

FOR THE COMMON GOOD

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Key Verse: 7, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

This is the first of seven messages this year of a special series on Spiritual Gifts. We want to study comprehensively what the New Testament tells Christians about spiritual gifts. What are spiritual gifts? How do we get them? Who gets them? What is the purpose of them? May God bless our study of spiritual gifts beginning with 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. May God bless and use these studies to enrich and cultivate our walk with God as individuals and as a church. May God's work in us, among us and through us be advanced through this study for his glory.

Let's briefly consider the background and overall picture of this letter of Paul. The church in Corinth in ancient Greece was established by Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey recorded in the Acts 18:1-11. We have in the Bible two of Paul's letters that he wrote to the young Christian church that he founded in Corinth. In this his first letter Paul addresses many problems that arose in the Corinthian church, which they had written to Paul to ask him about. These problems included: divisions (Ch.1-4), sexual misconduct and church discipline (Ch.5), lawsuits and sexual immorality (Ch.6), marriage and sex (Ch.7), eating food sacrificed to idols (Ch.8), worship and the Lord's supper (Ch.11). Now in chapters 12-14 he addresses some commotion that came up regarding spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of prophecy and tongues. We will discuss these two gifts in more detail when we study chapter 14. Paul says in the famous Love chapter 13 that the most excellent way of overcoming these squabbles and living as a fruit-bearing Christian and church is through love, that is, the love of God. Paul writes in 13:7-8, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away."

As we focus on 12:1-11, we will consider this passage in 3 parts: (1) the confession "Jesus is Lord" (1-3), (2) unity with diversity for the common good (4-10), and (3) to each one as he wills (11).

First, the confession "Jesus is Lord" (1-3). Look at verse 1. "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed." The words "now concerning" indicate that the church in Corinth asked Paul about these matters. Paul is responding to their concerns. So these problems or questions were specific to this church in Corinth. Churches are gatherings, assemblies and communities of believers and followers of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Churches are specific people at

specific times in specific places who follow Jesus. The Church with a capital C consists of all believers and followers of Jesus Christ from the time of Jesus' death and resurrection until now. As churches, we are precious to God and blessed. God raises leaders and gifts all the members to build up one another. In all of Paul's letters to churches that he founded, he writes gracious and meaningful words of greeting of who they are in Christ Jesus. Listen to Paul's marvelous greeting in the first words of this letter (1:1-9), which sets the whole context of this letter:

"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Paul called them "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1:2). He also said of them: "you are not lacking in any gift..." (1:7) God gave this community of believers all that they needed to survive and thrive. God watches over and shepherds his churches.

This is encouraging since no church is perfect. If you start looking here and there for a perfect church you won't find one, because only God is perfect. Churches are groups of sinners who have been saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, who love Jesus, who love each other, who are indwelt and guided by the Holy Spirit, and who reach out to a dying and lost world in the name of Jesus.

Since Christians are sinners saved by grace, every church has its own issues, struggles, challenges, weaknesses and problems to wrestle with and overcome together by the help and wisdom of God through love and prayer. We are not alone in this struggle. God is with us in the Holy Spirit to change us and enable us to grow together. We call this process of growing in Christ "sanctification" or "being made holy." We need each other to grow in holiness and we belong to each other in Jesus Christ.

In verse 1, Paul wants to explain to them about spiritual gifts. He says more about this in chapter 14 which begins, "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts..." Then he explains in more detail about prophecy and tongues. Here in 12:2, Paul now begins to inform them about spiritual gifts for the church.

Look at verse 2. "You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led." The Corinthians consisted mostly of Gentile converts. They were not raised Jewish. This means they worshiped idols, such as the Greek gods like Zeus (Jupiter), Aphrodite (Venus) and Ares (Mars). These were not real gods but rather idols that couldn't speak or give real guidance to people. These idols were not like the true God of Israel. These idols, like all idols and false gods, only led people astray. People are still led astray today by false gods, such as money, pleasure and human glory.

Now look at verse 3, a very beautiful and powerful verse in the Bible: "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."

It's not clear why someone would want to say "Jesus is accursed." Of course, Jesus was condemned and crucified as a criminal on a Roman cross. Because of this, many people saw Jesus as cursed. Even the Jews regarded anyone hung on a tree as cursed. Humanly speaking, Jesus looked cursed when he died tragically. But we who believe know that Jesus was not dying for committing any sin. Jesus never sinned. The truth is, we who believe in Jesus know that he died for our sins. Jesus took in our places the shame and curse that we deserve. Not only that, we know and believe the story did not end there. Jesus rose again from the dead. In rising from the dead, Jesus defeated all the power of sin and death and the devil. God made this Jesus who was crucified, the Lord and Christ, King of all kings and Lord of all lords, our Redeemer and Savior.

So for anyone to call Jesus cursed means they do not believe this. Rather, they are still in darkness. They are following lies. They are still under the power of sin. They do not have the Holy Spirit. Anyone who denies that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again from the dead is not a Christian and does not have the Holy Spirit in them.

In contrast to a person who rejects or insults Jesus, anyone who says "Jesus is Lord" and who loves and follows Jesus as their true confession of faith is a Christian and has the Holy Spirit in them. Paul says similar words in Romans 10:9, "because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Paul is talking about spiritual gifts. Do you know what the greatest gift of God is? The greatest gift of God is the Holy Spirit, the presence of God himself in believers. Jesus once said to a thirsty Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." (Jn 4:10) Jesus went on to say that this living water is a spring of water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:14). So the gift of God is the Holy Spirit who gives salvation and eternal life. Listen again to Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

How then does a person receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? We receive the Holy Spirit when we repent of our lives of sin and commit our lives to Jesus as his followers. On the day the Holy Spirit came upon the first Christians, Peter preached a bold message in Jerusalem proclaiming, "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." His listeners were cut to the heart and asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Ac 2:38). So we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when we repent of our sins and put our faith and trust in Jesus to love and serve him in our lives.

Does the Holy Spirit live in you? Have you confessed and repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus to live for him? Can you say and mean it: "Jesus is Lord"? If you can from your heart, then you are a child of God, adopted into his family by his grace, and the Holy Spirit lives in you. If you cannot, then you can start with a simple prayer, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." You are not saved by attending church or even by reading the Bible. You are saved by turning from sin and self-seeking and self-righteousness, and putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, and resolving to love him and live for him.

Second, unity with diversity for the common good (4-10). Look at verses 4-6. "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." Paul mentions varieties here. There are varieties of gifts, varieties of service, and varieties of activities in God's work among God's people. But it is the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God who empowers them all in everyone. The source is the same. The source is God the Father, God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit—one God in three divine, eternal persons. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are working in his people.

The point here is that one God works in his redeemed people in a variety of ways. God gives gifts to enable to serve others in the church. For what purpose? It is for the common good. Look at verse 7. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." God works in each person and endows them with spiritual gifts not so they may boast or brag or feel good about themselves. God gives gifts to his people for the common good of the church, which is the body of Christ. By the way, the word gifts or "charismata" in Greek is from the root word "charis" which is grace. Gifts are graces. They cannot be earned or merited. They are gifts freely given, simply to be received and used for God's good purposes to build up his church and to bring glory, thanks and praise to God. Gifts are received humbly and thankfully for they are from God, and God knows what he is doing.

Do you have a gift from God? If you are a Christian, yes you do. You have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in Romans 8:15-16, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." You also have the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. All Christians have these gifts. In addition, God gives gifts to his children for the common good of the church. That is, God gives each of us gifts to serve others in the name of Jesus.

Did you know that you also received at least one gift to serve God's people? Verse 7 says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." We have all been given spiritual gifts from God for the common good, to build up and participate in God's house.

In the New Testament, there are 22 gifts mentioned to serve the church. There are probably many more. The 22 spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are: Apostles; Prophets; Pastor-Teachers; Evangelists; Prophecy; Teaching; Wisdom; Knowledge; Faith; Miraculous Powers; Healing; Distinguishing between Spirits; Speaking in Tongues; Interpretation of Tongues; Helps; Service; Administration; Encouragement; Giving; Leadership; Mercy and Celibacy. God gives gifts to his people for the common good to serve others. Some are offices or roles like apostle or pastor. Others are abilities or characteristics like faith, encouragement, or mercy.

Paul mentions 9 of these gifts in verses 8-10: "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, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." Paul repeats that these gifts are: given through the Spirit,

according to the same Spirit, by the same Spirit, and by the one Spirit. They all come from the same God.

Nine gifts are mentioned here. Wisdom is wise counsel to someone seeking direction in a difficult decision. Knowledge could be supernatural insight into a person's life situation, or right application of Bible teaching. Faith is more than saving faith in Jesus, which all Christians have. The gift of faith is added conviction to help someone through a very challenging and difficult time. Healing is prayer for wholeness in body and spirit. Miracles are God's power exercised in prayer. Prophecy is the forth-telling of God's will based on his word. Discernment is recognizing what is of God and what is not in line with God's word and Spirit. Tongues are foreign languages or a heavenly unknown language. Some people have this gift to boost their private prayer lives. Interpretation is the understanding of tongues. God gives these gifts to people to help others to be strengthened, encouraged and built up in their walk with God.

Third, to each one as he wills (11). Now look at verse 11. "All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as he wills." Spiritual gifts are from God given to people for the common good of his people. So we cannot boast about anything we have or do for others. It is God's grace. At the same time, we must not envy what others have or do, but thank God for them. Why? Because God gives gifts to us all as he pleases. God is good. God knows what he is doing. God gives gifts not because anyone is better or more naturally gifted than anyone else. God gives gifts as he sees fit to build up others. God will not give gifts to people who have wrong motives to boast or look down on others. Rather, God will take those gifts away and give them to others.

How can you determine your gift from God? One way is to pray and ask God how you can serve others in the name of Jesus. Do you have a heart or passion to serve God's people in some way? Do you see a need in the church which you really want to pray about and believe that you can help with? Talk with a mentor or pastor about it. God could be leading you to serve his people with God's gift in God's power. You could also ask mature believers who know you well what gift you might have to serve God's people. There are also helpful descriptions of gifts to help you identify at least one gift with which you could serve others in the name of Jesus¹. There are also helpful short quizzes you can take to help identify your gifts to serve the church, such as giftstest.com². If you are not serving others in the church, find what you can do and just

¹ A helpful article with a list of spiritual gifts is here: [What Are The Spiritual Gifts? A Comprehensive Bible Guide](#).

² <https://giftstest.com/test>

try to do it. It could be your way to serve others in Jesus' name. Everyone has some way to contribute to serve and build up others in Christ.

So we thank God for the gift of his Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and give us eternal life in his family and kingdom. We thank God for the gift of his Holy Spirit who lives in us, assuring us that we are children of God and empowering us to live and grow as God's children. We thank God for whatever gift he has given us to serve others. And we thank God for the gifts he has given other people as well to serve God's people.

May we all serve God's people humbly and thankfully for the good of his church with the gifts that God has given us, by the power of the Holy Spirit.