

Manifestations of the Spirit and Life in the Triune God

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Introduction – Having made the point that if one confesses “*Jesus is Lord*,” it is the work and manifestation of the Holy Spirit, Paul now goes on to address the other diverse manifestations of the Spirit. The diverse gifts and their unity of purpose is likened to the diversity and unity of the triune God and our life in Him, individually and corporately. Diversity within unity belongs to the character of God and to the character of the church.

Diversities (vv4-6) – There are a diversity of gifts, ministries, and activities given to members of the church. This means that the church will never be homogeneous; we are not supposed to be carbon copies of one another. All the gifts come from the same Spirit and therefore are all valuable and necessary. The different ministries (acts of service) are all necessary within the body of the church and for the work of the Lord Jesus, and God the Father has a diversity of activities (energies) but He works (energizes) them all. This language of diversity and unity is going to later correct the abusive teaching that all should have one particular gift or that the language-gifts are more spectacular and spiritual.

These verses also hint at the unity of the triune God and yet His diverse activities/functions in the persons of the Godhead. It isn’t Paul’s main point and so he doesn’t develop it. But he does assert it and build from it. And we learn from these verses that all three Persons of the Godhead are actively involved in the life of the church.

The Purpose (v7) – This is the main point and verse of this section. The manifestation of the Spirit is for the profit of all. When one is given a manifestation, it is given to the one in order to be a part of blessing the whole. Paul is not even saying that each and every person in the community has his own gift. That may or may not be true, but it is not his concern. Nor is he demanding that everyone go through a test to discover their own personal spiritual gift. His point is that the manifestation of the Spirit’s life in believers is for the common good of the body. He is anticipating the corrections he will be giving in chapters 13-14.

An Ad Hoc List (vv8-10) – Paul gives this non-exhaustive list of gifts without definition (frustrating us in our attempts to know exactly what each one is) because that is not his point. His list is merely representative of the diversity of the Spirit’s manifestations so that Corinth will stop elevating the “splashy” ones. The gifts are diverse, but there seems to be flexibility in how they are to be distinguished (especially if you compare with other ad hoc lists he gives in these chapters as well as in other letters, i.e. Rom 12:4-8, Eph 4:11).

Keep in mind that the New Testament is not available to the church at their time – this helps in seeing the purpose of the word-gifts and apostolic signifiers. The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge may be timely utterances of what is to be done or what is to be known. The gifts of faith, healings, miracles, prophecy and discerning of spirits seem to be in the arena of the kinds of signs that accompanied and identified the apostles and therefore their particular authority (2 Cor 12:12). The apostles were providing the foundation of the church that we are no longer pouring (Eph 2:20). Finally, there are the different kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

Quick Review of Tongues - The tongues that were manifest at Pentecost were known languages that declared the Good News of Jesus to a diverse crowd that had gathered as the Spirit filled the disciples with the word in languages the world around them could understand (Acts 2:1-12). Pentecost was the Feast of Firstfruits and God was harvesting His firstfruits of every tongue, tribe, and nation that day. Also, remember that tongues were given by God at the tower of Babel to disperse the wicked false-temple builders but ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, tongues were given to draw in all the nations of the world to be the new temple of the Holy Spirit – and to declare the end of the old, defiled temple.

As the Spirit Wills (v11) – The Corinthians were a factional group (Chapters 1-3), and were tempted to believe that certain gifts identified one as more spiritual. But the same Spirit brings forth these gifts “*as He wills*” not according to some carnal view of spirituality. You couldn’t sign up for a gift.

The Person of the Holy Spirit – It would be good to pause here and see what we’ve learned about the Spirit. He speaks of Christ (v3) and He manifests Himself in gifts to build up the body (v7) according to His own will (v11). We should see that the Spirit and the Word accompany one another (Eph 1:13). We hear the Word of truth and, believing by means of the Spirit, we are sealed with Him. He anoints the message by anointing the believing ears that hear the message.

Not a Force – The Spirit is a Person. He has a will (v11). He testifies to Jesus (Rev 19:10). He can be grieved (Eph 4:30), lied to (Acts 5:3), and obeyed (Acts 10:19-21). His personal presence is a comforting presence (John 14:26).

One and Three – Theologians distinguish God as He is within Himself (the ontological Trinity) and God as He works in our midst (the economic Trinity). Eph 2:18 gives a good illustration of His economic working: “*For through Him (Christ) we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit to the Father.*”

The Spirit Uses the Word to Glorify Christ – Look at these two parallel passages and see what the Spirit is doing with the Word for the sake of Christ:

Ephesians 5:18–20 (NKJV) And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Colossians 3:16 (NKJV) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Put together, we see that the Spirit is not the “fluid” that fills us. Rather, the Spirit is the agent who fills us with the Word of Christ. And what comes forth? Wisdom, teaching, singing with grace, constant thanksgiving – to God the Father. Life in the Triune God.

But notice what I’ve done. I’ve used the Word to bring forth this truth. The Corinthians, and all of the first generation church, did not have this Spirit-Word (the canon of Scripture), and so God manifested this Spirit-Word with particular gifts for a time. We have to jump ahead but consider when these would no longer be needed (1 Cor 13:8). There are many other gifts mentioned in other lists, and we have no need to believe that these are exhaustive. The Spirit gifts us in many ways and He does so to us individually, according to His own will, and for the benefit of the whole body. Then, using what has been written, empowered by God’s Spirit and knit together, we are taking that Spirit-Word (“Jesus is Lord”) to the world.

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