

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Not *All* the Gifts, ...but Desire the *Greater Gifts*

by Dan Trygg

“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ... <sup>27</sup> Now y’all are Christ’s body, and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? <sup>30</sup> All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? <sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the greater gifts... <sup>14:1</sup> Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-19,27-31; 14:1

As we studied through Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:7-16 and 1 Peter 4:10,11, it seemed quite clear that **we all received a spiritual gift when we came to Christ. The emphasis in those passages was to clearly perceive and utilize our spiritual gifts** for the fulfillment of God’s purpose in our lives, and for the help, maturation and upbuilding of the other Christians in Christ’s Body. **There was no suggestion that our spiritual gifting might vary from that fundamental appointment which God has assigned to us.**

As we saw last time, **in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Paul seems to be presenting a somewhat different picture about the spiritual gifts** he describes in those verses. **By using present-tense verbs and participles** (“-ing” words), **he seems to be describing giftings that are temporarily distributed as the Spirit leads**, when the believers meet, or whenever the Spirit may desire. These giftings seem to be primarily revelatory in nature, or episodic inworkings of power, given to deal with a present circumstance. **Interestingly, the giftings in this section are *not* referred to as “members” or “parts” in these verses.** They are called “gifts” (*charismata*), “services” (*diakonōn*) and “inworkings” (*energēmatōn*). The same word for “gifts” (*charismata*) is used in Romans 12:6 and 1 Peter 4:10. The emphasis of this word is that the ability to serve is *not* a human ability, but a capacity that is graciously provided by the Holy Spirit.

**Then, there seems to be a shift in focus.** Verse 11 begins with a “but”, a strong signal of a change in thought. **He acknowledges that “the one and the same Spirit” inworks all these episodic gifts mentioned in vs. 4-10. He distributes them (present tense) to each person according as He purposes.** Then he turns his attention to the “members” or “parts” of the Body of Christ. “For just as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are being many, it is one body, in the same way also is Christ.” It is important to note that the word translated “for” here is *not* a strong causal connector. It can be used to introduce an illustration or an example, as here. **What Paul is saying is that the temporary distribution of the Spirit’s inworking in 4-11 was similar to the distribution of functional parts in a body.** The Body of Christ is like that, an interactive organism of many parts.

**Then, in verse 13 there is a change in the verb tense.** Instead of present tense action, Paul talks in terms of past action. “By one Spirit we *were* all baptized into the Body of Christ, ...and we all *were* made to drink of one Spirit.” There can be no question that **this refers to receiving the Holy Spirit when we were born from above.** [For those who have been confused about “the baptism of the Holy Spirit”, this is the only time that the NT clearly talks about it. What Paul clearly teaches is that anyone in Christ *was baptized in the Holy Spirit*. It is *not* a secondary or later work of grace. It is an *initial* work of grace. It is what happens when we were born from above. By the Spirit we were baptized into the Body of Christ.] It doesn’t matter what our background was. **All people, ...of any racial origin, or socio-economic background..., are baptized into the Body of Christ the same way, and are made to drink of the Spirit. Paul’s point is that *this has already been done, and we are now members of the Body of Christ.***

**The Body is not *one* member or part, it is comprised of *many* members or parts.** This is the point of the next few verses. Don’t compare yourself to other parts, or think that you have to be like other parts. Every part has a unique and valuable function. They are not supposed to be the same. **God placed the members, each one of them, in the Body according as He desired.** Note the past action. God already placed the parts according as He wanted them to function. This language sounds like Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4.

**The next eight verses emphasize again the importance and value of each part, ...how they are supposed to be different, ...how each part is significant and should be *welcomed, honored and respected* for what they bring to the**

common benefit of the entire Body. In fact, God has composed (past tense) the Body so that there would be no division in the Body, but **all parts should care for each other**. If one part suffers, the other members suffer with it. If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Paul says, “**But y’all are the Body of Christ and members of it.**”

Verse 28 ties directly back to verse 27, “...and whom, on the one hand, God appointed (placed) in the *ekklēsia* (called-out assembly, church), first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.” Note the past tense here. Paul is not talking about a present-tense distribution of temporary gifts, here. He is talking about a past designation or appointment of a function in the Body of Christ. **God already placed or appointed particular gift-functions in the Body**. The numbers here, followed by “then..., then...” would seem to be a ranking of a sort. This will become significant, later. **Apostles**. An apostle literally is a “sent-one”, a representative sent out by Christ. Apostles typically went to new areas to preach the gospel and start new churches (groups of believers meeting together). **Prophets** received revelation from God directly through the Spirit, usually through a dream, vision, revelation or inner word of some kind. They were to speak forth the revelation they received to those it is intended for. It could be for correction, or for edification, encouragement or consolation (12:10; 14:3). **Teachers** are people spiritually-gifted and empowered to teach. They are not just people *able* to teach, but *empowered by the Spirit* to teach. **Miracles** were mentioned in 12:10. The word literally means “power”, or “powerful acts”. Jesus’ and early church ministry were characterized by signs, wonders and miracles (acts of power) (Acts 2:22; 6:8; 8:13). **Gifts of Healings** were also mentioned earlier (vs. 9). Note again the plural is used both of “gifts” and of “healings”, indicating a wide variation of types and expressions both in approach and in result. **While there is a temporal expression of some of these giftings, there seems also a more permanent foundational gifting that God has assigned to some people in the Body**. **Helps** is a word meaning literally to “take up over against”, implying taking up a task with someone else. **Administrations** is an interesting word. It is the Greek word, *kubernēsis*. You can see how over time this was mispronounced and slurred through the Latin “gubernare” to become “govern” eventually in English. At the time of the NT, however, it was less about governing control and hierarchy than about giving Spirit-directed guidance. The word was commonly used for the navigator or pilot of a ship. Interestingly, he did not sit up front. He sat at the rear of the boat, so he could more clearly see the direction of the boat. He calculated the course and gave instruction and guidance to the crew members, so they could work together as a team to get the boat where it needed to go. It is important to remember that the *ekklēsia* was a small group of people meeting together to build each other up, and maybe a network of home gatherings in a city. There were no buildings, or a business presence, or even offices, as in many modern churches. Whatever a *kubernēsis* was in that time had to do with Spirit-inspired perspective, wise counsel and guidance, and being able to get others to follow. **Kinds of tongues**. The word “various” is not there in the Greek. It is implied by the word, “kinds”. We saw this phrase in verse 10. Paul mentioned that there were “tongues of men and of angels” (13:1). These are languages, not nonsense gibberish.

**Then verse 29 and 30 are rhetorical questions in Greek. The format used for each question is expecting a negative answer.** Not are all apostles? *No*. Not are all prophets? *No*. Not are all teachers? *No*. Not are all miracle-workers? *No*. Not do all have gifts of healings? *No*. Not do all speak with tongues? *No*. [As an aside, the language is very specific. Some would want to differentiate between the gift of tongues, and a personal prayer language, or even a one-time “sign” of the baptism of the Spirit. The language here excludes *all* these possibilities. Do all *speak* with tongues? *No!*] Not do all interpret? *No*. **The clear lesson of these questions is that no one will have all the gifts, ...nor should we expect everyone to function in all the giftings.** God has not designed things that way. He designed us to need each other.

Then verse 31 adds another dimension to this whole spiritual gifts reality. **By encouraging us, “But earnestly desire the greater gifts”, Paul seems to indicate, again, that our experience of the spiritual gifts is not static. There seems to be room to grow and be granted the experience of other giftings, and even to develop facility in the “greater gifts”.** These “greater gifts” would seem to be the ones listed in the ranking Paul gave, ...first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, next miracle workers, next gifts of healings. These seem to be set apart from other gifts, at least if the listing he gave is meant to be understood as some kind of ranking of importance. Apostles, prophets and teachers are listed in Ephesians 4:11, ...and prophets and teachers are mentioned in Romans 12:6,7. Peter refers to the “speaking gifts” as well in 1 Peter 4:11. Ephesians 4:11,12 emphasizes the role of these giftings in equipping us all to do the work of serving one another to build up the Body of Christ. **In addition, Paul would later exhort the Corinthians to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (14:1). The word translated as “earnestly desire” means to be “zealous for” and even to “seek after”.**

So, to sum up our survey of spiritual giftings so far:

**(1.) We all were given a spiritual gift**, a grace apportionment to serve the Body of Christ; **(2.) The Spirit may give us certain temporary gifts** to use on specific occasions; **(3.) No one has all the gifts, ...nor should we expect to utilize every gift**; **(4.) It is possible to grow and expand our spiritual gift experiences and our gift-set**; **(5.) We should seek to function in the “greater gifts”, especially prophesy**; but, ultimately, **(6.) God decides.**