

The Pastor and the Spirit: Priorities from 1 Cor. 12-14
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I. Introduction

- A. These chapters do not tell us everything we need to know about the Spirit's work, but they are particularly relevant for us as pastors.
1. These chapters have the church in view.
 2. These chapters have the gathered assembly in view.
 3. Because this text is in many ways corrective, it illuminates certain tendencies we can have in this area of our doctrine and practice.
- B. Familiarity with these chapters will promote not only understanding, but also promote desire for the Spirit's work, and practice of the gifts, and experience of God's active presence in our lives and in our churches.

II. The Setting of 1 Cor. 12-14

- A. The Corinthian correspondence gives us a wonderful window into the rollicking relationship that existed between the apostle Paul and the church in Corinth.
- B. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is responding to circumstances that had developed between the time he founded the church and the writing of the letter about 3 years later.
- Paul had received a report from "Chloe's people" about factions in the church (1:11)
 - He has also heard about the case of incest (5:1), and factions at the Lord's Supper (11:18), and erroneous speculation about the resurrection (15:12)
 - Paul's responses are marked by the phrase "Now concerning" (*peri. de.:* 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12)
 - Chapter 12 marks one of these markers: "Now concerning spiritual gifts . . ."

C. Structurally, chapters 12-14 illustrate a common method Paul uses in setting forth his arguments in I Cor. with an A-B-A pattern to structure his arguments:

- A: Paul addresses the issue in general terms that place it in a larger perspective
 - B: Paul appears to digress, but in actuality provides important theological foundations for the issue at hand.
 - A: Paul responds specifically to the actual matter at hand
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- A: 12: Paul addresses spiritual gifts in a general way and provides an overall framework for their understanding.
 - B: 13: Paul addresses the virtue of love, which transcends the gifts in importance and is to govern their exercise.
 - A: 14: Paul deals specifically with the key issue: the Corinthians' abuse of the gift of tongues

III. Pastoral Priorities from 1 Cor. 12-14

A. The Priority of the Gospel (12:1-3)

- The opening verses of ch. 12 are often overlooked but are actually vital to understanding these chapters as a unit.
- In this section where Paul will teach that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to all believers, he prepares for this idea by making it clear who it is who has the Spirit to begin with.
- Unlike pagans and Jewish opponents, it's those who confess "Jesus is Lord" who have the Spirit. Everyone who makes a saving confession of Jesus Christ is by definition "spiritual," because that can only be done by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.
- With this definition of "who is really spiritual?" Paul exalts the centrality of the gospel. It's the transforming effect of the gospel that is pre-eminent in terms of spiritual experience.
- We must never isolate our pneumatology from the gospel; biblically, the doctrine of the Spirit is subordinate to Christ and His saving work.

“A great Christian leader of an earlier century, Bishop J.C. Ryle, suggested that the gospel may be spoiled in a number of ways. We can spoil the gospel by substituting for Christ’s saving work on the cross (for example, our good deeds, as Pelagius did). We can spoil Christ’s work by adding to it (for example, faith plus circumcision, as in the Galatian error). We can also spoil the gospel by disproportion when secondary biblical accents become primary (for example, clerical clothing). This latter problem is particularly relevant to the present discussion. We can spoil the gospel when the NT sense of proportion is lost and pneumatology becomes our primary emphasis rather than Christology. The idea in some charismatic circles, for example, that ‘the major compass point for moving ahead in active ministry’ is not ‘the cross’ but ‘charisma’ is extremely troubling.” (Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, p. 275)

B. The Priority of Variety (12:4-11)

- With the repetition of “varieties,” Paul seeks to begin to broaden the Corinthians’ perspective on the work of the Spirit.
- He also does this by a transformation and reinterpretation of their terminology.
- In v. 1, Paul takes up the issue of “spiritual gifts” using a term most likely brought up by the Corinthians: pneumatikōn (pneumatikw/n: “spiritual things/persons”).
- The term refers to “spiritual phenomena”—spiritual gifts, but with the particular emphasis of something that is manifestly of the Spirit (i.e., a more dramatic display of the Spirit). In the context of these chapters, they are most likely inquiring about Spirit-inspired speech.¹
- Paul brilliantly shifts the terminology: they ask about pneumatikw/n, but Paul answers in v. 4 using the term charismata (carisma, ta—“gifts”); and then he broadens it further, to include acts of service that are equally inspired by the Spirit.

¹ In *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 24, E. Earle Ellis, noting the use of pneumatikōn with carisma in Rom. 1:11, makes this helpful distinction: “. . . carisma can be used of any or all of the gifts, while pneumatikōn appears to be restricted to gifts of inspired perception, verbal proclamation and/or its interpretation.” Cf. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 563.

- In v. 7, Paul refers to the “manifestation of the Spirit” that each is given. “Manifestation” is an umbrella term for all that the Spirit does, and with this term Paul demolishes the distinction between the various gifts.
- Two implications flow from this “priority of variety” that Paul stresses:
 - All Christians are gifted by the Holy Spirit (v. 7)
 - All the gifts are supernatural
- If we narrow our focus to one gift or a certain *kind* of gift, then we’ve abandoned this Biblical priority
- The purpose of gifts is the good of the entire church (το. συμφερον; 6:12; 10:23; cf, also 7:35, 10:33)

“Paul’s contrasting emphasis falls on the first and last words, “to each” and “for the good” . . .²

C. The Priority of Unity (12:12-31)

- In vv. 12-13, Paul provides the theological basis for unity
- The body metaphor impresses upon them a towering reality: they are united in one body.
- Verse 13 explains how this can be so: their common experience of the Spirit at conversion served to unite them into one body and gave them the same powerful experience of the Holy Spirit. Christians are by definition “Spirit-people”
- Given this reality, we are all necessary for the body: no can say, “I’m not necessary” (vv. 14-21)

² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* (Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 465.

- Given this reality, we are all interdependent in the body: no one say, “I don’t need you” (vv. 21-26)

“The church is not to be like its surrounding society, which always honors those who are already honored. It is to be countercultural and bestow the greatest honor on those who seem to be negligible.”³

- Paul illustrates our interdependence with the gift list in vv. 27ff. In both lists in this chapter, Paul lists tongues and interpretation last, not because they’re the “least of the gifts,” but because these were the gifts the Corinthians were exalting.
- As pastors, we have the privilege of honoring all that the Spirit is doing, of pointing out to our people how the Spirit is in work in their lives regardless of their gifts, and especially of honoring those members who appear weak and unseemly.

D. The Priority of Love (13:1-13)

- Paul’s “paean of love” is actually a rebuke to the Corinthians—a vision of life that specially addresses problems in their midst.
- Apart from love, spiritual gifts and even heroic displays of self-sacrifice are of no value and say nothing about one’s true spiritual condition.

“In none of these instances does Paul depreciate spiritual gifts, but he refuses to recognize *any* positive assessment of *any* of them unless the gift is discharged in love.”⁴

- Love is the infallible measure of the Spirit’s presence and work.

³ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 596.

⁴ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 61.

“The greatest evidence that heaven has invaded our sphere, that the Spirit has been poured out upon us, that we are citizens of a kingdom not yet consummated, is Christian love.”⁵

E. The Priority of Pursuit (14:1, 39; cf. 12:31)

- Although this is not a primary part of Paul’s argument, it is stunning that in the midst of correcting the Corinthians’ flagrant abuse of spiritual gifts, he nonetheless commands them twice to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts” (12:31 and 14:1; cf. 1:4-7).
- From a Biblical perspective, we don’t have the option of merely acknowledging spiritual gifts; we are called to eagerly desire them; the Bible commands not just practice, but an attitude.
- Although the Spirit’s work is in no way limited to more prominent, spectacular gifts, neither does it exclude them.

F. The Priority of Edification (14:1-26)

- In chapter 14, Paul enters the 3rd stage of his argument, taking up the actual issue at hand—the Corinthians’ use of tongues in public worship.
- The structure of the argument in vv. 1-25:
 1. 14:1-5: Comparison of tongues and prophecy, with prophecy being superior for edification
 2. 14:6-12: The reason for (and illustrations of) the unprofitability of tongues: unintelligibility
 3. 14:13-19: Practical instruction for glossolalists: aim for intelligibility
 4. 14:20-25: Comparison of tongues with prophecy, with prophecy being superior

⁵ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 76.

- Paragraphs 1 & 4 compare the two gifts; in between, Paul focuses specifically on their use of tongues (no mention of prophecy). Both paragraphs 2 & 3 end by reaffirming Paul's main priority here: edification.
- The term "edification" in its various forms has occurred 8 times earlier in the letter, and here it is the dominate theme, occurring 7x in this chapter.
- Edification is Paul's unmistakable priority for the gathered church.
- Prophecy's edificatory potential is the reason he redirects them to prophecy over (uninterpreted) tongues:
- Note: Paul's comment that tongues edify the individual is not derogatory: tongues is a gift, it is equated with prayer and praise (vv. 14-17), and Paul will **later** thank God for his abundant experience of this gift (v. 18).
- The "greater gifts" (12:31) are greater to the extent that they build up the gathering as a whole.
- The Necessity Condition for Edification: Intelligibility (vv. 6-12)
- The four "intelligible" gifts listed in v. 6 as being superior to tongues further illustrates Paul's burden in this text—it's not that prophecy is the supreme gift that must be exercised all the time, but that there are a number of gifts that benefit the gathered church, and they do so because they're understandable.

G. The Priority of Order (14:26-39)

1. Goal: edification
2. Guidelines: order

- Tongues are to be limited in number, sequential, and always interpreted (14:27-28)
- Prophecies are to be limited in number, sequential, and tested (14:29-32)
- Christian worship is to reflect the character of God (14:33)

3. Implications:

- Spiritual gifts are not an end in themselves, but they are subservient to the overall goal of edification.
- Spiritual gifts are to be subject to the church's leadership.
 - The very regulation of the gifts is a function of the Spirit—i.e., Spirit-led, Spirit-given leadership.
- Paul provides a vision here not of *mere* order, but one of harmony, peace, joy, and unity fostered by an awareness of who God is and sense of His active presence with us.
- Our corporate gatherings are meant to reflect the nature of the God we worship.

IV. Conclusion

- These chapters alert us to the dangers of a pneumatology that is either distorted or disproportional in its emphases.
- These chapters protect us from isolating the Spirit's work from the gospel and its implications in lives of God's people.
- These chapters free us to pursue the Spirit's work with faith, confident of His desire to empower and equip us, informed as to the purposes of the Spirit's work, and ultimately

positioned to allow the Spirit's work to clarify and strengthen our appreciation of and passion for the gospel.