Every believer has been given a spiritual gift. That's important to know. But to each one is given. No one has been left out. We all have a service to render, and we all have the special ability to do it. That's true of every one of you who are believers in Jesus Christ. You have a special ability to serve the Lord and to serve His people. Second, no one has been given a gift for private use. For example, there is no special gift to help a person in his or her personal prayer life. All of the gifts are for the common good. For the edification, the welfare of the church, not for self and personal advantage. And of course, that requires of us, selflessness in our service to one another, and unity with one another. It's all for the

common good; it's all to bind us together in a single body, to be ministering together, to be ministering to one another, and to be reflecting the grace of God to the world.

Paul illustrates the variety of the gifts given in verses 8 through 10. And I say illustrates because there are many more gifts listed in the Scriptures other than the ones that he gives here. They are found in Romans chapter 12 and in Ephesians chapter 4 and in 1 Peter chapter 4. So, if you want to know where the gifts were listed in the New Testament, just think of those two numbers. 12 and 4. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4.

Here, Paul lists nine spiritual gifts, and eh probably lists them in the order of their importance. In verse 8, he gives the first two: the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. These are very similar to one another. It's difficult, I think, to distinguish them. That's true of other gifts as well. There's something like 25 spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament, and there may be some overlap in those gifts. These two may be the same as the gift of teaching. They may be the same. But if they're not, they're certainly related to it. If we can distinguish these two, the gift of wisdom probably involves what we might call practical teaching having to do with moral instruction and exhortation. Something very much like the proverbs, giving that kind of instruction. It's certainly necessary in delivering a sermon and making the proper application of the text to daily life. We come away from a sermon feeling a little empty if no application has been given, if we don't see how this relates to my life personally. And I think that's part of it. A sermon should have that, not that every sermon is so obviously related to personal life, but, part of it's, of the gift of having that gift is being able to take the word of God and apply it to life, and show us how we live wise lives in light of a particular doctrine or a particular passage.

It's also necessary to have this gift if one is giving counsel to people. Counseling the naïve, counseling the confused, giving them direction in life. One needs the word of wisdom. The word of knowledge has more to do with the exposition of Christian truth, of giving a well-reasoned explanation of doctrine. In both of these gifts, wisdom and knowledge, they help people understand the Word of God, and that's what we need. Paul has already indicated that's fundamental to discernment. We will not have discernment. We will not have wisdom. We will not know how to make good decisions in life if we don't know God's word, and these gifts help us in learning God's word and having that base and that discernment.

The next two gifts are in verse 9: the gifts of faith and healing. The gift of faith here is not saving faith, although that certainly is a gift. No one has faith in Jesus Christ apart from the sovereign grace of God. He imparts that through regeneration. That is a gift. But every saved individual has this. This is a gift that distinguishes one from another. Not everyone has the gift of faith. So this is a special gift that sets people apart. It gives a person the ability to trust God in spite of great obstacles. Those who have this gift understand the promises of God and are able to act upon them readily without hesitation, without doubt. Others may be timid to act upon the promises of God and step out in faith, as we say. But these people who have that, they understand things. They do it. They are able to act in faith more readily than someone else. We naturally think of people like George Müller or Hudson Taylor who had what are called "faith missions." They made no appeals for money. They trusted holy in the Lord. They took their problems, their issues, their needs. They put them before God in prayer, and He always answered them. They trusted in Him. That's an act of faith.

The gift of healing is different from the ability of a physician. We may go to a good physician, a good doctor and say he's a gifted man. He understands. He's skilled. This is different from that. This isn't natural skill. This is the gift God gave people to have the supernatural ability to cure diseases and physical afflictions. Jesus had that gift. We see it in the gospels. The gift of healing is what is sometimes referred to as a sign gift and a temporary gift. It was for the purpose of authenticating the message of the gospel in the early days of the church. That explanation for miracles is not simply my own, or theologians of my stripe. That's what the Scriptures say in Hebrews chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. The author writes that after the gospel was spoken through the Lord, he says it was confirmed by "signs and wonders and miracles." So, those miraculous gifts, those miraculous abilities were given for signs to confirm the truth. Now that the canon is complete, we have all the revelation of God, the church no longer needs authenticating miracles.

Now, some today disagree with that and argue the situation really hasn't changed. We still need signs and wonders to prove the truth of the gospel to unbelievers, and we should expect them. All the gifts occurred today. All of them are extant. All of them are in existence today and we should look for them. Well, without getting too involved in a response, the answer to that is: the Scriptures are

self-authenticating. This is a supernatural book. Through it, the Holy Spirit opens spiritual eyes to see. When the Word of God is preached, when the Word of God is proclaimed, when you give the Word of God in a conversation with someone who's not a believer, through that, God opens their eyes. The Spirit of God works upon. He works through this book, as He works through no other book. This is a supernatural book. That's what the author of Hebrews goes on to tell us in chapter 4 verse 12. The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. What book can be described in that way? You say "Moby Dick" is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword? Maybe an interesting book and have some insights, but this is unique. The Bible is powerful by itself. It doesn't need miracles.

Now, in the first generation of the church when the New Testament was in the process of formation, when the people didn't have it, when they had "charigma," as theologians like to say, the spoken, declared message of the gospel. Those miracles, those confirming testimonies were necessary. Now that we have the New Testament, they have ceased.

The author of Hebrews indicates that, I think, in the statement that he makes there in chapter 2, he speaks in the past tense. That's significant. It's subtle, but it's very significant. God confirmed to us, he said. Testified with signs. So, the author of Hebrews said that God did that. He did that in the past. He doesn't say God is confirming. He said He did it. He confirmed. He puts it in the past, as if to say, and I think he is saying, He's not doing that now. It's been done. It happened.

Now, God can still do miracles and He can heal people, and we pray for that. We have that bulletin that we go over every Sunday morning, and on the back of it are a long list of prayer requests. And why do we pray? Because we believe God is able to heal. God is able to provide. We're commanded to pray, we're commanded to seek finances and health from Him, provision from Him. But this particular healing happened through the ministration of a gifted person, and the cures that occurred without fail. Those who had this gift of healing. Jesus never failed to heal a person. Peter and Paul never failed when they tried to restore a person to health. They didn't put their hands on them, pray, and then say, "Well, I guess you just don't have enough faith." They put their hands on someone. They healed them. That person got in their shadow and they were healed. They took Paul's handkerchief; they were

healed. That's a miracle. We're not seeing that today. They did it instantly. They did it with a word. They did it with a touch, without fail.

Well, as I say, that's not happening today. The miraculous sign gifts are no longer necessary. That's why it's not happening. Nothing God can't do; there's no need to do it. The canon of Scripture is complete and the Scriptures are self-authenticating. We don't need anything else. The Scriptures are sufficient. They proved themselves. The cessation of the gifts is suggested later, I think, also in 1 Corinthians 13, verses 8 through 13 where Paul says, "if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease." Now, he doesn't say they're going to cease in my lifetime. He doesn't say they're going to cease in the next generation. He just says they're going to cease. And so, you could argue from that that they haven't yet ceased. Someday they will when Christ comes back. They will cease. But, I think there is a suggestion just from the rest of the New Testament that that was already happening. That was beginning late in Paul's ministry when he was in imprisonment in Rome in Philippians chapter 2 verse 27. He speaks of a Epaphroditus who came close to death while he was ministering to Paul there in Rome, and during Paul's imprisonment. But, he says, God had mercy on him. He recovered from his illness. Not because Paul healed him. He didn't heal him, as far as we know; there's no indication. Evidently, Paul prayed, and prayed earnestly, and others prayed. And by God's grace, Epaphroditus recovered.

When Timothy was having stomach trouble, Paul didn't tell him to go to a healer. He didn't say, "Find Peter, have him put his hands on you, and you'll be okay." He advised him to drink wine in place of water." God can still heal today, and he does. I'm not suggesting he doesn't. We can pray for that, and we should pray for that. In fact, we, as elders here at Believers Chapel, practice James chapter 5 where the sick are counseled to call for the elders in prayer, and we will come, and we will pray, and we will anoint with oil. But the gifts of healing are no longer extant.

Neither are the next gifts listed in verse 10. At least four of the five are temporary gifts, or sign gifts. And to another, the effecting of miracles. "And to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues." Tongues in prophecy are issues that we will deal with in

some detail later in chapter 14, but in considering tongues, I think it's important to remember the purpose for the gifts. Paul wrote in verse 7: they are for the common good. The gift of tongues is for the common good. It's not a gift given for private use in prayer. None of these gifts are given for private use. All the gifts are for the edification of the church. These gifts were given primarily to be used in the meeting of the church. They were used in the marketplace. They were used in the synagogue when a man went over and preached the gospel there, when Paul did that. But they're public and primarily for the church. That's Paul's central lesson here, and we are all to be unified in working together for the common good, for the good of the church. And we can do that because we all have a spiritual gift. We all have an ability. Paul said that in verse 7, and then he says it again in verse 11. He repeats it. Obviously, he thought this was a very important point for us to understand. "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have a spiritual gift. They've been distributed to each one individually. So, we need to know our gift, and use it for the edification of the church. You need to be active in doing that.

Well, the natural question is: how can I know what my gift is? Well, first, you need to know what the gifts are. And then, I think you consider what your desire is. It ought to be in line with the fit that you had. For example, if it is the gift of teaching, and I use that because my experience. But if you have the gift of teaching, you should have that desire. That should be what you want to do. It should also be your desire to learn and study and have the discipline to do that, to have the willingness to spend some isolated time in your study away from people, and spend a lot of time in that situation. And then, look for opportunities to teach. The response that people give to that is helpful. It may be a little discouraging, but it's helpful. It can either confirm you in it, or it can dissuade you from it. A negative response, as I say, is a bit discouraging, but it shouldn't be. It just means that God's giving you something different. If you think you have the gift of teaching and you don't, you don't want to be spending your time in that when it's not what you should be doing when God has something else for you.

So, put these things to the test and a good evaluation will come back, and you understand you have it or you don't. Maybe the gift that you have is one of exhortation and you discover that in the attempt to teach, or it's hospitality, or giving

gifts. Those are listed in Romans 12. Some people have the means to give, and they enjoy doing that. They enjoy helping those in need. Look, every gift is important, is vital for the health of the church. Some of the gifts are more extraordinary than others, but it doesn't follow that those who have the more spectacular gifts or the more public gifts are the more spiritual. They're not. This isn't a matter of spirituality.

Now, those who have, say, the gift of teaching or a gift of evangelism or some public gift should strive to be very spiritual, and mature, and grow. But, they're not given because, well, these are the very mature, spiritual, wonderful people, we'll give them these gifts. It's not a matter of merit. The Spirit gives the gifts sovereignly. That's what Paul says. He distributes to each one just as He wills. Not as we will, not as we desire, not as we determine. We don't determine it. He determines it all. He gives the gifts. So, there's no room for boasting in any of this. It's all of grace, just like salvation. Just as Paul indicated back in verse 3 where he gave the test of genuineness, the test of orthodoxy. No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. God must first work in us, give us knowledge, and give us faith before we can believe and be saved. It's all his work. There's no ground for arrogance or boasting. From beginning to end, Christianity is God's work. It is supernatural. God causes people to be born again, and God equips them to serve Him. So that's what we're to be doing: serving Him by serving one another. Not serving self and separating, but uniting to build up the church for ministry, to build up the church to be a body in this world that is light in the midst of darkness and brings glory to Him.

But, the question must be asked: are you part of that body? Are you part of the church? Can you confess Jesus is Lord? Can you confess that He is the sovereign Savior, that He is God the Son, that He died for sinners so that all who believe in Him will be saved? Can you confess that, and have you done that? Have you trusted in Him? Then you're one of His children. Praise God for that. If you're not come to Him, believe in Him, trust in Him. That's all one must do. Receive Him as Savior. And having done that, serve Him by serving another and living for Him, and living for His glory. May God help you to do that and help all of us to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do pray that You'd help us to do that, that You'd help us to see that we have a function. We have a place in this body, this local body. But

"Gifts for the Greater Good" by S. Lewis Johnson

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wherever we go, whatever local body we are a member of, we have a place in that body and a function. And help us to do that. Help us to take that seriously, to be caring toward one another, and seek to be a blessing. And as we do that, You'll let us know how we're to do it. As we're open to it, You'll –