

## EMPLOYING THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

### INTRODUCTION

- Taking an aerial view of the spiritual gifts in the larger context in which the apostle discusses them.
- It is not enough that we know that spiritual gifts exist; and that we can rightly define them; we must also of necessity see "*how and in what way*" these gifts are meant to function.
- Chapters 12-14 not only provide us the proper basis and pure motivation for employing spiritual gifts, but, these chapters also provide us the necessary boundaries we need to avoid many dangers and pitfalls.
- If we are to be a church that faithfully seeks to employ spiritual gifts, then we must be constantly governed by these 4 principles...

### PRIORITY OF THE GOSPEL

- I Cor. 12:1-3, "*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 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.*"
- The problems of orthodoxy (right doctrine) and orthopraxy (right practice) in Corinth.
- The significance of "Now concerning" (cf. 7:1, 8:1, 12:1).
- The Corinthians had questions on the nature and proper use of spiritual gifts in the gathered assembly.
- In verses 1-3 Paul establishes the very foundation for rightly understanding how we are to employ spiritual gifts **by first** drawing attention to the priority of the gospel!
- A more literal translation is "*Now concerning the spiritual or now concerning spiritual persons.*" In other words, what Paul is saying here goes something like this... "*Now let me address the reality of who is really spiritual.*"

- The spiritual person, the person who has the Holy Spirit is the person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ!
- When Paul addresses the question of who is truly spiritual (who truly has the Holy Spirit), Paul does not begin with gifts, he begins with the gospel!
- The authentic marker that one has the Holy Spirit is not whether or not they possess this gift or that gift. It's whether they possess Christ! Do they believe the gospel! Do they confess Christ!
- "Jesus is accursed" or "Jesus is Lord!"
- Before Paul begins dealing with the diversity of gifts he begins by establishing the unity of the body.
- Pneumatology is really the study of Christology.
- This 1<sup>st</sup> principle is highly instructive and serves as a guardrail to help us avoid error and pride. We don't ever want an unhealthy pre-occupation with the gifts, but with the gospel!

### **PRIORITY OF LOVE**

- *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 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. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*

- Paul's point here is not to detract from the gifts or to devalue the gifts, but to value the beauty of love.
- The Spirit's primary work in a believer's life once He has united us to Christ, is **not** to impart gifts...it is to impart grace that transforms us into the image of Christ!
- *Do you want to know who's spiritual?? Want to know who has the Holy Spirit? It's the one whose life is characterized by love!*

*"The greatest evidence that heaven has invaded our sphere, that the Spirit has been poured out upon us, that we are citizens of a kingdom not yet consummated, is Christian love."*<sup>1</sup>  
D.A. Carson

- Spirit generated love must not only characterize our lives but it must be the continuous motivating factor in the employment of our gifts.

#### **PRIORITY OF EDIFICATION**

- Chapter 14 v.1, *"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up."*
- To *"earnestly desire the higher gifts"*, or *"greater gifts"*, means that we are to seek those gifts that have the greatest capacity for edifying everybody.
- This is the reason why prophecy is preferred over tongues unless tongues are interpreted. An un-interpreted tongue builds no one up because no one understands him.

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 61.

- Edification, not personal experiences, is Paul's unmistakable priority for the gathered church.
- We must never, ever, seek to employ any spiritual gift for self promotion.
- How much division and schism would be avoided if we remembered that the goal was unity, that the end game for which we employ spiritual gifts was to serve one another out of love.

### **PRIORITY OF PURSUIT**

- Chapter 12:31, "*earnestly desire the higher gifts*", Chapter 14 v.1, "*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy*" v.39, "*So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophecy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.*"
- In the midst of flagrant abuse and misuse of the gifts, the apostle commands them to earnestly pursue them! Why? Because he just adjusted their self centered perspective with the priority of the gospel, the priority of love and the priority of edification!
- He commands them to not just pursue the gifts, but to *earnestly* pursue them! It's a word that means to be jealous for, to be zealous for.
- Here's what this sobering command tell us...*to not pursue these gifts is disobedience. It's not a matter of indifference, but disobedience.*
- Scripture adjusts our attitudes towards the gifts! It doesn't give us the option to acknowledge they exist but to never functionally pursue them.
- When Paul confronts the massive problems in Corinth on spiritual gifts, he corrects their theology and attitude, and then says "Now, go and eagerly desire them!"

### **A very important qualifier**

- This admonition to earnestly pursue spiritual gifts and expect God to manifest spiritual gifts should not lead us to an unbiblical theology of glory. The expectation for the manifestation of spiritual gifts should be pursued not to deny the reality of suffering but because of God's purposes in suffering.

- Sometimes it is God's will to heal which is why we should earnestly desire and pray for this gift. However, for all of our earnest pursuit of spiritual gifts, we must always hold side by side with that a theology of suffering. God very often uses suffering to sanctify and deepen faith.
- Mark 14:36, "*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet, not what I will, but what You will.*"
- This 4<sup>th</sup> principle needs to govern our hearts that in earnestly pursuing gifts we don't fail to understand the larger purposes of God in suffering. This will guard us from projecting a false expectation on one another.

## CLOSING

- Once we have the gospel, love, edification and pursuit governing our minds and hearts; where do we go from here?
- **We must go to prayer!** We must pray, must eagerly desire (ask, seek and knock) but then we must act.
- Begin by seeking to apply this at home, in CG and in the gathered church.
- May the Lord give us the grace to be a church that employs spiritual gifts as we are anchored by the gospel, motivated by love to serve one another and doing all things to the glory of God.