



Research article

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND INDIVIDUALISTIC SPIRITUALITY: SOME EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS ON 1 CORINTHIANS 12–14

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

Article history:

Received 24 Sept. 2020

Accepted 05 Oct. 2020

Available online: 28 Oct. 2020

Keywords:

Individualistic spirituality, Christians, Corinth, Paul, Spirit, Spiritual gifts

Contemporary Christianity shows a misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of the gifts of the Spirit. Some Christians use gifts of the Spirit for their private benefits; others consider the display of spiritual gift by a person as a measure of the person's level of spirituality. Some gifts are considered more valuable than others. In the euphoria of spirituality, most contemporary Christians place an exaggerated estimate on the more spectacular and ecstatic "spiritual gifts", especially *glossolalia*. One agrees with Alfred Koduah that "If the current situation remains unchecked, it would be a matter of time that the masses will lose hope in the empty sensationalism being projected in most churches today."¹ This paper is the author's contribution to the church's efforts in checking the erroneous view about spiritual gifts as expressed in the worship life of many contemporary Christians. The paper found that a proper understanding of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 12–14 serves as an antidote to individualistic spirituality and hence, has the potential of bringing uniting the church and promoting its growth.

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¹ Alfred Koduah, *Christianity in Ghana Today* (Accra: Church of Pentecost Press, 2004), 156.



Introduction: Background Issues

First Corinthians was written to a church with numerous challenges, many of which are common in today's churches. Among these is the issue of spiritual gifts, which is discussed in chapters 12–14. In their ignorance, members of the Corinthian church misconceived and misapplied their abundant Spirit-given abilities. The gifts, which were intended to be used for the benefit of the entire Christian community, became a personal "property" for personal benefits. In other words, individualistic spirituality (the use of spiritual gifts solely for individual benefit) became the order of the day as people used their gifts for their own edification instead of edifying the church as well. Gifts were regarded as a measure of the recipient's level of spirituality. Some gifts were considered spectacular and everybody desired those ones. This problem of the abuse of spiritual gifts prompted a response from Paul (chp. 12–14) which serves to correct rather than to inform.² This paper examines some major issues related to spiritual gifts in the context of 1 Corinthians 12–14. The major contention is that true spirituality consists in love of the brethren

which manifests itself by making all attempts to bring edification and strengthening to the diversified body of Christ.

The City of Corinth was one of the largest, wealthiest, and most prestigious cities in ancient Greece.³ Corinth had been a leading center of Greek power before the Romans subdued it in 146 BCE. Corinth, like most ancient Greek cities, had an acropolis which rose 2,000 feet and was used both for defense and for worship.⁴ The city was a center of commerce and cultural activities, and people from all parts of the Roman Empire usually gathered there for one activity or the other. Yet, most Christians in Corinth were poor (1 Cor 1:26). The Corinthian church was established by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18) with the help of two Jewish believers, Priscilla and Aquila. The letter was written in about 55 AD toward the close of Paul's three-year residency in Ephesus (Acts 16:5–9; 20; 31), during his third missionary journey.⁵

² Gordon D. Fee, *God's Enabling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 148.

³ Peter Enns and Mark Strauss, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 355.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1562

⁵ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1562.



Paul wrote this letter to address a number of issues which he became aware of through a personal report received from Chloe's household (chp. 1–6) and a letter from the church. The church began to evaluate Paul, the Apostle, and Apollo, the pastor of the church. This created division in the church (see 3:1-10). Apollos's spoken rhetoric was better than Paul's (although Paul's argumentation in his letters was skillful; cf. 2 Cor. 10:10). Paul discouraged this behavior and drew their attention to the fact that only God's Day of Judgment would properly evaluate God's servants (1 Cor. 3:13–4:5). Paul also addresses the issue of sexual immorality and marriages raised in their letter (1 Cor. 7:1; see also 6:12–13) and reports about them (1 Cor. 5:1). Another issue the letter deals with is that of food offered to idols. Paul discouraged his readers from eating food offered to idols not only because such act could damage other believers' faith (1 Cor. 8) but also because the spirits the pagans worshiped in the idols are demons (1 Cor. 10:20). Paul also deals with the way and manner Christians ought to observe the Lord's Supper (chp. 11). In chapters 12–14 (which is the focus of this study), Paul responds to questions about spiritual gifts. His major emphasizes is that

gifts should be used to build up the body of Christ.

First Corinthians 12–14 is the single largest text on spiritual things that can be found in Pauline literature.⁶ As such, this text has attracted huge scholarly and popular attention, especially in relation to matters regarding Christian spirituality. Before coming to this section, Paul (from 8:1ff) treats issues related to public worship. He forbids Christian participation in pagan religious activities (see 8:1-10:22). Paul then deals with three issues related to the worship life of his audience, one of these issues being disorderliness in worship (which he treats in the present pericope).

Chapter 12 opens with the subject of spiritual gifts, or perhaps spiritual people, and chapter 14 ends with Paul's conclusion about prophecy and speaking in tongues, two of those gifts. Three facts support the idea that chapters 12–14 constitute a single literary unit. First of all, the repetition of the expression "now concerning" (*peri de*) in 12:1 (cf. also 7:1, 25; 8:1; 16:1, 12) shows that a new theme is beginning. Second, the ideas expressed in 12–14 cluster around spiritual gifts. Third, the issues discussed in

⁶ Fee, *God's Enabling Presence*, 146.



chapters 15 and 16 are not about spiritual gifts, the main subject of 12–14.

The general structure of this literary unit consists in a movement from the general to the particular. It can be outlined as follows:

- i. A basic test concerning spiritual realities (12:1-3);
- ii. The unity and diversity of the body with respect to the operation of various spiritual gifts (12:4-31);
- iii. The emphasis on love as the vehicle through which gifts can operate beneficially (13:1-13) and
- iv. The primacy of edification in the exercise of spiritual gifts, with particular reference to tongues and prophecy (14:1-40)

Paul uses this literary unit to resolve the problems connected with the gifts of the Spirit.⁷ A key misconception was that the Corinthians thought, “those who operate in what they call gift are the only Christians inspired by the Spirit and that those who operate in what they call services and works are only involved in some natural activities

without any inspiration at all.”⁸ The dichotomy between gifts that were inspired by the Spirit and those not inspired by the Spirit is what made their view wrong. There are clues in 12:5, 6, that the Corinthians only accepted the spectacular gift operators to be inspired by the Spirit, an idea which was completely erroneous.⁹ This erroneous view about made them more zealous for the “miraculous gifts” insofar as they demonstrated one’s superior spirituality (14:12). Paul argues instead that the Spirit gives a variety of gifts to people and these gifts are not yardstick to measure the recipient’s spirituality (12:4-11). He legitimizes his argument by contending that the Spirit distributes the gifts according to his sovereign purposes (12:11).

With this background, the study now proceeds to consider the text more closely.

Introductory comments (12:1-3)

Paul indicates a shift in theme by the repeated “now concerning” and the vocative “brothers and sisters” (v. 1). Verse 1 forms a basic introduction to the paragraph (and indeed the whole literary unit from chapter 12 through chapter 14) indicating Paul’s

⁷ John J. Kilgallen, *First Corinthians: An Introduction and Study Guide* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 109.

⁸ Seth Kissi, *The Gift and Spirituality: Understanding the subject in the context of 1 Corinthians* (Accra: African Christian Press, 2014), 5.

⁹ Kissi, *The Gift and Spirituality*, 5.



concern that the Corinthians not be ignorant of certain truths about the things of the Spirit. The word translated concerning is used to mark a new section in 7:1, 25; 8:1 (cf. 8:4); 16:1. The expression *ton pneumatikos* may be masculine, “spiritual people” or neuter, “spiritual gifts” or “the things of the Spirit.”¹⁰ *Pneumatikos* occurs fourteen times in 1 Corinthians in reference to: (a) persons, 2: 13, 15; 3: 1; 14: 37; (b) things (“spiritual gifts”), 2:13; 9:11; 10:3ff.; 14:1; (c) the spiritual resurrection body in contrast to the natural body, 15:44-6 (four times). In 12:1 it seems *pneumatikos* should be read as neuter.¹¹ Paul could not refer to his audience as spiritual because earlier (3:1) he laments that they were not very mature spiritually. Again, the immediate context of 12:1 seems to emphasize gifts than on those who possess them.

Verse 2 reinforces Paul’s statement that he does not want them to be ignorant about “spiritual things.” Here, Paul is either contrasting the former state of the Corinthians (when they were idolaters) with the present state as Christians (v. 2) or setting forth “a pagan example against which they are to understand both ‘inspired

utterances’ and significance of ‘tongues.’”¹² Whatever one’s position, one thing is clear: The Corinthians were spiritually blind in the past but now Paul (through the Spirit) is going to enlighten them. As a typical Jew, Paul disdains the idols as incapable of speaking, hearing or answering. The “‘inspired utterances’” were however not new to the Corinthians because it was part of their pagan worship tradition, despite the mute idols. Though the Corinthians knew about “inspired utterances”, they needed instructions on intelligibility of such utterances and what its content should be (that is, Christian content).

Paul concludes his opening word using the emphatic “Therefore.” The expression “I want you to understand” (v. 3, RSV) echoes “I do not want you to be uninformed” (RSV) of verse 1. In the present verse, Paul teaches that that true spirituality (far from being determined on the basis of spiritual utterances or manifestations) is manifested in a person’s personal confession that Jesus is the Lord. The assertion “No one ... says ‘Jesus is/be *anathema* (“cursed”)!” may indicate that some people in the Corinthian church said “Jesus is/be cursed” or that Paul is just giving a hypothetical example that Paul gives to make the point

¹⁰ Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 152.

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of the issue consult, Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 152-153.

¹² Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 153-154.



that one can recognize a Spirit-possessed person by the utterance of the person.¹³ Both positions have their own challenges; yet, this point seems clear: “Paul’s point is not to establish a means of ‘testing the spirits,’ but to remind them that ‘inspired utterance’ as such is not evidence of being ‘led by the Spirit.’”¹⁴ The present author agrees with Fee that the second option is more plausible. Paul’s point then is that the confession “Jesus is Lord” (cf. Rom. 10:9) comes from the Spirit but “Jesus is cursed” does not rest on divine inspiration. In the Septuagint, the word *kyrios* (“Lord”) translates YHWH in the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 40:3; Matt. 3:3; 16:16; John 4:2, 15). Paul therefore alludes to the deity of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit by the use of expressions “Jesus is Lord” and “Spirit of God.”

The Source, Unity and Diversity of all Spiritual Gifts (12:4-11)

In this section, Paul argues that a healthy Church needs diversity, not uniformity, in gifts. Diversity, in Pauline thought, is God’s own will and means by which he (God) ensures that the church has all the spiritual “nutrients” for growth. Paul offers a considerable list of spiritual gifts, nine in all (vv. 8-10). He does not intend to give an

exhaustive list but just a representative of the diverse manifestations of the Spirit.¹⁵

Paul begins this section noting that, “There are different kinds (*diaireseis*) of gifts (*charismaton*)” (v. 4). The noun *diaireseis* occurs only here in the New Testament and may be translated “varieties” or “differences” to fit the emphasis on the variety of gifts in the context. The cognate verb *diairein* clearly means “to distribute” (in 12:11) and so some interpreters render it “allotments” or “distributions.” *Diaireseis* is a compound of *haireseis* (“factions”) in 11:19, but without the negative meaning of that word. Paul refutes the idea that only the more spectacular gifts are important. His emphasis on the variety of gifts clearly shows that the Holy Spirit considers every spiritual gift important.

The term *charismata* comes from *charizomai* and means a gracious favor or benefit bestowed or received without being based on any merit or being deserved by the recipient. Here, Paul highlights the “giving” nature of the gifts, while in verse 1 he stresses the spiritual nature of the gift. Paul’s point is that no one deserves the gift he/she has received from God. With such understanding, the Corinthians are to guard

¹³ Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 156.

¹⁴ Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 157.

¹⁵ Fess, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 160.



against any form of pride that comes with the “possession” of the so-called spectacular gifts because those spiritual things are undeserved gifts that are given freely by the Holy Spirit.

The word *charisma* is characteristically Pauline because of the 17 appearances in the New Testament, it occurs only once outside of the Pauline literature (1 Pet. 4:10). Seven appear in this letter, and five in this chapter (12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31). *Charisma* is the consequence of grace. The possessor does not deserve it. *Charisma* may therefore be rendered “grace-gift”.

Pauline use of *charisma* varies. He uses it to refer to God’s action in Christ to bring salvation to humans (Rom. 5:15–16; 6:23), his own miraculous deliverance from life-threatening danger (2 Cor. 1:11), God’s election and calling of Israel (Rom. 11:29), the absence of sexual passion that allows celibate devotion to God (7:7), the manifestations of God’s working in believers for cooperate benefit. Paul’s choice of *charisma*, rather than *pneumatikos* (12:1) allows him to effectively correct the popular Corinthian perception about spiritual gifts. He wants them to know that spiritual gifts are not a “badge of spirituality,” but a “mark of grace”.

Paul contention in verse 5-6 is that there is a unity behind all of this diversity. The allotment of gifts is diverse and falls into three broad categories: “grace-gifts” (*charismata*) which come from the Spirit, “services” (*diakonai*) which come from the Lord, and “workings” (*energēmata*) which come from the God. Whether one has grace-gifts, services or workings, the source is the same one true Triune God. The words “grace-gifts,” “services” and “workings” are not distinct categories but just three different ways of looking at the “manifestations” of the Spirit (cf. v.7). The fact that “both ‘gifts’ and ‘workings’ occurs again in the list” and that “both ‘God’ and ‘the one and the same Spirit’ are respectively the subject of the same verb (‘works’) in vv. 6 and 11” are some of the evidence that Fee uses to support the above position.¹⁶ Paul’s contention is that all gifts come from the same divine source and so there is no point valuing one manifestation higher than the other.¹⁷

According to Fee, Paul’s use of word *hekastos* (“each one”) in verse 7 is not meant to say that every individual person in the community has his/her own gifts; rather, “each one” is used to contrast the individualized instances of the immediately

¹⁶ Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 161.

¹⁷ Kissi, *The Gifts and Spirituality*, 7.



preceding collective (“in all people”).¹⁸ If so, then “each one” mean “everyone who has gift of the Spirit.” Though what each one is given (according to this verse) is *phanerosis tou pneumatos* (“manifestations of the Spirit”) rather than *charisma* (“gifts”), Paul’s change in word is not meant to say what follows cannot be called gifts; rather it is meant to signify that Paul’s emphasis in the unit under consideration (chs. 12–14) is on the Spirit, and not the gifts.

Paul then moves on to state the purpose for which these gifts are given, the common good of the body of Christ (v. 7b). This statement is illustrated by examples in verses 8-10 and concluded in verse 11. Each gift is to work in unity with other gifts. Paul gives the hint that God frown upon individualistic spirituality. Here, John F. MacArthur Jr. serves us well with the following quote, “Spiritual gifts are given to edify the body, not the gifted individual (1 Cor 14:4 - 5, 17, 26). When you see someone using his gift selfishly or as a performance, or putting other people into a state of unconsciousness, you can be sure that whatever he is doing, he is not using a legitimate spiritual gift.”¹⁹ Paul’s argument that “spiritual gifts” are for the common

good of the church prepares the reader for his concerns in chapters 13 and 14 that the manifestation of the Spirit during the assembly of believers is meant for the building up of the entire community rather than for the sole benefit of the individual believer whom the Spirit uses as instrument to manifest himself.

In verse 8-10, the Apostle gives a sampling of gifts: to one a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge, to another faith, to another gifts of healings, to another powers to effect miracles, to another prophecy, to another discernment of spirits, to another tongues, to another interpretation of tongues. Paul’s emphasis is on the diversity of the Spirit’s manifestations in the Christian community. He uses alternate pronominal adjectives, *heteros* (another of a different kind) and *allos* (another of the same kind) probably to create an ordering feature or to divide the gifts. Different scholars have grouped these gifts differently. For instance, Michael Green grouped the gifts into three classes:

- i. Gift to know (wisdom, knowledge and discerning of spirit).
- ii. Gift to do (faith, healing and miracle).

¹⁸ Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 163.

¹⁹ John F. MacArthur, Jr, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Oasis International Ltd, 1992), 161.



- iii. Gift to say (prophecy, tongues and interpretation).²⁰

A discussion of the various gifts Paul listed and how they should be grouped lies outside the scope of this paper. However, the following points could be noted. Firstly, it is not Paul's intention to give an exhaustive list of gifts since it varies from the lists in Romans 12:6–8 and Ephesians 4:11. Secondly, the list comprises both what some might label "spectacular" and "more ordinary gifts," though Paul does not make such distinctions. Thirdly, the categories overlap and illuminate each other.

The Apostle ends this part by making it clear that it is the same Spirit who is behind all the manifestations. The expression "one and the same Spirit" connects well with both verses 4-6 and 8-9 (here like before) emphasizing that it is the same God who by the Spirit "works" all the manifestations listed in the preceding verses. Paul's contention that it is the Spirit who determines what gift one possesses, not the recipient (v. 11) highlights the fact that one cannot get what the Spirit does not desire for him/her and so whatever the Spirit has given to anyone should be put to use rather than

craving for others. The assertion that the Spirit acts sovereignly in distributing gifts to members of the Christian community is the Pauline way of saying "The wind/Spirit blows where it/he wills" (John 3:8).

The Diversity and Interdependence of Members of the Body (12:12–31)

In this section Paul, using the analogy of the human body, develops his earlier point that the manifestation of the Spirit is given for mutual benefit (12:7). The passage constitutes an extended image from 12:12 until 12:27 concerning the human body and Christ's body which is the church. The text can be divided into two, the first (vv. 12-19) contends that the body of Christ is made up of many parts, not one, and the second (vv. 20-27) argues that the various parts of the does not constitute multiple bodies but one. There are not much exegetical problems in this section and so the study summarizes Paul's point as follows. Paul teaches believers' oneness by saying that all believers were baptized in the one Spirit into one body and were all given one Spirit to drink (v. 13, cf. Gal. 3:26–28). He then moves on to contend that if one part of the body refuses to function the entire body cannot function. His argument is that if all the body was made up of one part then the

²⁰ Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 165.



functions of the other parts would be lacking, and therefore, each part of the body must be considered as equally important. In 12:20-27, Paul argues that because there is one body, one member cannot say to another, “I have no need for you.” Paul’s point is that the body would no longer be a body under such conditions and the common good eclipsed. Thus, even in this second section (12:20-27) the focus is still on the member of the body, of whom, the rest are inclined to think they have no need. In 12:28 Paul focuses our attention back on God as the sovereign One who organizes the gifts and people in the church (12:28). In 12:29-30, Paul asks several rhetorical questions which demand a “No” answer. He raises these questions to make the point that no one person has all the gifts. Thus, his rhetorical questions can be generalized as: “Are all one thing?” or “Do all have the same thing?”²¹ Paul lists a sampling of members that God has placed in the church body. From the use of the ordinal series—“first . . . second . . . third . . .”—they appear to be ranked in order of importance. However, Paul’s intention is to emphasize diversity in the manifestation of the Spirit rather than to rank them.²² Apostles appear first as the founders of church communities.

“Miraculous deeds” and “grace-gifts of healings” (12:28) appear in reverse order in 12:9–10, suggesting that one should not impose any strict chain of preeminence on the items in the list.

The following points are noteworthy from this section. All gifts are of equal importance. No gift is superior to others. None of the gifts should be given undue attention over and above the others. The spiritual gifts are to unite the body of Christ together and not to divide them. Spiritual gifts are given for equipping, edifying and preparing Christians for the work of the ministry. No one should be redundant in the vineyard of the Lord. It will be unwise to assume that because someone exercises a spectacular gift that person is more spiritual than one who has less spectacular gift.

In 12:31a he commands them to desire the “greater gifts” with 12:31b providing an excellent transition into chapter 13 where he shows his audience a “more excellent way” (31b, RSV). The study proceeds to examine this excellent way in the next section.

The Superiority of Love (13:1-13)

The supposedly title of the chapter is “The Greatest Gift.” It was noted earlier that 12:31b really introduces this chapter. Verses

²¹ Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 188.

²² Fee, *God’s Enabling Presence*, 187.



1-3 all have a similar structure and argue for the pre-eminent nature of love in comparison with even the greatest gifts or sacrificial religious acts. Verse 1 begins with a condition, and verses 2 and 3 with two conditions each. In each case the conditional clauses are followed by the words *de mē echō agapēn* (“but have not love”) and then by the main clause in the Greek. One gathers from this section that anything done without love lacks Christian spirituality. Without love the Christian can do all (wondrous) things (including even causing mountains to move) but he/she will remain without any value in God’s sight.²³ The Greek word *agapē* (“love”) was uncommon in pre-Christian times.²⁴ It is used here to refer to the love of Christians and elsewhere in the New Testament in reference to the love God and Christ have for each other (cf. John 15:10; 17:26) and for humanity (cf. John 3:26; Rom. 5:8).

Verses 4-7 personifies love and makes it the subject of a series of verbs. These verses describe the practical nature of love, while verses 8-13 argue for the permanence of love, enduring beyond

spiritual gifts, indeed even beyond such things as faith and hope. Love is characterized by patience, kindness and the lack of jealousy, conceit, or pride (vv. 5-6). Love endures all things (v.7). All the gifts, be it tongues, prophecy or any other, will *katargēthēsetai* (“pass away” or “disappear”) but love will forever remain relevant (v. 8).²⁵ The point is that the other gifts are temporal, limited or incomplete, in relation to love, which is perfect. This point is to illustrate using analogies from human life experiences (vv. 11-12) and finally, Paul crowns love as the *meizōn* (“greatest”) (v.13).

In contending for the superiority of the way of love, Paul intends to diffuse the Corinthians’ competitive notions about gifts, which appear to have brought conflict among those who deem their particular gift more spectacular than others’. Paul’s point is that the use of spiritual gifts must be guided by love. Therefore, God frowns upon religious display of gifts by one who is not acting as according what is described in verses 4-7. In other words, any use of the gifts which is not motivated by love is unacceptable before God. In the context of the present passage, love simply means concern for the other members of the community. Love serves as

²³ Paul Ellingworth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians* Second Edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), n.p. electronic edition.

²⁴ Ellingworth and Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians*, n.p.

²⁵ Ellingworth and Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians*, n.p.



the check on the exercise of the gifts. Love in this context is the fulfillment of the love whose demands are summed up in “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Without love, charismatic gifts have no real value because love is the way, the manner of life within which all the gifts are to find their proper place. To conclude, chapter 13 is a perfect reflection on the theme of “the common good” (cf. 12:7).²⁶

Intelligibility in Worship (14:1-40)

Having contended for the preeminence of love (in chp. 13), Paul moves on to encourage the church to excel at edifying others with their spiritual gifts, as an application of that love. Chapter 14 falls into two parts. The first part comprises verses 1-25 deals with the necessity for intelligibility in worship, a necessary ingredient for edification of the church. That the setting is the church gathered together for worship is clear from verses, 5, 16, 17, 19, 23, 25, 26, 28, 33, and 35. The structure of 14:1–19 falls into three units: the criterion of edification (14:1–5); the criterion of intelligibility (14:6–12); the application of the criteria to speech in public worship (14:13–19). Paul argues that prophecy is to be preferred to tongues unless those tongues are interpreted

and so understood by everyone present. Tongue-speaking (without interpretation) is a private affair between the individual and God for no-one else understands, the speaker alone benefit from it. In other words, prophecy is to be preferred to uninterpreted tongues because in the case of the latter, no one is edified, unless the tongues are interpreted (vv. 1-6). Paul illustrates what he means by uninterpreted tongues through the use of musical instruments and languages that the speaker does not know (vv. 7-11).

By contending that tongues must be interpreted in prayer and worship to benefit the entire assembly (vv. 13-19), Paul is not saying that tongues speaking is inferior to prophecy. Rather, his point is that in the church, intelligibility is preferred to non-intelligibility, because the former seeks to edify the whole community while the latter edifies only the individual. The pursuit of love demands that in church one seeks to edify the whole community. For Paul, tongues is basically for private use is betrayed in statements like, “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues” (14:5) and “I think God I speak in tongues more than all of you” (14:18), the one who speaks in tongues is speaking to God (14:2) and thereby edifying him/herself (14:4).

²⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 652.



In 14:20-22 Paul urges the Corinthians to be mature in their thinking (regarding tongues) and quotes from Isaiah to demonstrate the purpose for tongues. The Apostle moves on to give the conclusion or results that follow from a wrong perspective on this issue as far as non-Christians were concerned (vv. 23-25). Fee outlines Paul's argument in verse 20-25 as follows:²⁷

²⁰ Exhortation: Redirect your thinking

(about the function of tongues)

²¹ OT text: Tongues do not lead people to

obedience

²² Application: So then—

Assertion 1—Tongues a sign not for
believers but for unbelievers

Assertion 2—Prophecy [a sign] not
for unbelievers but for believers

²³ Illustration 1—Effect of tongues (1) on
unbelievers

²⁴⁻²⁵ Illustration 2—Effect of prophecy (2) on
unbelievers

The second section comprises verses 26-40 which focuses on the necessity for order in worship.²⁸ Apparently, there was

disorderliness in the worship life of the Corinthian Church, especially in relation to tongues speaking (cf. v. 23, 27-28). It seems more than one person spoke forth concurrently, making the service noisy (and unintelligible).²⁹ As a corrective measure, Paul argues that each gift has something to contribute to the edification of the church; yet, this must be done in an orderly manner (v. 26). He then instructs his audience on tongues and its interpretation (vv. 27-28) as well as prophecy and its discernment (vv. 29-31). For Paul, just as the God behind Christian inspiration is not a God of disorder, so the manifestation of God's gifts and inspiration should not be disorderly; congregational worship must not be out of control (vv. 32-33). After these and other discussions Paul climaxes his discussions with statement "all things should be done decently and in order" (v. 40).

Conclusion

The study has yielded the following conclusions. First, the different gifts have a common source, the Triune God. Second, it is the Spirit who sovereignly determines one's gift. Third, no single believer has all the gifts. Again, individualistic spirituality

²⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 677.

²⁸ W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* vol. 10 edited by F. E.

Gaebelein. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 271. See also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 652.

²⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 688.



has no place in true Christianity. Being “spiritual” means the use of one’s spiritual endowments to edify the Christian community. More so, the paper has also brought to the fore the need to stand against the abuse in the use of gifts in our day. This calls for sound biblical exegesis of the passages related to spiritual gifts and their use. Further still, the paper has pointed out that it is wrong to consider someone as spiritual simply because the Spirit manifests many gifts through that person. True Christian spirituality is Christ-centered (12:3), other-centered (12:7) and collaborative (12:14-23). Therefore, true spirituality consists in love of the brethren which manifests itself by making all attempts to bring edification and strengthening to the diversified body of Christ. This is the kind of spirituality that is needed for the survival of the Christian Church now and forever.

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