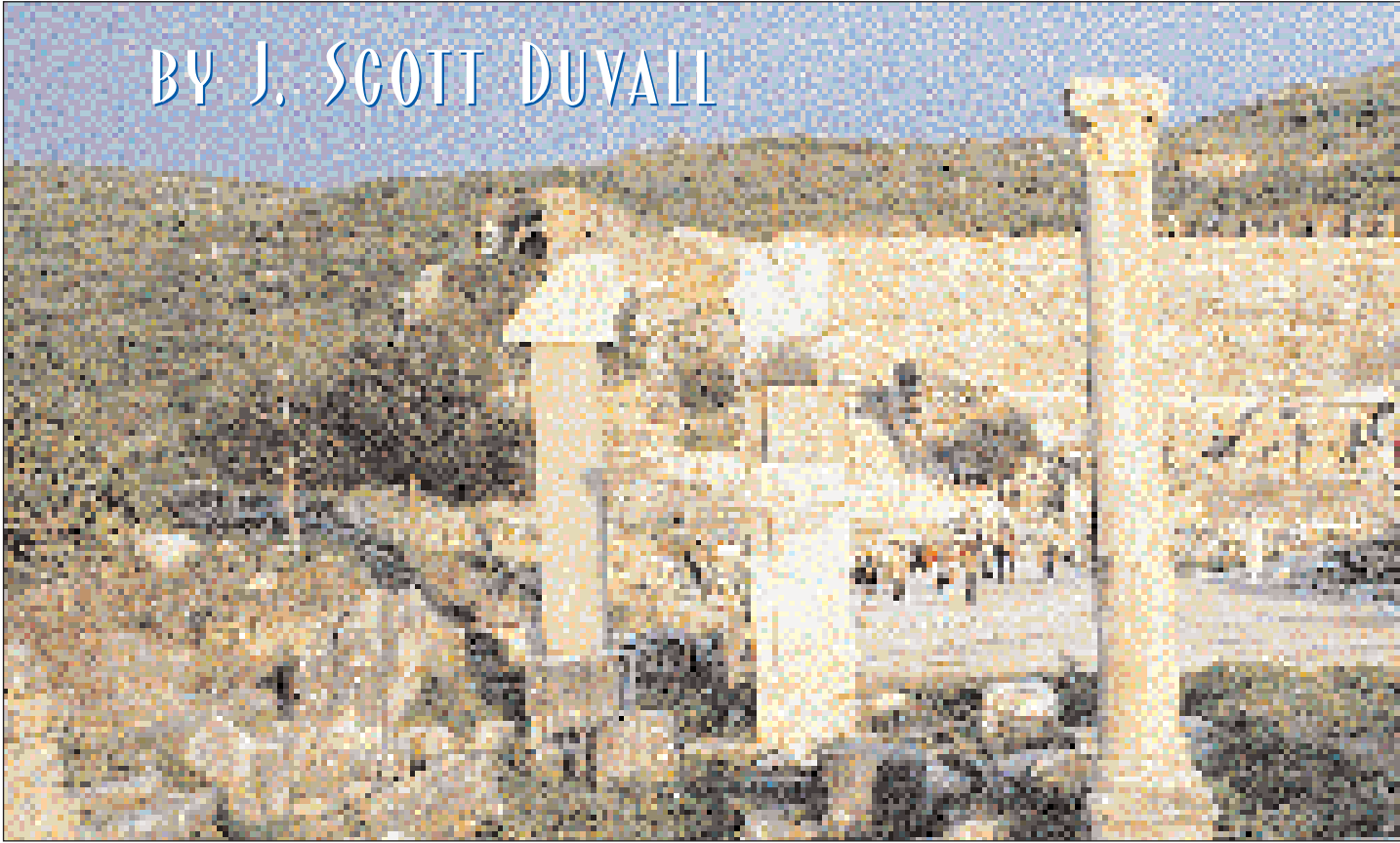


“COMPARING THE “GIFT

BY J. SCOTT DUYALL



When people become Christians, they receive the Gift, the Holy Spirit, who in turn gives them gifts as He sees fit. Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 that the Spirit unifies the church with His presence and diversifies the church with His gifts:

There are different kinds of gifts (*charismata*) [charis MAH tah], but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service (*diakoniai*) [dia ko nee ai], but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working (*energēmata*) [en er GE mah tah], but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Paul's last sentence leads us to define a spiritual gift as a God-given ability or manifestation enabling a believer to

serve God and build up the church. In Paul's letters we see lists of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; and Ephesians 4. Before taking a closer look at why the lists differ and how they are alike, we need to examine the larger context to see how the lists fit into the letters.



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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO KEN TOUCHTON/MUSEUM OF ROMAN CIVILIZATION, I.E. UFI/ROME (2/8/96)

S OF THE SPIRIT" LISTS



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Above: The Grand Theatre at ancient Ephesus.

Below from left to right: Roman forum and Arch of Severus in Rome.

Circus of Caligula and Nero in the Ager Vaticanus (middle 1st Century A.D.) from a model of Rome.

Corinthian columns near Corinth. Greece. Upper Agora of ancient Ephesus.

Understanding the Lists in Context 1 Corinthians

Paul penned 1 Corinthians about A.D. 55–56 during his three-year stay in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8; Acts 19:1, 8-10). The church at Corinth was wracked by problems caused by faulty beliefs, arrogance, and immaturity. Spiritually speak-

ing, the Corinthians felt they had arrived already. And this overly triumphant attitude explains, for example, why they divided into rival factions (with each claiming to be superior) and why they took pride in displaying the more spectacular gifts of the Spirit.

The city of

Corinth was known for its immorality and idolatry, and possibly the Corinthian church had not sufficiently broken with

Lesson Reference:

LWS: Romans 12: 6-11;

1 Corinthians 12:1-11;

Ephesians 4:11-13;

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“The Lists of Gifts in Paul’s Letters”

	<i>1 Cor.</i> 12:8-10	<i>1 Cor.</i> 12:28	<i>1 Cor.</i> 12:29-30	<i>Rom.</i> 12:6-8	<i>Eph.</i> 4:11
Message of wisdom	1				
Message of knowledge	2				
Faith	3				
Gifts of healing	4	5	5		
Miraculous powers / miracles	5	4	4		
Prophecy / prophets	6	2	2	1	2
Distinguishing between spirits	7				
Speaking in tongues	8	8	6		
Interpretation of tongues	9		7		
Apostles		1	1		1
Teachers / teaching		3	3	3	5
Helping		6			
Administration		7			
Serving				2	
Encouraging				4	
Contributing				5	
Leadership				6	
Showing mercy				7	
Evangelists					3
Pastors					4

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO BOB SCHATZ (11/7/10)

the prevailing pagan culture. As Gordon Fee put it, “Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was yet in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviors that required radical surgery without killing the patient.”¹

In the main body of the letter, Paul responded to problems relating to division (1:10—4:21), immorality (5:1—6:20), marriage (7:1-40), food sacrificed to idols (8:1—11:1), worship (11:2—14:40), and bodily resurrection (15:1-58). In the section on worship, Paul stressed the unity of the body and the diversity of the gifts (chap. 12), emphasized that gifts without love are completely useless (chap. 13), and provided specific guidelines for exercising two of the more controversial gifts: prophecy and tongues (chap. 14).

The main reason Paul included lists of gifts in this letter is to illustrate the dynamic of diversity (grounded in unity) as God’s plan for the local church. To deny diversity by saying, for example, that all members must have the same gift is to deny God’s original design.

Romans

During the winter or early spring of A.D. 57, near the end of his third missionary journey, Paul wrote Romans, a letter outlining the good news of a righteousness from God (1:16-17). The house churches in Rome evidently were divided along cultural lines with a Gentile majority and a Jewish minority. Paul hoped his sweeping account of the one true gospel would persuade Jew and Gentile house churches in Rome to unite (Rom. 14:1—15:13; 16:17-18). A reconciliation would bring unity, that, in turn would promote Paul’s larger purpose of gaining support for the next phase of missionary work, his trip to Spain (Rom. 15:23-29).

The list of gifts occurs in Romans near the point where Paul shifted from presenting the essential truths of the

gospel (Rom. 1—11) to exhorting his readers to apply the truths (Rom. 12—16). In view of the strained situation in the church at Rome, Paul began the application section by underscoring the need for right relationships: with God through worship (12:1-2), with ourselves through humility (12:3), and with others through service and love (12:4-10). He used the gift list in Romans 12:6-8 mainly to encourage Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome to serve one another with enthusiasm and a proper attitude.

Ephesians

Paul wrote this letter from prison, probably in Rome, sometime between A.D. 60–62 (Acts 28:30; Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). In Ephesians Paul sought to deepen our understanding of God’s eternal purpose of restoring peace and harmony to the universe. In chapters 1—3 he showed how God has already begun to accomplish His purpose through His Son Jesus Christ and His people, the church (1:9-10,20-23; 2:11-22). In chapters 4—6 Paul instructed believers in how to live out this heavenly purpose in the marketplace of life.

The short list of gifts in Ephesians occurs in the context of 4:1-16 where Paul admonished his readers to live in unity (4:1-6) and grow to maturity (4:7-16). The gifts mentioned in 4:11 are people. The risen Christ has given gifted leaders to His church to help guide them toward maturity. A maturing church can better cooperate with God and His eternal purpose for the universe. In summary, Paul highlighted the need for unity and diversity in 1 Corinthians, the need for humble service across cultural lines in Romans, and the need for gifted leadership in Ephesians.

Taking a Closer Look at the Lists Why Do the Lists Differ?

Paul mentioned at least 20 distinct gifts. The chart on “The Lists of Gifts in Paul’s Letters” shows the place where each gift occurs in a particular list. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 the “message of wisdom” comes first, the “message of knowledge” is second and so on, while in Romans 12 “prophecy” oc-

curs first, “serving” is second, and so on. A quick glance at the chart makes one thing obvious: Paul never intended to give an exhaustive index of all spiritual gifts for all time, but more of a sampling of the various ways God works through His people. This means, as Craig Blomberg pointed out, that “we ought to encourage believers to consider as spiritual gifts many kinds of abilities dedicated to the Lord’s work.”² These might include God-given abilities in music, writing, art, the trade skills, technology, media, and so forth.³ That 13 gifts occur in only one list and that no one list includes all the gifts also supports a “representative” understanding of the gifts. Why would Paul omit the gift of administration or evangelism when writing to the church in Rome? Were there not Christians in Rome who had those gifts? Perhaps the Roman church had access to 1 Corinthians or Ephesians at some point or received personal instruction from Paul, but Paul’s list to the Romans is simply representative. The representative nature of the lists goes a long way toward explaining why they are different.

A related (and likely the main) reason why the lists differ is that Paul mentioned gifts that corresponded to the different situations he addressed in each letter. Since the Corinthians were preoccupied with and divided over the more spectacular gifts, Paul listed such miraculous and often verbal kinds of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 to make the point that all of them come from the same Holy Spirit. Diversity of gifts gave the Corinthians no cause for division. With the later list in 12:28 Paul expanded the Corinthians’ understanding of spirituality by adding more mundane gifts such as teaching, helping, and administration. He always listed last the gifts the Corinthians were prone to exalt.

In Romans, where the situation consisted of Jewish and Gentile Christians who needed to reconcile, the gifts appear less spectacular and more ordinary, less verbal and more action-oriented (for example, serving, encouraging, contributing, leading, showing mercy). Yet these gifts (which are never said to be any less

Left: City walls of ancient Corinth. The city of Corinth was known for its immorality and idolatry. The church at Corinth was wracked by problems caused by faulty beliefs, arrogance, and immaturity.

“spiritual” than their more “miraculous” counterparts in the Corinthian lists) fit the Roman situation quite well. Such practical, “ordinary” kinds of gifts call for the Romans to serve one another in love in the grind of everyday life. In Ephesians with its broad and sweeping portrayal of God’s universal purpose for His church, Paul listed only church leaders as gifts, both those playing a role in establishing the church and those having a part in its ongoing ministry.

How Are the Lists Similar?

In comparing the gift lists, we find they have at least five things in common.⁴ First, every list speaks of God as the source of the gifts. In 1 Corinthians it is God the Spirit who gives the gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-11); in Romans it is God the Father (Rom. 12:3,6); and in Ephesians it is God the Son (Eph. 4:7-11). That God is the source of the gifts, giving “to each one, just as he determines” (1 Cor. 12:11), means simply that the gifts are

bers as absolutely essential and necessary. Knowing that God is the source of the gifts also means we should avoid the Corinthian error of faulting others for not having the gift(s) we have or for thinking that any one gift (for example, tongues) is essential to a genuine Christian faith. Paul made it crystal clear that the sovereign God has “arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be” (1 Cor. 12:18).

Second, each list verifies that every believer is gifted. There is no such thing as an ungifted Christian! Paul used the expression “each one” to assure his readers that if they have the gift of the Holy Spirit, they also have at least one gift from the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7,11; Rom. 12:3,6; Eph. 4:7). Perhaps some believers have more than one gift; Paul himself had at least two—apostleship and tongues—but all believers have at least one. With gifting comes responsibility to discover and use our gifts for God’s

mon good” (1 Cor. 12:7).

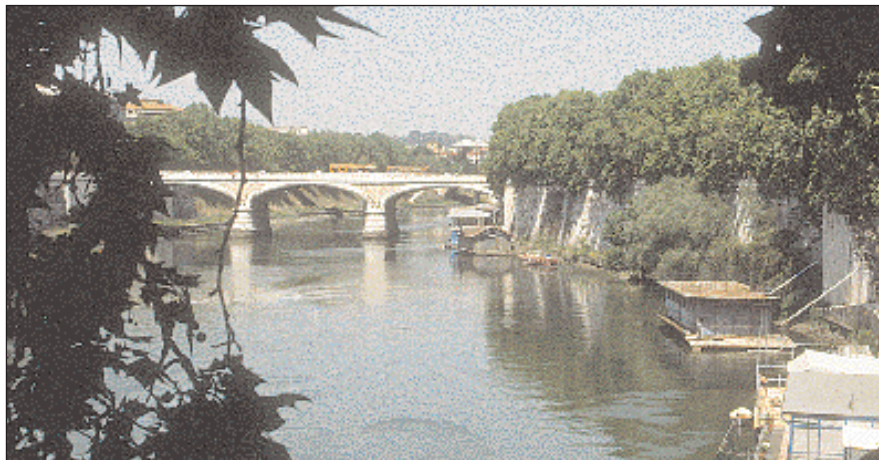
Fourth, in each list Paul depicted the church as one body with many members in order to illustrate unity and diversity (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:12,16). Since no one person has all the gifts (1 Cor. 12:14-21) and since no one gift is bestowed on every person (1 Cor. 12:28-30), God has created a remarkable situation where believers need each other. He has designed His church to work much like an orchestra with “each part making its own unique contribution to the symphonic harmony.”⁵

Fifth, all five lists place a priority on the intelligible communication of God’s truth. The only gift mentioned in every list is prophecy, while teaching shows up in four of the five. No other gift is listed more than three times. Perhaps the implication is that although all gifts are essential, we should appreciate greatly the gifts that clearly and accurately proclaim God’s Word in the context of public worship (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1-5,12,18-19).

Conclusion

Craig Blomberg had it right when he said that “church should be a place where people gather and get along with each other who have no merely human reason for doing so.”⁶ We should gather and get along because we have both a divine reason and a divine enabling. We have the gift of the Spirit and the Spirit’s gifts. Our challenge is to submit to the Spirit, discover the gifts He has given us, and develop those gifts through discipline, training, and ministry—all to the glory of God!

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Above: The Tiber River in Rome. Rome was one of the sites of a church to whom Paul wrote and included one of the lists of the gifts of the Spirit.

not of human origin. Consequently, we have no cause for either boasting (as if somehow we have earned or achieved certain gifts) or jealousy (as if somehow God has slighted us). All the gifts, though not equally visible and public, are nevertheless equally indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22-26); and God Himself affirms the “weaker” (v. 22), “less honorable” (v. 23a), and less respectable (v. 23b) mem-

glory and the good of the church.

Third, the reason God has gifted individual believers is so they will build up the Christian community (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:5,12; Eph. 4:12-16; implied in Rom. 12:5). The gifts do bring a certain satisfaction and benefit to the individual who exercises them, but they were never intended merely for the individual’s enjoyment nor meant to be used for selfish personal advancement. Rather we are gifted so that we may contribute to the local community of Christians. Each person is gifted, as Paul put it, “for the com-

¹Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 4.

²Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 256.

³Compare the comments by John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 88-89.

⁴Three of the five are mentioned with little comment by John Stott in *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 328-29.

⁵D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 32.

⁶Blomberg, 252.

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