You are a gifted person. Since God created you, he has fashioned you with certain abilities. Unless some disease or disorder has affected you, each of you has physical skills like the ability to move, walk or talk. God has given some people physical abilities to run fast, jump high, shoot accurately or dance skillfully. Some athletes can soar through the air to dunk a basketball, swim through the water at world class speeds or run like the wind. Some people can sing with a booming voice, some can dance on their toes and some can play a violin at a rapid pace.

Not only has the Lord given you physical abilities but also spiritual skills. The Lord may have blessed you with a beautiful voice, a warm personality, the ability to play an instrument or the talents to teach children. Today we begin a three-week series on spiritual gifts. Today we will see how all these gifts come from the same triune God, the purpose of these different spiritual gifts, what some of these spiritual gifts are and how God distributes them. Our theme for today is WE ARE GOD’S GIFTED PEOPLE. We will see how God blesses the church and us through his spiritually gifted people.

In the previous chapter Paul talked about the Lord’s Supper in detail. Now in chapter 12 the Holy Spirit inspires him to write about spiritual gifts. Since chapters 12-14 speak about spiritual gifts, for the next three Sundays we will focus on what God has to say about spiritual gifts.

First, we need to know something about Corinth, Greece. Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian Christians, after he, Silas and Timothy spent a year and a half preaching and teaching God’s Word to the people there. Acts 18:1-17 records the founding of the Corinthian congregation. Corinth was the leading city of Greece at the time. Some scholars estimate it had a population of 200,000 in Paul’s day. The city is located on an isthmus, like Panama, on a strip of land dividing two seas. Since the Mediterranean Sea near the southern tip of Greece was dangerous for small ships that transported goods to and fro from cities in Greece and Italy, it was safer to take the Gulf of Corinth. Today, like Panama, a canal near Corinth connects these seas.

Corinth was a very immoral city. It was littered with temples and shrines to Greek gods. The Corinthians built a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Her worship involved sacred prostitution, and so more than a 1000 harlots worked in the city. The immorality was so vulgar for the Greeks the phrase “to Corinthianize” meant to engage in sexual immorality. The very rich and the very poor lived side by side, some in mansions and others in shanties. The wealthy bought others as slaves; the poor could hardly afford a crust of bread.

In the middle of all this immorality lived a few, new Christians, who struggled to keep the faith and practice it. While the Corinthians had spiritual gifts in abundance, they didn’t always use them wisely or evaluate them properly. In fact, some of them were probably abusing these gifts to elevate themselves and to divide believers into special cliques. So Paul wrote these chapters to clarify what spiritual gifts are and how to use them properly.

Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians about their former way of life as idol-worshipers. As idol-worshipers, they were pressured or misled to serve mute, voiceless idols that provided no answer to their prayers, no release from their fears and no light for their spiritual darkness. As they went searching from one idol to another for spiritual help, in vain they found none. But in their present way of life as Christians, they had found the truth and seen the light in Jesus. Paul uses this contrast to make the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit stand out more strikingly. The Holy Spirit had led them to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

When the Corinthian Christians held public gatherings, the service was open to the public. Unbelieving Jews and Gentiles were often admitted to these Christian gatherings, and during public worship someone might suddenly exclaim, “Jesus is anathema or cursed.” The inexperienced Corinthians might think a mad shout of this kind to be inspired. But St. Paul assures them that neither the fanatic Jew who made this incessant cry against the Christian
religion or the unbelieving Gentile who repeated this blasphemy could be speaking by the Holy Spirit. Since the Corinthians appear to have elevated the more spectacular gifts of the Spirit as more important, Paul may be reminding them that the greatest spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit is faith. The fact that “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’, except by the Holy Spirit” – that is the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit.

As God’s gifted people, we should thank God for his gifts. Verses 8-10 give us a short list of some of God’s spiritual gifts. To some the Spirit gives wisdom and to others knowledge. The gift of wisdom includes an exceptional, thorough knowledge of the great truths of Scripture and the mysteries of the gospel and the ability to expound them in a clear and convincing manner. The gift of knowledge is the ability to apply God’s Word to individual cases in life. It is intelligent understanding, the ability to apply these truths to oneself and others, and being able to make wise choices and sound judgments based on facts.

The second series of gifts focuses on miraculous powers. The gift of faith is not justifying faith given to all believers, but is very likely, the special miracle-working faith of the early apostles. It is the precious gift of the Holy Spirit to have faith the size of a mustard seed so that mountains are moved for God’s Glory. Such faith trusts God whether thrown into a fiery furnace, a lion’s den or a raging sea. This faith believes God is watching over me as I sleep on a boat cushion unafraid that the turbulent waves will sink the boat. Gifts of healing were given to Christians only when and where the Holy Spirit willed. Some early Christians were able to cure the sick without medicine, to punish the wicked, or raise the dead to reinforce God’s Word. Remember that God’s great work of spiritual healing accomplishes far more than the physical healing charismatics profess they can perform.

The third group centers on prophecy and tongues. In its broad sense prophecy is the preaching and proclaiming of his Word. In its narrow sense it is the direct revelation to one person who by the power of the Spirit is able to foretell future events accurately. Distinguishing between spirits is the ability to discern between false and true teachers very quickly. When the devil raises up people within the church who proclaim false doctrine, these people are able to uncover the weak and dangerous position of the false teachers at once. To another Christian, the Spirit enables him to speak God’s truths in a most amazing way to prove his presence. By God’s Spirit these gifted people could praise the Lord in a foreign language he had never learned or used. Since this gift would have been useless without an interpreter, the Holy Spirit gave some the ability to translate the unknown language or speech for the congregation’s benefit. Today we thank God for enabling people to learn foreign languages and dialects so God’s Word can be proclaimed around the world.

We are God’s gifted people. What spiritual gifts has God given you? Are you naturally open and friendly with people? Do you play an instrument, draw, paint or sing? Do you like to teach God’s Word to his little lambs? Do you like to read or enjoy making crafts? Do you have the ability to sew, knit or crochet? Do you love to share God’s Word and his gospel message with others? Do you enjoy spending time with youth? Do you know how to work with wood, paint a wall or landscape a yard? Are you good at organizing or serving? Do you like to cook, take photos or use electronic devices? God created you with physical and spiritual gifts. Thank God for the gifts he has given you. Maybe you don’t know all the ways God has gifted you. Possibly you need to try other spiritual gifts to see if you are skilled in another way or enjoy a certain activity. Maybe you need to let the Spirit develop your spiritual gift.

By no means is Paul’s listing here the complete record of spiritual gifts. In Ephesians he lists some more: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (4:11f). In his second letter to the Corinthian Christians Paul talks about the gift of generosity that they have and urges them to use it. “But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2
Cor 8:7). God encourages you not only to use your gifts with joy, but to excel in them.

We are God’s gifted people and he urges us to use those gifts with joy. By the power of the
Holy Spirit we rejoice that we believe in Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit you can say with
confidence, “Jesus is Lord; Jesus is my Savior.” The gift of justifying faith to believe that
Jesus obeyed every law perfectly, that he care for people deeply, that he suffered for people
willingly, that he died for all sin completely, that he rose to lie victoriously is the greatest spiritual
gift.

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of
service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works
all of them in all men” (v. 4-6). “The Holy Spirit gives different gifts in different amounts in
different combinations to different people at different times under different circumstances for
different purposes” (Sermon Studies on the Gospels, Series C, p.70). But the same Holy Spirit
grants them all. The church has these “different kinds” of spiritual gifts in great variety. These
words make it increasingly clear that God’s people are active in living and sharing their faith.
With all the variety of gifts God enables his people to grow, change, increase and develop as
they learn more and more ways to share God’s truth and his gospel. There are many kinds of
gifts but only one God, the triune God. Here Paul is naming the three persons of the Trinity –
Father, Son and Holy Spirit in reverse order to heighten the value and importance of spiritual
gifts.

Paul applies these spiritual gifts to each believer. Each Christian has his or her own spiritual
gift or gifts. Every Christian possesses some gift of God’s grace, a gift that is being continually
offered for the profit of all. The separatist, cliquish, and selfish Corinthians needed to be
reminded that their gifts were not intended for personal prestige or group gain, but to serve
others. These gifts were not given further personal enjoyment, entertainment or glory but at the
disposal and for the service of the entire congregation and the whole Christian Church.

All these gifts were bestowed by one and the same Spirit as his will determines. No one can
boast that he or she has earned or merited his gifts, because they are all God-given. There is no
reason for conceit, pride or factions because the Holy Spirit has given each one his gift as the
Spirit wills, not as the person thinks he or she deserves. The purpose for bestowing all these
gifts is his eternal glory. The final result of using all these spiritual gifts is the rescue of many
people from Satan’s lake of fire.

As God’s gifted people, use your spiritual gifts with joy. Some of you may be thinking, “I’m
not very talented. OK, so I have one spiritual gift, some people have so many.” God says,
“Don’t belittle your gift; use it often. Use it to help people come to faith or grow in their
faith. Don’t compare yourself to others.” For Jesus said, “From everyone who has been
given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with
much, more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). Don’t say, “I can’t serve the Lord in any way. Ask,
“How can I serve the Lord joyfully with my gift or gifts?” Pray to the Holy Spirit so that you
can fully use or develop your gifts. Pray that the Spirit would move you not only to benefit
yourself but to use your gift to serve others. Pray that the Holy Spirit would inspire all our
members to use their spiritual gifts so that this church may benefit and grow. Continue to
encourage God’s people, including the gifted, to use their spiritual gifts for God’s glory.

Whether you always think so or not, you are a gifted person. Seek to discover your spiritual
gift or gifts? Give thanks to God for so graciously giving you spiritual gifts. Do not become filled
with pride or envy regarding spiritual gifts. But use your gift joyfully to serve the common good
and the growth of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Amen.