

"Now There Are Diversities Of Gifts ..."

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God who worketh all things in all" (1 Cor. 12:4-5).

The word "*diversities*" is found three times in these two verses. It means "different" thus different gifts, different ministrations, and different workings. Already it has been noted that the gift of the Spirit may refer to the gift believers receive when they are baptized, to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or to one of the nine gifts Paul names in this chapter. When Paul spoke of diverse gifts, he has no reference to either the gift which comes in baptism nor to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. His allusion is to the nine different gifts he names in the following verse.

These gifts -- diversified as they were, addressed different needs which the first century church had. And, while they came from the Holy Spirit, it was through the agency of the apostles. The apostles had the unique power to impart to these miraculous gifts. This is seen from Acts 8. Philip the evangelist had worked miracles and astonished many Samaritans by his works, even a sorcerer named Simon was awed by the things which he did. Peter and John came to Samaria to confirm the church and equip it by imparting spiritual gifts to them -- they did this by laying hands on disciples (Acts 8:17). Paul imparted miraculous gifts in the same manner by laying hands on certain Ephesians as well as on Timothy (Acts 19:6; 2 Tim. 1:6). The inference to be drawn is that only apostles had power to bestow gifts on others: "*Through the laying on of the apostles hands the Holy Spirit was given*" (Acts 8:18). The power of conferral of these gifts began and ended with the apostles, for while those who had hands laid on them could work miracles, there is no example of, nor indication that any other than an apostle could bestow gifts. Philip is an example of this. He could work miracles (as he did in Samaria) but he gave no such gifts to those whom he had taught and baptized. It was necessary that John and Peter come to Samaria in able to do that. When Peter and John came to Samaria, they prayed for gifts to be given to the Samaritans for as yet the Holy Spirit "*had fallen upon none of them*" (Acts 8:16). Some dispute this conclusion, offering 1 Timothy 4:14 as an example otherwise. The passage reads, "*Neglect not the gift that is in thee which was given thee by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.*"

This passage, however, does not teach that the presbytery laid hands on Timothy to impart spiritual gifts to him. It tells us that when the presbytery laid "*hands on Timothy,*" at the same time prophecy was made concerning

the gift Timothy was to receive. Paul claimed that the gift Timothy had was something he received from the laying on of his hands "... *stir up the gift of God which is in thee, through the laying on of my hands*" (2 Tim. 1:6). Remember, the "*laying on of hands*" does not refer exclusively to the imparting of spiritual gifts -- sometimes it was the means through which health was restored to a person (Matt. 9:18), sometimes when a person was arrested (Acts 4:3), and sometimes when a person or persons was set aside to a special task (Acts 13:1-2). Timothy was well-reported of by brethren in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). Paul wanted to take Timothy with him on his journey and it is as natural that the presbyters (elders) in Lystra should lay hands on him "*to set him aside for this task*" as he joined with Paul in his labors as it was that certain men in Antioch had laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, complying with the Spirit's instructions: "*Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*" (Acts 13:2-3).

When the apostle had listed the gifts which came from the Spirit, he added, "*But all these worketh the one and same Spirit, divided unto each one severally even as he will*" (1 Cor. 12:11). The apostles were the ones through whom spiritual gifts were given, but the Spirit Himself determined which of the nine gifts that individual should receive.

An important truth which must not be forgotten and which perception of is critical in understanding things Paul writes about the exercising of these gifts in chapter 14 is that the purpose of these gifts; the function God designed them for in the first century church. There was a specific purpose for each gift. There was also a general purpose (and this is significant) also for each of them. Paul spoke of that purpose when he wrote, "*But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal*" (1 Cor. 12:7). The apostle illustrated that truth also in chapter 12 when he discussed the body with its many members and the various functions of each. Keeping that truth in mind helps the reader to understand what Paul will say in chapter 14. Whatever specific purpose the gift was given for, its general purpose was to the benefit and profit of all the rest of the church.

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