

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3

### INTRODUCTION

I want to continue where we left off last time by continuing to work our way through this letter of Paul's to the church at Corinth. Corinth was a very important city in the commercial world and the church was finding it difficult living in such a sinful and pagan city.

They wrote to Paul with many questions and Paul has been dealing with each question and each problem and each situation as we have gone through the book. Many subjects have been covered from favouritism incest, lawsuits among Christians, food offered to idols, marriage and singleness and worship including the Lord's Supper.

So as we can see a whole host of varied subjects have been covered and we now want to start looking at a new section (chapters 12-14) on the subject of spiritual gifts. The opening verses that we are looking at are an introduction to the whole section.

There was much confusion at Corinth about Spiritual gifts and spiritual experiences. Corinth was filled with religious priests, priestesses, temple prostitutes and diviners of mystery religions who claimed to represent a god or gods and have supernatural powers. The temptation in Corinth was to follow the practices of the various religions especially the temptation to show by miraculous signs that Christianity had real power.

It was into this situation that Paul gives these instructions concerning spiritual gifts and how to use them properly within the church.

### 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (v 1)

Now the word "gifts" is not in the original documents but the word is supplied by the translators because it is clear from the context that it is spiritual gifts that Paul is talking about. The Greek word translated "spiritual gifts" simply means "spirituals," which of course does not make sense in our language. The word refers to that which has spiritual qualities or characteristics or is simply under spiritual control.

The word can often be used to refer to spiritual people or to spiritual things. But the context makes it clear here, that Paul is referring to spiritual things especially the gifts of the Spirit.

Paul is writing to make sure that the church at Corinth has a clear and complete understanding of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are the special equipment for ministry that the Holy Spirit gives in some measure to all believers. They are to be used for God's glory and are under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Paul uses the term of affection "brothers" here probably because he has used some harsh words about the abuse that was going on at the Lord's Supper. Therefore he wants to assure them that he considers them to be genuine Christians even though they had many false practises going on within the church. They still belonged to Christ and were brothers and sisters to Paul.

This is why Paul is deeply concerned that the church should have a proper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit within the church especially in relation to spiritual gifts and their use within the life of the church at Corinth. Paul does not want the church to be ignorant on this point. That term "ignorant" is often used in the Greek language to introduce an extremely important subject. Paul used it in his letters to encourage his readers to pay close attention to a critical truth (Romans 1:13 & 11:25). The Greek word translated "ignorant" literally means, "not to know" it is the term from which we get our term agnostic.

Paul does not want the church to be agnostic about this matter of spiritual gifts he wanted them to be certain about this subject; he wanted them to identify and use their spiritual gifts within the life of the church so that God will be glorified. You see Paul knows that no church can function or mature without God's people knowing their gifts and then using them properly within the life of the church.

We have an enemy who is Satan who will seek to distort God's spiritual gifts as we will see in these chapters and he will seek to hinder God's people from identifying and using their spiritual gifts within the church. He knows that when God's people use their spiritual gifts then the church is stronger than when God's people neglect their spiritual gifts.

Of course Satan tries to introduce into the church counterfeit gifts and he will try and induce believers to misunderstand or abuse and pervert the true gifts that God gives to his people. Sadly we see many churches in our own day where Satan seems to have succeeded and such churches are confused and deluded and sadly often split and ineffective. This is why Paul's teaching in these chapters is absolutely critical and vital for the church today.

## 2. THE TEST OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (v 2-3)

Before Paul tells the Corinthians about the gifts of the Holy Spirit he wants to remind them that not every gift that seems to be from God actually is from Him. Not everything is genuine and there are counterfeit gifts that they need to be aware of. Paul reminds them of their pagan days before they came to faith in Jesus Christ (v 2).

One of the chief characteristics of those pagan days was idolatry they followed after idols. As former pagans Paul wants them to remember that they were often influenced and led astray to mute idols. The word "led astray" was often used in Greek of prisoners being taken away under armed guard. That is a good description of people before they are saved they are held captive by Satan and are led into idolatry.

You see no unbeliever is free, everyone who is unsaved is held captive to sin and Satan they cannot help but be influenced and led astray to worship mute idols. Yet these idols that unbelievers are led astray to follow are mute. That is they are speechless they are unable to respond to people's needs.

They cannot answer our questions or give us answers to our dilemma's' or forgive our sins when we confess them because an idol cannot respond to us. Paul's point is that in their unbelief the Corinthians were being controlled by other powers for what lay behind the idol were satanic powers which led astray and influenced people (1 Corinthians 10:20).

As pagans they would have had spiritual experiences but these experiences were satanic. In Corinth there were all sorts of spiritual experiences taking place as we will see in future weeks so how can one tell if the gifts that are being exercised are genuine or if they are satanic designed to lead astray and influence people into idol worship?

Paul gives the answer to that question in verse three. There are two tests that can be applied to every spiritual gift that will help us to realise if the gift being used in the church is of God or from the Devil.

**a) The Negative Test** – No gift that seeks to curse Jesus Christ is from God. It seems that there were some in the church at Corinth who were doing this and were claiming that their gift of teaching was a gift of the Holy Spirit. The word "cursed" or "accursed" refers to severe

condemnation. To say that Jesus is accursed is to condemn his nature, His character and his work for sinners.

Paul tells the Corinthians that such blasphemous utterances could not possibly be by the Spirit of God. Now nothing should be more obvious or logical than the point that Paul is making but it seems that the church at Corinth had come to judge gifts on the basis of experience rather than content.

The more impressive and showy some gifts were and the more spiritual experiences that one received, as a result of that gift seemed to be more respected and accepted within the church than other gifts. They looked for spiritual experiences just like their pagan days and as a result their judgement concerning spiritual gifts had become warped.

As long as the gift was used within the public life of the church and was used by someone who claimed to be a Christian and perhaps led people into some sort of spiritual experience then the practise was accepted without question by the church. What the person said was ignored even something as obvious as Jesus be cursed, the experience is what mattered.

Paul says this is simply impossible for the Holy Spirit would never lead anyone to speak and teach lies about Jesus Christ. When the Corinthians were involved in their pagan worship they were blind and led astray by Satan but if one is truly converted then one would never even think of teaching such lies.

What was happening was that Satan was at work in the church counterfeiting God's gifts and giving spiritual experiences and so deceiving some in the church at Corinth. But have things changed? There are still many so called churches that claim to possess the gifts of the Holy Spirit who say things that are not true about Jesus Christ.

On Sky television there are a number of channels that proclaim so called preachers who say many things that are untrue about Jesus Christ. If you were to ask them if they had the gift of the Holy Spirit they would claim they had. There are still many churches in our own day that put more emphasis upon spiritual experiences than they do upon truth. Of course they would deny it and claim that they were speaking the truth but people who know their bibles would clearly understand the error of what some of these characters say. So when it comes to judging spiritual experiences and spiritual gifts the first test is to ask are they speaking the truth about Jesus Christ.

If they do not then that is a sure sign that they are not speaking with gifts given to them from the Holy Spirit. But there is also another test

**b) The Positive Test** – No one can speak the truth about Jesus with sincerity without the help of the Holy Spirit. Now Paul is not just talking about saying the words Jesus is Lord for any unbeliever can say those words. But he is talking about the person who sincerely confesses that Jesus is Lord of his life through faith in Him. This is the person who backs up his confession with a life that is consistent as a follower of Jesus Christ.

This is the person who takes God's word seriously and who actively seeks to obey God's word by submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The word "Lord" implies that Jesus is God that he is sovereign and possesses authority and is therefore ruler sustainer and controller of all things. Such a person who confesses Jesus is Lord is acknowledging all these things and is acknowledging therefore that he is the sustainer and controller and ruler of one's life. Therefore such a person submits to Jesus Christ in every situation and under every circumstance. No one can do that unless the Holy Spirit has changed his heart and has given him new life to follow submissively after Jesus Christ.

It is the Holy Spirit's task to point people to Jesus Christ. It is his job to enable people to submit to Jesus Christ, he never ever draws attention to himself. Therefore those who truly possess and exercise spiritual gifts are people who seek always to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.

They never draw attention to the Holy Spirit or seek to exalt him but they always teach that Jesus Christ is sovereign sustainer and controller of all things and seeks to be Lord of our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit. So as we go through these chapters and look at the various gifts of the Holy Spirit and notice some of the abuses that went on in Corinth we must apply these two tests to every situation.

Is the gift exalting Jesus Christ? Is the spiritual experience helping people to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord? Is the truth about Jesus being taught as a result of someone's gift? Is the Holy Spirit focused upon or is it Christ who is the centre of attention. Just like Corinth we have many strange and bizarre things that take place in the name of Christianity with claims that they are from the Holy Spirit.

Well let's be practical and apply these two tests to all such claims so that we can discover if such gifts are from God or whether they come from our enemy the devil. Let us not be naïve or foolish there are many Christians and churches who take everything as gospel but let's test things by the tests that God gives us in his word. If we do that then we will not be fooled or led astray by spirits that will lead us into idolatry.

Amen