

The basics of the spiritual gifts

1 Corinthians 12

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Not all beliefs have the same importance. Not all beliefs have the same weight. The Apostle Paul gives us examples of this. In Romans 14:2-3, he says, ***“One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.”*** While in 1 Corinthians 15:17, he says, ***“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”*** In the first example, Paul gives freedom to believe what a person has decided. In the second case, Paul is teaching that to disbelieve in the resurrection of Jesus is to have a worthless faith. It is to die in your sins.

There is a famous quote you might have heard: ***“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”*** This statement has a profound meaning for Christians. In everything that is necessary for salvation and is clearly taught by scripture, “the essentials,” we should have unity. We should teach, defend and try to spread these views. The essentials might be as simple as God exists or that Jesus is the divine son of God who died on the cross and rose from the dead. It might be forms of immorality that God says he is clearly against and that those who persist in these practices face judgment, like in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: ***“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”***

We are to strive for unity in these things. In things that are uncertain or unclear, we should give liberty or the freedom to have different views. Whether you think the Sabbath has been moved to Sunday, or whether you think the millennial kingdom is now or is coming, these are not necessary for salvation and are surely not very clear. In everything we do, we should show charity, which means that we should be loving no matter where our beliefs lead us.

You may wonder why I am sharing this today. It is because of our text this morning. Today the topic is the basics of the spiritual gifts. People hold many different views on the spiritual gifts. But your view on the spiritual gifts is not essential for your eternal destiny. It is something that churches and Christians can disagree on and still be in unity. Having said that, it might be helpful to give a general understanding of those different positions.

If you could imagine beliefs in the spiritual gifts on a spectrum, the far left of the line being those who do not practice or emphasize the spiritual gifts, and the far right, being those who place the highest importance on it. There would be at least three positions. First, there is a group of people who believe that not all spiritual gifts are the same. They say some of the gifts, like tongues, miracles, healing and prophecy are sign gifts. That means some spiritual gifts existed in the past to testify, to be a sign. Moses complains to God that the Israelites won't listen to him and God gave him the ability to do a couple of miracles. This is a very common purpose in the Bible for miracles. Miracles testify to the messenger. So, what these brothers believe is that though God still heals and still does miracles, he just does not give the gift of healing or prophecy or tongues to specific people anymore, because we now have the Bible and there is no need for those gifts.

On the other end of the spectrum, would be the Charismatic or Pentecostal Christians. These brothers and sisters believe and testify that God is still working through the spiritual gifts. They would argue that there is no good reason from the Bible to believe that these gifts have ceased. In our church, I am sure that we have both of these groups and others who do not know and are not sure what they believe.

But there is also a group or groups who are not at either end but more towards the middle of the spectrum. These people would not fit in either group. This group might be called open but cautious.

So whatever group you are from, please know that you are welcome. But be assured that our passion is to be biblical. Experience is important, but what the Bible says always trumps someone's experience. What I want to do this morning is give you five basic truths from the Bible that apply to the practice of spiritual gifts of any kind and function as filters for our beliefs:

1. Be careful to judge people's spirituality by their gifts (v. 1-3).
2. The spiritual gifts are for God's glory and not our glory (v. 4-6).
3. The spiritual gifts are for the common good, not our individual good (v. 7).
4. The Holy Spirit is a person and his manifestations are holy and personal (v. 8-11).
5. We need each other's spiritual gifts. (v. 11-31).

1. Be careful to judge people's spirituality by their gifts

¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³ 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.

Throughout 1 Corinthians, we have constantly spoken about the immaturity and spiritual confusion of the Corinthians. This, however, carries over to the use of spiritual gifts. You may read these verses and think, "what does this have to do with the rest of the chapter?" There is a direct connection. The Corinthians had evidentially created competition about spiritual gifts. If you have a miraculous gift like tongues, healing or prophesy, then you had the Holy Spirit, and if not, you did not. Paul

immediately reminds them that any person who says Jesus is Lord does so by the power of the Holy Spirit. That should make us pause. If you can say and really mean that Jesus is Lord, you do that by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Be careful to judge others. Be careful to assume that because a person does not have certain gifts, they are not a Christian. One of the strangest things that has happen to me was watching three missionary families we had been close to, from three different nations, be destroyed. In all three cases, they were gifted people. Having a spiritual gift does not mean you are immune to sin or the devil's attacks. Be careful to seek God daily until you die. You have not arrived at perfection. Your marriage, family, career and testimony for God depend on it.

2. The spiritual gifts are for God's glory and not our glory

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

In verses 4-6, notice the Trinity. The word Trinity is a nickname for the biblical teaching that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are three divine persons in one divine nature. The point in the text is clear. The glory in any and every way belongs to God. If you claim to have a gift, the text is clear to say that came from the Holy Spirit. If you have a position of service, it was given by the Lord Jesus. If you can think of any activity, it is God who empowers them all. Paul is reminding us of what should be clear: God deserves the glory for any and everything that happens. Please be careful in lifting men up. Be careful in having Christian heroes. God is the real hero. It is God who empowered the Apostles and still empowers the missionaries, pastors, evangelists and preachers of our day. He deserves the glory.

I have had the amazing opportunity to see God do miracles. I have witnessed his power in a variety of ways, but it is God who deserves the glory. Not only that you should never have to pay for prayer or for a blessing. Please, listen to me. I have been in cultures where supposed Christian leaders charged people and sold blessed items, like roses or oil. Jesus says in Matthew 10:8, ***“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.”*** It is a disgrace to Jesus to charge in his name. If people want to give, let them give. But this is not a business. The Apostle Peter gives us a much better example in Acts 3:12,16:

“And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? (...) ¹⁶ And his name —by faith in his name— has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

Peter refuses the glory. He gives it all to God. God has said that in the last days, many false prophets would come. Be careful. Ask yourself if this person is making a bigger name for themselves or for God. There was a famous Christian Pastor in a certain country who called himself “the Reverend, Doctor, Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Teacher, Shepherd of the Flock and Angel of the Church”. The way of the devil is the way of seeking glory for yourself. The devil. The way of Jesus is the way of

honestly and humility. We are all broken and weak. If we have a spiritual gift, it is in a jar of clay, to show that surpassing glory is not ours, but his.

The Seattle Times reported that a new study will be published this fall in the *Journal of Research in Personality* that show that people who post selfies are viewed negatively by people who do not know them. Here is a quote from the article: "119 students were asked to rate people based on their photos with no captions or hashtags. People who posted more selfies were viewed to have lower self-esteem, to be lonelier, less dependable and less successful." Lets put the spotlight on Jesus, not us.

3. The spiritual gifts are for the common good, not our individual good

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The Spiritual gifts are for the common good. That means the good of the group, not our individual good. It is so interesting to see God's plan. He gives the Holy Spirit to us to unite us, and with those gifts, the church in Corinth was dividing. Their corporate, group, Sunday, church meeting appear to have been totally disordered. They seem to be unorganized. Each person came thinking about their own interests. Paul says that a huge part of the corporate gathering is to think of others. How can my gifts encourage others?

Most people wonder why we do a church service the way we do it. The Bible gives instructions on what Christians should do or not do when we get together, but it also leaves us room to have our cultures and personalities. It is hard to do church to please everyone in an international church. But if each person will use their gift and sacrifice their preferences, then we can begin to move toward unity. In case you noticed, there is no tongue-speaking or organized prophecy here on Sunday mornings. We have two services and want to have order in all we do. We practice things that everyone from almost every background can participate in, and we hope that even if you are missing your home, that you would feel loved and cared for here. I will go into much detail on this topic in two weeks, so I will not talk more now.

4. The Holy Spirit is a person, and his manifestations are holy and personal

⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Notice that it repeats *Spirit* five times in these verses. The Spirit gives. The Spirit empowers. The Spirit apportions, which means that he distributes. The Spirit does these things individually, that is to each person. No Christian gets skipped. This should encourage you. As a missionary who has worked in remote places, one of the biggest shock is that cults get to the lost many times before we do. The Jehovah's Witness is one such cult. They teach that Jesus is an Angel, not God. They teach that only

144,000 of their people will make it in the third heaven. They have declared multiple times the exact day that Jesus was returning, and he did not. They teach that the trinity is a lie and the Holy Spirit is not a person, but only a force like electricity or the wind. When I have had the opportunity to interact with them, this is one of the subjects I always point out to them. Verse 11 clearly states that the Holy Spirit has a will: ***“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”*** Does electricity have a will? Does the wind have a will? Does water have a will?

It is easy to pick on the cults, but what about us? Often, we forget that the Spirit is a person. We do this in at least two ways. First, though we claim to believe that the Holy Spirit is a person, we treat him more like a force. Our popular culture has movies like those by Marvel or Star Wars. Some of these characters have powers, like electricity that flows from them. Many times, we think of the Holy Spirit like that. But he is more than a power or a force. The Holy Spirit is a person. This means you can have a relationship with him. I heard a Pastor this week saying that of the 56 times the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the book of Acts, 39 show him leading people to some form of speech. You see, the Spirit is a person, and therefore, we should recognize that the most common forms of manifestations come as speech. I am very saddened when He is reduced to a force like electricity or an emotion.

The second way we deny his personhood is by ignoring him. We don't pray for his ministry. We don't ask him to teach us as we read the Bible. We are not depending on his strength or praying for his wisdom. Lastly, I should say one more thing about the Holy Spirit. He is the HOLY Spirit. He is not called the Powerful Spirit. He is not called the miracle Spirit. He is the Holy Spirit. Any person who claims to be a person of the Spirit should also be a person of holiness. Not perfect, but definitely not living the same as those who are lost around them.

5. We need each other's spiritual gifts

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body —Jews or Greeks, slaves or free— and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less

honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

Could you imagine a body covered in eyes? Or hands? It would be ugly and useless. God has given every person in this room a spiritual gift. He has placed desires within you. You were born with natural abilities as well. I need you. I cannot do this without you. I struggle as it is to do what I do well. I need help. I need people with faith, with musical talent, with a servant's heart. I need evangelists, deacons, Sunday school teachers. I need you, and whether you believe it or not, you all need each other. Even the people who are hard to get along with, help us become better people. We need each other. Let us not compete with each other. Let's move forward toward a better way, a way of love.