13 - The Manifestations of the Spirit

1 Cor. 12:4-7

Now there are gifts being distributed to people, but it is the same spirit.

And there are ministries being distributed to people, and yet it is the same Lord.

And there are energizings being distributed to people, but it is the same God who energizes all of them in all people.

Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.

These four verses have individual and inter-connected information, summarized like this:

Verse 4. Spiritual gifts.

5. Spiritual ministries.

6. Spiritual energizings.

7-11. Spiritual manifestation.

Let’s handle this section by starting with the manifestations and then discuss the energizings as they come up. Then we will circle around to the ministries and gifts which are what the rest of chapter 12 discusses.

First, we’ll discuss some general guidelines that affect all the manifestations. When was the first time the spirit was manifested in the Church age? At Pentecost!

Acts 2:4

And they were all filled with holy spirit, and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

A little research opens our understanding about this verse and how the spirit came. Greek verbs have three VOICES, active, middle, and passive, indicating the origin and direction of the action described. The active voice is used when the subject of the sentence is the instigator of the action described by the verb. The middle voice denotes that the subject is both the instigator and the receiver of the action. The passive voice is used to show that the subject of the verb is acted on by an outsider.

1. John threw the ball to Pete. Active voice. John (the subject) initiated the action and “threw” to another.
2. John threw the ball to himself. Middle voice. John (the subject) initiated the action and “threw” to himself.
3. John was thrown the ball by Pete. Passive voice. John (the subject) was acted upon, not initiating the action, but receiving it.

In Acts 2:4, the word “filled” is in the Greek passive voice. This means they (the subject – the disciples) didn’t fill themselves, Jesus did. That may seem obvious to some, but not all of us. I stressed out thinking about my part in getting filled with the spirit. I worried unwisely because it’s a God-sized job, beyond my paygrade, as the saying goes. How did the filling happen? The apostles obeyed Jesus and were at the right place at the right time and Jesus did the rest – passive voice. They didn’t act – they were acted upon. This is how it works for us too. We confess Romans 10:9 and the Lord fills us with the spirit. Whew!

The next phrase is, “and [they] began to speak in other tongues…”. Grammatically, the subject “they” carries over to the next phrase. The word “began” is in the middle voice. So, although the first part of the verse is the passive voice (disciples acted upon), the second part of the verse says the apostles then initiated the action [speaking in other tongues]. In other words, filling them with holy spirit was God’s job, then, speaking in tongues was their job. How does this work? Think about it. God initiates. Man responds by trust and activates by doing. In terms of speaking in tongues, how does this work?

The third phrase in verse 4 is “as the Spirit was giving them utterance”. The words “was giving” is in the active voice. The means the subject [the Spirit-God-the Giver] initiates and is responsible for the action of giving utterance to the one speaking in tongues. The speaker does not decide the utterance, or the content, the Spirit does. God energizes it.

Please see this example and pattern of the Church’s first manifestation of the spirit event from which all others will follow.

1. God initiates all spiritual gifts, ministries and manifestation by filling us with His spirit. If someone is saved, then they have already been filled with holy spirit.
2. We activate the spirit within by doing what God says to do. It varies for each manifestation.
3. God energizes the outcome, resulting in a manifestation of the spirit.

Why is speaking in tongues a manifestation of the spirit and not a manifestation of our mind? Because we cannot speak in a language we’ve never learned. It’s physically impossible. Therefore, speaking in tongues and the rest of the manifestations of the spirit are supernatural. Once again, it’s a manifestation of the spirit, not my smarts, strength, personality, etc. It’s bigger than me. It’s beyond me. It’s God sized! Why? Because it’s energized by God! This is why…

THAT we speak is our business. WHAT we speak is God’s business.

The manifestations are a partnership between God and us. No one speaks in tongues unless they speak. No one also speaks in tongues unless God gives the content. It’s a partnership and a fellowship. (Sound familiar?)

This reality can be a problem for those who think that the “spirit” (the gift) is the third person of the Trinity. They cannot imagine that they should “activate” God! The idea can make some queasy and back away from the manifestations – sometimes for a lifetime. How awful! It’s really simple. They should forget about the idea that God Himself is His gift. Ask yourself, “How do we walk? Does “God” move our legs and make us walk?” The idea is silly. We just activate our legs and go! That is how speaking in tongues works also. Just as our legs are part of us and subject to our will, the spirit is similar. It’s a gift to us. Like our legs, the spirit is a part of us. We are body, soul, and spirit.

“Speaking” (our job) + “in tongues” (God’s job) = speaking in tongues. This is the simplicity and clarity that extends to all the manifestations.

1 Cor. 12:7

Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.

Many (including some of my favorite Christian minister friends) think that this begins the list of ‘the gifts of the spirit’. I disagree. It doesn’t say ‘gift’, it says ‘manifestation’. These are two entirely different Greek words and concepts. To explain, here is a helpful analogy. Let’s say I give you a Swiss Army knife.



What did the knife cost you? Nothing, it was a gift. What did you have to do to get it? Only receive it. This is the nature of a gift, and a spiritual gift is still just that – a gift. Now on your new knife you have nine ways to use it – bottle opener, 2 screwdrivers, scissors, etc. One knife - many operations. Each operation came with the gift – “to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given”. Each of us can operate all nine of the manifestations, but each of us will be more adept at one or more of them than the others. I’ve owned a Swiss Army knife for 20 years and never opened a bottle with it! Could I have? Sure, but I never have. Why not? Probably because I usually drink from cans with easy open tops. What have I used it for? I’ve used the knife, awl, screwdrivers, and the can opener.

This is similar to the manifestations, which in Greek means a “shining through”. Can we see the spirit directly? No. Can we see the manifestations of the spirit? Sure. We know the spirit of God is there when we speak in a language we don’t know. We know God is involved when we know something beforehand that comes to pass. We may not be able to see Jesus, but we see his love and power shining through in a healing.



See the lamp above? Can you see the bulb inside the lampshade? No. Is it there? Sure. How can you tell? Because we can see the light ‘shining through’ (manifesting) the lampshade. It lights up the wall, cup and everything near it. This is how the manifestations work. You can’t see the spirit, but you can see the tongues, prophesy, etc. They are not from the human mind or ability, just like the light isn’t from the physical lamp. It comes from electricity (the “energizing” of God) to the bulb (the spirit) through the lampshade (us).

Manifestation / Gift

God gives each of us the ability to manifest the spirit. The potential problem with the “gifts and manifestations are really the same” idea is twofold. #1. A person might think they must wait to receive the gift. Because if they think it’s a gift, they feel it would be presumptuous of them to act like they have the ability already instead of waiting for notification from the Giver. At Pentecost we saw that once they were filled, they started speaking in tongues. The gift is being filled with the spirit. The gift is not the manifestation. It’s like the knife analogy. Once you have been given the knife, it’s up to you to use it. Waiting is unnecessary. It’s all there. We activate it by trusting God. Then, He energizes.

The second problem with “the manifestations are really gifts of the spirit” idea is that some Christians gets the mistaken idea that God choses which ‘gift’ they get. This is erroneous. We have the ability to manifest the spirit in any way we want **IF** we activate it **AND** God energizes it. Just as the screwdriver (and other functions) must be folded out for use in our knife, so we must “fold out” a manifestation to activate it and see if there’s a corresponding divine energizing. We’ll discuss this more as we consider each manifestation.

In effect, it really doesn’t matter if someone calls them manifestations or gifts as long as they realize that the activation is up to the individual, not God. And that they act as if they can operate all nine, not “wait for the gift”, or “a gift”, or “gifts”. Once again, the gift is holy spirit, the manifestations are the evidences of that spirit. I’ve seen many people call them gifts but think and act like they are manifestations and that usually works out fine.

Manifestations are Beneficial

Another gem of truth we get from verse 7 is “the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.” Manifestations are beneficial to the operator and the church. Regretfully, there are ‘operations of the (evil) spirit’ that always ultimately lead to being stolen from, killed and destroyed. I’ve had Christians tell me stories from their past that curled my hair. Some describe millions and even billions of dollars lost because of advice given by familiar spirits in spiritualist sessions. I’ve seen health, marriages, and family relationships destroyed because evil spirits were given a say in their life. The genuine manifestation of the spirit is always beneficial. Always. With some of the manifestations like revelation and faith, it may be difficult to accomplish at first, but when you follow it all the way through, its profitability is unquestioned. I’ve had revelation that I had to trust for years before it came to pass. The revelation didn’t seem profitable at first. It seemed like an ‘impossible dream’ – a fantasy. But over time, God strengthened me and through some twists and turns, what God promised came to pass. Was the result “good”? It was - and is - fantastic!

1 John 1:5b

God is light and there is no darkness in him at all.

There is never any evil or harm in the manifestations. If God is energizing them and His spirit is producing them, they will always be good and valuable - to us and others. (Of course, evil spirits and those subject to their influence will object, but what do we expect?)

Owner’s Manuel?

Now some wonder why God didn’t have Paul write an instruction manual about the manifestations. It certainly would have made it easier for us, right? I can think of two reasons. The first is that they thought Christ was coming back shortly and there was no need to provide info for an audience twenty years later, much less two thousand years later. Why? Remember, the time that began on Pentecost was a sacred secret. What it entailed began to be revealed 10-20 years later. This Corinthian epistle was written about the 20-year mark and they had no idea how long this Era of Grace would last. Do you? No, no one does. This epistle was written to address their questions, and the first person reports Paul heard. The “Gift of Holy Spirit” book adds another reason:

“The people of Corinth and other Christians in the first century were familiar with the manifestations of holy spirit, so there was no need for Paul to explain what they were or how they worked. God’s people had been manifesting holy spirit for generations (except for speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues, with which the Corinthian church was very familiar). God had put holy spirit on people in the Old Testament such as Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Elijah, and many others, and those people could then hear knowledge or wisdom from God (thus the message of knowledge and wisdom). They had the faith to do what God asked of them even when it seemed impossible, they did miracles, and when Jesus came on the scene, he taught his disciples to heal and cast out demons. The believers in Corinth were familiar with these manifestations, and of course Paul, who founded the Church in Corith on his second missionary journey had also instructed them.”

How do we learn of the manifestations of the spirit today since there is no “Owner’s Manual”? We learn from the scriptures and from experienced brothers and sisters (like the Corinthians did) who are more experienced in manifesting the spirit. And we practice and get better. Guess what? This is exactly what we’re doing!

Filled with the Spirit

One more clarifying teaching point before we begin. There are some in the church that use the phrases “filled by the spirit”, “overcome by the spirit” and “controlled by the spirit” in confusing ways. On – and since – Pentecost, when a person got saved, they were filled with holy spirit. Then “they began to speak as the Sprit gave utterance”. God fills, we speak, God energizes, right? The idea that we get filled again after salvation inplies that we must have sprung a leak, some spirit leaked out and we need to be refilled! Sounds silly, doesn’t it? To repeat, we get filled with the spirit at the new birth. We will never get more … or less spirit afterward. It’s a gift, remember? We can’t do good works and get 10% either (thank the Lord!) We are filled – period!

Now, sometimes it says in the New testament that someone acts or speaks in conjunction with being filled with holy spirit (or the “Holy Ghost” in the King James). You will notice that no mention os made of a “refill” just a referring to those named speaking or acting from holy spirit, i.e., manifesting the spirit – spealing in tongues, prophesying, etc. Here is a verse that offers a picturesque analogy.

Eph. 5:18

And do not get drunk on wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled with the spirit:

We all know wine’s effects on us. Too much of it alters our thinking and actions. Is it beneficial? Have you ever heard of the book called “Great things in history done while drunk”? No? That’s because there is no such thing! Drunkenness leads to reckless actions and wreckful words. How many relationships have been sunk from the torpedoes of hurtful words? Too many – that’s for sure. God says instead of letting alcohol color, your actions and words, let *pneuma* do that. God wants our actions words, and attitudes flavored by the spirit He gave us. We are to be filled with it like we would be filled with wine. Does that mean if we were drunk and poked with a stick wine would pour out? No, the filling is figurative both with the wine and the spirit. It figuratively means to let holy spirit inspire you like wine can. Instead of a win-o oh be a spirit-o! Be high on spirit.

“The Spirit Controlled Life”

Now, there is some wording in some churches that can confuse folks. I know – it confused me for years. They speak of the “spirit-controlled life”. When I heard that I took it to mean that the “Spirit” (God) would control me. I remember praying to God to “control me” and tell me what to do. I thought allowing God to do things “through me” was right. After praying for this, I was confused because I didn’t get an answer and God never “controlled me”. I emptied myself and waited for the “controlling influence of the Holy Ghost” but was repeatedly disappointed. Later, I saw this next verse and began to understand my errors.

1 Cor. 14:32

And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

I had been thinking that the prophets should be subject to the spirit, when the Bible says that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets! God is not to be in control of me, manifesting the spirit, I am to be in control! The prophet is responsible for his prophecies, just as each of us are responsible for our own manifestation of the spirit. In other words, if there are errors either in content or the manner of manifesting, it’s not God‘s fault, it’s our fault because we are in control, not the Spirit (God) or the spirit (the gift).

As I read the Bible, I realized that “the spirit-controlled life” was never mentioned. Where did this idea come from? Probably from some theologian who meant well but confused me and others. Since realizing that God initiates, I activate, and then He energizes the manifestations, I no longer wait in vain for God to control me. I manifest – anywhere anytime. Perhaps the control idea was put forth with the intention of meaning influence. Nonetheless, I thought “control” meant control, and it cost me years of confusion and not manifesting the spirit until I learned the truth. God made, and backs free will, especially with the manifestations of the spirit.

Perhaps this conflict highlights the errant ideas of “the Holy Spirit” or “God” being misidentified in the manifestations. If unlearned Christians think that “the Holy Ghost” is involved, the idea of “activating God” probably makes them shutter and feel close to blasphemy. I understand that sentiment of love and respect for God. I have it too. But I know that the manifestations come from the gift of holy spirit, something God gave us when we were our saved, meant to relay information and power to us. God‘s spirit is a part of us – and in the big picture - part of God too, yet it is subject to us. There is no scenario – where or when – it “controls” us. Or “overpowers” us. Or “acts on its own”, making us a bystander. The spirit of the believer is subject to the believer just as the spirit of the prophets are subject to the prophets. Our challenge is to develop a partnership with the Lord to know how and when to activate the spirit to do his will and walk as he did, benefiting everyone. Although we were born to sin nature in the first birth, we are born again to manifest the spirit – to speak in tongues, to interpret, to prophesy, to get revelation and trust God for miracles and healing. We are not only body and soul like everyone else we are now body, soul and spirit, new creations living in a new spiritual life. I trust these teachings are encouraging you to open your spiritual eyes and take a spiritual leap to walk in step with our wonderful Lord Jesus and heavenly father, God. What a wonderful adventure and journey!