

Question: When I am studying a passage using layman's Greek (Strong's) I have come to a number of passages, where a plural is used, and if the word was not plural it could mean something different. Strong's makes no distinction if the word is plural or not. Is there a "plural" in Greek, or do the translators assume the plural to fit what they believe to be the context? How does this relate to 1 Cor 12:31? If it is plural it refers to several gifts. If it is singular, I would think it is referring to what he speaks of next in chapter 13 to love one another, which Christ gave as the New Commandment.

Answer: Yes, there are plural nouns and verbs in Greek. While Strong's doesn't necessarily recognize this fact, most English translators attempt to maintain the singular and plural distinctions of the Greek text so you should be able to recognize this in most English translations. While I believe Hebrew and Greek can be overrated, I do believe that it is usually important to note singular and plural references. Fortunately, as I've indicated most of these can be picked up by a simple reading of a more literal English translation (e.g., NASB, ESV, NET, and NKJV).

Re: 1 Cor 12:31, the noun charisma is charismata, which is an accusative neuter plural noun. All of the English translations I looked at reflect this fact. Therefore, it is best to understand charismata ("gifts") as encompassing multiple gifts. The "greater gifts" would then be referring to prophesying and possibly teaching (see 14:19) versus the more miraculous gifts (e.g., speaking in tongues and working miracles). In this context, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to desire the "greater" gift of prophesying (14:1, 5, 39a) over the miraculous. Note: the word "gifts" in 14:1 is not in the Greek text, but rather is supplied by most English translations. This is not necessary since the emphasis seems to be on prophesying.

I see the bridge in this passage as the phrase "a still more excellent way" (12:31b). This is Paul's segue to love (1 Cor 13), which is the oil that causes all the gears to work properly.