

This morning, I am continuing in my sermon series called The Gospel Changes Everything, based on the New Testament book 1 Corinthians, Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, a church he started around the year 50 AD. He has since left the church in the hands of other leaders so that he might start other churches, and he writes this letter around the year 54-55 AD in response to what he is hearing about some of the issues in the Corinthian church. So far he's addressed the pride and arrogance in the church that has led to division and rivalry, the sexual issues that are rampant in the church and culture, how they should deal with the rampant idolatry in the city, and some of the problems happening in their worship gatherings. In this section, from chapters 12-14, he will be addressing something he calls "spiritual gifts." Remember that Paul is writing this letter in response to the issues going on in the Corinthian church, and one of the issues they were dealing with is that they had elevated certain gifts and abilities above others as the mark of real spirituality. Specifically, those who could speak in tongues, in other-worldly language, were seen as superior, as more spiritual than everyone else. And so Paul wants to address the idea of spiritual gifts and whether or not there really are different classes of spirituality in the Lord. Let's read this passage a little at a time.

1 Corinthians 12:1-31 - Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ 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. ⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Paul begins this chapter by telling the Corinthians that he wants to educate them about spiritual gifts, because evidently they don't have a correct understanding. He tells them in verses 2-3 that while pagans, those who do not follow the God of the Bible, are led astray by dumb idols or false gods, and while Jews declare that Jesus is cursed, not recognizing him as the Messiah, Christians confess by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is Lord. I think Paul starts off this way to let the Corinthians know that all who acknowledge and serve Jesus as Lord are spiritual. They all have the Holy Spirit inside of them. In other words, there are not different levels of spirituality based on what gift you have. All Christians are spiritual, filled with the Holy Spirit, united in declaring that Jesus is Lord.

But, Paul goes on to tell them that although they are united, they each possess different spiritual gifts. Paul references the Trinity in verses 4-6, telling them that

although there is one Spirit, one Lord Jesus, and one God the Father, the triune God gives each Christian different spiritual gifts. And in verse 7, he gives his summary statement:

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Let me share four things we learn about spiritual gifts in this passage:

1) They are gifts are from God

The Greek word Paul uses for gift in this passage is Charisma, where we get the word charismatic from. “Charis” means grace, and “ma” means the result of. These are grace-gifts. Grace is an undeserved gift given by an unobligated giver. God owes you nothing, and you deserve nothing, but He gives you salvation, forgives you of your sins, adopts you as His beloved child, and gives you His Holy Spirit, and along with that Spirit, supernatural gifts.

Now, if the charisma are gifts, given free of charge, what does that mean? It means that you did not earn it, you did not deserve it, and you would be wrong to boast in it. If someone gives me a free gift, how can I boast as if I earned it? No – the proper thing to do is to thank the giver and give credit to the giver of the gift. And so, by calling these gifts charismas, grace-gifts, Paul is letting the Corinthians know up front that any boasting is misplaced. Anyone who thinks they are more spiritual because they can speak in tongues or prophesy or teach or do anything else is missing the point – these are gifts, freely given by a generous God.

2) Every believer has gifts

Again, notice how Paul writes that “to each one” gifts are given. He goes on to list a number of examples:

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

When you come to faith in Jesus, not only are you justified – declared not guilty, forgiven of your sins; and adopted – brought into relationship with God as a beloved child to a father; but you are given His Holy Spirit, new life. And along with that Spirit, you are given “manifestations of the Spirit,” spiritual gifts. Paul does not give an exhaustive list here, but gives nine examples. As I read through them, write them down if you think this may be something God has gifted you in:

Wisdom – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by making wise decisions and counseling others with sound advice, all in accordance with God’s will

Knowledge - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by communicating God’s truth to others in a way that promotes justice, honesty, and understanding.

Faith – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by stepping out in faith in order to see God’s purposes accomplished, trusting him to handle any and all obstacles along the way

Healing - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by healing and restoring to health, beyond traditional and natural means, those who are sick, hurting, and suffering

Miraculous powers – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ through supernatural acts that bring validity to God and his power.

Prophecy - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by offering messages from God that comfort, encourage, guide, warn, or reveal sin in a way that leads to repentance and spiritual growth.

Discernment – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by recognizing truth or error within a message, person, or event.

Tongues - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by communicating to God in a special language unknown to the speaker

Interpretation - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by understanding, at a specific time, God’s message when spoken by another using a special language unknown to others in attendance

Here are eleven other gifts that show up in other New Testament passages:

Administration – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by effectively organizing resources and people in order to efficiently reach ministry goals

Apostleship – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by launching and leading new ministry ventures that advance God’s purposes and expand his kingdom

Encouragement – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by helping others live God-centered lives through inspiration, encouragement, counseling, and empowerment.

Evangelism – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by sharing the love of Christ with others in a way that draws them to respond by accepting God’s free gift of eternal life

Giving - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by joyfully supporting and funding various kingdom initiatives through material contributions beyond the tithe.

Helping - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by offering others assistance in reaching goals that glorify God and strengthen the body of Christ. This aptitude is sometimes referred to as the gift of helps or service

Hospitality - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by providing others with a warm and welcoming environment for fellowship

Leadership - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by casting vision, stimulating spiritual growth, applying strategies, and achieving success where God’s purposes are concerned.

Mercy – The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by ministering to those who suffer physically, emotionally, spiritually, or relationally through actions characterized by love, care, compassion, and kindness.

Pastoring - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by taking spiritual responsibility for a group of believers and equipping them to live Christ-centered lives.

Teaching - The God-given ability to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by teaching sound doctrine in relevant ways, empowering people to gain a sound and mature spiritual education.

Definitions are courtesy of Erik Rees' book SHAPE.

How do you know where you are gifted? You serve, and you find out what brings you joy and blesses others. And once you find it, use it.

2 Timothy 1:6 - *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*

3) All the gifts are needed

¹² *The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.* ¹³ *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.* ¹⁴ *Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.* ¹⁵ *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.* ¹⁶ *And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.* ¹⁷ *If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?* ¹⁸ *But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.* ¹⁹ *If they were all one part, where would the body be?* ²⁰ *As it is, there are many parts, but one body.* ²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"* ²² *On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,* ²³ *and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,* ²⁴ *while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it,* ²⁵ *so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.* ²⁶ *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.* ²⁷ *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* ²⁸ *And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.* ²⁹ *Are all*

apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Remember that the Corinthians believed that certain gifts, especially the more obviously supernatural ones like speaking in tongues – were more important, and meant that the person was more spiritual. Paul argues against this by using the analogy of a human body to make the point that every gift matters. Some are like an eye, some like an ear, some are like a foot, but all are an integral part of the body. Even the more hidden parts of the body, he says in verse 23, are very important, just as those spiritual gifts that are not as up-front and flashy are integral to the proper functioning of the body of Christ.

We all have different gifts, and every gift matters. No gift is elevated above another as somehow giving its owner a greater spiritual status. In fact, you will notice that he always lists tongues last on his list, probably as a way of letting them know that it is not more important than other gifts.

This is still true in our day with more flashy spiritual gifts, or more up-front gifts. Some branches of the Christian church believe that speaking in tongues or prophesying is the sign that you have the Holy Spirit in greater measure. Some promote pastors and prophets and evangelists as spiritually greater. But let Paul's words remind us that every person and every gift is needed as an integral part of the body. Sometimes there may be an older person who says that they can not serve or teach or give much, but "all they can do is pray." To which I say, "that is no small thing!" There are many of us who can not find extended time to devote to prayer, and thank God for those who can do it. Others may say, I would hate to get up front and teach something, but I love to serve the church by keeping the building clean, so that we can be hospitable and God can be honored. Praise God! I hate cleaning! Some of you may be willing to call up or visit someone who is sick or shut-in and listen for hours, sharing the love of Jesus with them. Praise God, because many others don't want to do that! Some of you love to give financially to the church or people in need. Praise God! Others don't. Some of you have the ability to organize a system or event in a way that others of us can not. Praise God! We are all needed.

One person alone, no matter how gifted, cannot play a Beethoven symphony, act a Shakespearian tragedy, or compete against another team. The same is true in the church.

4) They are to be used to build each other up

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given **for the common good.**

Romans 12:4-8 - Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ **so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.** ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is **prophesying**, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is **servicing**, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is **encouraging**, let him encourage; if it is **contributing to the needs of others**, let him give generously; if it is **leadership**, let him govern diligently; if it is **showing mercy**, let him do it cheerfully.

1 Peter 4:10 - Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

The vision of the church is a place where everyone contributes their gifts, ministering to God and to each other, until, as Paul puts it:

Ephesians 4:11-13 - It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Pastors and teachers and prophets and evangelists are to **prepare God's people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up, so that we might reach maturity and the fullness of Christ.

Remember, Paul does not want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. Neither do I want you to be ignorant or uninformed. God has given the Holy Spirit to live inside of every Christian, and along with the Spirit comes a manifestation of the Spirit, spiritual gifts, given to each believer not so they might boast in themselves, but so that they might use it to build others up to greater maturity. If we could ever awaken and unleash the massive talent, resources, creativity, and energy that we have here, the church would explode. I know there are gifts that many of you have that we don't even know about.

We are like a body with many members, each with different functions, and the Spirit has given us gifts to be used for the common good. We belong to each other,

and we depend on each other's gifts to function. What is your gift? Prophesying? Serving? Teaching? Encouraging? Giving? Leadership? Mercy? Do it! We are all ministers. **You have all been created for ministry - Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

One helpful way to consider how God might want to use you in service to others is to consider the acronym SHAPE, which comes from Saddleback Church in California:

Spiritual gifts: A set of special abilities that God has given you to share his love and serve others

Heart: the special passions God has given you so that you can glorify him on earth. Know what drives you, who you care about, the needs you will meet, the cause you will help conquer, your ultimate dream for God's kingdom

Abilities: the set of talents that God gave you when you were born, which he also wants you to use to make an impact for him

Personality: The special way God wired you to navigate life and fulfill your unique Kingdom Purpose

Experiences: Those parts of your past, both positive and painful, which God intends to use in great ways. Achievements and pains.

How has God shaped you to serve others? Greatness comes not through living for yourself, but in seeing how God has gifted you and using those gifts to serve others and build them up.

Mark 9:33-35 - *They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the **servant of all.**"*

Use the gifts God has given you to serve others and build up the church, until we all reach maturity.