

Introduction

As a former instructor in the oil and gas industry, I saw the questions that people struggled with on their certification exams. Therefore, in class I would make a point to carefully go through that material. We also put together specific homework problems that addressed those areas. We also did a final review with them prior to the test, and there were review questions on those areas. I did not want those troublesome questions to catch a student by surprise. I wanted them to be fully aware of those problems, and how to properly deal with them.

The Corinthians had a lot of problems, and they had a lot of questions for Paul. Paul began by addressing some of the problems, like the divisions in the church, sexual immorality, and the lawsuits and strife. Then, he began answering their questions about sex, marriage, divorce, meat that had been sacrificed to idols, and headship. He introduced these subjects by saying, “Now concerning...” In 1 Corinthians 7:1, he said, “Now concerning the things you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.” In 1 Corinthians 7:25, he said, “Now concerning virgins.” In 1 Corinthians 8:1, he said, “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols...” Now, in chapter 12, he begins by saying, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.” The Corinthians had some problems and some questions about spiritual gifts.

(1 Cor 7:1) “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.”

(1 Cor 7:25) “Now concerning virgins....”

(1 Cor 8:1) “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols...”

(1 Cor 12:1) “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.”

Paul is answering some questions they had about the gifts, and he addresses this in chapters twelve through fourteen. He starts today with giving three reasons why he is addressing this with them. These would be three reasons in addition to the fact that he was answering their specific questions. His answers also serve as an introduction to this important topic. Because there were problems with the way that they were being exercised in their meetings, Paul wants to give them a thorough understanding of the gifts, the purposes of the gifts, and the use of the gifts in their assemblies. In the midst of his discussion about gifts, he sandwiches in the famous chapter about love. Paul wanted them to know the surpassing value of love over the gifts. They could have all the faith in the world, speak in tongues, prophesy, and even be a martyr, but without love, it would mean nothing, and would profit them nothing. They needed to pursue love, but earnestly desire spiritual gifts. We will be breaking down these different topics about the spiritual gifts over the next couple of months.

This morning, we will look at three reasons that Paul addresses spiritual gifts. He does not want them to be unaware. He does not want them led astray, as they were when they were pagans. Third, he wants them to be able to discern the Spirit of God and what is not of the Holy Spirit.

Why Paul addresses spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1-3)

1. Paul does not want them to be unaware.
2. Paul does not want them led astray.
3. Paul wants them to be able to discern the Spirit of God.

(1 Cor 12:1–3) “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. {2} You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. {3} Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”

1. Paul does not them to be unaware.

The first reason that Paul addresses spiritual gifts is that he did not want them to be unaware or ignorant about them. The Greek word is *agnoeo* (Strong’s G50), which is a compound word meaning not knowing or ignorant. This is an important topic and he wanted to make sure that they understood spiritual gifts. The fact that Paul addresses spiritual gifts in chapters twelve through fourteen shows how important it is. Just as I emphasized certain important and critical points in my classrooms so that the students did not miss these, Paul took the time to carefully explain spiritual gifts so that they would not be unaware.

(1 Cor 12:1) “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.”

I have found that the church at large is aware of some of the gifts. People have been taught about serving one another, and many people readily identify with the gift of serving. The church knows about the gift of helps, and many identify with that. Many know about the gift of teaching, and some identify with that gift. But beyond this, I have seen that many people in the church lack awareness about spiritual gifts, and in particular, their own spiritual gift. There are some good books on spiritual gifts. There are a number of spiritual gift assessments that are available online, and through a battery of questions, they help people discover their spiritual gift. Unfortunately, I have seen people come away from these tests thinking they have a certain gift, when I don’t believe that is their gifting at all. I think that these tests can be useful, particularly if a knowledgeable pastor works with them.

I have also seen that spiritual gifts have been a divisive thing in the church. There are churches that believe and teach that many of the gifts ended in the first century. There are other churches, like the charismatic and Pentecostal churches that believe, teach, and practice all the gifts. There are feeling of arrogance and superiority with those who have certain gifts, and these cause further divisions. I have seen erroneous teaching about spiritual gifts in both camps, so there is a need in the body of Christ for teaching about spiritual gifts so that the church is not unaware. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is just as relevant today as it was in 53-54 AD when he wrote this letter.

Many years ago, I led quarterly prayer meetings in the city of Acworth. I invited pastors and their congregations to join together to pray for our city. We moved the meeting around to different church facilities to make it more inclusive of everyone. I emailed, wrote letters, called, and visited the pastors in the area to invite them. One day I was meeting with a pastor of an independent Baptist church, and he asked if anyone that spoke in tongues attended. I told him that there were some that did and some that didn’t. He told me that they could not be unequally yoked with them. I said to him, “Pastor Kitchens, I am not asking you to marry them; I am just asking you to pray with them.” Their church did not participate in our prayer meetings.

In Romans 1:11, Paul wrote that he longed to go to Rome and see them so that he could impart some spiritual gift to them so that they could be established. Spiritual gifts help churches to be established, and the church needs to be aware of them and to be operating in them. Real apostolic ministry seeks to equip and establish churches, and to give them whatever is needed to help them

be established. We do not know what gift he wanted to impart, but it may have been teaching, as that is one of the gifts that helps establish churches, and Paul was a teacher.

(Rom 1:11) “For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;”

In 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul exhorts the church to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, and especially prophecy. We need to understand something if we are going to earnestly desire it. Before Paul tells them to earnestly desire or be zealous for spiritual gifts, he is going to give them some understanding about spiritual gifts.

(1 Cor 14:1) “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”

2. Paul does not want them led astray.

The second reason that Paul did not want the Corinthians to be unaware was to protect them from being led astray. When they were pagans, they were led astray to the mute idols. There were lots of false and deceptive teachings and prophecies, and it would be easy for them to be led astray. Paul does not specify how they were led astray, saying, “however you were led.” We are to pursue spiritual gifts, but we have to also understand that an improper understanding of the gifts could cause us to be led astray, and Paul does not want that to happen. So, he is writing and instructing them about spiritual gifts so that they will not be led astray.

(1 Cor 12:2) “You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.”

In my thirty-six years of pastoral ministry, I have seen many people tell me about things that they were going to do because of a vision, dream, or impression that they had. God does speak to us in visions, dreams, impressions, and in many other ways. But we also get visions, dreams, and impressions that come out of our own souls, not the spirit of God. We must be able to discern the voice of God and when the Holy Spirit is leading us. Otherwise, we can be deceived and be led astray.

The word of God has a lot to say about being led astray. Jesus is the way, the life, and the truth. If we are truly following Jesus, we will not be led astray. Unfortunately, there are some people that think they are following Jesus, but are being led astray. The best way to know if you are on God’s path, and not being led astray, is the word of God. The word of God is our authority in all matters of doctrine, and practice. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16-17)

There are lots of books on finances, but we need to follow the guidance given in the Word of God about how we manage our money. There are lots of books on parenting and raising children, but we need to follow the guidance given in the Word of God about raising our children. Unfortunately, many in the church have bought into the world’s way of raising children, and there are many undisciplined children in the church. The word of God must be our authority. The same thing could be said about books on marriage, leadership, psychology, and many other topics. We can be led astray unless we know the word of God and use it as the plumbline of our doctrine and practices.

When someone tells us to do something, or we have an impression to do something, we must filter it through God's word. Does this line up with Scripture, or does this violate a Scriptural principle? Are there Scriptural examples that support this? Does this follow the pattern of God's wisdom? In James 3, we learn that the wisdom of God is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, and without hypocrisy? We need to compare the impression or activity with these qualities. Is the reasonable? Is it pure? James also tells us that the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. God gave us this instruction about His wisdom so that we would not be led astray.

(James 3:13–18) “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. {14} But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. {15} This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. {16} For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. {17} But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. {18} And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

Let me give you an example. One year a young man came to me and said that the Lord told him to marry my daughter, and to move to North Dakota, where he would get a job as a youth pastor. When I heard this, it did not sound reasonable at all. The young man had not shown much interest in the youth group, or in helping to lead it. I told him that he needed to learn to be faithful in our church before thinking about becoming a youth pastor. I told him that we would be willing to mentor him in the teaching and leadership, and he could become more involved with our youth. I told him that he needed to be prepared and approved by God for ministry. The young man insisted that the Lord told him to do these things and he was not going to disobey what he believed God had told him. He did not want to be mentored by us, and was not going to be involved with the youth. I told him that he had not heard from God, and that I was not going to allow him to marry my daughter. If he was willing to get some training, and prove to be faithful, I would be willing to reconsider. His parents were in agreement with my counsel. What this young man dreamed up was not from God, and was also full of disorder. He rejected my counsel, the father of my daughter. He rejected my counsel, as the Senior Pastor of the church. He rejected his own parents' counsel. This was completely out of order; it was full of disorder and every evil thing. I did not allow my daughter to be led astray by this young man. It is important that we learn to discern the Spirit of God and fleshly thoughts and impressions.

Many years ago, a person came to me and said the Lord told them to do something. The next day the same person said to me that the Lord told them to do the very opposite thing. Unfortunately, not all of our thoughts and impressions come from God, and this person was going back and forth in their mind about an issue, and was incorrectly thinking that this was God telling them to do it one day and then something different the next day. We need an understanding of spiritual gifts and how God speaks to us so that we are not led astray.

My friend, Joe Warner, moves very powerfully in the prophetic. He has a workshop where he teaches people to hear the voice of Lord. One of the things that he said that has always stood out to me is, “Much word, much prophecy! Little word, little prophecy.” He encourages people to fill themselves with the word of God. When people fill their hearts and minds with the word, they will recognize the voice of the Lord, and are less likely to be led astray.

3. Paul wants them to be able to discern the Spirit of God

How do we discern the Spirit of God so that we are not led astray? There are a number of ways. Paul said, “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed’, and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” What a person says about the Lord Jesus Christ is a key way of knowing if it is the Spirit of God.

(1 Cor 12:3) “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed’; and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

When we look at false religions and cults, we have to look at what they say about Jesus. If a group denies the deity of Christ, they are a false religion. Do not get involved with them, and do not be led astray. If they say that Jesus did not come in the flesh, do not get involved.

This same principle was taught by Peter and by John. In 1 John 4:1-3, John said that we are not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. He said that many false prophets have gone into the world, and I do not believe this has changed in the past 2,000 years; there are still many false prophets that have gone into the world. John went on to say that every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is slightly different from what Paul wrote. Paul wrote the Jesus is Lord, and John wrote that the Jesus Christ (the anointed Savior) has come in the flesh. What both of them have in common is the correct identity of Jesus. Jesus was the promised Messiah, who was fully God, and fully man. He was Immanuel, God in the flesh. Jesus is the Lord, and the Head of the church. The fullness of deity dwelt in Jesus in bodily form. Any teaching that does not believe that Jesus is Immanuel, God in the flesh, and Lord of heaven and earth, is not from God, but is the spirit of the antichrist.

(1 John 4:1–3) “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. {2} By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; {3} and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”

One day, a man in church told me that he had been to a dreams conference. The speaker was nationally known and had written some books. He was telling about how to discern whether the dream was from God. He said that if the dream was in color, it was from God, and if it was in black or white, it was not from God. Church, that is not how you tell if a dream is from God or not. I have had plenty of colorful dreams, visions, impressions, and thoughts that were not from God. We don’t use color as the test. We test the content, by holding it up against the Word of God. We test the spirit of the word. We test the wisdom of it.

Like John, Peter said that there are false prophets that arose among the people. He also said that there were false teachers. These false prophets and teachers introduce destructive heresies, and lead people astray. Many follow their sensuality, and are led astray by their greed and false words. Peter stresses the fruit of these false prophets and teachers. They are sensual, and indulge in the flesh. They are greedy and exploit people. They have corrupt desires and despise authority. They are self-willed. When we are testing the spirits, we must test more than the words they say. People will lie about things in order to deceive. We must look at the fruit of their lives, not just their message.

(2 Pet 2:1–19) “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. {2} Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; {3} and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.... {10} and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties.... {18} For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, {19} promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.”

Since we know this, we are to be on guard so that we are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men. What may seem like a prophetic word, an encouraging word, a positive word, could actually be an enticing word to lead us astray. We must be aware and understand spiritual gifts so that we are not led astray. We must be on guard, and test the spirit by examining what they say about Jesus. We must also examine the lives of those prophets, and if their fruit is not good, we need to stay away.

(2 Pet 3:17) “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,”

In Titus 1, Paul addressed some false teachers that had created quite a storm on the island of Crete. He told Titus that he had left him there to set things in order. Who created this storm and upset the lives of the believers there? They were rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, who taught things for the sake of sordid gain. We must carefully examine the lives of people so that we are not led astray. Does good leadership in a church matter? Absolutely. Godly leadership helps silence those who would try to lead people astray, and they set things in order.

(Tit 1:5–16) “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,... {10} For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, {11} who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain... {16} They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”

In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, he said that evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. He exhorted Timothy to continue in the things that he had learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom he had learned them. His mother and grandmother had taught him the Scriptures. Then, Paul came along, and became a spiritual father to him. Paul’s caution to Timothy is about holding on to the Scriptures, and trusted teachers.

(2 Tim 3:13–17) “But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. {14} You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, {15} and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. {16} All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; {17} so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

In Ephesians 4:11-14, we are taught that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are given to the body to equip the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. They help bring the body to maturity. The result of this is that we are no longer children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, but the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. When we are testing what is the Spirit of God and what is not the Spirit of God, we need to be spiritually mature and know God's word. If we do not know God's word, it is easy to be deceived and to be led astray.

(Eph 4:11–14) “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; {13} until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. {14} As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he warned them not to let anyone take them captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. In order to be spiritually discerning, we must know the Word of God, so that we recognize that the teachings of men are not in alignment with the Word of God. I have heard it on more than one occasion that the FBI trains their agents to recognize counterfeit currency. The way that they do it is to make them experts on real currency. When they see anything counterfeit, they immediately recognize that it is not real currency. We have to be the same way with the Scriptures. We have to know the Word so well that when we hear something that does not line up with the Word, we can reject it.

(Col 2:8–9) “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. {9} For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,”

One of the safeguards that God gives the church is leadership. In Acts 20:28-30, Paul was addressing the Ephesian elders. He told them to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock, and to shepherd the church of God. He said that after his departure savage wolves would come in and would not spare the flock. They would speak perverse things to draw away the disciples. One of the things that God tasks leaders with is to watch over, discern error, and protect the flock from being led astray. We have an individual responsibility to know Christ, and to know His word, but we should also be part of a church where the pastors are watching over and protecting them. For that to take place, the shepherds and the sheep must have a relationship where they are sharing with one another. There are some people that do not have that kind of relationship and are more vulnerable to being led astray. There are some that do not take advantage of that relationship and try to do everything on their own, and they are also vulnerable.

(Acts 20:28–30) “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. {29} I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; {30} and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

In Mark Virkler's course, *Four Keys To Hearing God's Voice*, he mentions the importance of having spiritual advisors. He encourages people to have people who are in authority over you, or are spiritually mature, or are subject-matter experts in your life that you can run things by them. This is just a safeguard to keep us from being led astray. Unfortunately, many people do not use a spiritual advisor. It requires humility for us to submit our thoughts and impressions to others for their input and counsel. The benefits of receiving the counsel of others far outweighs the consequences of being deceived and being led astray. We should make full use of other mature believers that God places in our lives.

Conclusion and Applications

God wants His people, the church, to be aware of spiritual gifts. He does not want us lacking knowledge or understanding about the use of spiritual gifts. God does not want us being led astray, as those without Christ are. He wants us to be well grounded and stable in our faith, not being tossed here and there by strange doctrines, or false visions or dreams. God wants us to know how to test the spirit to see if it is from God or not. God wants us to be alert and discerning so that we are not deceived or led astray.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for this passage on spiritual gifts. Thank You for giving us awareness and knowledge about this important topic. We want to learn so that we are not led astray. We want to learn so that we use our spiritual gifts to edify others in the church. We want to learn so that we can be good stewards of our own spiritual gifts. As we go through these chapters on spiritual gifts, give us revelation, understanding, insights, and applications for our lives. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Introduction (1 Cor 7:1, 7:25, 8:1, 12:1-3)

- 1. Paul does not want them to be unaware.** (1 Cor 12:1, Rom 1:11, 1 Cor 14:1)

- 2. Paul does not want them led astray.** (1 Cor 12:2, 2 Tim 3:16-17, James 3:13-18)

- 3. Paul wants them to be able to discern the Spirit of God.** (1 Cor 12:3, 1 John 4:1-3, 2 Pet 2:1-19, 3:17, Tit 1:5-16, 2 Tim 3:13-17, Eph 4:11-14, Col 2:8-9, Acts 20:28-30)

Conclusion and Applications