

Personal Definition:

[PP slide]

SPIRITUAL GIFT ✓ ***A ministry characteristic of the Holy Spirit,***
 ✓ ***which God has given me in special abundance,***
 ✓ ***through which I can supernaturally serve the body of***
Christ, the church

7 keys to my gift discovery

[PP slide]

1. Spirituals come in VARIETY v. 4 - 6
2. Spirituals are ASSIGNED by God v. 7-11
3. Spirituals are FOCUSED: for one body (v. 12, 13)
4. My spiritual is CRITICAL for the body (v. 14 - 19)
5. My spiritual is DEFICIENT by itself (v. 20 – 26)
6. My spiritual is about CARING for the body v. 25 – 26)
7. The key to my spiritual is INTERDEPENDENCE

12:31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

A missed translation brings misunderstanding

1 Corinthians 12:31 is a critical, pivotal verse in the teaching of spiritual gifts, and yet it is a most misunderstood verse because it has been poorly translated in almost all versions.

1. It is **critical and pivotal** because it moves us from consideration of spiritual gifts to the foundational consideration of spiritual fruit.

Just as what a person DOES is important, but not as important as WHO they are - So the use of GIFTS is important, but not as important as the displaying of FRUIT

PRINCIPLE: FRUIT before GIFTS (or, Maturity before Ministry)

2. It is **misunderstood** because translations continually indicate that one should “desire the greater gifts” when this is contrary to what is taught throughout chapter 12

Chapter 12 has taught clearly that (1) gifts are ASSIGNED, not chosen and (2) all gifts are CRITICAL – one is not “greater”

Therefore, virtually all translations of v. 31 contradict the chapter’s teaching

PRINCIPLE: SCRIPTURE DOES NOT CONTRADICT ITSELF

3. It is **poorly translated** because context demands the better of two possible translations, and yet the poorer choice has been universally used

In the Greek, the word for “desire” is used. It can equally be translated as an

aggressive command: “desire” or as a passive statement of fact: “you desire.”

The correct usage is always determined by context. In this case, context demands the passive “you desire the greater gifts” (wrongly). That was the primary Corinthian problem with the use of gifts.

PRINCIPLE: CONTEXT DETERMINES CHOICE OF TRANSLATION

Therefore, 12:31 should better be translated:

“But you (wrongly) desire greater gifts. But I show you a more excellent way.”

I have found only three current Bible translations that acknowledge this possibility

1. **New International Version (NIV)** has 12:31 as: “But eagerly desire the greater gifts,” but has a footnote stating: “or, ‘but you are eagerly desiring the greater gifts’ “
2. **Contemporary English Version (CEV)** has 12:31 as: “ I want you to desire the best gifts,” but has a footnote stating: “or, ‘you desire the best gifts’ “
3. **The Message**, by Eugene Peterson is the ONLY contemporary Bible version that uses the alternate translation in its text. Its 12:31 reads: “And yet some of you keep competing for so-called ‘important’ parts” Kudos to the courage of Eugene Peterson!

John MacArthur, Jr., eminent and contemporary scholar of the New Testament, in his New Testament commentary on 1 Corinthians defends that the correct translation of 12:31 should be “but you (wrongly) desire greater gifts.” So at least I am in good company!

The accurate point of 12:31

Contrary to wrongly seeking after the gifts of God’s Spirit, which are assigned, we should be seeking after the fruit of God’s Spirit – specifically LOVE – which are developed.

Rightly, 1 Corinthians has been called the “Love Chapter” because of its wonderful emphasis on what “agape” love is – the sacrificially, selfless love of God that we need to develop by letting God’s love flow through us.

! Corinthians 13, however, is also a chapter about spiritual gifts – right in the middle of a 3 chapter treatise by Paul on this subject. Because of the emphasis of our series, we will focus in this chapter study on what best helps us understand and discover spiritual gifts. We will examine the chapter in its 3 parts.

1. Gifts without fruit = 0 (v. 1-3)
2. 16 characteristics of “agape” love that enable gifts (v. 4 – 8a)
3. Temporary gifts and unending love (v. 8b – 13)

Chapter 13

I. Gifts without fruit (love) = 0

- 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- 2 If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

A rough paraphrase for our purposes is as follows:

1. If I have the spiritual gift tongues - supernaturally speaking in a tongue I have not learned - but don't use it in love, it is just a bunch of pretentious noise and is worthless.
 2. If I have the spiritual gift of prophecy - proclaiming God's Word, and the gift of knowledge - understanding and communicating God's deeper truths, and the gift of faith – believing God for great things – but don't have love, I am nobody of any importance whatsoever.
 3. And even if I have the gift of giving so that I give all my money to feed the poor and my body to be martyred – without love there is absolutely no value in my giftedness.
1. Note that 5 specific, different gifts (all mentioned in chapter 12) are used as example. (tongues, prophesy, knowledge, faith & giving)
 2. The obvious point is that my spiritual gift, even in superabundance, is worthless to God and to my church if I am not using it in the maturity of God's "agape" love flowing through me as I use it.
 3. The principle: **Gifts without fruit (love) = 0 (zip!)**

II. 15 characteristics of "agape" love that enable gifts

- 4 Love is patient, love is kind, *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant,
 - 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,
 - 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
 - 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
1. Note that these 15 wonderful qualities of God's love are often taught out of the context of spiritual gifts (and that's OK) – teaching us about what true "agape" love should look like.
 2. For all you Godly mothers who have exemplified these qualities – thank

you! And happy Mother's Day!

3. But for our study purposes, note that these are 16 qualities that spiritual gifts LACK without love. For instance, we can serve with impatience and with little kindness. We can give with arrogance that doesn't make us or God look good. We can lead by seeking our own best rather than those we lead. We can be provoked in our attempt to show mercy –and so on.
4. The principle: **Love, and all the Spirit's fruit, must enable my gift**

III. Temporary gifts and unending love

- 8 Love never fails, but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.
- 9 For we know in part, and we prophecy in part;
- 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.
- 11 When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.
- 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.
- 13 But now abide faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.
1. Note the mention or implication of the following gifts: prophecy, tongues and knowledge in verse 8b, 9 and 11
 2. In verse 8a “done away,” speaking of both the gift of prophecy and knowledge (Greek emphasis: “superceded” or “replaced”) In verse 8b a different word, “cease,” speaking of the gift of tongues (Greek: pauo – to be “cut off”, implication: to stop naturally of themselves)
 3. These two different words may have implication for different times of their ending. In other words, it might be teaching that tongues ceases before prophecy and knowledge are replaced. But for now, the primary teaching is that these gifts are TEMPORARY, unlike LOVE
 4. The coming of “the perfect” will replace the gift of prophecy and knowledge, both of which are imperfect in completeness. (v. 9-10)
The Greek for “the perfect” is “to teleion” – literally “the complete thing.” It is in the neuter tense, so cannot refer to Christ. Scholarship is divided on whether “the perfect” refers to the completion of God's perfect revelation of the New Testament or the perfection of our state when Christ returns. That v. 12 refers to this time as when we see “face to face” and “know fully” would argue for the latter – meaning that the gift of prophecy and knowledge would now still be in effect.

5. LOVE WILL NEVER CEASE OR BE REPLACED – IT WILL LAST FOREVER

It appears that faith and hope also “abide” forever as well. We will forever have faith in the truth and person of God and we will forever have hope in the sense of anticipated joys that will await.

But LOVE IS THE GREATEST that will last forever. This would seem to indicate that FRUIT, which is the personality character of God the Spirit will last, whereas GIFTS, which are the ministry characteristics of God the Spirit will be superceded by the perfect heavenly state.

PRIMARY POINT OF CHAPTER 13 (in light of Spiritual Gifts) :

LOVE is essential for the proper employment of GIFTS

1. Gifts without fruit (love) = 0
2. “Agape” love enables gifts
3. Gifts are temporary, Fruit is Unending

SUMMARY APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

1. I should not seek a spiritual gift, but DEVELOP what I have been given
2. My gift will be in effect until my heavenly state supercedes it
(Some gifts, such as tongues, might cease earlier – more on this in future studies)
3. LOVE must always guide my use of a spiritual gift - my gift is of no use without LOVE