

The Book of 1
The Book of 1 Corinthians
1 Corinthians 12:28-31

Session 55: Ranking the Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

What Paul has done in verse 28 is this: he has taken all those spiritual gifts, and lined them up under these different operations God wants accomplished.

Now we are going to talk about the gifts in general to make sure you understand there are at least five operations of God that these gifts were designed to accomplish. Now, did you notice that when Paul starts out in verse 28, he starts numbering; first, secondarily, thirdly, and then he stops with the numbering?

Why does he then change to “after that?” Why not just say, fourthly? And instead of continuing his list after miracles, he says, “then” as though it is another group, because it is. Why is he doing this, as it seems very disjointed?

It is because he is grouping some things together. That means that apostles, prophets and teachers, although they are different gifts with different administrations, and are accomplishing different operations, all three have something in common, which makes them different from the rest of the gifts. Miracles is in a category of its own and the last four (healings, helps, governments and tongues) are in another category.

Paul numbers, apostles, prophets and teachers to link them together and what is the common link? They all pertain to the communication of God’s word. The first operation the gifts are designed to accomplish is the communication of God’s word.

In verse 31, Paul calls these “the best gifts” in connection with the local assembly because they accomplish the main operation of God in the local assembly, which is the communication of God’s word.

1 Timothy 3:15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

This makes us realize the communication of God's word is the main issue in the local assembly, as it is designed to function as the pillar and ground of the truth. That is to say, the church is designed as a classroom for the communication of sound doctrine for edification. Godly edifying is the objective in the local assembly and therefore the communication of God's word is the issue. Therefore, the gifts that functioned at the beginning of this dispensation of grace to achieve that objective, are to be recognized as the best ones. Then it says,

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, **after that miracles**, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Miracles have nothing to do with communicating God's word, and they have no real role in a local assembly. Why? Because miracles were not for the purpose of producing godly edification in a local assembly.

Miracles have an entirely different operation in view. What is the operation of miracles? They were a confirmation of the reality that God was now working with Gentiles. You can see how this is an entirely different operation from that of apostles, prophets and teachers within the local assembly.

Turn to Romans chapter 15 and note what God said those signs, wonders and miracles were all about.

Romans 15:15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, ¹⁶ That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, **that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable**, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. ¹⁷ I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. ¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, **to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,** ¹⁹ **Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God;** so that from

Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

The second operation of God is to demonstrate that by the dispensational change, Paul's offering up of the Gentiles to God was acceptable. In short, the second operation is to demonstrate to the Gentiles that God is now offering them salvation apart from the agency of Israel, and the confirmation of that truth was accomplished by the miracles which the apostle Paul performed.

In these verses, Paul is talking about his special Gentile apostleship in connection with the dispensational change. What God was doing through Paul was "the offering up of the Gentiles."

Romans 15:16 That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, **being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.**

What does that last phrase mean? It means that ministering to the Gentiles, and "offering them up" to God is what the Holy Ghost is now doing. In other words, the Holy Ghost was "setting apart" (sanctifying) Paul's ministry to the Gentiles as the main thing (center-stage) in this dispensation of grace. This is now what God is doing, this is what is being put on display.

Paul is saying that there are things that Christ has wrought by him, there are works Paul has done to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, and the way in which he did it is by mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.

Paul was an apostle, but he also had the gift of miracles. But the purpose of that gift was the same as anybody that was given the gift. After Paul left an area, there was someone there that the Holy Spirit gave the gift of working of miracles to, in order to continue that testimony in that area after Paul had gone. And what was that testimony? The reality that God had turned to the Gentiles.

The power of the Spirit of God there worked through that individual with the working of the miracles gift to make the Gentiles obedient. We are not talking about Gentiles who had already trusted Christ. These miracles were to prove to

unbelieving Gentiles that God is now working with them. To what end? So that they would believe the gospel of grace. After the miracles, someone with the gift of evangelism would come along and preach the gospel and the Gentiles would believe.

The gift of miracles was to confirm the reality of God dealing with the Gentiles.

That gift works where the unbelievers are, that's the gift that functions in conjunction with the evangelist going around. That gift doesn't function in the local assembly. The local assembly is where believers come together to get edified.

The value of the gifts of working of miracles had a completely different operation of God to accomplish by the individual's possession of that gift. Go back to chapter 12 in 1 Corinthians, that **second operation of God**, the gift once again to accomplish that is miracles.

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, **then gifts of healings**, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Look at another one, it says; "then gifts of healings." The gifts of healings are the third operation of God. Paul looks at miracles differently than he looks at gifts of healings. In the mind of God, these gifts of healings are different from miracles.

Even so, there is a sense in which these healings are miracles. So, why doesn't God see them as one in the same, for these seem related? There is the critical difference; while at the same time being distinct and different.

For what purpose was the operation of the miracles? To confirm the dispensational change to unsaved Gentiles.

So, for what purpose is the operation of the gifts of healings? To confirm the dispensational change to unsaved Israel! Both are confirming that God is now working with Gentiles (similarity: both are miraculous) but those confirmations are to two different groups (distinct from each other).

We talked about these “gifts of healings” being plural. There is a reason for describing it like that and it is because there are some particular healings spoken about in the scriptures that are described in a very special way and were described as very meaningful to Israel.

To see this, turn to Matthew 11. Now, where are we on Israel’s timeline when we are in Matthew 11? We have arrived at the climactic stage in the program. What do I mean by that?

After the 400 years of silence, all that is left is the days of the Messiah (34 years) and Daniel’s 70th Week (7 years). These two being on the other side of the time of God’s silence constitute them being the “climactic stage of the program.” Yes, that final stage has two parts. The “days of the Messiah” means it is the time of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus.

As Jesus conducts His ministry, certain signs and miracles are being performed (as signs of the times) confirming that the kingdom was at hand. Jesus was fulfilling Old Testament passages, such as Isaiah 35.

Isaiah 35:4 Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, **your God will come** *with* vengeance, *even* God *with* a recompence; he will come and save you.

He will actually come twice. The first time the Messiah comes, He will perform signs and miracles such as listed in verses 5-6.

Isaiah 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. ⁶ Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing...

When He comes the second time, all of that will be true along with some other things listed in the passage.

Isaiah 35: 6 **Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing:** for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and **streams in the desert.** ⁷ And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay,

shall be grass with reeds and rushes.⁸ And **an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness**; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*.⁹ **No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon**, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk *there*:¹⁰ And **the ransomed of the LORD shall return**, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and **sorrow and sighing shall flee away**.

Even though there are two “comings,” they both constitute the climactic stage of the program.

When Israel’s God came, specified healings would take place in Israel. Those healings functioned as specific signs of the presence of Adonai Jehovah in the land of Israel (Matthew 11:1).

But what I want to emphasize is that Jesus is performing certain healings in connection with His first coming to Israel. With that in mind, let’s read Matthew 11:1

Matthew 11:1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.

Back in chapter 10, when Jesus first commissioned The Twelve, He sent them out and gave them power to perform certain healings.

Matthew 10:1 And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

He gave them the power to heal and notice when he identifies the particular healings in verses 6-8.

Matthew 10:6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.⁷ And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.⁸ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

There are some particular healings that are taking place along with the casting out of devils. Jesus commissioned The Twelve to go out and put those signs of the Kingdom into effect. These healings, along with casting out devils, become the two hallmark signs of the Kingdom.

Matthew 11:1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities. ² Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, ³ And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

John knew from the OT what to look for. So, when he hears of these particular healings taking place, he sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the prophesied Christ.

Matthew 11:4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

Compare this list with what we read earlier in Isaiah 35.

These healings were highly significant to Israel in particular; at least they were supposed to be viewed that way. And they were viewed that way by those who were familiar with their OT. You could say that these were “Israel’s healings.” In what way? These were the healings that would take place when, according to Isaiah 35, “Israel’s God comes” to them.

And now what has happened? The Spirit of God has given some Gentile believers the supernatural gift to perform these specific healings; Israel’s healings which were in connection with their Messiah. What does this mean?

It means that the healings promised to Israel are now given to the Gentiles, signifying a dispensational change where God is “visiting the Gentiles” to “take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14).

These healings, now being performed by the Gentiles, were the sign that God had turned from Israel and was now working with Gentiles. It was a message to Israel.

We can see that because of the special nature of these healings, they must be separate from “miracles.” We can also see that this was not a gift which was exercised within the local assembly, but outside the assembly where it would be seen. So, there is the third operation.

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Then there is a fourth operation. After the healings, there are helps, governments. We will put these two together as they are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. That “coin” would be “local church orderliness.” To bring order to the assembly required more than one gift.

You will notice that these gifts are not listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, in the list of gifts; but some of those gifts which are listed fall into these categories. What I mean by that is that some of the gifts listed are in the same category of operation where certain gifts line up with helps and governments.

By the way that becomes a big issue here in this latter part of 1 Corinthians. Over and over Paul talks about “keep the ordinances,” (1 Corinthians 11:2), “I will set in order when I come,” (1 Corinthians 11:34), and “let all things be done decently and in order,” (1 Corinthians 14:40.) But for now, we will stick with the words used in 1 Corinthians 12:28; helps, governments.

The gifts would bring order to the local assembly so that it functioned properly and efficiently and there was peace in the assembly. That is the fourth operation.

The final one listed in verse 28 is diversities of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, **diversities of tongues.**

The particular operation of tongues is found in chapter 14. Diversities of tongues were a sign to unbelieving Israel.

The gift of tongues is not designed for the communication of God's word in a local assembly; the gift of tongues is not designed to confirm that God is dealing with the Gentiles, it is not designed to confirm God turning from Israel, and it is not designed to provide local assembly orderliness. Quite the contrary, Paul will say that tongues within the local assembly can create disorder.

1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:
¹⁹ Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue.

Notice Paul says, I speak with tongues more than ye all, but he understood that the role of that gift is not in the local assembly. This is one of the reasons Satan loves to misuse a genuine gift or even counterfeit a gift; to create confusion. And, while we will get into this when get to chapter 14, for now just know that tongues are designed to be a final sign to unbelieving Israel.

This satanic misuse and counterfeiting of tongues is why Paul tells the Corinthians in the very next verse, they need to have an intelligent, adult understanding, especially when it comes to the gift of tongues.

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Verse 20 is saying they need to understand what tongues was about. And what is it about? Take a look at the next verse.

1 Corinthians 14:21 **In the law it is written**, With *men of* other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

The quote of verse 21 is from Isaiah 28:11-12.

Isaiah 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. ¹² To whom he said, This *is* the rest *wherewith* ye may cause the weary to rest; and this *is* the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

Funny isn't it, that the quote is found in Isaiah, yet Paul starts off 1 Corinthians 14:21 by saying, "In the law it is written..." Some will think this is a mistake, as the

“law” refers to the first five books of the OT. There are a couple of ways to reconcile this: 1) It seems that sometimes the “law” is used to refer to the Old Testament in general, as in the case of 1 Corinthians 12. Another example of this would be John 10:34.

John 10:34 Jesus answered them, **Is it not written in your law**, I said, Ye are gods?

But where is this found? In the Psalms.

Psalms 82:6 **I have said, Ye *are* gods**; and all of you *are* children of the most High.

The Psalms are not part of the first five books, so it seems that sometimes, “the law” is just a general reference to OT scriptures.

But Paul may also use the phrase “It is written in the law” to point out something to the Corinthians, something they already know about their sanctification. And what should they know?

They should know they are not under the law, but under grace. And whenever the scripture says, “it is written in the law,” they should know that is talking about how God dealt with Israel. When Paul writes in verse 21 of 1 Corinthians 14, “In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and lips will speak to this people...” the Corinthians should understand that God was using diversities of tongues to make an impact upon Israel. And what does the rest of 1 Corinthians 14:21 say?

1 Corinthians 14:21 In the law it is written, With *men of* other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; **and yet for all that will they not hear me**, saith the Lord.

Isaiah 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. ¹² To whom he said, This *is* the rest *wherewith* ye may cause the weary to rest; and this *is* the refreshing: **yet they would not hear**.

When we get to 1 Corinthians 14, we will look at this in much more detail and when we do, you will see that tongues was a final sign of God displeasure with unbelieving Israelites. You will also see that God gave this gift at the beginning of

the fifth course of punishment (CoP) and God would continue to use it throughout the fifth CoP to testify of His displeasure with them. Tongues was the last of a series of things which God did to make Israel heed what was being said to them.

And what does the scripture say about this final warning? “Yet for all that, they will not hear me.” God’s last resort was to have “men of other tongues” (Gentiles) speak to Israel. And again, at the beginning of the dispensation of grace, during the “diminishing of Israel,” God was displeased with the unbelieving element in Israel because they didn’t respond to the “gifts of healings” and the other things God did to get their attention.

So for now, we understand that this fifth operation, which has to do with diversities of tongues was to confirm God’s displeasure with unbelieving Israel. That gift has no role within the assembly itself. By working our way through 1 Corinthians 12:28, I think we have a good understanding of the various “operations” which the gifts were designed to accomplish.

Recap:

Operation 1: Communication of God’s word

Operation 2: Confirming God’s turning to the Gentiles

Operation 3: Confirming God’s turning from Israel

Operation 4: Local Assembly Orderliness

Operation 5: The Final Sign to Unbelieving Israel