Spiritual Gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:1-7

Even though seminars have developed to help believers discern their spiritual gifts and pastors teach about this topic, most Christians continue to have a nagging uncertainty about this subject. Could it be that your experience and uncertainty are actually correct, and it is the teachings you’ve received that are off? Please allow me to provide some thoughts for your consideration:

1. In 1 Corinthians 12:1 the subject is not “spiritual gifts,” but things pertaining to the Holy Spirit. What is translated as “spiritual gifts” is actually a Greek neuter plural adjective that means “the category of spiritual stuff.” The audience’s experience in this area before they became believers was reckless abandonment to demonic excess. It’s no surprise that some of this carried over into the church after they became believers (12:1-3).
2. Paul lists three categories and a summary in verses 4-7 that each carry the same grammatical weight:
   1. Classifications or divisions of grace-gifts (12:4). The term translated “gifts” refers to that which is freely and graciously given. The classifications or diversities are all of grace and not of works. Grace is always the motivator for serving the Lord.
   2. Classifications or divisions of ministries (12:5). “Ministries” refers to someone who is able to make the dust fly; they get a lot done. This looks at the action of what is being done.
   3. Classifications or divisions of activities (12:6). “Activities” translates a term that looks at the results of the energy of God in the believer. “Implementations” would work as a translation. This looks at the results of what has been done.
   4. The fourth term is in verse 7, where the structure is different than the previous 3 verses. It seems that Paul is summarizing the previous 3 classifications by stating that the manifestation (to make something visible) of the Spirit is for the profit or the benefit or profit of others. The Greek does not provide an object, so our translation adds “of all.” The preposition used indicates a direction away from the person, in other words, the gifts are not for our own benefit, but for others.

It seems to me that the focus on “what is my spiritual gift” looks in the wrong direction. Rather than trying to figure out what my spiritual gift is, I should be looking for ways I can, by the power of the Spirit, benefit others. The Spirit of God is actively helping believers energetically minister to others with lasting results. Asking the Lord to help us do that makes more sense to me than trying to figure out which one of the spiritual gifts I have. We live in an age where great attention is given to one’s self, it’s refreshing to hear that God has a different perspective.

My love to you all,

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