

**The Rock: 09-19-2021****The Gifts series**

**First reading:** Psalm 133

**Title:** Now concerning Gifts

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 12:1-7

**Theme:**

In beginning to address the gifts to the Church, Paul makes clear that the unity of the body and the proper use of the gifts (to glorify God and edify the church) needs to be remembered.

**Introduction:**

By way of reminder, and especially if you have not been with us for the first two messages of this series, Paul has spent the first portion of his letter covering all kinds of issues.

He does so in response to at least one letter he had received from this church. Issues that covered pretty much every aspect of daily life in Corinth, the role Paul held within that daily life, along with those who traveled with him.

In reading his response carefully, we discover that the lack of unity is mentioned on more than one occasion:

**-1 Corinthians 1:10 (ESV)**

"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."

**-1 Corinthians 3:1-4 (ESV)**

"But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?"

**-1 Corinthians 6:1-2 (ESV)**

"When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?"

**The Story:**

Reading these verses, it's really no wonder he lands where he does in what we call chapters 12-14. Writing chapter 13 not as a marriage scripture, but rather as a reminder of how we are to operate in the gifts, within our community, and toward other individuals.

Without love, we have nothing. He is reminding this church that they have lost the primary reason for everything in relation to a healthy community of believers: LOVE.

Writing to his Ephesian friends, he reminded them also of the same thing:

**-Ephesians 4:1-3 (ESV)**

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

It's emphasized so much because it is much needed, even as it is today. In fact, the theme of unity of the Spirit within the framework of Christian community, driven by love for one another is a common theme for Paul.

Why? Well, let's be honest, the enemy always starts there. Sowing seeds of chaos and disunity among God's people.

He does so because he knows that a church that is not united in purpose, even with all of the gifts operating, becomes a church which lacks power to be a witness for the Gospel.

Once this happens, we are no longer operating in the truth of what Jesus said would be our one identifying mark as believers

The Apostle John records for us in his gospel that Jesus said:

**-John 13:34-35 (ESV)**

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love then is our primary driver. Unity happens when we love in spite of differences, when we love simply because He first loved us.

When we recognize that there is diversity within unity -not uniformity. A healthy body will always celebrate the differences found, and the diversity

which God brings together within the local congregation.

This is why this wokeness and cancel culture is so dangerous. Address wrongs, yes, but to simply cancel someone or something because you don't agree with or like or somehow are offended, is not unity in any sense.

Corinth it seems, as we look at the gifts, was united. Only it seems they were united in one thing and that was, as Gordon Fee puts it, against Paul and his teaching on how the gifts are used. Specifically, the gift of tongues.

It's in the midst of all this where I can imagine Paul getting up, taking a stretch, grabbing a coffee and candle, sitting back down and writing:

**-1 Corinthians 12:1-2 (ESV)**

"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."

Spiritual things were not new to the Corinthian people. In fact, they had quite a spiritual culture, and felt they had a good grip on these things.

But they didn't, they were deceived, led astray. Tongues were not a new thing. The spiritual language or a word from "the gods" was something they always sought out in their temples.

Often going to one of them that housed these "gods", and spending the night in that temple waiting to hear from them.

Taking various things to "help them" get in contact and her from the spirit world. Sadly, that doesn't sound strange to our ears.

So, it makes sense that there was concern about whether these words were from God or not. How can we discern this? That's the question.

Paul, a brilliant man, once again makes it simple for us all:

**-1 Corinthians 12:3 (ESV)**

"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 can't be that simple, can it? Oh, but yes, it can be and is. Yeah, but what about if the devil tries to sneak in and trick me into saying...No, no. It is that simple.

Paul will unpack for us how we share, and verify later in these chapters. As an aside, this is why a church needs to have good, dedicated and praying elders and leadership. Because, as Paul says, they are the ones we can and should go to when we get a word.

Paul here is helping them to have a simple framework of discernment as the goal. How do we know? Well, we need to ask the question: "Who is being glorified?" It really is that simple.

Paul doesn't wrestle with "saved", "unsaved", are they the right type of people or anything like that. No, not at all. Is Jesus being glorified or is He not?

Very simple: So, let's not miss this. Older and farther along in your journey with Jesus, be reminded. Brand new in your walk and journey, take note and remember: Do not over complicate clear and simple teaching.

Palin things -main things as Begg puts it.

We cloud the issue and make it far more complicated when we try to define just what that may look like, and through whom it might come.

We don't want to do that, nor do we want to define what gift ought to be working and when. That's not our job. That is the Holy Spirit's job.

Paul works that out as we see in the next few verses:

**-1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (ESV)**

"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."

Now, I don't want to move too quickly here in these verses. Paul makes a deep theological point in what he has just said.

Speaking to a polytheistic culture where each temple had their own deity or god, Paul makes clear that there is only one, but he does so here in three ways.

For the Corinthians, depending on the need, you would go to one place for one type of spiritual blessing, and so on.

Not so with Jesus. When you come to Him, you come to the fountain and well-spring of spiritual blessing itself. Jesus is the one and the only way.



The all-sufficient source of blessing and power. Paul captures the trinity here in such a beautiful way. Even using the trinity as the perfect example of unity within diversity.

You see, we have the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God. Yet each one is separate and distinct in their function.

This becomes the pattern for how the body of Christ ought to operate. N.T. Wright, in his little commentary on this puts it this way:

"...Paul does something striking...At the very moment when he is wanting to say that the various gifts that different Christians have are all to be seen within unity, a unity which is God Himself, He expresses that unity in three closely related ways: Spirit, Lord, God."

**-NTFE: Pg. 155**

Again, verses 4-6. Unity within diversity, driven by love. Love for His creation, and His desire to fellowship with us and to bless and empower us for His purposes. This is no afterthought for Paul.

HE is not trying to squeeze this into the conversation, Rather, this is the prime thought! Love and unity flow from the

Godhead in that perfect unity through His people and for a purpose:

**-1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**

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

For the common good, not for my personal pleasure or satisfaction. Nor is it to be bragged on and about as though it's some spiritual boy scout badge we've earned.

No, it is by the grace of God and His goodness that He gives these gifts to us for the common good of the body of believers.

You see, these gifts are secondary or a means to an end, not the end itself. God is the end. To worship Him and enjoy Him every day.

The common good is rooted in the correct focus of His people -the worship of Him. M.L-J. reminds us, me especially not to make God some sort of a means to an end.

In other words, seeking Him out in order to get what we think will make us happy or bring us joy. God is the end -find Him in and through the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and everything else comes together.

The moment this is forgotten, things will spiral out of control into one of two things: Legalism or Licentiousness (anything goes attitude because God will forgive me).

In both cases we lose the freedom of the promised Holy Spirit. If we give into everything and chase after the gifts for the sake of the gift and the "feeling" it produces -we have turned them into our object of affection.

In other words: Our idol, and God does not share His throne with another. That's lawlessness.

If, however, we shut it all down and say that God only operates a certain way within a certain people, well that too is a problem.

It de-values any human being who is not just like me and operating within the framework I think they ought.

The danger then is I am using my standard as I see it. That too is idolatry -of self. Law bound and self-centered, we lock it all down until we feel they have met our standards. Grace is thrown out the window.

The other side of that coin is an absolute free for all when it comes to the operation of the gifts. Where nobody

can tell anyone what to do, how to do it and when.

"The Spirit is using me right now. You have no right to quench the spirit. That would crush my freedom."

Of, "I can live my life any way I want because God has saved me and filled me with His spirit, and grace is on me."

While that is true, grace can never be cheapened to the point where it is used as an excuse to do things and act in ways, we know to be wrong and detrimental to the Gospel and the name of Jesus.

I have seen this happen too many times, especially in our Pentecostal circles. Too often what one can find on line or in a service ends up being disorder and chaos dressed up as "freedom in the spirit", with everyone seeking and doing their own thing.

We will talk more on this as we get to chapter 14 but to look at two verses right now are helpful:

**-1 Corinthians 14:32-33 (ESV)**

"...and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace."

**-1 Corinthians 14:40 (ESV)**

"But all things should be done decently and in order."

That's why Paul writes all these things. So, we can know what the standards are, and apply them all in the right way.

If love then is the ultimate goal, if unity is what makes the church strong, and the gifts are given for the common good, then our goal starts with the giver of all good things.

From there, we work toward the healthy operating of all the gifts God gives to us as a body. For His glory and for our healthy growth and encouragement.