

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/21/11 Wednesday Evening
1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Before us is an exciting and very needed section of God's Word. 1 Corinthians 12-14 offers both great help and, unfortunately, great controversy to the church. The controversy has to do with the subject of tongues and sign gifts. The larger subject at hand is that of *spiritual gifts*.

What are spiritual gifts? Who possesses spiritual gifts, who gave the gifts, and why? How should spiritual gifts be used? How should they *not* be used? What happens when God's people use their gifts in proper ways? We'll find the answers to these questions in the passage before us.

The Larger Context: Chapters 12-14

We often pull the "love" chapter (ch 13) out of this context. Love is the oil that lubricates the machinery of the church as the parts work together to do God's work. We'll attempt to keep in mind the overall context as we move our way through the various smaller sections.

In verses 1-11 Paul gives three things to introduce the subject...

I. The Need for Understanding Spiritual Gifts (1-3)

Q: What do the first words, "Now about spiritual gifts" indicate about this subject? This, like other subjects addressed in the letter, is probably an issue raised by the Corinthians themselves (in a letter they sent to Paul).

Q: What did Paul *not* want to be true of the Corinthians in v 1?

A. We must not be ignorant (1).

The Corinthians had basic knowledge of the subject of spiritual gifts, for Paul had taught them at an earlier time. And there was practice of the gifts in the church. In fact there was *over-practice* (or more accurately, *mal-practice*).

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Ignorance is not bliss. That's why we need to have a strong, Bible-centered teaching ministry as a church. That's also why we need to be in the Word consistently on our own.

B. We used to be confused (2-3).

Read verses 2-3.

Paul says that prior to conversion the Corinthians were "pagans" ['Gentiles' in the KJV]. What does that term imply? What was true of the Corinthians before salvation?

1. When we were pagans we were led astray (2).

Please realize that non-believers are not neutral in their condition. They are "influenced" ['carried away,' KJV] and "led astray" by "dumb idols" [KJV]. We were created to worship something. We will either worship the true God or we will worship some false god we have created (it could be a statue, or a job, or

even ourselves). What's more, the god that we create will control us. We cannot break free from its bondage. Only the Spirit of God can do that.

Discuss: What does this truth imply about the so-called doctrine of man's "free will." Yes, man is free to do what he *wants* to do. The problem is, he doesn't *want* to do what he *ought* to do, that is, submit himself to the Living God and plead God's mercy (he would much rather promote his own Lordship and plead his own merit).

But when the Holy Spirit enters our lives He changes this fundamental condition...

2. *The Holy Spirit enables us to make a true confession of Jesus (3).*

Q: What can a person not say if he has the Holy Spirit?

Q: What can a person not say unless he has the Holy Spirit?

Discuss: What does this have to do with the subject of spiritual gifts?

II. Some General Principles regarding Spiritual Gifts (4-6).

Here are three. By the way, notice the mention of the Trinity here...

A. There is one Spirit, but there are different kinds of gifts (4).

Q: What passages in the NT mention spiritual gifts?

If you add together the various gifts mentioned the number is around 20. There are many different gifts in the church.

B. There is one Lord, but different kinds of service (5).

This helps us understand why there are different gifts. We need different kinds of gifts to do different kinds of service.

E.g.—If all I have in my tool box is 11 different hammers, I'll be limited in what I can build...

C. There is one God, but different kinds of working (6).

God does not clone His people. He gives each of us His life, His Son, His Spirit. And He gives each of us the opportunity to serve Him. But the gifts, service, and working vary from one person to the next.

The KJV says there are "diversities of operations."

Discuss: How many kinds of "jobs" are there to be done in the church. Let's mention as many as we can think of as done in the Corinthian church (then in our church)...

III. Some Specific Principles regarding Spiritual Gifts (7-11)

A. The Spirit gives each Christian a gift (7a).

Paul calls it the "manifestation" of the Spirit. Here's how the Spirit "manifests" His presence in the Body of Christ. He gives each believer a special ability to do something.

Q: Why are the words "to each one" significant?

B. Spiritual gifts are for the common good of the church (7b).

Q: What do the words “for the common good” mean? [KJV ‘to profit’] Here are a couple of implications...

1. *We must not use our gifts to bring glory to ourselves.*
2. *We must use our gifts to benefit the rest of the Body.*

This is beautiful to watch in action. No one of us can “do church” by ourselves. We need each other. We need what the Spirit has given to one another.

Challenge: When you use your gift, think of the good of the church. So often people slack off in their church participation and say, “Oh, I didn’t feel like going.” Or, “I don’t get anything out of the service when I do go.” Answer this. What’s out of focus in such a person’s life? His perspective is inward. He’s thinking only about *his* good, not the *common good*.

C. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts (8a).

Notice the words “through the Spirit” and “by means of the Spirit” throughout the verses that follow. Let this sink in. God has gifted you exactly the way He wanted to gift you. The same goes for the person next to you.

We don’t sign up for gifts. The Spirit gives them as He sovereignly chooses.

Discuss: Why is that important to keep in mind?

D. There are a variety of spiritual gifts (8-10).

Paul mentions a few here (he’ll mention others later, and still others in Romans 12). Keep in mind the purpose of the gifts isn’t to make my life comfortable or successful as an *individual*. The purpose is the *common good of the Body*. The Spirit gifts the Body so it will function in this world. Each part contributes.

1. *The Spirit gives one person the message of wisdom (8a).*

Churches have decisions to make. They need wisdom. “How are we going to reach the lost in our community?” “How should we organize our child care workers?” “How much money should we budget for missions this year?” “Should we call an Associate Pastor at this time, and if so, what should be his ministry description?” In these and dozens of other decisions, we need *wisdom*. And God gives it. He gifts some of His people to be able to apply His Word to determine what’s best for particular decisions.

2. *The Spirit gives another person the message of knowledge (8b).*

Some people are tremendous with their hands. They can do great things in the area of mercy and helps. We need that contribution to the Body. But we also need those gifted in *knowledge*, those who can think carefully and critically to prevent us from making foolish decisions.

E.g. –Those gifted in mercy want to respond to every need that comes along as soon as they hear of it. Generosity is a good trait. But discernment is needed. I remember a fellow who came to my dorm room at college asking for money to help with some great need. I didn’t know what to do so I just gave him a little money. Later I found out he was with some cult.

The church needs those gifted with knowledge to bring the Scriptures to bear on decisions.

3. *The Spirit gives another person faith (9a).*

This, too, is a vital gift. The person gifted with faith sees what others fail to see. And He can motivate them to trust God and step out in dependence on Him.

4. *The Spirit gives another person gifts of healing (9b).*

The next gift is related...

5. *The Spirit gives another person miraculous powers (10a).*

In the early church the Spirit enabled certain individuals to heal and do spectacular miracles. The purpose was to gain the attention of the pagan world and authenticate the gospel message. Not every one had these gifts, but some did. The exercise of these gifts opened the door for others to use their gifts.

There is difference of opinion about the permanence of the “sign gifts.” I believe the Scriptures teach that the sign gifts per se ceased once they accomplished their purpose. Can God still heal and do miracles? He can do whatever He desires. Does every local church have these gifted individuals? I don’t believe the Scriptures warrant this. Are there places today where as the gospel advances into new territory (SE Asia, etc) God performs miracles to gain the attention of the non-believing world and to encourage His own people? Again, God can do as He pleases. We must let God be God.

But we mustn’t build our theology on what we see happening. We must build it on what the Scriptures teach.

Some other gifts...

6. *The Spirit gives another person the gift of prophecy (10b).*

The ability to proclaim God’s Word to the church...

7. *The Spirit gives another person the gift of distinguishing spirits (10c).*

The ability to determine if a message is from God or not, and if not, how so?

8. *The Spirit gives another person the gift of speaking in different kinds of tongues (10d).*

The term could be translated “languages.” Again, this gift was vital in the early church. We’ll give more attention to this in chapter 14.

9. *The Spirit gives another person the gift of the interpretation of tongues (10e).*

If tongues were exercised, so was the interpretation. The Spirit gifted for both.

E. Though the gifts differ, the Giver is the same (11a).

There is no reason for competition in the church. We are what we are because of what God has done and continues to do in our lives.

F. The Holy Spirit determines who receives what gifts (11b).

Application: Discuss the following...

Many people have the attitude (some may say it), “I don’t have anything to offer.” What contributes to that kind of thinking? How can we overcome it ourselves, and how can we help others overcome it? Be practical.