

Gifts, Services, Spirit: I Corinthians 12:1-11

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Introduction

Throughout this program year we are teaching on the Holy Spirit. We have learned that He is the source of all the power that can make a difference for good in the world. He anoints words of gospel and the ears that hear them; He anoints acts of mercy and the hearts that benefit from them, He gives power to prove faith through prayer and the answers that come from them. He imparts the treasures of wisdom so that all who receive wisdom may live with grace and dignity. If this is power we want for the church, we need to ask for it as a promise from God; with expectation, obedience and readiness. This is the promise the apostles sought after when they gathered in Acts 1 for regular prayer meetings. Then in Acts 2 the Spirit fulfilled the promise, anointed them to preach the gospel, and three thousand were added to them in one day.

The Holy Spirit also brings to fruit different facets of God's own character in believers and in the Church. Some of us here today wonder if visible signs of spiritual power are even supposed to be present for the Church; we get uncomfortable with the idea that someone is praying in tongues or is presenting their faith through a healing touch in the name of Jesus. But in Paul's day the Corinthians assumed that spiritual power would be evident, and many had set themselves on a hierarchy of experiences and became elitist. Paul reminded them all that the same Spirit was the source of their special powers and experiences. Rather than being on a ladder with some of them closer to God, their gifts and service were all on the same level in God's eyes. To show the world a complete testimony to God's power, they needed each other.

Let us pray: Lord, we ask for your Spirit that we may hear you and live in you. Amen.

1. Gifts

The first gift that the Holy Spirit makes is a relationship of faith with Jesus Christ. The way to know that you are saved is not whether you are preaching a sermon every Sunday, whether you can touch a sick person and they become well; the way you know you are saved is that Jesus is your Lord, and when you say so, you mean it.

When Paul states, “No one can say Jesus is LORD except by the Holy Spirit,” he is not giving us any license to be a hypocrite. Our gospel lesson today was the caution that Jesus made: “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Jesus then cautions against using signs of power as criteria to determine salvation. The Holy Spirit will bring glory to God and establish the testimony of Jesus’ name, but for your salvation the Holy Spirit must be in your heart bearing within you the fruits of repentance.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the statement “Jesus is Lord” was a huge risk; only Rome’s Caesar was Lord. This Jesus whom they called Lord, proved it by overcoming a Roman execution; the power of Caesar was able to have Jesus killed but could not keep him dead. This hope, this name, this declaration “Jesus is Lord,” is a subversive threat to any government that strives to rule by fear. In our land we are not used to being afraid of our governments, so we do not really understand all that was once implied in the testimony that Jesus is Lord.

Today around the world, the risk of a Christian’s testimony is the claim that Jesus is God. There are other religions that are aware of Jesus and even think they give him his due as a prophet and so forth, but the claim that Jesus is God is a blasphemy worthy of death. Also in our free and open society today, to say that “Jesus is God” cuts against the intellectual and cultural grain. Many who call themselves Christians are not even sure that they believe it themselves that

Jesus is God. It is the exclusive claim: Jesus is God. Krishna is not, Buddha is not, Mohammed is not. Jesus is the only way to know God. Jesus is the only way to enter into eternal life with God. Jesus is the only name under heaven by which we must be saved: Jesus is God.

It's easy for me to say it to you that Jesus is God, but it is much harder for you to say it in the public schools and libraries where you facilitate learning, to say it among your co-workers of a hundred different faiths, to say it to family members who are getting their theological training from day-time talk shows, and to pray it and preach it at assemblies of the USA's armed forces personnel. The testimony that "Jesus is God" carries real risk socially and professionally.

This is the gift that the Holy Spirit makes, the first gift of all, a relationship with Jesus that gives the believer the power and the confidence to bear a witness to Jesus Christ and who He is. **2. Services**

From that first gift of Himself, there come many kinds of special, unique gifts to the believer to help them be of service to the church and in the world. Now when Paul states, "I would not have you be ignorant," most of think, "Well that's a relief, because I sure don't know much about how the Holy Spirit works." When he says this to the Corinthians he is being almost sarcastic. The problem among too many Corinthians is that they were bragging about their spiritual knowledge and experiences. But too many of them were just transferring the experiences from their old pagan days into the Church. Prophesying happened during pagan worship, and so did gushing, inarticulate vocal noise. How can we know such eruptions come from God? When "Jesus is Lord" is affirmed.

Meanwhile Paul reminds the Corinthians: who is to benefit from this power they boast about having? Ecstasies, prophecies, healings and demonstrations of power are for the benefit of the Church and the glory of God; they are power for service. Those who set themselves apart as a

spiritual elite on the basis of these experiences miss the point. Paul emphasizes that no one kind of anointing and no one kind of service is a mark of salvation to the exclusion of any other.

The list he makes here is specific, and many sermons have been preached on them to encourage you to discover, foster and exercise your gift for service whatever it might be. Almost twenty years ago I took the Thomas Fuller Spiritual Gifts Assessment. My highest rank was in the gift of knowledge. I am now finishing my third graduate degree this spring. I did not make this plan as soon as I took the inventory, but God had a plan and I have to admit, that while graduate school is not for everybody, it is for me. I have thrived in that environment. But who is this gift of knowledge for? It has always been my hope that my gift of knowledge has benefited the churches I have served, in Arizona, Germany, Chicago, and here.

If you are interested in a Spiritual Gifts inventory please come and talk to me about having one administered and the results discussed. It can be a helpful tool in discernment. But it does not substitute for a heart yielded in obedience, seeking the anointing of God. The temptation that we have is to transform godly principles into scientific principles, and that is especially for people who gifted in knowledge. *To find out what God wants to do with your life, here is a questionnaire.* How about: To find out what God wants from your life, pray that God shows you. If the answer to your prayer is that the pastor is talking about a Spiritual Gift Inventory, great, here's your sign from God, let's do it. But don't come asking for an inventory just because you think it might be a good idea and you're grasping at straws. Pray. Seek the Lord. Ask for Wisdom, and he will give it to you, because the thing he wants to give you above all, is more of Himself. Next week we will continue in First Corinthians 12, and follow up more on the specific gifts for serving. But today we move on to the theme that all of these have their source in One Spirit of God.

3. Spirit

Friends, do you want more of God Spirit's moving here in power? Over a hundred years ago the last major revival in the United States gave birth to the charismatic movement. Now there is finally an integration that is taking place as the Pentecostals have gotten themselves grounded theologically. The consensus emerging among scholars Pentecostal and Evangelical, is that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a consecration for mission. Those who think like the Corinthians, that having giddy times in worship is a sign of their spiritual maturity, are actually spiritual infants, who hardly know the difference between church and a pagan ceremony.

This is finally put to rest, in convincing fashion, in First Corinthians 14, which talks about decency and good order. For Paul there should be an obvious distinction between a church service and a pagan festival. Rather than a cacophony of Babel sounds, those who speak in tongues should limit themselves to two or three in order, with interpretation, or remain silent.

The rule Paul makes is common sense. Jesus Christ is the Word incarnate, the one who creates and then sustains creation with order, not chaos. How then can the Holy Spirit testify to Jesus Christ with chaos? That problem is finally coming to some resolution among Pentecostals.

But tens of millions of evangelicals in North America today suffer the opposite problem: We would rather bury our heads in the sand than open our ears, hearts and minds to the anointing of God's Holy Spirit, and here is why: We know our Bibles enough to know what that anointing means. It means radical mission to people unlike ourselves, it means signs and wonders that make us feel uncomfortable as we try to fit them into our knowledge boxes of science and psychology, and it means, scariest of all, the loss of our control. We love nothing so much as knowing exactly what to expect when we come to church.

Revival power in our world is coming out of Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Pacific Rim. They are starting to send missionaries to the United States, people like Henocho Fuentes, and it is high time they did. We need more missionaries, because in the United States the evangelical gospel is everything BUT anointed: It is marketed, it is fun, it is learned, it is profound, there are times that it is even prophetic, but it is not anointed, for if it were, with all the churches we have millions would be coming to Christ and this place, and Larkin Avenue Baptist, and E. Free, and Highland Christian Fellowship, and a hundred other churches in Elgin would be busting at the walls. We are trying to do with money, facilities and programs what God does in the wind and fire of heaven.

Conclusion

What is church for? What are we about? Do we want more of God, and if we think we do, what for? So that worship is even more fun than it is now? In terms of being a small evangelical church just like everywhere else in the United States, we actually have a lot going. We have a number of skilled and energetic people who can make a lot of things work on the basis of their brains and fingers. Thank you for the work you do.

Now wouldn't you hard workers like to see God make use of this special legacy that you have tended so faithfully, by fanning these embers with the wind of heaven, so that we burst into flame and become a shining light to our world and our community?. It will mean less control, and so much more power. Are you ready to pray for that, to seek it as God's promise?

Then do it. Here again is the insert which suggests a way to lay a claim on the Pentecost promise of God. Pray it through. Pray it over and over. Let God fulfill his promise in us. Amen.