

Now Concerning Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Introduction (pray)

- A. Notice the desire the Apostle Paul has for the church in Corinth: “I do not want you to be uninformed about spiritual gifts.” Your pastors have the same burden for you. Why?
 1. Verse 7: **Spiritual gifts are for the common good.** This means nothing less than the health of the church is at stake.
 2. Listen, we love the gospel of Jesus Christ (the cross is the crux). But, the risen and ascended Christ has given gifts by His grace because He is building His church.
- B. 1 Corinthians 12-14 is about the use of these gifts. In verse 1, Paul uses the word *pneumatikon* which means spiritual things.
 1. Because Paul shifts to *charismata* in verse 4 (spiritual gifts) most translations use this term in verse 1 as well. What then are spiritual gifts?

“Spiritual gifts are concrete disclosures of *divine* activity and only secondarily *human* activity. Spiritual gifts are the presence of the Spirit himself coming to relatively clear, even dramatic, expression in the way we do ministry. Gifts are God going public among his people.” Sam Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, p. 14

2. We recognize there are certain obstacles in pursuing spiritual gifts.
 - I don’t want to identify with many in the public eye who practice gifts
 - I don’t want to be weird
 - I’m afraid (emotional, fanatical, unfamiliar, rejection)
 - Ignorance
3. Understood. But, the Word of God is our guide for godliness and practice. We are always concerned to hear the Word and do the Word.
- C. Question: how would you describe yourself today? Are you informed or uninformed? The church in Corinth thought they were informed but evidently not. Notice, they had gifts.

1 Corinthians 1:4-8 (ESV) “[4]_I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, [5]_that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—[6]_even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—[7]_so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, [8]_who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1. They are not lacking in any gift and yet Paul is concerned that they are uninformed. We would probably say we lack some gifts. So, what do we do? This:

2. We seek to understand the Word of God which is our rule for godliness, life, and practice. We want to hear the Word and do the Word so we are not deceived.
3. In this sermon I hope to show you that:

Because Jesus Christ is building His Church we must not be uninformed about the priority of spiritual gifts. My title is **Now Concerning Spiritual Gifts** (notice the word now - more than open).

D. Three points:

1. The priority of Jesus as Lord (verses 1-3)
2. The priority of the common good (verses 4-7)
3. The priority of being empowered (verses 8-11)

I. The urgent priority of Jesus as Lord (verses 1-3).

A. As we consider spiritual gifts, we do not leave Jesus Christ behind. The gifts of the Holy Spirit operate by grace and are not some advanced level of spirituality (not related to character).

1. The Holy Spirit shines a spotlight on Jesus Christ because Jesus is our all in all.

John 15:26 (ESV) [26]_“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, **he will bear witness about me.**”

John 16:13-14 (ESV) “[13]_When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. [14]_**He will glorify me**, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

1 Corinthians 2:2-5 (ESV) “[2]_For I decided **to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.** [3]_And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4]_and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but **in demonstration of the Spirit and of power**, [5]_so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

“The ultimate criterion of the Spirit’s activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord”. Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians NINCT*, p. 582

2. When your faith rests in the power of God it rests on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ex: This might help some of you understand why we aren’t neutral about alleged activity of the Spirit that have nothing to do with Jesus. We consider them worthless.

B. Jesus is Lord and we follow Him (He is not only a Savior). As we consider spiritual gifts we are not leaving Jesus behind.

1. I say this because some folks long for more *charismata* (whole pie). Some folks pine for the

good old days (maybe). Some of you are cautious and uncertain (we understand).

2. We, in SGC, made a doctrinal shift decades ago when we moved from being Spirit-centric to gospel-centric. This should not decrease the use of spiritual gifts.
- C. “Jesus is Lord” is the earliest Christian creed. In this section of Scripture on spiritual gifts Jesus Christ is central.
1. In 1 Cor. 12 Paul concentrates on the church as the body of Jesus Christ.
 2. In 1 Cor. 13 the character of Jesus Christ is on full display (love).
 3. In 1 Cor. 14 Paul takes two gifts (tongues and prophesy) and shows how a spiritual gift, exercised with true Christlikeness, builds up the body of Christ, the church.
- D. Tongues are a mystery (precisely because it is an unknown language) so Paul, in verses 1-3, wants them to know they aren’t saying anything inappropriate as they speak in tongues.
1. Jesus is Lord means He rules and reigns over all things. We yield our will to His will. This means we have a desire to see His church built up. This will mean we care about gifts.

“To be truly ‘spiritual’ drives a person neither to ecstasy nor to individualism nor to other-worldliness, but into the life of the local church as an expression of his personal commitment to Jesus as Lord and to His body here on earth. It is there that the implications of what it is to be ‘spiritual’, men and women of the Spirit, will be worked out.” David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians TBST*, p. 195

2. Jesus is Lord means He is king. My gifts are not king. Be very careful about considering gifts and obsessing over yourself. Rather, think about others. Go to the action.

Ex: My first ministry assignment? Setting up chairs (there isn’t any gift of setting up chairs). We are called to serve and God will determine our how we are used.

3. Jesus is Lord and so we care about the common good (we have died to self).

II. The urgent priority of the common good (verses 4-7).

- A. Each Christian has received or will receive gifts from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives gifts and empowers those gifts in Christians. Another definition:

“A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.” Wayne Grudem in *Systematic Theology*, p. 1016

1. Gifts are for the common good and not for myself. Gifts aren’t supposed to make you feel better about yourself. Think corporate church body, not your almighty-self.

“Anything which makes self prominent or great should always be regarded with the greatest possible suspicion.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit*, p. 95

- B. The text says there are varieties of gifts, varieties of service, and varieties of activities, but the same

God is at work in everyone.

1. Some folks say that gifts have ceased, some folks say some gifts have ceased. We say this: we treat the NT like it is fresh off the printing press. Nothing has changed or stopped.

“The Scriptures never anywhere say that these things [spiritual gifts] were temporary - never! There is no such statement anywhere.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit*, pp. 31-32

“To reject spiritual gifts, to turn from this immediate and gracious enabling, is, in a sense, to turn from God. It’s no small issue whether one affirms or denies these manifestations of the divine presence. In affirming them, we welcome him. In denying them, we deny him... Whether spiritual gifts are for today or not is not some secondary, tangential issue that exists only for theologians to debate. It directly touches the very mission of the church and how she lives out her calling.” Sam Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 14-15

C. Spiritual gifts are not optional, but rather, spiritual gifts are essential (even with the Bible).

1. Gifts are needed to help us press on to maturity. Gifts are a means of grace.

Ephesians 4:15-16 (ESV) “[15]_Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16]_from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

2. God has designed the Christian life for community. We need one another, every single person. I cannot say to a member I have no need of you. We share our lives.

D. Maturity is a priority (mature in Him). Gifts function to help us grow up into Christ.

1. To grow up into Christ we need to become receivers and dispensers of grace. It is very much like the role of the husband and wife.

Ex: The husband is to sacrificially love his wife. The wife is to respect her husband. This is not because the guy needs respect, rather, I need to love. I need to give.

2. We need power. So how do we become empowered?

III. The urgent priority of being empowered (verses 8-11).

A. You acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. You see the need for maturity and you want to give to others. What happens? First, you must be a Christian (the gospel).

1. What happens is God gives gifts as we go. The bus steers easier when it is moving (no gifts for the couch potato). And, we must be amenable with risk (and some mess).

Proverbs 14:4 (ESV) “[4]_Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.”

Ex: Bert Turner ministering to us in Lancaster (about 1980) and walking in “the gift of prophecy (words of knowledge).” We later learn it was the first time for him!

B. So, there are two things at work.

1. One is the Holy Spirit distributing gifts.
2. The other is our desire to be used by God for the glory of God. It is all of grace. We desire grace. If you’ve been a Christian any length of time you know this paradox.

1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV) “[10]_But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV) “[12]_Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13]_for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

C. We underscore the sovereignty of God in giving gifts because some people think that if you have a gift you can use it any time you like. You, so they say, are sovereign over your gift.

1. God is always God and God is always sovereign. Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19). He did not always heal everyone. Neither did the apostles.
2. God graciously gives gifts. God loves when we desire to serve others in building them up to maturity. We are jars of clay whom God delights to use. The Spirit proportions gifts and the Spirit empowers gifts. We are dependent people.

D. Paul gives a list that isn’t exhaustive but covers a lot of ground. We can walk in any of these on occasion but we will tend to have a predominant gift (which can grow over time). The list (not necessarily all-inclusive) given by Paul:

1. The utterance of wisdom (the right application of the gospel)
2. The utterance of knowledge (facts about a person revealed by God)
3. Faith (a special endowment)
4. Healings (plural, not a gift of healing, relates to health)
5. Miracles (not ordinary or naturally possible)
6. Prophecy (report of a revelation)
7. Distinguish between spirits (the presence of demonic)
8. Tongues (unknown language that speaks praise to God)
9. Interpretation of tongues (interprets the unknown language)

E. How to be empowered. Five steps:

1. Ask God in **persevering prayer** (three present tense imperatives).

Luke 11:9-13 (ESV) “[9]_And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [10]_For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [11]_What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; [12]_or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? [13]_If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

- Danger: We give up (doesn’t say how soon but keep at it) and don’t ask.

“What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use -- men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men - men of prayer.” E.M. Bounds in *Power Through Prayer*, p. 8

- Danger: Our prayers reveal our faith and our desires.

2. **Repent** of any known sin in your life.

- Danger: The Holy Spirit resists pride but gives grace to the humble.

3. **Earnestly desire** spiritual gifts for the glory of God, the building up of the church, but not your glory. Care about the whole church more than yourself (test of your heart).

1 Corinthians 14:1 & 5 (ESV) “[1]_Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.... [5]_Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.”

- All may prophesy or speak in tongues though not all do (tongues best in private)
- Learn to step out in faith when prompted (first time may well be the hardest)

4. **Value eternity** more than you value this life. We live this life now for Jesus Christ and He is eager to reward those who live for Him. It is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV) “[58]_Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

- Danger: we love this life so much we forget what matters most.

5. **Serve whosoever** is around you in whatever ways the Lord leads you. Take a step. Our gifts are discovered in community as the Holy Spirit imparts grace.

- Danger: More concern for me than for others (consider them more important).

Conclusion

- A. It is doubtful that in one sermon I can answer all your questions (if I had all the answers). But I hope you can say you are informed. Informed is superior to uninformed.
1. But informed is insufficient. I have prayed that God would move upon your heart, and fill you with urgent, expectant desire, and that today you would receive gifts.
 2. We desperately need the power of God to move in our lives.

“My conclusion is this: The real problems, the painful struggles, and our diminishing impact won’t be solved short of a fresh infusion of power - not just any power, mind you, but spiritual power, the kind of power that human flesh can’t produce and education can’t conceive and revamped programs can’t strategize. The church desperately needs the power of the Lord and the energy and activity of the Holy Spirit.” Sam Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, p. 10

Pray

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