

Paul means something further by the inclusion of knowledge in this list of spiritual gifts. If we compare the passage here [I Corinthians 12] with I Corinthians 13:2 and 14:6 it becomes apparent that Paul is speaking of some revelatory word from God for the benefit of others. Jesus clearly had this gift when he knew that the woman of Samaria had already had five husbands. Peter had it, when he knew that the heart of Ananias and Sapphira was not right with God. This seem to be the gift of which the apostle is speaking. It is a God-given disclosure of knowledge that could not normally be available to the recipient. It is intended not for the gratification of the individual who receives it, but for the benefit of the congregation or some member of it. It is a particularly precious gift for the Christian counsellor, who needs to know the heart of the man to whom he is speaking.

L. Showing Mercy

Roman 12:6, 8 -- " We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is . . . showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

Williams (p.118) writes:

If the gift of generosity relates to the giving of our means, then showing mercy relates to the giving of ourselves. The man who possesses this particular gift recognizes another's need and ministers to it.

Again there is the suggestion here that although this virtue should be found in every Christian, there are some individuals who have a particular grace gift to devote themselves to the alleviation of the wretchedness and suffering of others. Perfunctory acts of charity are no substitute for mercy cheerfully shown to people who are in real need. This ministration evidences not only a compassionate heart but a high degree of spiritual maturity. Undoubtedly this gift would have been a great blessing in the early Church, in an age of slavery and social discrimination. It will still be invaluable in any community, social welfare notwithstanding. Mercy tends to cultivate mercy. As Jesus said: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Sanders (p. 121) says that "Showing mercy is a gift, and the term is variously rendered in modern versions, e.g., 'He who shows pity', 'If you are helping others in distress', 'He who does acts of mercy'. Each rendering sheds some light on its significance. To be effective, this gift must be exercised with kindness and cheerfulness, not as a matter of duty.