

1 Corinthians 12:1-12

Sermon Sunday 16th January 2022

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The reading from 1 Corinthians today is all about Spiritual gifts

All of us are in different places when it comes to Spiritual Gifts.

Maybe there are some who are thinking, I don't even know what you're talking about, Jenny. What are spiritual gifts?

Then they'll be others of you, who have some idea of what Spiritual Gifts are but not really sure why are they important. Why do spiritual gifts matter?

And then, some may know what Spiritual Gifts are, **and** why they matter, but not sure what we're supposed to do with them. How do we use them in our lives?

Paul starts this section of his letter with the words. Now about spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed, or as some translations put it – I do not want you to be ignorant.

Okay, we don't want to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. So our first question is:

What are Spiritual Gifts?

There are some things gifts which seem relatively normal and everyday and useful. Like administration, serving and leadership. There are some things that seem a lot more like Christian character traits. Like showing mercy and faith. And there are some which frankly, seem a little weird, like speaking other tongues, distinguishing spirits and miraculous powers. And what makes this even more complex is that this probably isn't an exhaustive list. Paul mentioned spiritual gifts multiple times and he uses different groups and different lists which suggests that there are many different Spiritual gifts.

But what is certain is that they are in the Bible so they must not be ignored or written off.

To help us unpack what they are, let's take a quick look at our reading.

There are four things that I would like to draw out of what Paul writes.

1. Their journey of faith. – the before and after!

He starts in verse 2 by reminding the Corinthians that they were once 'pagans'.

The Corinthian church were mainly gentile converts, whereas the converts in Jerusalem were mainly Jewish. He uses the word pagan not as a derogatory word, but as a matter of fact. He reminded them that they had been previously led astray by things of this world, by idols, idols that were dumb. Whereas now, they were to follow Christ, with whom they could have a personal relationship, a conversation. A God who speaks. A God who speaks not only to you but through you.

The book of 1 Corinthians, is a letter written by Paul, to the church in Corinth, in response to news that they were not behaving correctly. Not behaving as Christ would have expected. It sounds like they had gone a bit off track and become obsessed with spiritual things, not all of which were of Jesus. There were members of the congregation that had gone down some dark alleyways, that had sent them **away** from Jesus.

So, Paul is saying: Remember what you were before Christ and who you are now, in Him.

2. from v3. Paul says that the gifts from the Holy Spirit all point to **Jesus as Lord.**

We read, 'I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God can say Jesus be cursed. And no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. If Jesus is Lord of our lives, we will not curse him. If we say "Jesus is Lord", of our lives then the Spirit is in us

In today's culture, there is a lot of 'spirituality', a lot of seeking after the spiritual. But without first trusting in Jesus as Lord of our lives, these spiritual things may not be of God. And that's when things become dangerous. Friends, there are many things in our community that are not of God, many things that seem harmless and fun. Things like horoscopes and spiritualist healing. Many things that seem spiritual, but, if they are not done, in the 'name of Jesus', then they may be not be of God. So take care. Having taken the decision to follow Jesus, don't slip back into worshipping other idols. In the Corinthian church Paul was writing to refocus the message, to reinforce the Gospel, to remind them of what true Spiritual Gifts are. Paul is not saying, don't explore Spiritual gifts. In fact he's saying exactly the opposite, He is really keen for the Corinthians to explore them, to understand them, and to use them. He's saying, those who keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, will receive spiritual gifts – good gifts of the Holy Spirit, good gifts from God. So remember where you have come from and secondly, remember Spiritual Gifts from God point to Jesus as Lord.

3. The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity.

That may seem a bit obvious but in verse 4 Paul reminds us of this when he writes. There are varieties of Gifts – but the same **Spirit**
There are varieties of service – but the same **Lord**
And there are varieties of activities – but the same **God**.
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, working together in our lives, working together in perfect harmony. Spiritual gifts are not an add on, they are not something separate. They are of God. Father, Son **with** Holy Spirit. As he goes on to say – in all these things, gifts, service & activities - **the same God is at work**.
Don't be afraid of Spiritual gifts. They are from our loving heavenly father. They come in unity with our compassionate Jesus. They come with the counsellor, the comforter, the helper, the **Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit very much part of the Trinity.

4. We are all given gifts for the common good

And fourthly Paul reminds us in verse 7 that 'to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.' Each one – each one of you – each person, individually, is given gifts. All, who are in Christ, are given them but... they are not for your own personal use. Spiritual gifts are to be used for the building up of one another, as it goes on to say... to play our part in the **body**, the church, of which Christ is the head – Christ is Lord. In 1 Corinthians 13, a chapter that is often read at weddings, we are reminded that spiritual gifts are to be used in love. Yes The reading we often hear read about love is actually a reading about Spiritual Gifts. In all the examples. If I speak in tongues, if I have a gift of property, if I serve others. But I don't have love. I'm wasting my time...Spiritual gifts are for others and to be offered in love.

So: Remember how your life has changed because of Christ. Remember that Jesus is Lord. Remember the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity of God and remember Spiritual gifts are for everyone and for the common good.

Why do they matter?

They matter because they bind us together, they help us grow and they show others that there is something beyond just us.

Let's take a look at a couple of gifts to show what I mean.

1. The Spirit of Wisdom.

We all need wise people in our lives to help us and guide us - but this is not about natural talent or learning, Paul is talking about a **Spiritual** gift.

You see our passage actually says – 'To one there is given, through the Spirit, a **message** of wisdom. Or as another translation says – the **utterance** of wisdom by the Spirit. (NRSV)

This Spiritual gift of wisdom is:

Someone who receives an understanding from God of what is necessary to meet the need of the body of Christ

Someone who provides divinely given solutions in the midst of conflict and confusion

Someone who listens and hears the Spirit provide direction for certain situations.

This is not someone who has learned appropriate scripture verses and uses them in an appropriate situation – although it is good to know our scripture.

This is not someone who has been trained in theology or medicine or law, but someone who is attuned to God's Spirit and hears His wisdom.

We all need wisdom and we can all ask for wisdom from God for certain situations but there are some here who have a real Spiritual gift of wisdom and we need people like that to help steer the church in God's direction.

2. the gift of faith.

Shouldn't we all have faith? – absolutely! But Paul says there is a special Spiritual gift of faith. Someone who is divinely enabled to act on God's promises with confidence and unwavering belief in God's ability to fulfil his purpose. My friends, we need people who have been given this gift of faith, to help us through times of wavering and doubt.

3. the gift of discernment?

Some people are better at working out the right thing to do in tricky situations - but is this the Spiritual Gift of discernment?

The Spiritual gift of Discernment is a gift, where the Spirit enables you to distinguish between different spirits – between good and evil. Between good and evil spirits.

We can all have times when we feel something is a bit dark or disturbing, don't we? but we need people who have a real gift of recognising, what is of God and what is of the evil one.

My friends, in this time of uncertainty, we need people with this gift.

Gifts of the spirit empower us to do things that we are not able to do ourselves.

Gifts of the spirit build up the body of the church.

When a church longs for spiritual gifts. When the church uses spiritual gifts. She grows.

And God is seen to be the God that he is.... through us

So we **do** press on. We **do** pursue spiritual gifts, aware that when they are used in love, how powerful they can be? Because the Holy Spirit is powerful.

So finally, the last question, is how? **How do we use Spiritual gifts?**

And I think this is actually fairly simple for us, really.

We pray and we practise.

We ask God. He invites us to ask. 'Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find... '

So, a small challenge for us all this week... really small.

If we were to pray for two minutes everyday for two weeks. Starting today.

If we pray for 2 minutes a day for a spiritual gift from God what would happen?

Have a look at this passage - 1 Corinthians 12 or Romans 12 or Ephesians 4 –

Is there a gift that jumps out at you? Then ask God for it.

2 minutes a day for two weeks. I reckon that would amount to less than one millionth of your life. Quick maths. The tiny fraction, but it can make a huge impact.

So we pray, we ask God, and secondly **we practise**.

How do you know if you have received a spiritual gift?

You don't knowif you don't try. You never find out until you step out and try.

If you pray for the gift of encouragement - Go and try encouraging someone

If you pray for the gift of tongues – you need to open your mouth and say something

If you pray for the gift of miracles – and my prayer is that many of you will – ask boldly and confidently.

And as you do, think about what that spiritual gifts is. Does it point to Jesus? Is it for the common good? Does it build others up? If so, it may well be a spiritual gift.

None of us is an experts at any of these things, when we first picked them up.

But we step out, and as we go, as we go for God, he empowers us

As we step forward with the gift that he gives us

As we serve, as we seek to serve the church and the world.

It's then, that we see God's gifts has been given to us.

These are tools, not toys.

So actually, perhaps a better question to ask than what gift do I have is?

What would the Holy Spirit like me to do?

And how would he empower me to do that?

I finished with this quote from Scott McKnight,

He says ' I'm nervous about someone saying that they 'have' a gift, as if they possess the thing, the way they possessed a book or a car or a home.

Instead, the spirit enables and empowers us, so that we might better say we've been "had" by a gift, when God chooses to do something through us.

Please don't leave today without giving some thought, some prayer to how the Spirit can embolden us for his kingdom, for his glory and for the building up our fellowship.

It is by His Spirit that we are bound together, that we grow, and that we show others that there is something that we carry that is beyond ourselves .

Amen.