

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**Spiritual Gifts: 'Earnestly desire the best gifts'**  
**Pastor Dave Scherrer – August 28, 2011**

**1 Corinthians 12:27-31**

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

**What went wrong in Corinth?**

When Paul wrote his letters to the churches, he was often instructional and informational. He was letting these new bodies of believers know about the wonders of faith in Christ. Two good examples of these kinds of letters, letters that are instructional or informational are Romans and Ephesians. These books are chock-full of good teaching and information. And there is teaching in this letter to the Corinthian church too, but something a bit different is happening.

Especially in this particular part of the letter, Chapters 12-14 and into Chapter 15, seems clearly to be a response to a letter or correspondence that Paul received from the church to him, a letter that has not survived history. So he wrote back to the leaders at that church writing on the comments and questions that they had shared with Paul. It seems that he is responding to a question or perhaps a new set of habits that concern him.

The church at Corinth was a carnal church. They were plagued with divisions, which we see from the very first chapter (1:10-13). They had never matured as believers and were still like babies in Christ (3:1-3). They tolerated immorality in their midst and Paul confronted them on that in chapter 5 (5:1-2). Yet, this was still a spiritual congregation, and it seems that this immature church exhibited most, if not all, of the spiritual gifts. You see, it isn't just the "super saint" that possesses spiritual gifts, but every believer has at least one spiritual gift and probably more than one. So that means there is good likelihood that the gifts may not be used well.

So Paul sets out not so much to instruct but to correct. They have slipped into troubling forms of worship and into a misunderstanding of spiritual gifts and how they are to be enjoyed and manifest. Gordon Fee, one of today's most recognized New Testament scholars notes that:

"Since 8:1 Paul has been dealing with matters related to worship and being 'Spiritual.' Being spiritual to Paul means to edify the community in worship because 'the perfect has not yet come.' The problem is an abuse of the gifts."  
Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, p.186

It seems the sign gifts were becoming a problem. The problem at Corinth was not that they didn't possess gifts; it was that some in the church wanted gifts that they had not been assigned by God. And others who were gifted handled the responsibility poorly. When God gifts the Christian, He does so in His own Sovereign will. So, the people at Corinth were stepping outside the boundaries laid down by the Lord and were trying to practice gifts that they had not received. As a result, there was chaos and confusion in the church.

There was an over-emphasis on these ecstatic and charismatic manifestations. We are going to spend a few moments on these "sign gifts" this morning so that we have a base understanding of how the Holy Spirit hopes to build our faith through them.

Let's back up just a bit. Quick review:

The purpose of the spiritual gifts is to: 1. Edify the saints of the church, 2. To encourage unity and to build our faith by demonstrating God's power and immanency, 3. And to show us the fullness of God through the Body of Christ, the church. I have been mentioning that there are several categories of gifts. Peter in his first letter separates some of them into the categories of 'speaking' gifts and 'serving' gifts. But there is another category, sometimes called the sign gifts. These are the gifts that are the more spectacular and supernatural.

### ***An over-emphasis of the sign gifts***

You see, some people in the church in Corinth were not experiencing these more spectacular gifts and they felt left out and small. Others had been given some of these sign gifts and they were feeling proud and special and my guess is human nature kicked in. Some people began to rub it in that they were more blessed than others.

The problem developed when some people began to feel *useless* and others began to feel *pride*.

### ***Uselessness and Pride***

We mentioned this in passing last week. There are two huge problems that can happen when we begin to more fully explore the spiritual gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit – feelings of uselessness regarding the gifts or feelings of pride about your particular spiritual gift.

### ***Miraculous gifts and Non-Miraculous Gifts***

#### ***1 Corinthians 12:8-10***

For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

#### ***The Sign Gifts***

Prophecy          Teaching  
Miracles          Healing  
Tongues and Interpretation  
Words of Wisdom and Knowledge  
Distinguishing between spirits

***Prophecy*** - Isn't predicting the future, it isn't speaking for the Lord. Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p.1049) defines it as "telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind, not with words of the authority of Scripture but human thoughts." A person who has this gift will be careful with their words. They may say something like "I feel that I have something that the Lord would want you to hear." It may be corrective if there is poor thinking or course behavior happening. It may be direction pointing and have characteristics of a discernment gift.

***Teaching*** - Is the ability to explain scripture and to apply it to another's life. Maybe you have sat through teaching that just staggers you in how they seem to know you. You are in a group setting and it seems as though the speaker is teaching directly to you. That is a spiritual gift of teaching.

***Tongues and Interpretation*** – Speaking in tongues (Glossa) is prayer or praise in syllables that is not understood by the speaker. There are very specific rules that are placed on this gift that includes the ***interpretation*** of the words. The gift that was being so poorly used in Corinth was this gift of tongues and to this day it is a very misunderstood gift.

[Let me just say that any gift from God can be misused, unused or selfishly used, the gift of tongues has no corner on the market when it comes to sinfulness.]

**1 Corinthians 14:2**

For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

**Words of Knowledge and Words of Wisdom** are similar in that God is pressing on the sharer to take a risk and say things that may even surprise them. In a word of knowledge the sharer may say something like, "The Lord has told me that you are experiencing hardship through sickness. He wants me to tell you that you will be healed from this condition and you must not lose hope." Discernment is the quickening of your spirit by The Spirit that says, "It is time to leave" or "it is time to give" or "it is time to speak out."

**Healings and Miracles seem straightforward** but maybe not so much. The Greek word for miracles is *dynamis* meaning power, from the word that we get the word dynamite. These could be power words of confrontation, powerful interventions in the spiritual world (have you ever prayed that it might not rain and it didn't?). **Healings** are direct spiritual interventions against sickness.

**Personal story: regarding Susan and the stroke**

I did not feel led to pray for her full healing. Early on I felt I had received a word from God that this was not unto death. I was comforted by this and I told Heather what I felt I had heard from God. But there were two moments where I prayed for a miracle, one I would like to share with you regarding her healing from an MYRSA bacterial infection that had no cure that was in her renal system. I asked the church to pray and from evening to morning the infection went away. I am convinced that God healed her that night.

**Should you pray for and seek certain gifts?**

I don't believe that there is any reason that you cannot ask for a specific gift from God. As in all prayer and personal desires, check your attitude and motives. God is willing to give you so much, ask for what he wants to give you. Spend time with the Father and you will know what he longs to give to you. I have asked for help in counseling sessions where I felt I needed discernment or knowledge or a word of encouragement and I have seen God provide.

**Two things I want you to remember from this series**

- 1. The gifts are given in vast variety to stir up unity according to God's sovereignty for His glory!**
- 2. The gifts are nothing without love and grace**

"The presence of the Spirit in power and gifts makes it easy for God's people to think of the power and gifts as the real evidence of the Spirit's presence. Not so for Paul. The ultimate criterion of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. Whatever takes away from that, even if they be legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move away from Christ to a more pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself."

**The greatest gift: Love**

**1 Corinthians 12:31- 13:1-3**

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. <sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love,

I am nothing.<sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

***Where does this all lead?***

***To a 100-fold Kingdom expression in your life and in the life of our church***

***Personal stories***

- Prayed over for Tongues, I have not as yet been gifted with that manifestation. I am open if God wants to encourage us here.
- I have felt at that God has gifted me in the gift of evangelism, leadership and discernment.
- I have felt the power of God in healing and in words of knowledge. Most recently I was met by a stranger who had profound words of encouragement for me. He said God is well pleased with my faithfulness and perseverance. He said God is strengthening you and your church for a mighty work and He is pleased with us.

The Corinthians preferred the “showy” gifts, which made the individual look spiritual. But Paul reminds them of the principle, which he has repeated often in the book, that God prefers the weak and humble and insignificant of the world, because they do not depend on their own ability, but on God’s power and grace and sovereignty. Paul also shows that diversity is necessary for the proper function of the body (12:17). The Corinthians’ problem was self-love. They wanted to exalt themselves, and consequently, they emphasized the gifts which brought glory to themselves. But Paul points out that love does not seek its own, but is instead other centered and thinks more highly of others than ourselves.

What is your personal story? Will you seek to use your gift for the hope of the Kingdom? Will you open up your life to us so that God may be glorified?