

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11

### INTRODUCTION

Now as we saw last time Paul gave the church two tests for determining if what a professing Christian says is truly from the Holy Spirit or some other spirit. Only true Christians who possess the Holy Spirit can say with conviction that Jesus is Lord. Now one of the issues at Corinth that caused great division is this issue of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

No doubt Paul had taught the church about this matter when he ministered to them for 18 months yet they perverted what they were taught so much that Paul has to teach them again about this important matter.

### 1. THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF GIFTS & SERVICE (v 4-5)

The word translated “gifts” means “gifts of grace” or “grace gifts” Sometimes the word is used to talk about the gift of salvation but its most frequent use has got to do with divine enablement for believers to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. Now we need to understand that spiritual gifts are not natural talents, skills or abilities that we all have to some extent whether we are believers or not. Spiritual gifts however are not natural and are only given to believers in the Lord Jesus. They are special capacities given by God to believers in order to equip and enable us to serve others especially our fellow believers. Consequently if those God given gifts are not being used or are not being used properly then the body of Christ the church cannot function as it ought and therefore the work of God is hindered.

That was certainly true of the church at Corinth. However there is great variety in the gifts given to God’s people because there is great variety in the service that God’s people are involved in. Now all these gifts come to us from the Holy Spirit so although there are many gifts these gifts come from the same Spirit. Therefore there is an essential unity to the gifts but it is a unity that has diversity.

Unity and purpose can only be maintained through diversity of service. Of course when we talk about unity we do not mean uniformity. A football team has a unity to it but there is great diversity within it. There is a goalkeeper and forwards and defenders etc. A team that has players that all want to play as a forward might have uniformity but it will be a team that will not function as it is intended to function.

So it is with the church of Jesus Christ, God gives to his church people who have been given different gifts so that many different acts of service can take place.

Now we do not have an exhaustive list of the many kinds of gifts that are given to the church. We have several lists of the categories of gifts that you would expect to find within the church but these lists are only examples of the wide variety of gifts necessary for a church to function.

If your gift is not listed then that does not mean that you have misunderstood your gift or that your gift is not necessary, it’s just that we have a number of examples given to us to help us to know what is meant by gifts. Look at the lists in verses 8-10 here and in Romans 12:6-8 for examples of the richness in the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the church.

Now what we need to know is that every Christian has at least one gift that God wants them to use for the benefit of His church. Your gift or gifts is not for your benefit as we will see but they are given so that we can use them in service for our Lord. Now because there are different kinds of service this means that two Christians with the same gift can use their gift in different ways. For example you might have people in the church that have the gift of teaching. Some might be able to use that gift in the public ministry of the word while others with the same basic gift may be less

able to teach in public but might be good at teaching individuals or children or young people. It's basically the same gift but there are lots of ways of exercising that gift for the benefit of God's church.

The important thing is that our gifts are used in service and we must not limit the type of service that our gift could be used in. Gifts are given to serve others but the problem at Corinth is that they were being used to show off, being used to exalt individuals rather than being used for the benefit of the church as a whole. That is always a danger when we use our gifts especially if our gifts are used for more public service.

There can be a great temptation to use them to exalt oneself or to build up one's self esteem but that is not the point of gifts they must be used to serve others. Now this puts a perspective on church that I think is missing in some people's thinking today. We live in a society that puts great emphasis on the individual rather than on the community. That thinking can spill out into the church so that all that matters is self.

When that happens then church becomes something from which I benefit from and when I cease to benefit from it I no longer go. Because church is for me then if I don't feel like going then it is only me that is affected. But that is wrong and sinful thinking. Church is not for you it is for us. It is not about what I get out of it but it is about what do. What I put into it.

It's not about how much I benefit but how much do others benefit through me being there and using my gift. Of course in truth when we are all using are gifts for the benefit of others then we will benefit from the gifts of others. But please let us get away from this me mentality that is rife in society and sadly is common in the church.

When for example you do not come to church without good cause you are stealing from your brothers and sisters the gifts that God has given to you and he wants you to use for the benefit of his church as a whole. So let us all identify our gifts and then look for active ways that we can use our gifts to serve others within the church.

## 2. THERE ARE DIFFERENT RESULTS BUT ONE PURPOSE (vs. 6-7)

The word translated "working" (v 6) means something like "what is worked out." It is God's power in action through the exercise of the various gifts within the church. God who gives us the gifts of the Holy Spirit empowers us by that same Spirit in their use so that they achieve their various results. God does not give us the gifts and leave it to us to use them so that they achieve results.

No our gifts would accomplish nothing unless God by the power of his Spirit enables us to use them and then by his power cause those gifts to produce certain effects or results in others. This means that no one can boast about how their gift has changed someone's life.

For example let's take the gift of preaching and teaching. Let's say someone preaches and as a result someone in the congregation repents and believes. Can the preacher feel boastful because he was so convincing in his preaching that someone was moved to repent? Of course not for God who gives the gift also enables the preacher to preach with power and enables the sinner to be moved and enables him to repent and believe the gospel.

Yes there is a human element but the human element can achieve nothing without the gift and without the power and without the work of the Holy Spirit to bring the right result from the use of that gift. So whatever gift or gifts we have we can never boast about them or feel superior to others who don't have the same gifts? We can never boast about the results that come from using our gifts; for God is the one who gives empowers and achieves his purposes through the exercise of his gifts given to each one of us.

However we ought to be seeking God's grace every day to use his gifts in a powerful way so that they will accomplish the very purposes for which he gave them to us.

That purpose we are told is for the common good of others (v 7). The word literally means "to bring together" but the term came to mean "to help or confer a benefit or to be advantageous" In the context of this passage it means that spiritual gifts are to be used for the mutual benefit and advantage of the church. As each one of us has at least one spiritual gift, each one of us has a part to play in the building up of the church.

Your gifts are a great benefit to the church it is to the church's advantage that God has given to you your gifts. Now I hope you can see just how important each one of us is to this church. We all have something to give that is of great benefit to this church. Our gifts will benefit others and other people's gifts will benefit you. Now this helps to correct faulty thinking that some are more important than others in the church. It's easy to think that the gifts that are more public are more important that is certainly how the church at Corinth thought. But that is not true.

We need the gifts that are exercised in a public manner but the church also needs the gifts that may be in the background but are not less important than the public type gifts. But the question comes to us all that if our gifts benefit God's church then are we people who seek to use our gifts for the benefit of the church. Are we actively engaged in works of service according to the gifts that God has given to us?

Could it be that we feel so inferior that we do not use the gifts God has given to us because we feel that they are so basic that they could never be of any use in our church? Stop thinking like that, your gifts are just as vital for the welfare of this church as my gifts are or anybody else's gifts.

This church needs your gift so that we can benefit from it. If any of us fail to actively use our gifts in active service then our church is disadvantaged and we will not benefit as we would if we all used our gifts in active service in the power of the Holy Spirit. Churches would be completely changed and transformed if every member truly understood what their gift involved and how they could use it for the benefit and advantage of the church.

Perhaps you once did use your gifts in active service but over the years for a number of reasons you have ceased to use them in the way you once did. Then can I encourage you to seek the Lord's grace to help you to start using your gifts to their fullest potential so that the church will once again benefit from them?

Likewise when people are converted they have gifts that can be used for the benefit of the church. Every conversion brings benefits to the church as we have more people with gifts to be used in active service of others so that individual people benefit but collectively the church also benefits. So let us make sure that we are using those gifts by serving one another for the good of the church.

### 3. EXAMPLES OF THE VARIETY OF GIFTS GIVEN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (vs. 8-12)

Spiritual gifts do two things essentially as we will see in future weeks. The permanent gifts edify the church and the temporary gifts are signs to validate the word of God. God continues to give his permanent gifts to the church today and those gifts are to be used for the benefit of the church in order to build it up. These gifts include things like verbal gifts such as prophecy, knowledge, wisdom teaching and exhortation.

These gifts also include what I call serving gifts or non-verbal gifts like leadership, helps, giving, faith etc.

However God also gave temporary gifts during the apostolic age which he does not give today for they were limited to that period and were used to authenticate the apostolic message as the word of God. These gifts include miracles, healing, tongues or languages etc. We no longer need these sign gifts because we have the completed word of God which is self-authenticating.

In these verses Paul mentions some gifts which are permanent and some which are temporary but active during the apostolic age in order to illustrate the great variety that there is with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul does not explain the function of each gift here because his point is to illustrate the variety and the common source of all these gifts. Let me just comment briefly on these gifts and I do mean briefly.

**a) The Gift of Wisdom** – It's actually the gift of the "message of wisdom" so immediately we see that this is a speaking gift. Wisdom is the ability to understand God's will from his word and apply it to the various situations of life. This gift is the ability to make sensible and practical applications of God's word to various life situations. It's a very necessary gift that the church needs today.

**b) The Gift of Knowledge** – This again is a word gift because it is a "message of knowledge." This gift is the ability to perceive and understand the truths of God's word in order to communicate them to others. God grants to some Christians the wonderful gift of being able to understand the difficult parts of the bible in order to communicate the truths discovered there to others.

I have a library full of books from men who have this wonderful gift and it has been of great benefit to me and to this church.

**c) The Gift of Faith** – This is a faith that is distinct from saving faith which is a gift that all Christians receive otherwise we would not be Christians. This gift is probably the ability to trust God in very difficult and demanding ways. It is the ability to trust God in the face of overwhelming obstacles and human impossibilities. Did Abraham who was tested by God to see if he would be willing to sacrifice his son not have this gift of faith? Has the strong faith of some through trying times not been an encouragement to others in their times of trial?

**d) The Gifts of Healing** – This is a temporary sign gift or gifts but it was in operation during Paul's age so he does not make any distinction between this gift and the others. Christ had this gift so did his apostles and the 72 appointed by Jesus as well as some associates of the Apostles.

Now of course God may still heal today in response to the faithful prayers of his people but no Christian today has this particular gift as it was a sign gift and ceased to function after the apostolic age as we will see in future weeks.

**e) The Gift of Miraculous Powers** – This is another temporary sign gift for authenticating the apostolic message. This gift was the ability to do miracles probably casting out of demons and God gave this to some apostles to validate their message as from God.

**f) The Gift of Prophecy** – The basic meaning of this word is "to speak forth" or "to proclaim." There was a predictive element to it within the New Testament but its main purpose was to speak forth God's message. Preaching is prophesying in the true sense of the word for preaching is proclaiming, expounding and exhorting the word of God. It is speaking forth God's message.

**g) The Gift of Distinguishing Between spirits** – The basic meaning of the word "distinguishing" has to do with "the separating out for examination and judging in order to determine what is genuine and what is not." We might like to call this gift the gift of discernment for that is what Paul is talking about. We need this gift today within the church because our enemy is out to deceive us and to counterfeit God's true gifts.

I am always grateful for people who warn me against new movements and false preachers and do so with an ability to pinpoint the error in their doctrine and practise. That I think is what Paul is referring to when he talks about this gift.

**h) The Gift of Speaking in Tongues and the Interpretation of Tongues** – This is a controversial gift that divides churches today as it divided the church at Corinth. There are churches that believe they practise this gift today while there are others like our own who believe this gift does not exist today because it was tied to the apostolic age. We will deal with this gift in detail when we get to chapter 14 so you will have to wait till then for me to give you reasons why this gift ceased to exist with the completion of the Scriptures.

It was however a very useful gift in New Testament times for tongue speaking is really the ability to speak in other unlearned languages. Interpretation is therefore the ability to understand unlearned languages. You can see how those gifts were useful for validating the message of the Apostles.

So you can see there is richness in the variety of gifts that God gives to his church. Each one of us is graciously given an appropriate gift or gifts by God (v 12) so that we can use them for the benefit of the church. Therefore as I conclude can I ask do you know your gifts? Are you using them for the benefit of the church?

I trust we are and if that is the case then this church will benefit and be helped greatly by the use of our spiritual gifts. May God help us all to use our gifts for his glory?

AMEN