

The God Who Gives Gifts
1 Corinthians 12 July 25-26, 2015

Introduction

- Have you ever been given a gift that was exactly what you wanted or maybe something you didn't expect but that you absolutely loved? Of course there are also those gifts that we receive where we try to smile politely and say thank you, PP but inside we're like "what am I going to do with this? Who can I re-gift this to?"
- I've got to be honest with you, I'm a terrible gift giver. I used to get Leslie gifts and she'd do the polite smile thing, and she'd wear the clothing one time and then it would "accidentally" get shrunk in the wash.
 - A couple years ago I got my kids Star Wars Risk, which I thought was an awesome gift....its Star Wars, the greatest fictional universe ever, and Risk...one of the best board games ever. It even had cool little plastic battle droids and storm troopers. I mean, how awesome is that? And my kids were like, "uh, thanks dad. I'm gonna go watch the paint dry over here."
- And it kind of stinks when you make the effort to give someone a gift you think they'll like and then it's not appreciated, or underutilized, or flat out discarded and tossed aside.
- Well, today, as we continue our study on the Holy Spirit, we're going to be studying our God who gives gifts....and what we do with them.
- Last week we studied how important it is for us to yield to the empowerment and leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives every day. And today, we'll see one of the ways we can yield and be empowered – through the use of our spiritual gifts.
- We're going to be studying **1 Corinthians 12**, and as you turn there, I'm going to pray.
- Now before we dive into our passage I need to set the agenda for us today because this is a huge topic and there's a lot of disagreement about spiritual gifts in the church PP....Bible believing Christians argue about whether some of the gifts have ceased, how they work, how many there are, and lots of other things.
 - So just so you know where I'm coming from, I don't believe any of the gifts have ceased, I believe they're all in operation today. I believe many gifts can be and are abused and aren't done decently and in order as scripture commands.
 - My aim today isn't to define or defend these positions and so I'm not going to address these topics. Today, I want us all to appreciate the gifts we've been given – regardless of whether you think some have ceased – and I want to encourage us to utilize them and bring glory to our God as we do so.

Scrutiny of the Gifts (v1-3)

- And so we begin by learning how to properly scrutinize the gifts of the Spirit. PP

- **1 Corinthians 12:1** “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.”
- Well, Paul may as well have been writing to the church in the US because so many of us need to be better informed about spiritual gifts.
 - The Greek word **PP** for “uninformed” (Gk. *agnoeō*) literally means “to be ignorant of” and is the word from which we get agnostic.
 - From my perspective, many believers are ignorant of spiritual gifts which causes us to either sensationalize them and make a bigger deal out of them than we should or ignore them and pretend that they don’t exist or are dangerous.
 - Both of these extremes are wrong and grieve the gift giver.
- We must become better informed of the spiritual gifts so that we don’t sensationalize them and hype them up as the be-all, end-all of spirituality and so that we don’t dismiss them as unimportant
- **1 Corinthians 12:2-3 PP** “You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 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.”
- To give a little cultural context here, Corinth was well known for its pagan cult practices, which included what they called rites of ecstasy where an individual would be “filled” with the power and/or spirit of the god being worshipped and they would say and do crazy things on behalf of that God. These rites of ecstasy were particularly known for the speech that accompanied them.
- And so the first thing we need to realize to properly inform ourselves of spiritual gifts is that the enemy will try to distort them by introducing cheap copies of what the Holy Spirit has given us and encourage their misuse.
 - **John MacArthur** said **PP** “Satan will try to counterfeit the Spirit’s gifts, and he will try to induce believers to ignore, neglect, misunderstand, abuse, and pervert them.”
- Many of the Corinthian believers had formerly been led astray by these supernatural displays of the devil. Paul wanted to make sure they could properly scrutinize the gifts and confirm they were from the Spirit of God and not from the devil.
 - The Greek word for “led astray” **PP** (Gk. *apagō*) was used to refer to prisoners being taken by armed guard to prison or to execution...being led into bondage
 - Paul didn’t want the Corinthians’ misunderstanding of the gifts to become a form of bondage and idolatry as was the case in their former occult lifestyles.

- Many scholars believe this is why Paul spent so much time specifically addressing the gift of tongues – since the gift of tongues looked a lot like the rites of ecstasy that were already being practiced by the pagan cults.
 - And, you know, we can't be led astray because of our ignorance of spiritual gifts either. We've got to be able to properly scrutinize and discern them but we can't throw the baby out with the bathwater simply because the gifts can be abused.
- Thankfully, Paul gives us a very clear test to help us discern the validity of spiritual gifts, especially when it comes to gifts of speaking.
 - Paul basically says, **PP** measure the use of the gifts against the truth of scripture. Does the use of the gift agree with what we know biblical truth to be and does it lift high the name of Jesus Christ.
 - The proper use of any gift, and **1 Peter 4:11** basically breaks them down into two categories, gifts of speaking and gifts of serving, the proper use of these gifts will always end in the glory of God, the adoration of Jesus Christ, and the recognition of Him as Lord.
 - Spectacular behavior, even if it has the appearance of being under the influence of a higher power, is no guarantee of divine inspiration.
- We must be discerning when it comes to the gifts and we must always measure their use against the absolute truth of the Word of God and the glory of Jesus Christ.

Source of the Gifts (v4-11)

- But we aren't merely to go around scrutinizing the use of spiritual gifts, skeptical of their validity. We need to understand the source of the gifts **PP** and celebrate their proper use.
- **1 Corinthians 12:4-11** "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. **PP** For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, **PP** to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."
- Now, I'm not going to take the time to dive into each of the gifts mentioned here in this list. There are other gifts mentioned later in this chapter and elsewhere in scripture and it would really take a separate sermon series to do that conversation justice. Know however, that the lists in scripture are not exhaustive but are examples of just some of the gifts that the Lord has blessed us with.

- Instead, the main thing I want us to see here is the source of all spiritual gifts: **PP** the Holy Spirit.
 - The Holy Spirit is mentioned seven (7) times throughout this text, and verse 11 really sums things up well – it’s the Holy Ghost who empowers all of our gifts and who apportions them to each of us as He wills, which will be in accordance with how God the Father wills.
- In fact, the first three verses here make clear that the entire trinity is at work in the use of our spiritual gifts.
 - We see the Holy Spirit in **verse 4**, the Lord Jesus in **verse 5**, and God the Father in **verse 6**. All are active in the operation of the various gifts that have been given to us.
 - The Greek word for “gifts” **PP** (Gk *charisma*) refers to things bestowed by the Spirit of God, free gifts of grace
 - These are not the same as talents, skills, and abilities – unbelievers have those things. These are gifts that are spiritual in nature and are only present in believers – though the enemy will try to counterfeit them as we’ve discussed.
- All of our spiritual gifts are empowered by the Holy Spirit says **verse 11** and as we yield ourselves more fully to the power of the Spirit – as we discussed last week – we will learn to utilize our gifts more effectively.
- **Jake Healed Hip Story**
 - Technically, none of us can really say that we own these gifts. In reality we’re merely conduits through which the Holy Ghost manifests His power. We’re stewards of the grace freely given to us. The more we yield to the Spirit moving through us, the more powerful the result.
 - **Romans 12:6 PP** “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” Every gift we receive is the result of God’s grace and shouldn’t be dismissed or used lightly.
 - And let me remind us that spiritual gifts are tools for ministry not indicators of spiritual maturity...don’t fall into the trap of thinking that simply because someone has a gift that you consider desirable or unique that they are also spiritually mature. I know plenty of spiritually gifted people who lack spiritual maturity in many areas of their lives.
 - That’s one of the problems with the exercise of spiritual gifts: spiritually immature people use them and then others are either afraid to help them mature because they don’t have those same gifts, or the person using the gift is too immature to receive correction.

- Spiritual gifts are exciting to think about and experience, but they are built upon the foundation of God's grace, and we've got to humbly acknowledge that at all times.
 - The minute we start focusing on the gift more than the giver we've just been led astray into idolatry – just like some of the Corinthians were.
 - God the father willed for us to each receive these gifts, and Jesus lived a perfect life, and defeated sin and death so that we could have eternal life and walk in the power of the Spirit who gives us the gifts that we have.
- We've got to be a church who responsibly and effectively utilizes all of the gifts it's been given. And so we now turn our attention to the final point today, **PP** the significance of the gifts

Significance of the Gifts (v7)

- **1 Corinthians 12:7** "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."
- Spiritual gifts are critically important because they not only bring glory to God but they also build up the body of Christ.
- "For the common good" **PP** (Gk. *sympherō*) means, "to bring together, to be profitable or useful for all."
 - Our gifts are given to us individually so that we can exercise them for the benefit and edification of the entire body
 - **1 Peter 4:10 PP** "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace"
- If I have a gift, and **verses 7 and 11** make clear that each one of us receives some spiritual gift, I better be using it not merely for my benefit, but for the profit and health of the whole body.
- Some of us get so worked up about experiencing manifestations of the Spirit that we forget that our goal should be to build up the church.
 - **1 Corinthians 14:12 PP** "So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church." (see also 14:26)
 - Yes, experiencing the gifts in operation is exciting, but we should be more excited about strengthening the body of Christ.
 - And this provides another test for us in discerning the gifts – which we can add alongside measuring them against scripture – the proper exercise of the gifts will bring unity and strength to the body of Christ. Whereas demonic counterfeits or improper use of legitimate gifts will weaken and fracture believers.
 - We can't be so concerned with the use of the gifts that we forget that we're supposed to use them for building up the body and bringing glory of God.

- We've always got to be mindful of our selfish and prideful desire to keep glory for ourselves and recognize that the exercise of gifts can be a means to doing that. We can become puffed up and think we're something special because of this gift we've been given...and that neither glorifies God nor builds up the body.
- But we also can't sit on the sideline and think that our spiritual gift is of little value or not beneficial for the church, or worse yet, be content not contributing our gifts for the benefit of others. We're not going to read it now, but Paul addresses the problem of believers thinking their gifts aren't that significant or are unnecessary in **verses 14 through 26** of chapter 12.
 - Every single gift is critical for the unity and strength of the church and if you aren't using the gifts with which you've been entrusted you're walking in sin.
 - Sound harsh, but Paul's tone was strong to the Corinthians
 - **James 4:17 PP** "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."
 - Sadly, too many Christians want to receive the benefit of *other* parts of the body using *their* gifts, but they're perfectly content sitting passively and not offering the gifts they possess.
 - So we've got to ask ourselves, am I using my gifts for the benefit of the body? Do I receive more ministry from the church than I give to it? Have I been resisting God's call to step up and contribute the gifts I've been given?
 - I mean, have you ever asked yourself why the Lord has brought you and your family to Cornerstone? If part of the answer to that question doesn't involve how you can be using your gifts to contribute to the body of Christ, then you've been led astray into idolatry – viewing church as one more item that you consume for your own personal benefit. We can't be ignorant of this any longer. The Lord is calling us to mobilize and use our gifts for the benefit of all – no matter how small we may think they are.
 - One of the prayers that the board has been praying for several years now comes from **Ezekiel 36:37-38 PP** which says "Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock. Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD."
 - The Lord has given us permission to ask Him to increase our numbers with people who are willing to fully submit to the Lord. We've seen the Lord answer that prayer, and yet I know there are many gifted people here who have yet to find their place

where they can sacrifice themselves in worship to God and use their gifts to build up the body. If this is you please speak with us and we'll help find a place for you to use your gifts.

- But here's the hard part – it may not be where you want to be or think you deserve to be. Our pride can very quickly cloud our perception of our gifts and cause us to write off things that we consider below us. To use Paul's analogy, you may want to be a hand or a foot, but the Lord may be calling you and gifting you to be something completely different. In order to properly exercise our gifts we need to humbly follow the leading of the Lord.
- We talked last week about yielding to the power and control of the Spirit, well, one of the evidences of the Spirit filled life is the exercise of your gifts for the building up of the church, wherever that may be.
- Maybe you're sitting here and you're unsure of what gifts you have. **PP** Well, let me say up front, don't just go out and take a test and then assume that the test has all the answers. I've seen too many people take those tests and then think that they're qualified and called to something that in reality they're neither called nor qualified to do.
 - No, **PP** the first thing you should do is pray and ask the Lord to show you what your spiritual gifts are. There may be one, there may be multiple, but ask Him to show you what that gift is.
 - Second, **PP** we should speak to spiritually mature believers who we trust to be honest with us and tell us what they have observed in our lives. Humbly listen to these men and women and then pray through what they tell you.
 - Third, **PP** start trying things – volunteer to serve in different capacities, get involved in life groups, and be willing to try something new, and don't be afraid to mess up or not have all the answers.
 - Finally, **PP** don't be afraid to ask the Lord for additional gifts (see **1 Cor. 14:13, James 1:5**) but make sure you have the right motives. If you just want to feel better about yourself or puff up your pride, don't expect the Lord to answer that prayer affirmatively. But if you genuinely desire to build up the church and bring glory to God, then the Lord may give you an additional measure of grace – but be ready to use them if He blesses you with them.
- As this world continues to press in upon the body of Christ, we cannot afford anyone to remain lax in the use of their spiritual gifts. We can't afford to be uninformed any longer. We can't have people abusing and misusing spiritual gifts nor can we have people disengaged and ignoring the gifts they've been given.
 - As Paul wrote to Timothy **1 Timothy 4:14** "Do not neglect the gift you have..."

- No more excuses. **PP** God will hold us accountable for how we're stewarding the gifts of the Spirit that He's entrusted to us.
- We can no longer politely smile and nod our heads at the gift the Lord has given us and then set it down and forget about it or pretend it doesn't exist.

Conclusion

- You know, my kids did eventually pick up that Star Wars Risk game I gave them, and now they play it all the time. I had to do a little prodding and encouraging, but once they learned to appreciate what they'd been given, they took off with it. And now they love playing all kinds of great games – Stratego, Settlers of Catan, monopoly, ah, the inner board game geek inside me rejoices.
- We've got to learn to neither abuse nor neglect the gifts of the Spirit that God has entrusted to us. Yes, we must learn to be discerning and test them, but we've also got to remember that the Holy Spirit is empowering us with these gifts to build up the body of Christ and glorify God.
- Let's not grieve the gift giver any longer by failing to use what we've been given or by using them improperly. Let's not celebrate the gift above the giver, but let's all walk in the power of the Spirit as He bestows upon us His amazing gifts. Amen. Amen.