

## **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

Hymns: #18 Now Thank We All Are God

#541 Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah

#### **Reading: 1 Corinthians 12**

It was Friday night and the police Booze Bus and Breathalysing team was set up and funnelling cars into the left lane for checks. A car comes to a stop and the police officer gave the usual instructions, "Please blow into the meter until I tell you to stop". The driver complied and the reading came back 0.00. "All good...have a good night" said the officer. But before the man drove away the officer noticed a large collection of knives on the backseat. "Sir," he says. "Why do you have all those knives on your back seat?" "They're for my juggling act," the man replies. "Prove it," says the officer. So, the man gets out of the car and begins juggling the knives just as two other men drove by. "Man," says one guy. "I'm glad I quit drinking. These new sobriety tests are getting really hard."

What is it that come easy to you that is not so easy for others? The answer lies in your gifting.

This morning we are going to see Paul seek to educate the Corinthians about Spiritual Gifts.

A Barna Research Group survey found that 29% of all adults have never heard of spiritual gifts. 69% have heard of spiritual gifts but do not know what their spiritual gift is. If these statistics are accurate, that means only 2% of the people surveyed knew about spiritual gifts and knew what theirs was. Wow! Which group would you fall into if you had taken part in that survey? Do you know what your spiritual gift(s) is (are)?

In this Chapter we're going to see nine gifts of the Spirit, One Body with many parts, two pitfalls to be avoided and the priority of gifting within the church.

**1. Nine Gifts of the Spirit V. 1-11** *"Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. 2You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."*

When Paul says in v. 1 that he doesn't want the Corinthians to be ignorant, you can be sure that they were in fact ignorant, thus Paul spends considerable time addressing the gifts of the Spirit, (Ch. 12), the Spirit of the gifts (Ch. 13) and the Language of the Spirit (Ch. 14). What he says literally is that he doesn't want them to be ignorant about πνευματικῶν- Lit. "spiritualities"; adjective meaning things produced by the Spirit as opposed to "carnalities" which we have already seen the Corinthians had plenty of.

First, in v. 2-3 Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to ignorant about the "spirituality" of certain people or dynamics. Verses two and three of this chapter have presented commentators and expositors a challenge and as such a number of explanations have been offered to the "Jesus be cursed" or "Jesus is Lord" thought of Paul. One explanation is that Paul was referring to that earliest

## **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

Christological heresy known as Docetism which denied the humanity of Jesus. Certain false teachers in Corinth appeared to be exercising a prophetic or teaching gift, but denied the humanity of Jesus as expressed in the words "Jesus be cursed."<sup>1</sup> Another explanation is that, there was a rumour circulating that someone speaking in tongues was overheard by someone who understood the language that he was speaking in, and it was reported that the tongues speaker was actually blaspheming God. Paul said, "Impossible. No man by the Spirit calls Jesus accursed."<sup>2</sup>

In v.4-6 Paul doesn't want them to be ignorant of the fact that Trinity owns and directs all spiritual gifts. The word gifts here is Χάρισμάτων- from xárisma - "grace"; spiritual gifts are literally "grace-endowments"; Spirit-empowered service to the Church to carry out God's plan for His people.<sup>3</sup> The ministry of Spiritual Gifts originates in the New Testament and is commissioned by our Lord Jesus Christ. After He established His church on the earth and ascended to Heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to equip His church with power and spiritual gifts so that His disciples could continue to carry out His ministry objectives. While there are certain gifts of a spectacular nature that are often given greater attention, the New Testament mentions at least 21 that are provided to the church. These gifts are listed in Eph. 4:11, Rom. 12:3-7, and here in 1 Cor. 12. They are generally assigned to one of three categories:

- 1) Ministry or Office gifts: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher.
- 2) Motivational or Practical gifts: Service, Exhortation, Giving, Leadership, Mercy, Helps and Administration
- 3) Charismatic or Spiritual gifts: Wisdom, Knowledge, Discernment, Prophecy, Tongues, Interpretation, Faith, Healing and Miracles.<sup>4</sup>

In v. 4-6 we see The Trinity fully active in a great cascading dynamic of spiritual gifts. The Spirit gives different spiritual endowments to serve the Son's different ministries which in turn serve the Father's different operations or big picture workings.

In v. 7 Paul doesn't want them to be ignorant of the fact that each and every believer has been given at least one spiritual endowment gift. No one is left out. Do you know what He has given you? Paul also doesn't want them be ignorant of the fact that this gift is for the "common good". In other words, though the Spirit has given you a specific gift, it is not specifically "for" you. It is given to you to be exercised for the benefit of others (The only exception, which we'll see later, is the gift of tongues which does come with a personal application). Often when people ask me what my spiritual gift is I tell them "You are! You are God's spiritual gift to me. I hope you will exercise it for my benefit; for the "common good"."

The apostle Peter puts it like this: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet. 4:10-11)

In v. 8-10 Paul doesn't want them to be ignorant of what some of these specific gifts are, so he illustrates with nine gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are representative, not a complete catalogue of all

<sup>1</sup> David K. Lowry; *1 Corinthians; The Bible Knowledge Commentary- An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty; 1983; SP Publications (p.532)*

<sup>2</sup> Chuck Smith; Calvary Chapel; [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/smith\\_chuck/c2000\\_1Cr/1Cr\\_012.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/smith_chuck/c2000_1Cr/1Cr_012.cfm)

<sup>3</sup> HELPS Word Studies

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Dale A. Robbins

## **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

the gifts of the Spirit. Let's look at these and give a brief and by no means exhaustive definition of them:

- Wisdom- refers to insight into doctrinal truth. I think of Athanasius and the important insight into the doctrinal truth of the Trinity and the Incarnation.
- Knowledge- refers to the ability to apply doctrinal truth to life.
- Faith- refers to an unusual measure of trust in God for something; beyond the faith of salvation.
- Healings- the ability to restore health or temporarily hold off death.
- Miraculous powers- may refer to exorcising demons or of spiritual warfare “power encounters”.
- Prophecy- refers no longer to “foretelling” but to “forth-telling” with the result being the strengthening, encouraging and comforting of believers (1 Cor.14:3). In action it is bringing a current application of a living and active word to a situation that cuts through all religiosity, bureaucracy and hits the “bulls eye” of what God is saying and intending in that very moment.
- Distinguishing of Spirits- differentiates between true children of God and unbelievers; between a true prophet and a satanic deceiver. The late great Dr J Vernon McGee, who taught through Bible verse by verse for decades, publically acknowledged that he did NOT have this gift. He said he'd been taken in by people he had trusted more times than he could remember. How he needed this gift in the Body, and fortunately his wife had it and would warn him about who to beware of.
- Tongues- refers to the ability to speak in an unlearned language. Lit. γλωσσῶν- tongues. Was the normative experience of the 120 believers when they received "tongues as of fire" at Pentecost (Acts 2:3) and miraculously spoke in other actual languages, i.e. that they could not speak before (Acts 2:4f). This sign was repeated in Ac 10:46, 19:6 – furnishing ample proof (three attestations) that the Lord had incorporated all believers into Christ's (mystical) body (1Cor. 12:13).<sup>5</sup> Paul also speaks of tongues of men AND OF ANGELS (13:1) a heavenly language. So in their use tongues are not only for evangelism but also for praising and giving thanks to God (14:16-17) and self- edification (14:4).
- Interpretation- refers to the ability to interpret an unlearned language that has been expressed in the assembly of believers.

Finally we see in v. 11 that Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to be ignorant of the fact the Holy Spirit not only gives these gifts but He decides who gets what gift and He directs their use. As I was preparing this message, and using my gift which I trust is for your common good, I was struck by this last “don't be ignorant” element. I felt like the Holy Spirit brought something home to me that is applicable in any every gift and is just as important as the gift itself; namely using the gifts under His direction.

I was reminded that it is entirely possible for me to set in motion a whole series of events that God may not actually be in if I indiscriminately exercise my gifts without His direction; without “checking in” with Him first. This is an aspect of the “spiritualties” of v. 1 not just the “gifts” of v. 4. You and I may know what our gifts are, but if we are carnal about it or “compelled” to meet the needs of others with the indiscriminate use of our gifts, it actually diminishes our life with God. We need to learn how to “consecrate” our gifting to the ever present Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's specific direction. If we just “go with our gifting” like a bull in a china closet, we can make

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<sup>5</sup> HELPS Word Studies

## **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

hash of things. He may not actually be doing in that particular moment what “my gifts” see as a no brainer for action. To “check in” with Jesus before using our gifts means that we have to learn to be comfortable with sometimes disappointing other people; letting them down when we don't use our gift, in order to maintain our own life in God and keep in step with the Spirit, but also to help others find life in God and be ministered to by the Spirit in His timing and direction.

It's been said that greatest enemy to intimacy with God is service for God. Remember the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son to get a feel for what happens when intimacy is replaced by service. To maintain ourselves in a place of intimacy and thus in a place to hear when we “check in” with Jesus about using our gifts we have to find that all important seventh “S” of sustainability to accompany the “Six S's”; the disciplines of silence, stillness, solitude, simplicity, stability and study.

That means maintaining our spiritual disciplines as we CAN not as we CANT. In other words finding that sustainable practice and pace that keeps us “remaining” in Him (John 15) and intimate with God. Then we will be able to hear His voice of “Go/ No Go” on our gift utilization.

If you are not sure what your spiritual gifting is, I encourage to review the 21 listed in the NT, think about what comes easier for you than someone else, think about what fires your belly and ask others around you what they see in you. Most importantly though, ask Jesus and stay in the Six S's and be prepared to receive an answer.

**2. One Body, Many Parts V. 12-13** *“12The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”*

Paul now turns his attention to illustrate the “common good” by the image of the body. The body Paul has in mind in these two verses is not a generic human body, but specifically the Body of Christ. In v. 13 he says that we were all “baptized by one Spirit into one body”. Paul is not speaking of water baptism or of some Pentecostal second experience following salvation. He is referring to our inclusion and union in the Body of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the one responsible for our regeneration (that is our being born again); when we receive Jesus by faith, the Spirit comes and indwells us; He then baptizes us into the Body of Christ as a member or specific part of His Body; He seals us for the day of redemption with the security and ownership of God as a down payment guaranteeing our inheritance and He fills us. Regeneration, indwelling, baptism and sealing are all onetime events in our lives. The filling of the Spirit however is an ongoing process that we cooperate in by not grieving Him with sin. We are filled over and over again and are meant to maintain a fullness. The Bible says in Eph. 5, “Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. (Eph. 5:15-18) Lit. “keep on being filled with the Spirit.”

But here we need to see the staggering reality that we all as believers are actually, in reality, members of Christ Himself and therefore members of one another. This incredible unity was something the Corinthians were ignorant of and unfortunately, many Christians today live as if they too have never grasped this truth. The proper use of our Spiritual endowments can only be exercised when we know what the Body of Christ is, can discern it for ourselves, and know that we have been baptized into it. Paul knew what he was talking about. For he had been knocked off his high horse and been given a blinding revelation that to persecute individual believers was to persecute Christ

## **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

Himself. Let us not be ignorant of this spirituality. In doing so we can avoid two common pitfalls regarding spiritual gifts.

**3. Disdain of Personal Gifts V. 14-20** *"14Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20As it is, there are many parts, but one body."*

The first pitfall to be avoided is that of looking with disdain upon our gifts. To illustrate this Paul now shifts to the image of a generic human body and he points out how ludicrous it is for one part of the human body to have an inferiority complex about itself compared to other parts. Some people look around and assume because their gifting is not like someone else's then they have no place in the Body. "Oh, poor me, I'm not a missionary, therefore I have nothing to offer for the common good"; "Oh poor me, I'm not a teacher, preacher, evangelist, or prophet, I wonder if I'm even saved?" It's laughable when you stop and think about it. It's like we're somehow wishing the Body of Christ had the physic of Mr Potato Head instead of Arnold Schwarzenegger, or imagining the beautifully proportioned woman and bride of Christ to be a giant eyeball rolling around on the ground. It's crazy! Paul used the image of the human Body because it is fearfully and wonderfully made and each part is critical to every other part, whether it is seen or unseen. So it is with the Body of Christ. Just try and get along without your big toe for example.

One morning after his sermon, one of the church members who happened to be a doctor told a preacher something he'd never forget. He said, "You may be interested to know there's a part of your body that is absolutely essential to you as a preacher. You probably don't realize it when you're preaching, but without it, you couldn't do what you do." "What is it?" the preacher asked. "It's your big toe," he replied. "The big toe senses when your body begins to lean or shift or get out of balance, and it immediately strengthens so that you can stand up and speak. Without your big toe, you could never preach." That preacher said he's been guarding his big toes very carefully since then, recognizing they are an essential part of his ministry.

The problem is many times the "Big toe" doesn't know this and as a result withdraws and ceases to function its gift. This is more dangerous to the big toe than to the rest of the body as illustrated by Paganini's violin.

The great violinist, Nicola Paganini, willed his marvellous violin to Genoa, the city of his birth, but only on condition that the instrument never be played upon. It was an unfortunate condition, for it is a peculiarity of wood that as long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear. But as soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay. The exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case; valueless except as a relic. The mouldering instrument is a reminder that a life withdrawn from all service to others loses its meaning.<sup>6</sup>

**4. Dislocation of Personal Gifts V. 21-26** *"21The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24while our*

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<sup>6</sup> Bits & Pieces, June 25, 1992

## **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

*presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."*

If inferiority was the first pitfall from not discerning the Body of Christ and its related gifts, the second pitfall is the extreme opposite of pride. One part says to the other I have no need of you. This too is ludicrous when you consider it.

"It's like the man who broke his left arm. One night when he couldn't sleep he imagined a dialogue between his right and left hands. Right hand said. "Left hand, you are not missed. Everybody is glad it was you that was broken and not me. You are not very important". Left hand asked, "How are you superior?" Right hand replied, "Why my owner cannot write a letter without me." Left hand replied, "But who holds the paper on which he writes". Right hand: "Who swings the hammer?" Left hand, "Who holds the nail?" Right hand: "Who guides the plane when the carpenter smooths the board?" Left hand: "Who steadies the board?" Right hand: "When our owner walks down the street and lifts his hat to greet someone, which of us does that?" Left hand: "Who holds the briefcase while he does it? He continued "Also, if our owner's watch stops, you may do the winding, but if I'm not there to hold it, the watch won't get wound. You can't even take money out of his wallet to pay for something because I'm not there to hold it. The master can do very few things without me." So too does each of us have a place of service for the Lord. None is greater- just different."<sup>7</sup>

Donald Gray Barnhouse relates a story that further illustrates the mutual interdependence we all have for each other's gifts.

Several years ago, two students graduated from the Chicago-Kent College of Law. The highest ranking student in the class was a blind man named Overton and, when he received his honor, he insisted that half the credit should go to his friend, Kaspryzak. They had met one another in school when the armless Mr. Kaspryzak had guided the blind Mr. Overton down a flight of stairs. This acquaintance ripened into friendship and a beautiful example of interdependence. The blind man carried the books which the armless man read aloud in their common study, and thus the individual deficiency of each was compensated for by the other. After their graduation, they planned to practice law together.<sup>8</sup>

This interdependence hearkens back to chapter 11 and the complementarity that exists in a marriage between a man and a woman. But just as we saw there how complementarity does not exclude headship, so also we see that within the church there is an order of "headship" or priority of gifting that does not extinguish their interdependence.

**5. Priority of Gifts within the Body V, 27-31** "27Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. 29Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way."

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<sup>7</sup> Michael P Green; *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*; Baker Books; 1982; p. 353-4

<sup>8</sup> unknown

## **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

Paul prefaces this listing of gifts within the church by the phrase “God has appointed first”. Once again, “first” does not imply inferiority of all others, but rather a functional prioritization for the common good. The first two gifts in hierachal order are the ministry or office gifts of apostle and prophet. We see this duplicated in Ephesians 4:11-16 where we read *“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

While the debate continues among well-reasoned and godly men on both sides as to whether the gift of apostle and prophet were purely foundational gifts that ceased to operate once the church was established and the canon of scripture was completed or whether they are still functional ministry gifts in the church today, what cannot be debated is the reasoned objective for these gifts being placed first.

The Bible tells us they are there “first” because these gifts, along with evangelist and pastor-teacher, function primarily to equip all the other gifts of God's people for works of service; to build up the Body; to promote unity, knowledge, maturity and the fullness of Christ. Without this many of the lesser priority gifts could never function.

For me personally, I believe there is one word in this Ephesians 4 passage that leads me to believe that the ministry gifts of apostle and prophet are still in play today and it is the word “until” in v. 13. In the Greek language there are two different words for our English word “until”. The first is μέχρι- meaning up to a certain point or terminus of something. For example, imagine a line with the letter “A” on one end and the letter “B” on the other end and we are moving from point “A” towards point “B”; μέχρι refers to the letter “B”.

The second word is ἄχρι- which refers especially to the space of time or place intervening between two points. Imagine our line again with “A” on one end and “B” on the other, ἄχρι refers to the space between “A” and “B”.

The word used in Ephesians 4:13 is μέχρι, not ἄχρι. Let us ask ourselves, “Have we all arrived yet at “Point B” of unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God? No. “Have we all become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ?” No. “Are any still infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming?” Yes. Then we have not reached “B”- μέχρι- and thus according to this passage apostle and prophet gifts are required until then. If these gifts were only required for an interval period or season then ἄχρι would be appropriate, but that is neither the word used nor the reality we see around us. Finally, v. 31 urges us to eagerly desire the greater gifts, that is, the apostolic and the prophetic.

While I believe the apostolic and prophetic gifts are still given today, I do not mean to say that they hold the same office or function in exactly the same way as in the early days of the Church. For example, an Apostle was one who had personally seen the Lord Jesus in his resurrection. That is not happening today. Similarly, Prophets in the early Church fulfilled the role that Scripture now holds for us. That is not happening today; we don't have Prophets declaring divinely authoritative extra

## **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

Biblical truth. But in a more generic sense we do have the apostolic gifts being seen primarily in “extra-local sent ones” for foundation laying, for that is what the word apostle means. Some missionaries or other assembly establishing men may bring this gift today. Similarly, I think we do see the prophetic gift operating today when gifted individuals bring a current application of the living and active word to a situation that cuts through all religiosity, bureaucracy and hits the “bulls eye” of what God is saying and intending in that very moment. Paul urges us to desire these greater gifts.

I hope I have not lost you in a technical Greek word study at the end of the message, but it is important as we shall come up against certain gift rejecting reasoning in the next chapter.

In this chapter we have seen the gifts of the Spirit. In the next chapter we will see the Spirit of the gifts. And notice how Paul sets us up for what's coming with that famous last line “And now I will show you the most excellent way.” That way is Love.

Let us pray:

Almighty Triune God of Grace, thank you for sovereignly cascading your operations, ministries and endowments down to us and uniting us in the person of Jesus to your eternal will. Thank you Holy Spirit for reaching us in our darkness, regenerating, indwelling, baptising, sealing and continually filling us. Help us all to know what you have manifested in us. Help us learn to check in with you as we use our gifts. Save us from both inferiority and pride. And thank you for the greater gifts which we eagerly desire until we all grow up and into your likeness.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen