

"As He Wills"

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

"Now concerning spiritual gifts" introduces three chapters of Paul defining, explaining and mostly correcting the Corinthians about their misunderstanding and division over spiritual gifts. Paul's main thrust in these chapters is to rebuke the Corinthians who had an unhealthy attachment to the gift of tongues. This is what Ch. 14 is about but before he deals directly with their abuse of tongues, he has to remind them why they even have spiritual gifts (12:1-11), how our gifts are for others not yourself (12:12-31) and that serving each other with love (the way God serves us) is the way to use our gifts.

As we've seen so far, the church was divided over favourite bible teachers, meat eaters vs. nonmeat eaters, wealthy and the poor and now who has what gift. When Paul begins 'Now concerning spiritual gifts' the word gift is implied and that's a correct assumption, but literally it reads now concerning the spirituals. And in many ways the Corinthians were assessing their spirituality by what gifts they had. And surprise, surprise, the more spectacular the gift, the more spiritual they believed themselves to be.

Yet the word spiritual means Spirit-like or Spirit led. There are people who see themselves as spiritual but the Spirit may not be leading you. Let's pray before we open these verses

Our gracious Father, who saves us by grace through faith in Jesus and who has sealed us with Your Holy Spirit for salvation, thank You for the grace of the Spirit as demonstrated in the gifts He bestows on us. As Paul shows us Lord, gifts are given by the giver as He wills. Forgive us when we make the gifts about us or us or proof of how spiritual we supposedly are. Forgive us when we are unbalanced about this issue or any issue of Scripture. Help us to hear what the Spirit is saying to us about His role in our lives. Ultimately, we still can't figure it all out because it is a work of yourself and we're spiritually lacking to understand the way You work. Give us insight today, not to glorify ourselves for your giftedness to us but to build each other up and reach people for Christ with the Spirit-graced gifts You've blessed us with. Not to us, Oh Lord, not to us, but to you be the glory.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts". Paul is addressing another issue the Corinthians wrote to him about. He starts,

I do not want you to be ignorant.

Because they were displaying their ignorance about their use and purpose. Ignorance comes from the root family word for knowledge in Greek. Here they lacked knowledge and Paul wants them to have this knowledge about spiritual gifts. Where does this knowledge come from, God's Word. God's Word will correct their misunderstanding, abuse and even experiences. So to start off we must be adamant that

Spiritual Gifts Requires Spiritual Understanding **(12:1-3)**

It sounds obvious and yet sadly it is necessary for Paul to say, I don't want you to be unaware, meaning we need to be aware about some things regarding the gifts. The first comment he makes,

however, is a warning. Knowing he has tongues in mind Paul states that there are other religions and spirits where some verbal utterance was used in pagan worship. These people were saved from some of these pagan backgrounds where this happened. So let's make sure Paul says that

Gifts are Spirit-led not human-derived (vv.1-2)

² *You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.*

There was something ironic and demonic about these things. You were worshipping idols who can't speak yet you supposedly spoke utterances as coming from this mute called god. Does that sound logical to you? No, of course not. Now they understood but then they didn't. However, now you do know the One true, living and speaking God who gifts us in different ways to speak His truths. What Paul is getting at here is when you are claiming to speak God's truths through your gift (wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, evangelism, tongues) is the Spirit leading you or are you doing this yourself? Because if it's a spiritual gift then the Spirit has to be the One working through you. How do you know the difference?

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.*

Were some of these believers actually saying, 'Jesus is cursed' and claiming it was from the Spirit? I highly doubt that. I think Paul is using extremism to make a point. If you're not saved you don't know and understand that Jesus is Lord. If you're not enlightened by the Spirit, Jesus is simply a person, a good man, a good teacher who suffered the same fate as us. The Jews believed He was cursed because He was hung on a tree.

But only when the Spirit comes into your life do you call Jesus Lord. Jesus is the true King of your life. Those were dangerous words to say in Paul's day. Caesar was lord and supposedly even thought of as a god. But when we place our faith in Christ the Spirit comes into our life and we speak the truth about Jesus. And you're pointing people to Jesus when you say that. So

Spiritual gifts [Paul reminds us] glorify the Giver not the gifted (v.3)

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.*

If we're speaking truths from God we want to make it about God, Jesus or the Spirit. Whatever we do or say should be to exalt the lordship of Jesus Christ. That only through Jesus and His Spirit are we able to serve Him and use our talents and spiritual gifts to make Him known, not making it about ourselves. Paul's point is the fact that we even want to talk about Jesus doesn't come from us, it comes from the Lord Himself.

It may seem like an odd place to start his discussion of spiritual gifts but Paul knew his readers needed to understand that the division and abuse over our spiritual gifts is usually because we're trying to exalt ourselves and not Jesus. He highlights 'speaking by the Spirit' here because we'll see some of them were using their ability to 'speak by the Spirit' as a measure of their own spiritual maturity, intimating that those who don't possess certain gifts are not spiritual. When we do, who are we making spiritual gifts about? Us. As if we have control over the gifts. We want Jesus exalted not ourselves.

And there are many gifts Paul continues in v,4:

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.

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

Paul's big point here – and throughout his explanation of gifts – is what he's been striving at in the whole letter to these divided Christians:

Spiritual Gifts Produce Unity Not Division **(12:4-11)**

He just talked about the unity of marriage while enjoying and exercising your God-designed diverse characteristics and roles in Ch. 11. He comes back to that theme because that's the way the Godhead works. One God, existing in three unique persons with distinct roles and order. Did you notice how Paul shows us the work of the Godhead in spiritual gifts;

The same Spirit ... the same Lord ... the same God works all of them in all.

Spiritual gifts should produce unity in the body

Because the Trinity works together in us (vv.4-5)

The word 'variety' or 'different' gifts means distributed, parceled out. Given by who? The Spirit since there are different ways we serve the body. Peter broke up the spiritual gifts in two broad ways in 1 Pet. 4:10-11,

¹⁰ Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Again for what purpose? 'So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.' God, Jesus and the Spirit do not wrestle for power or pre-eminence. Jesus said in John 17

Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

To glorify God is to glorify Jesus. They share glory. Jesus came to bring God glory on earth which results in His own glory. What about the Spirit?

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.

15:26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, namely, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, He will testify about Me,

16:13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; this is why I said that He takes from Mine and will disclose it to you.

One of the criticisms of conservative evangelicals is we don't talk about the Spirit enough. Well, if we teach and preach the Bible by going through the Bible will we not deal with the Holy Spirit every time He comes up? Yes. And Jesus Himself said the Spirit's role is not to point us to Himself but to Jesus who points us to God. The Spirit – like wind - is the unseen power of God working in and through us. V. 7 says to each of us the 'manifestation/revealing of the Spirit' is seen when we allow Him to work through us for the common good. When do we see the Spirit at work? We see the manifestation (evidence) of work when we serve and build up the body for each other's good.

Using our gifts builds each other up (v.7)

Comparing ourselves to one another and measuring our spirituality based on the gifts we have or don't have divides us and makes everything about us. We didn't earn the gifts. They are meant for us to use for one another's spiritual maturity. The word for "common good" is a word Paul's already used in 1 Cor.

6:12 "Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial.

Matt. 5: 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

'Beneficial', 'to your advantage'. We have been given Spirit empowered abilities; things we can't do in our own strength, but in serving and obeying God's Word, benefit others and glorify God. Paul now lists some gifts. This is not an exhaustive list and he intentionally puts tongues last because the Corinthians had it first on theirs.

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.

We're not a whole lot different than the Corinthians because we want to focus on the gifts and wonder do I have this gift? But before we discuss the gifts briefly (because we'll see them again in Ch. 14) let's read it again without mentioning the specific gifts.

8 To one there is given through the Spirit ... to another ... by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another ... by the same Spirit, to another ... by that one Spirit, 10 to another ... to another ... to another ... to another ... and to still another

Whatever our gifts are, they were given to us by the Spirit.

Don't forget to thank the Lord for whatever gift you've been given (vv.8-10)

Each believer is gifted, so start with thank you Lord! Don't just thank God for yourself but thank Him for the person beside you who also is spiritually gifted to do something beyond their own abilities to serve Him with their life. Generally speaking, we spend an imbalanced time wondering or looking for our gift when the only way you'll know you're gifted is when you obey God and do something not based on your own abilities. That's what a spiritual gift is: an extraordinary empowering of God's Spirit energizing you to do and say things that manifest/reveal God is doing something through you. Make yourself available to serve God and in serving God you'll put your trust in Him to do things you can't do on your own.

What are the gifts? The first two are deliberately chosen by Paul to chastise the Greek-minded Corinthians who elevated human wisdom and knowledge above everything else. Paul said there is a supernatural gift of the word of wisdom, whereby one is given understanding about a situation or problem that shows God's perspective. Perhaps we overlook this gift and pass it on simply as being older or mature. But if it's a gift I believe Paul is saying there are times the body of Christ needs God's wisdom on a situation or direction. God then speaks through a person who reveals God's path or His perspective.

A word of knowledge is most likely the gift to know and speak God's truths again to a situation or to someone's life at a specific time when they need to hear it. Can I tell you what these are not? While most translations say 'word' the idea is not simply one singular word. The Greek word is logos for both. Logos is collective wisdom or knowledge of God, not a single word. If they are going to provide wisdom or knowledge from God, it's going to be more than just a word.

The gift of faith is an extraordinary ability to believe God for a situation that humanly speaking there is no reason to believe. Perhaps its related to healing but it probably can refer to people who have the capacity to believe unequivocally in evangelism, revival, church growth. Someone who trusts God in something so strong that many of us can't. And the evidence will be shown in time.

Healing isn't just physical. There are people who suffer mentally, spiritually and emotionally that perhaps others have laid hands on or prayed over and they received emotional or physical healing. Is the gift of miracles to perform them or believe in them? Probably both.

Prophecy may be declaring truth to someone more so than predicting the future. Predictions rarely prove accurate. Prophecy is not preaching but it doesn't mean a preacher can't speak prophetically into someone's life that they didn't know about.

These gifts aren't sounding as exciting as we hoped they would but they are needed. Especially the gift of distinguishing spirits. If Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, it takes supernatural power by the Spirit sometimes to discern whether something is from God or not.

Finally Paul says 'various kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Various kinds is one word in Greek, genos for which we get race, nationalities, descendants from. We'll elaborate more in Ch. 14 where we'll see that tongues is I believe the gift to communicate a language you are not able to speak. The gift of interpretation is the ability to understand what is said. His point in Ch. 14 will be what good is speaking another language if no one knows what you say by an interpreter and as a result, no one is edified?

We wish these were more definitive and concrete but that's all Paul tells us here. Perhaps this is intentional since his readers were enamored with the more spectacular gifts. I believe Paul downplays the actual gifts to focus on their purpose, to build each other up.

¹¹ *All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*

Or 'as He wills'. That word for 'will/determine' means to plan ahead and do.

Your gift was given with you in mind (v.11)

Don't be discouraged by what you don't have be encouraged by what you do have, because your gift was carefully planned and specifically given. Pretty soon we'll be exchanging Christmas gifts. And we're looking for and planning to get our loved ones a unique gift with just them in mind. If God's Spirit gifts you and I we have exactly the gift we've been given which enables to do things or say things about God and for God to the glory of God beyond our own abilities. But that requires faith to believe we can do something for God that we aren't humanly equipped to do.

You've trusted God for salvation, by faith in His Son Jesus alone. You believe You are incapable of saving yourself and that you are incapable of giving yourself the most meaningful and purpose-filled life. How are you trusting God to help you do something through the Spirit's power? Have you been asked by someone to do something different, out of your comfort zone? If you keep saying yes to only the things you know you can do, where's the faith in that? How can the Spirit empower you to do His amazing work if you don't trust Him?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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