

Sermon: Spiritual Gifts Are Given to (for) the Church.

Text: I Corinthians 12:1-11 ESV

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Introduction: I grew up in the 60's and while going to Lincoln Christian College I was exposed to wild stuff like Gaither Music and rock groups like Petra in worship. I met people involved with the *Jesus People* movement. I went to a couple of charismatic churches, and that was a strange experience - mostly because I as a Christian had no idea what was being said. It wasn't helpful to me as a Christian, and I can only imagine what a non-believer must have thought, wandering in off the street.

Much of what was being pushed back in the sixties and still exists today is the idea of "experiencing Jesus." What is going on here, many times, is a somewhat distorted view of worship. It is all about me rather than about Jesus. It is about how I feel and may actually disengage the brain in this experience.

Illus. It is a little like a long-distance runner. How many marathoners do we have here this morning? What is a *runner's high*, or what are the benefits of a runner's high? A variety of exercises can cause your body to release endorphins. These are the chemicals that produce sensations of happiness and pleasure. They can even act as a natural pain reliever, which is great for long-distance runners and those who engage in challenging runs. Some worship is structured like that.

Many of the Corinthian church members had believed in many imaginary gods, and even worshipped the emperor before becoming Christian. Once one comes out of that kind of system there might be a tendency to only think of oneself, but really we should replace false Gods with the one and only God, and what we do is for Him and then others before ourselves.

There is an analogy of the Body which we will talk more about next week, but this concept is also important for us to understand today. What we do to/for individuals affects the entire body and Jesus her head. "The human body, as well as the human spirit or personality, is destined for redemption. What one does with one's body now has implications for the church and our salvation." - adapted - Ben Witherington III, p. 255 (*Conflict and Community in Corinth*).

The study of spiritual gifts can be helpful in clearing up misunderstanding. Whatever functions we may have been given are the result of unmerited grace given to us by God, the Father, as He sees fit. Whatever we have as a gift is an occasion for thanksgiving and encouragement for others - not a platform for pride or egotism.

I. Different Kinds of Spirits (vv. 1-3)

I Corinthians 12:1-3 ESV 1 Now concerning[a] spiritual gifts,[b] brothers,[and sisters] I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

Footnotes:

[a] 1 Corinthians 12:1 *Now concerning* introduces a reply to a question like in **7:1**

[b] 1 Corinthians 12:1 Or **spiritual persons or spiritual things - comment**

People say all kinds of things to be given credibility. “God speaks to me,” someone may say. **Illus.** After a round of golf up in Midland, MI, early in my ministry there, I was approached by a man to whom I had been introduced and he said: “God has spoken to me to tell you that I am supposed to help you build the church here.

After a little while this brother was involved in the worship team and he said something I will never forget. He said what we need in our worship service is “planned spontaneity.”

Just a few years later he and his family left to start another church in Midland, MI. So much for God’s voice being heard. Apparently there must have been an expiration on his call from God to work with our church.

When I read this first verse of our text it might have been *spiritual gifts* or *spiritual people* or maybe both. Witherington, p. 256 - **Verse 1** reads like a slap in the face. Paul does not want his audience to be ignorant about the very things that the Corinthians thought they were most well-versed in -- spiritual gifts.”

Paul tells them that it takes discernment because there are different kinds of spirits. Be careful whom is leading you, i.e., whom you are following, and certainly who it is you worship.

Further in this chapter, running through **chapter 14**, Paul deals with a number of spiritual gifts, but he does spend a lot of time on speaking in tongues. The reason seems apparent after a reading of the material. Tongues can be a distraction in corporate worship. Non-believers coming in will think you are crazy. Believers in the assembly must have an interpretation and it must be only two or three and everything done “decently and in order.”

Pagan cults, mystery religions and the like also were known for this kind of “language” in their services. Tongues are not the supreme spiritual gift for the church even though some were elevating it - not for theological accuracy, but personal elevation and notice. Here is my rule on spiritual gifts: “Anything or anyone that takes focus away from the worship of God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit is not “of God.”

Witherington, p. 256 - “It seems unlikely that anyone was saying ‘cursed be Jesus’ or ‘Jesus is cursed’ in the Christian assembly, but one can imagine an ecstatic doing so in a pagan setting.” Even the Jews might have said such a thing about Jesus who was thought to have been cursed by God because he was killed by hanging him on a tree. And to some “ecstatic speech was proof of inspiration by the Holy Spirit.”

II. Diversity of Gifts and the Trinity (vv. 4-6)

I Corinthians 12:4-6 ESV 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

So here in these verses we see the Trinity (Spirit, Lord [Jesus], and God) involved in giving gifts to the Church. Just like there are various parts of the Body there are also various gifts all for the proper functioning of the Church which is the Body of Christ.

It is God who decides who gets what spiritual gift. We cannot earn it or study for it. We can only be thankful and utilize our gifts to benefit and empower others for God’s glory.

How could God’s good gifts be a problem even in the contemporary church? When they are misused for personal glory and not for others or the glory of God. “Tongues and interpretation of tongues are placed last in all three lists to deemphasize what the Corinthians were over-emphasizing, not because it was not a valid or valuable gift. Paul does not call it the least of the gifts.” - Witherington, p. 257

James 1:17 ESV 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.[a]

Footnotes: [a] James 1:17 Some manuscripts variation due to a shadow of turning

What I like about the idea of a “variety of gifts” is there is a gift for everyone. We all receive a gift from God that will help us be able to serve others and God all at the same time.

III. The Spirit Is Given (to All Believers) for the Common Good (vv. 7-11).

I Corinthians 12:7-11 ESV 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as he wills.

1. **Word of wisdom** – The fact that this gift is described as the “word” of wisdom indicates that it is one of the speaking gifts. This gift describes someone who can understand and speak forth biblical truth in such a way as to skillfully apply it to life situations with discernment.

2. **Word of knowledge** – This is another speaking gift that involves understanding truth with an insight that only comes by revelation from God. Those with the gift of knowledge understand the deep things of God and the mysteries of His Word.

There needs to be great care with these first two gifts and they must be tested against the Bible and the closed canon of God’s Word.

3. **Faith** – All believers possess faith in some measure because it is one of the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on all who come to Christ in faith (**Galatians 5:22-23**). The spiritual gift of faith is exhibited by one with a strong and unshakeable confidence in God, His Word, His promises, and the power of prayer.

4. **Healing** – Although God does still heal today, and while there is no biblical reason that God could not empower an individual with the spiritual gift of healing today, God miraculously healing people directly through the spiritual gifting of an individual seems to have primarily been limited to the ministry of the apostles and their close associates in the very early days of the church (**Hebrews 2:4**).

Illus. Recount story of faith healer in Deming, NM. Bill Harrison suggested I go.

5. **Miraculous powers** – Also known as the working of miracles, this is another temporary sign gift that involved performing supernatural events that could only be attributed to the power of God (**Acts 2:22**). This gift was exhibited by Paul (**Acts 19:11-12**), Peter (**Acts 3:6**), Stephen (**Acts 6:8**), and Phillip (**Acts 8:6-7**), among others.

6. **Prophecy** – The Greek word translated “prophecy” means “a speaking forth.” According to *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, the word refers to “discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden; especially by foretelling future events.” To prophesy is to declare the divine will, to interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God that is designed to influence people. **There are people, today, who call themselves “prophets” and “apostles.” Avoid them!**

7. **Distinguishing (the discerning) of spirits** – Certain individuals possess the unique ability to determine the true message of God from that of the deceiver, Satan, whose methods include purveying deceptive and erroneous doctrine. Jesus said many would come in His name and would deceive many (**Matthew 24:4-5**), but the gift of discerning spirits is given to the church to protect it from such as these.

8. **Speaking in tongues** – The gift of tongues is one of the temporary sign gifts given to the early church to enable the gospel to be preached throughout the world to all nations and in all known languages. It involved the divine ability to speak in languages previously unknown to the speaker. This gift authenticated the message of the gospel and those who preached it as coming from God. The phrase “diversity of tongues” (KJV) or “different kinds of tongues” (NIV) effectively eliminates the idea of a “personal prayer language” as a spiritual gift.

Comment - tongues were not always a cataloged language.

9. **Interpretation of tongues** – A person with the gift of interpreting tongues could understand what a tongues-speaker was saying even though he did not know the language that was being spoken. The tongues interpreter would then communicate the message of the tongues-speaker to everyone else, so all could understand.

There are a few other different spiritual gifts mostly in Paul’s writings. All are important to the healthy working of the Body of Christ, e.g. serving, teaching, encouraging (**hospital call with Joe Vaux**), giving, leadership, mercy, helps and a few others.

Conclusion: The last verse in our text this morning always needs to be kept in mind: **11 All these (gifts) are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.**

We should never be like the Corinthians and bragging about self and promoting one group over another. God and His church are to be honored above all else. A gift is something undeserved, and not earned, and certainly nothing to be used to elevate self, but to elevate God and others. **We are just servants, all of us!**

Conzelmann makes an interesting comment, he says, “everyday acts of service are now set on a par with the recognized, supernatural phenomena of the Spirit.” Humble everyday service should be appreciated for what it is a gift from God. No gift should ever produce division in the Body of Christ.

Craddock Stories, p. 70 - I went to Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York some years ago to preach in the absence of the minister. They gave their minister thirteen weeks off in the summer. Those places, I think that’s a nice idea...write that down (for your next minister - mention Chuck Markel). Different ministers filled in. This *was* a big church; I guess there were a couple of thousand people there that Sunday. Before I went to preach, I got a letter from Steve Kechelino. He sang in the choir, and he was in New York studying opera. His note was this: “Would you be willing to stay after church and have lunch with some of us and talk about the Christian life?” I sent him a note *back* that said I’d be glad to.

So after church, here were these young people in their late teens, twenties, maybe some of them as much as thirty, all of them in New York to try to make it on the stage or in music---Julliard school of music and opera, groups forming rock bands and all---and we went in the kitchen and fixed some soup and salad. I ate with them, and then we moved back into the sanctuary. There were about 250 of them. They were in New York, away from home; they weren’t even supposed to be in church! They asked me to stay with them, and we talked about the Christian life. We had a wonderful discussion. I said to them, “I’m really surprised to see you here. You’re away from home, and you’re trying to make it in New York, and this is the city, and all of that.”

During the discussion a young fellow stood up, and after asking him where he was from, I said, “What are you doing in New York?”

He said, “I’m trying to form a rock band.”

I said, Well, what does this mean to you?”

He said, “**If you have a gift and forget the giver, all you really have is talent, and talent isn’t everything.**” And he sat down. Wasn’t that something? If you forget the giver, all you have left is talent, and talent isn’t everything.

Most of the time, if you simply watch over time, you can understand who is important with people: God or them...You see the Corinthians were interested in displaying their gifts, much like a peacock, to get notice and acclaim for themselves, rather than glory for God. Paul tells them and us, today: **I Corinthians 10:31 ESV** ³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.