

SHOWING THE SPIRIT

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.

Introduction

1. We begin a new study today in the Corinthian letter concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts, though spiritual gifts are not really the main focus of the study. We need to make an effort to understand what Paul is saying to the Corinthians as he answers their questions concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the church at Corinth and then take what he says and extrapolate that to our own church.
2. Dr. D.A. Carson from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School has written a book, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, which may help to provide some direction (as well as a reliable resource) for us. I will likely be referring to that from time to time. Mostly this section of our study together is to be a careful look at the Scripture itself to answer the questions about the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of believers – specifically in relation to questions surrounding spiritual gifts. It is no secret that there are many questions today about spiritual gifts, and tensions and division have occurred over them. That should not surprise us because the same thing happened in Corinth.
3. Our intention is to move slowly enough to understand, but quickly enough to be able to see the entire picture without getting consumed by all the details. Several weeks from now you can judge whether or not we were successful.
4. As with any consideration of Scripture, the most important resource is the Bible itself in the hands of sincere believers who are willing to make the effort to know God as He is revealed in His Word.
5. I will make every effort to be fair in my approach. I will tell you what I believe but I will also be careful not to be inappropriately dogmatic where I see room for latitude in our

understanding and practice. Where we may differ, my hope is that we can be gracious to each other. If we fail there we will be falling into the same trap that hampered the testimony and the fellowship of the Corinthian assembly, and we do not want to do that.

6. Part of the problem in Corinth is also a problem today. There were some then and there are some now who believe that the possession and use of certain spiritual gifts are the definitive mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life, somehow elevating their importance over others. Or to put it another way, people who possess certain gifts are more spiritual or more favored by God than those who do not.
7. Is that true? Paul would argue, "No." In these first three verses he lays a foundation for his answers concerning these issues that he will later unpack. The argument will continue through chapter 14. The foundation of his argument could be stated...

I. IT IS NOT ABOUT YOU OR YOUR GIFTS; IT IS ABOUT THE SPIRIT

- A. Many are uninformed (or ignorant) about the Spirit and spiritual gifts
 1. If you have been around the evangelical church for any time at all, you have probably heard that you are to be spiritual, that you are to grow spiritually, that you are to live out your life in a spiritual manner that will probably look different than the world around you. I hope you have heard that and I hope you believe that and I hope you are seriously working on that.
 2. You have also probably been exposed to the concept of spiritual gifts – certain abilities given to us by God to be used to aid in the development of others in their spiritual growth.
 3. Some gifts are more controversial than others. Some appear more important or significant than others in terms of what they may accomplish toward the goal of spiritual growth. Some believers would argue that we must discover our spiritual gifts (and there are various tests and courses designed to accomplish that). Some would argue that the possession of certain spiritual gifts authenticates something about those who possess them. Thus not to have certain spiritual gifts would speak loudly as well, suggesting something less than true spirituality or even authenticity! Some would teach that the possession of particular gifts indicates a certain level of spiritual maturity or effectiveness or approval from God or some other mark of superiority over those who do not possess such gifts.

4. Paul would lump all of those presuppositions together and say that many are woefully uninformed about the character of spiritual gifts and the character of the Holy Spirit. So it is here that Paul takes the opportunity to inform them! He continues.
- B. Spiritual gifts are from the Holy Spirit given to every believer for the glory of God
1. The main idea of these three chapters is not really about us. It is about the Spirit of God and the purpose of God to work out the glory of God. Part of the problem in Corinth was the tendency to make everything about them. If you remember nothing else about the ministry here at Lakeview, I desire that it be this: "It is not about us – and it never should have been about us – it is about Him!" If we can remember that it will save a lot of headache and a lot of heartache. I think, then, it is appropriate to ask...
 2. Why would God give His people spiritual gifts? What was the point? God gave them to His redeemed people, as He determined – and here is the point – in order to build in them faith and effectiveness so that the body of Christ might bring glory to Christ. God's intention is that I should use what He has given to me to increase the faith and effectiveness of others. The gifts were given to build up others. These gifts were not given to call attention to the one who possesses the gifts. It must never be, "Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!" It must always be, "Look at Him! Look at Him! Look at Him!"
 3. One preacher I was reading this week addressed the issue of the fundamental problem related to spiritual gifts that Paul addresses here. It was not identifying the one or ones we have or even the responsibility of using them. It was a failure to understand their basic purpose. The Corinthian problem seemed to be that there was no desire to strengthen the faith of others. This preacher wrote, ***Human nature is more prone to tear down than it is to build up. The path of least resistance leads to grumbling and criticism and gossip, and many there be that follow it. But the gate is narrow and the way is strewn with obstacles, which leads to edification and the strengthening of faith. So the basic problem is becoming the kind of person who wakes up in the morning, thanks God for our great salvation, and then says, "Lord, O how I want to strengthen people's faith today. Grant that at the end of this day somebody will be more confident of your promises and more joyful in your grace because I crossed his path." The reason I say becoming this kind of person is more***

basic than finding out your spiritual gift is that when you become this kind of person, the Holy Spirit will not let your longings go to waste. He will help you find ways to strengthen the faith of others, and that will be the discovery of your gifts (Piper, March 15, 1981). I think he is on target and I think that was part of the issue in Corinth. If my spiritual gift is not about building others up, but only concerned with how it looks on me, I have missed the purpose God intended. And that makes the concept of spiritual gifts pointless.

4. We need to understand that God has given many people – believers and unbelievers – great **abilities** in a multitude of areas to accomplish much. And these abilities are God-given, whether we recognize it or not. It could be said of everyone, “What do you have that you did not receive.” The obvious answer is nothing. But we would not call these abilities "spiritual gifts" especially when they are possessed by unbelievers, because they are not expressions of faith and they are not directed toward strengthening the faith of others. No matter what abilities people have, believers or unbelievers, if they are not relying on God and not aiming to help others rely on Him, then those abilities are not spiritual gifts. It can only be a spiritual gift if it is from the Holy Spirit and given to be used in a way to magnify Christ in the building of His body.
5. Paul will make the case later in chapter 12 that every believer has been given something from the Holy Spirit to make an impact on others so that God is magnified.
6. Peter summarized the aim of all spiritual gifts when he wrote, **"in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ"** (1 Peter 4:11). In other words, God's purpose in giving us gifts, and in giving us the faith to practice them toward each other, is that His glory might be displayed. (And that is consistent with everything Paul has said up until now). God desires that all should marvel at Him – not the least of which, the church! **"For from him and through him and to him are all things"** (Romans 11:36). There should be **"nothing more thrilling, more joyful, more meaningful, more satisfying than to find our niche in the eternal unfolding of God's glory. Our gift may look small, but as a part of the revelation of God's infinite glory it takes on stupendous proportions"** (Piper, March 15, 1981). Think about it.

God is giving us something by which we can participate with Him to build up His body for His glory! That is pretty amazing!

7. As we exercise the use of those gifts God is to be front and center – not us! If we fail at this point to see spiritual gifts as from God for the good of His body and for the glory of His name, our gifts become a means of robbing God of glory, not a means of giving Him glory! So Paul says, **Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.** So what do we need to know? It is about Him, not about us! We must also understand...

II. IT IS NOT ABOUT OUR EXPERIENCES; IT IS ABOUT TRANSFORMATION

A. Everyone has experiences

1. That is true not only for believers, but also for those outside the faith. Paul reminded the Corinthians, **“When you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.”** Somehow these unbelievers were made to believe that they were following the truth even though they were following silent idols! They had some sort of experience in being “led” but it failed to result in a transformed life that looks like Christ. Only the true God can truly transform.
2. Believers have experiences. Some of those experiences come from God and some have a different origin. In regard to “manifestations of the spirit” it really is not about the experience. It is about the results of the experience, which is a transformation that is seen in increased Christ-likeness. Paul would make the case that...

B. Only the Holy Spirit can transform

1. Verses 1 and 2 go together something like this: “I do not want you to be ignorant of certain basic spiritual truths (v. 1). You know of course that when you were pagans your ignorance was profound on such spiritual matters. I don’t want you to be ignorant of these matters (vv. 1-2), so I am making them known to you.”
2. It is possible that there were two competing groups in Corinth. One group wanted to elevate the gifts to being a mark of true spiritual favor and superiority and they wanted Paul to affirm this. The second group looked upon these gifts with skepticism and wanted Paul to rebuke the former group. On the one hand there was too much emphasis attached to spiritual gifts and on the other hand, the idea of spiritual gifts was virtually dismissed. One commentator wrote, “The purpose of 12:1-3 is not to provide a confessional test to enable Christians to distinguish true

from false spirits, but to provide a sufficient test to establish who has the Holy Spirit at all.” In other words, these spiritual gifts were gifts from the Holy Spirit designed to give glory to God. They were given as gifts from the Holy Spirit to be used to build up the body of Christ. To see spiritual gifts as special favors for particularly spiritual people is to miss the point and to miss the purpose for the giving of the gifts.

3. The point that is made in verse 3 is that it is the Holy Spirit of God who transforms us. The Holy Spirit makes us different. We go from cursing Jesus to declaring Him to be Lord. That is the work of the Spirit within. And it is the Spirit of God who applies the gifts to us – not for us who are the possessors of the gifts, but for the glory of God and the good of the body.
4. In the following verses Paul will make that point more clear. He speaks of the “same Spirit”, “same Lord”, and “same God.” “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit.” The gifts are given “through the Spirit”, the “same Spirit” and “by the one Spirit.” This argument will culminate in verse 11 when Paul declares, **“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”**

Conclusion

1. So to get us started on the subject, if you belong to Jesus, if you have trusted Him, you have the Spirit of God within you. Before Christ, you cursed Him. Now that you are in Christ, you recognize Him as Lord. How did that happen? You were changed. You were regenerated. You were transformed. And only the Spirit of God can transform a dead cursing saint into an alive, praising child of God.
2. And God continues to transform us into ever increasing likeness to Jesus Christ. This continued transforming process is also a work of the Holy Spirit, but it includes the involvement of other believers who use their gifts to increase our faith and effectiveness in our walk with the Lord.
3. It is about Him and His glory. It is about His body growing and developing. In the words of Paul to the Ephesian church, **“¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the**

waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

4. God gave gifts to be used to build the body for the glory of Christ. In the weeks ahead we will learn better how to use them and how not to use them. But foundationally, remember this: It is about Him and He is the one who transforms. If we keep that central to our study, we will stay on track and fulfill the purpose God intended!