

"Spiritual Gifts – God Gave Them to Us to Be Used for the Benefit of Each Other"

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Preached on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

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IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD, WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE, WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE, NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

In 1 Corinthians 12:1 Paul writes, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." God wants us to know about Spiritual gifts. First let's make an important distinction... Every Christian has faith, love, knowledge, and Christian virtues – Every Christian has these. And every Christian has spiritual gifts. But Spiritual gifts are SPECIAL GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT – so not every Christians has the same gift. Some spiritual gifts have a natural basis. In other words... you're born with them. Perhaps you even worked at them and developed them. They are natural talents and abilities that God gave you from birth and then, later on, His Spirit augments and enhances the gift for God's purposes. For example you may be a natural teacher – and then God blesses you and your natural gift of teaching – enhancing it to be used for his own purposes. Other spiritual gifts have a supernatural basis – you were not born with them. They came to you later in life – they are not natural they are supernatural - miraculous. In other words they are impossible to do naturally – they clearly come from God.

Paul continues with these words from 1 Cor. 12:2-3, "You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore 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." Before talking about spiritual gifts – Paul teaches us that we need to recognize that the Holy Spirit himself is God's FUNDAMENTAL GIFT given to us. If there were no other gifts given to us by God than his Holy Spirit we would be still blessed more than we could ever deserve or imagine. Paul further reveals to us that it is only by the power of God's Holy Spirit that we can believe and confess that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour. "...no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." That's how much we depend upon God's Holy Spirit. Many know that Jesus died on a cross. But only by the power of God's Holy Spirit can people confess that he died for them. Only by the power of God's Holy Spirit can people confess that Jesus paid for their sins on the cross – that he is their Lord and Saviour. We should not take this for granted! Compare this with the speechless and lifeless idols worshipped by some. Listen to Psalm 115:4-8, "... their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk;

nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them **will be like them**, and so will all who trust in them."

Having set that straight Paul continues in vs 4-6, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." There are different kinds of gifts... Some Christians have one gift and others have another. But they all come from the same Spirit... Just because the gifts are different doesn't mean they come from a different spirit says Paul. Here Paul first uses the word, "charismata", to describe the gifts of the Spirit. You may have heard of certain churches called 'Charismatic' – these are churches that have a strong focus on the gifts of the Spirit. The word 'charismatic' essentially means gracious gifts. Paul says – there are different kinds of charismata. There are different kinds of gracious gifts, but the same Spirit gives each of them. The second word Paul uses to describe spiritual gifts is 'ministrations' or 'service', saying, "There are different kinds of service but the same Lord." Gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us to serve or minister to others for their benefit. For example the gift of administration is often used for the good of the church. Administration is an example of a spiritual gift used in service to the family of God. The third word Paul uses to describe spiritual gifts is 'energies' or 'workings' saying... "There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." These energies or workings are active forces imparted by God's Holy Spirit. Essentially this is God's power working through us So the key teaching here is these are gracious gifts – we did not earn them or get them because we are better Christians – God gave them to us because he is gracious. They are given to us to serve and thus benefit God's church. They are powered by God's spiritual energy. Finally, they are connected with God. The same Spirit is the gracious giver. The same Lord receives our service to others. The same God is behind the spiritual energy. Paul summarizes for us in the next verse 7, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." EACH BELIEVER HAS HIS or HER GIFT or GIFTS. EVERY BESTOWAL OF A GIFT IS FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF God's church. You have a gift that God expects you to be using to serve this congregation. Let me repeat that. Each of you has a God-given spiritual gift that God expects you to use to serve his people. Paul says, "Now to each one..." Each one of us has been given a gift. The gift is given to us to serve the church. Are you aware of this? Let's make this clear – you have been given a spiritual gift from God.

They may be clear in the natural talents you possess. They may be hidden and waiting to be discovered by you. But you have them and God expects you to use them to serve his people. This is an obligation that we too often forget. If you don't know what your gifting is – it might help to sit down write out what your natural talents are and start there. It is my experience that serving and trying different things is the best way to find out your gift. But I must tell you are not being faithful to God if you are not using your spiritual gifts to serve his people. If you feel you need help and direction on this – first I would encourage you to pray.

As I just said, take an inventory of your natural talents. If you still are uncertain – come and see me and we can talk things through. Sometimes it takes some searching and trying different things before you find your sweet-spot – the gift that suits you. Paul then lists some gifts for us to consider – this is by no means and exhaustive list... 1 Cor. 12:8-11, "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to 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. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."

If you have the gifts of wisdom and knowledge then teaching is likely the way you can serve God's people. Wisdom allows us to convey God's thoughts to others, his will and ways. Knowledge is more about the details and teachings of Scripture. Notice this... what good are wisdom and knowledge if they are not shared with the church?

Paul then mentions other Spiritual gifts. Miracle working faith – the kind that Jesus says can move mountains... The Spiritual gift of healing – demonstrated by Jesus and his apostles. The spiritual gift of prophecy – calling God's people to repent of their sins and communicating specific messages from God.

The spiritual gift of discerning of spirits is a gift where one is able to determine whether God is behind certain teachings or actions. The spiritual gift of tongues is the ability to speak in other languages that you haven't been taught. The interpretation of tongues is the ability to understand languages that you have never been taught. Let me restate what Paul says about these and other spiritual gifts, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." It is not for us to determine the spiritual gifts we might like to have – God's Holy Spirit determines who gets what. Our focus is to be on doing as Jesus did - using our spiritual gifts for the benefit of God's church.