We have been looking at Spiritual gifts for the past 3 weeks. We have referred to 3 main passages of Scriptures in relation to the lists of gifts. However, I believe 1 Corinthians 12 holds the key to understanding most of what we know about gifts and their use in the context of Church life, according to the Scriptures.

If I had to give a sub-title to this Chapter, it would be ‘Unity with Diversity’. That’s how God sees the Church. All different but part of the same body – the Body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthian Church is answering a range of questions that would have been sent to him to respond to.

What I’d like to do is look closer at this Chapter (12) so that there is no misunderstanding about what the Bible teaches. If we get this right, then the Church WILL grow!!! We need to know this stuff, before we go any further.

Let’s pray before we begin ...
Father God, Thank you for all of your gifts for your Church. Help us today to understand their importance and how critical it is to get this right. Without a clear understanding we will be tempted to fall into traps of ago, inferiority or superiority in the Church, all of which would be leveraged by Satan to stifle or stop its growth. God, show us your way, your agenda. Teach us from your Holy Word this morning and allow your Holy Spirit to open our minds to the ways of the Lord.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, who suffered, died and was raised on the 3rd day for the salvation of all mankind. Amen

**Corinthians Chapter 12 - “UNITY WITH DIVERSITY”**

**Theme of 1 Corinthians Chapter 12:**
Despite their diversity, they all belong to the body of Christ, the one church!

1. They have been transformed from a pagan existence to a unified Christian faith (vss. 1-3)

   **Proof:** They no longer say, “Jesus be cursed“, but all say, “Jesus is Lord“ (cf. Romans 10:9 & Phil. 2:11)

2. The one God produces the diversity (vss. 4-11)
   All gifts are produced by the same (auto) God (Spirit/Lord) (vss. 4-6)
   All gifts (no matter what they are - see listing) have 2 characteristics (vss. 7-11)
   - they are given for the common good (sumpheron) (vs. 7)
   - they are given by the determination of God (bouletai) (vs. 11)

3. The church at Corinth is a single body (vss. 12-30)
   A body is a single unit: therefore (the body of) Christ is a single unit (vs. 12)

   **Proof:** All were baptized by one Spirit into one body and drank from one cup (vs. 13)

   A body has many parts (all of which are important) (vss. 14-31)
   a. There should be no sense of inferiority (vss. 14-20)
      1) all parts are needed (vss. 14-17)
      2) all parts are God ordained (v. 18)
3) the body remains diverse (vs. 19), but singular (vs. 20)

b. There should be no sense of superiority (vss. 21-26)
   1) no part is independent (vs. 21)
   2) weaker/less honourable parts of body get special treatment (i.e., clothing), which proves their value (vss. 22-24a)
   3) God has designed the body as such to remove division (24b-25a)
   4) therefore: all parts should be concerned for all others, joining in their suffering, their honour and their rejoicing (25b-26)

c. You (Corinthian church) express this unity & diversity (vs. 27-31)
   1) You are the body with individual members (vs. 27)
   2) God has appointed different functions/gifts to members (v. 28)
   3) All do not have the same gifts! (do they?) (vss. 29-30)
   4) You are desiring the greater gifts, but I will show you a better way (vs. 31)

Introduction to 1 Corinthians 12:

1. 1 Cor. 12-14 is a fairly lengthy discourse and raises the possibility of many questions which may have been asked:
   a. How do we know if a person really has a “gift” from God?
   b. How many gifts are there, does everyone have every gift?
   c. Are some gifts more important than others? If so, which are most important?
   d. Should tongues be used in public worship?
   e. Should tongues be restricted in public worship?
   f. How should public worship be conducted?
   g. These are just a few examples that the modern church has posited as possible questions for which Paul is giving an answer/response.
   h. However, many of these questions, as such, will remain unanswered because they are not the central question which is here being asked.
      1) the real issue is what is the purpose and value of “spiritual” (pneumatika) things in the life of the congregation?
      2) this question takes on special significance in the light of the impending division within the Corinthian church (cf. 1:11-15)
      3) furthermore, the issues that have arisen out of this division have demonstrated clearly to Paul that the church at Corinth is still very much in its “infancy” stage
2. Before we approach the text, however, let us be reminded of the cultural setting of the Corinthian church
   a. many of the church members had come out of the Gentile population whose religious background included “ecstatic” utterances in association with the Delphi oracle
   b. furthermore, it was fairly common in Greek religion for worshippers to be “caught up”, or, as Paul says, “led astray” (1 Cor. 12:2), in an irrational mode of worship
   c. like the church in all ages, the tendency towards syncretism is present within the early church at Corinth; it is not easy to come out of an “energetic” and lively form of worship of false gods without wanting a similar style of worship for the one True God
   d. this does not mean that the Corinthians were bringing demons and demon worship into the church, but rather they were seeking similar experiences within the worship context of the Christian faith; in other words, they were seeking an “experience” of God which was similar to the “experiences of the gods” they had received prior to becoming a Christian
   e. Throughout the history of the church, in order for “worship” to be relevant in the minds of the worshipper, it has always had to be syncretistic; the ability of worship to reflect the philosophy and life-approach of men has traditionally been the yardstick by which the worship has been measured. (R. Edwards)

With this background in mind, it is fairly obvious why the Corinthians had seen the need to enquire of the Apostle Paul concerning the use of “spiritual” gifts within their worship.

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

1. The opening verses set the scene for what is to come and have incorrectly been used to “test” the spirits in modern-day “witch-hunts”
   a. Paul’s main point in these first few verses is not to provide the Corinthians with a “sure-fire” test by which they may determine who’s in and who’s outside the Christian community
1) in a group that is on the verge of coming apart at the seams, the last thing Paul wants to do is to give them a “crowbar” by which they may wrench themselves free from others.

2) the whole thrust of this section is love, acceptance and unity that flows from the Spirit of God who indwells each and every member of the Corinthian church.

3) Paul never suggests that some of the members of the church may be “demon-possessed”, for, if in fact, this were the case, one would expect “exorcism” to be the “modus operandi” for relieving the problem.

4) furthermore, Paul could hardly go on speaking of the unity of the body and its incumbent diversity if there were any question that the diversity hinted at was the result of a church member not really being a Christian.
   a) cf. 1 Cor. 10:19-21; 2 Cor. 11:4-5; 2 Cor. 11:13-15 (all of which are often used to advocate such a view, yet the method Paul uses of dealing with such issues is not one of casting out demons - although Paul’s ministry included this aspect - see Acts 16:18; cf. Acts 19:11-12)

b. instead, Paul’s intention is to assure the Corinthians that they are being influenced by God’s Spirit even though there is not a conformity of action (to be addressed in the following verses).

1) Paul begins in fact by contrasting their old way of life and the new:
   a) previously they were “led astray to dumb idols; in other words, they used to worship idols that could not speak
   b) now, however, they are being led by God’s Spirit

2) the impact of vs. 3 is not to try to make distinctions, but show the absurdity of those who want to withdraw from others on the basis that they don’t measure up spiritually”

3) Paul affirms that it is only by the leading of the Holy Spirit that the confession of Jesus as Lord can be made.
   a) this is not merely “lip-service” for that is never an understanding of Paul (cf. Rom. 10:9-10), but, at the same time, neither is it a negative test to eliminate some
b) this is the very basis of Christian unity and ALL who make this confession by their lips and with their lives are brothers in Christ - even if they practise or experience different manifestations of God’s working in their lives from the manifestations of God’s working in my life

4) in making this point, Paul posits an absolute absurdity: namely that some might say “Jesus be cursed” (anathema)

a) it is inconceivable that anyone associated with the Corinthian church would ever say such a thing - in fact, it would seldom be heard anywhere in history by any person or group - even non-Christians recognize Jesus as a “good person”; cf. the words of demons when Jesus confronts them

b) the point is that Paul does not for one minute believe that any of them would make such a statement (either under the ecstatic influence or otherwise) and, therefore, he proves to the Corinthians that they are one in confession even if they are not one in giftedness

c) Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians (Hermenia): “Paul presupposes that they have really received the Spirit and, accordingly, cannot speak thus (anathema Iesous)” (p. 205, footnote 10)

d) Martin sees in this confession an allusion to the unifying baptismal confession that each Christian would have previously made: “To make this earliest of all the New Testament creedal affirmations, recalling a person’s baptismal allegiance, is to pass under the authority of that name and to put oneself not on the side of the world ... but on the side of “the Lord” (R.P. Martin, The Spirit and the Congregation, p. 10)

e) cf. 1 Cor. 1:13-16 and 12:13 for similar references to baptism as the “evidence” of unity among Christians
1 Corinthians 12:4-11

1. This section may be one of the most important sections in terms of setting the understanding for what follows; in fact, it is really the heart of this chapter
   a. here Paul seeks to show to the Corinthians that the source of the variety of gifts is in fact a SINGLE source
   b. here there is a countering of the argument that variety of manifestation of necessity means variety of source
   c. it is important for the church, because “conformity” has been one of the persistent heresies of the church down through its history
      1) the tendency to measure another man’s spirituality by one’s personal experience of the working of God is a temptation that never leaves the church
      2) this temptation was in Corinth and (as we discover as we read further) the one gift which was being used more than any other as a yardstick of faith was the gift of tongues
   d. aware of this problem, Paul tackles it “head on”

2. Paul begins by using (almost inadvertently) the unity of God to prove the unity within the church (vss. 4-6)
   a. again, those who begin with a strong Trinitarian view which makes significant distinctions between Father, Son and Spirit will be incapable of understanding the Pauline emphasis
   b. however, Paul uses a “triadic” formula to demonstrate clearly that, even when God is understood differently (as Spirit, Lord, or God), it is the “same” (autos) one who is giving the “gifts” (charismata), the same source of the gift, the same type of gift (ministry - diakonia), and the same effect of the gift (workings - energia)
      1). the variety of terms used to refer to the “giver” is characteristically Pauline, and especially in this particular passage
      2). again, those who would distinguish between Spirit, Jesus (Lord), and God do not understand the direction of this passage which is emphasizing unity not diversity/distinction
   c. the final part of vs. 6 makes this extremely clear - “the same God works ALL OF THEM IN ALL MEN” (NIV)
d. the summary application may come in the form of a statement and a question:
   1) God Himself exists with a great deal of diversity even within His own nature and activity
   2) why, then, does the church find it so difficult to accept diversity within its midst when the church itself is the “body of Christ”?

3. Now Paul turns to the reason why diversity of gifts has been given (vss. 7-11)
   a. the reason is simply for “common good” (*sumpheron*)
      1) the term actually means “benefit”, but Paul’s usage in 1 Corinthians shows very distinctively more than this
         a) 1 Cor. 6:12 - individual good, but it is put in the context of the good of the whole (cf. 6:1ff re lawsuits)
         b) 1 Cor. 7:35 - individual good re marriage
         c) 1 Cor. 10:23 - specifically in the context of the value for others (cf. vs. 24!!!!)
         d) 1 Cor. 10:33 - value for others than self
      2) the re-occurrence of the term here signifies that Paul recalls the basic principle expressed in chapters 8-10 that individual goals/aspirations should not pre-empt the good of the body (or others)
      3) this principle will be applied more fully in 1 Corinthians 14
   b. Paul follows with a listing of SOME of the gifts which the Spirit distributes “for the common good”; each probably derives its inclusion from the fact that it is seen as important or significant to the Corinthians church (8-10)
      1) wisdom (sophia) (cf. 1 Cor. 17-30; 2:1-7)
      2) knowledge (gnosis) (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1)
      3) faith (pistis) (cf. 1 Cor. 2:5; 13:2)
      4) healings (hiama ); gifts of healings
      5) miracles (dunamis ) (cf. 1 Cor. 4:19-20; 2 Cor. 12:12)
      6) prophecy (prophesia) (cf. 1 Cor. 11:4-5; 13:10; 14:31)
      7) discernment (diakrisis) (CF. 1 Cor. 4:7; 6:5; 11:29 - all verbal forms of the same Greek word) (cf. 1 John 4:1 or 1 Cor. 14:29)
      8) tongues (glossa) (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1; 14:1ff)
      9) interpretation (hermaneia) (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26)
c. in other words, Paul’s list is neither exhaustive nor arbitrary, but takes this particular form because this list relates to this congregation
   1) cf. Rom. 12:6-8
   2) cf. Eph. 4:11-12
cf. 1 Cor. 12:27-31 - even here the list does not agree!
d. the list here is intended to demonstrate again that variety from the single source should be seen as the “norm” rather than the exception! (cf. vs. 11)
   1) the double emphasis given by the phrase “one and the same” (hen kai to auto) is not normal Pauline language and should receive its proper emphasis in the text
   2) Paul adds that this one spirit also determines to whom the gift is given
      a) Martin says, “Their purpose is therefore functional ... and thereby acting in a double way ... in rebuking any Christian who is tempted to boast, as well as encouraging any Christian who feels a sense of deprivation and inferiority. Since the Spirit gives or withholds, both attitudes are mistaken. And, since the spirit is one, unity is of the essence of the church’s life” (p. 15)
      b) this verse is really a transition to the next section

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

1. while this section should not be taken apart from what follows, we will examine it briefly as the prelude to vss. 14-31

2. the concept of a group of people being viewed as a body does not originate with Paul; the most famous predecessor to do such was Menenius Agrippa, a Roman consul in 503 BC, who told the following story to appease the plebs who threatened to destroy the city by cession; the message is that plebeian interests are the same as those of the patricians, since all Romans belonged to the same body politic:
   “There was a day when the human body was not as harmoniously ordered as it is today. Every member of the body had its own will and its own language. The other members became angry that they had to concern themselves with the need of the stomach, and provide it
with everything. The stomach just remained at the centre of all this satisfied with all that was brought to it. The members made this decision: the hands would not supply any food to the mouth - the mouth would not receive any food, nor would the teeth chew. Consequently, during this time in which they starved the stomach, all the parts of the body became weak and feeble. Then they realised that the role of the stomach was not to be despised as a passive one. Just as he was being nourished, he was passing on strength in return. (Livy, Urb. Cond. 2:32)"

(quoted by Martin, p. 22)
3. thus, Paul, whether or not he was aware of the above “parable”, used the same concept to make the point that every “gift” of every member made some contribution to the body
   a. this body is in fact Christ’s body - the church

4. into this body has come a wide variety of “types” of people, but their assurance that they are a part of the body is their “baptism”
   a. many try to suggest that Paul has in mind here Luke’s terminology of “baptism of the Holy Spirit”
   b. there are at least two arguments against this view:
      1) in all the references to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the term “Holy” (hagia) is always included in the references (cf. Mat. 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16)
         a) it would appear that the language has become “static” in reference to this event/act and one must explain why Paul alters the expression
      2) Paul’s association of baptism with the life of the Spirit (Rom. 6:3-4) and his discussion of (water) baptism in terms of the unity of Christians are both very common (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14-15; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27)
      3) in light of this, it would make more sense to see here an allusion to Paul’s understanding that all those who have been baptized into Christ have received the Spirit and therefore are one in the body

1 Corinthians 12:14-20

1. the first issue which Paul addresses by use of the “metaphor” is that of the sense of inferiority experienced by those who do not have or have not experienced the same “gift” that others have
   a. while it is impossible to make any sort of direct connection between the parts of the body mentioned and the gifts outlined, it is fairly obvious that some members have either adopted an inferior feeling or been made to feel that way
   b. the point that Paul wishes to make first of all is that no-one should feel “outside” in terms of the body or its functioning
c. if there be any one criticism of the “holiness” movement and its successors, it is the “false” sense of inferiority that they convey through the imposition of “crisis” in the lives of Christians
d. Paul argues that each part of the body has been placed in its position exactly how God wants it
   1) this is not to say that each member is perfect no matter how he lives
   2) rather, it is to affirm that every member is a “vital” member because his/her membership is a result of God’s work and not man’s
   3) when it comes to value, God is no respecter of persons - all have equal value not only to God, but, in fact, to the body itself

1 Corinthians 12:26

1. Paul now tackles the others within the body who think that they are all that is necessary for the effective functioning of the body
   a. the crux of the issue is found in vss. 24-25 which again affirm that the shape/form of the body is “God-designed” and members of that body do not have the option of re-designing it to fit their mould
   b. in this section, Paul rebukes (in an inoffensive way) those who think they have it all together
      1) that the tongue speakers are among this group seems obvious from what follows:
         a) 1 Cor. 13:1, 8 and 14:1ff
         b) no-one doubts that the tongue speakers were among the difficult members of the body of Christ at Corinth
      2) Paul’s metaphor invites those who think that they are most important to consider seriously the valuable role that others play in the total life of the body

2. he concludes this section with a dictum that applies to the body and, therefore, should apply to the church; namely that what happens to any member happens to the body at large - there is no such thing as an “individual” Christian
   a. probably more than any other passage, this one gives us clear insight into Paul’s understanding of the church
   b. he does not view the church in “institutional” terms, but rather in dynamic terms
1) each part of the “organism” makes a contribution to the “dynamism” of the body
2) while the variety is immense, the connection remains and, in fact, cannot be severed by value judgments on the worth of any individual member

3. 1 Cor. 12:14-26 seeks to encourage the discouraged and to rebuke the rebukers!

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

1. the metaphor is drawn to a close by a direct association of the metaphor with the church
   a. apparently Paul wanted to make sure the message was not missed; hence, he pointed out that the church at Corinth was, in fact, the “body of Christ”
   b. the parallel should have been obvious, but to a group who are inwardly fighting and criticizing, perception of the church as a “body” is not always obvious or simple

2. again, Paul affirms that God is the one who determines “gifts” (vs. 28)
   a. the numbering of “apostles, prophets and teachers” may reflect the special position Paul saw these groups occupying in the early stages of the church 9cf. Eph. 2:19-20)
   b. however, the lack of numerical notation of the rest of the group may not necessarily indicate denigration
      1) in fact, if it did, it would discredit everything Paul has just said
      2) to now take the list and argue that tongues are at the bottom and, therefore, less important, is to deny that the reader has understood anything that Paul has taught about the body
      3) instead, the very awkwardness of maintaining the numerical ordering may be the reason Paul does not continue
   c. the Greek makes it imperative that the answers to the questions in vss. 29-30 are answered in the negative
      1) questions beginning in Greek with the negative particle, me (μη) expect a negative answer
      2) they amount to a rhetorical question which was within the question the answer
      3) this Paul uses to again show the variety within the church and that no one gift/position is held by every person
3. the final verse requires some discussion
   a. the Greek does not indicate whether this statement is imperative (“Desire“!) or in the indicative (“you are desiring”)
   b. the word is zeloute whose form can be either
   c. again, the context seems to help us at this point:
      1) if Paul is commanding them to seek the “greater” gifts, then which does he have in mind?
      2) the previous section he has advocated that no gift is pre-eminent or above any other
      3) how, then, can he say “seek after the greater gifts”?
      4) on the other hand, Paul may very well be making an observation - namely that they are seeking the “greater” gifts (cf. Conzelmann, p. 215, ftnt 52)
      5) Martin quotes Gerhard Iber, to whom Conzelmann also refers, as suggesting that 12:31a should be a question and offers the following: “You are seeking, then the greater(est) gifts, are you? Well I will show you a still better way.” Martin p35
   d. either way, it would appear that the imperative to seek the greater gifts cuts across Paul’s earlier message; instead, Paul is citing their action, but then appealing to them to go one step further (and higher) towards a better way of acting

Concluding Remarks about 1 Corinthians 12:

1. in a very helpful chapter, Paul demonstrates the equal significance of every member within the body, whether or not they feel themselves to be significant, or whether or not others believe them to be significant

2. it would appear that Paul is quick to recognize that self-esteem, when given a false base, usually leads to one of two questions: inferiority or superiority.

3. as Christians and, in particular as ministers, we must be prepared to teach and affirm our people of the value God places on them in terms of His church - the body of Christ
   a. we live in a very fragile society in terms of self-esteem in which the two tensions between egoism and self-denigration are constantly confronting us as the only two options available
b. the message of the Gospel denies these two options as being viable for effective Christian living, but instead affirms the value which God gives to every individual within the church

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Refer to PowerPoint on roles/tasks/jobs/ministries possible in the life of the Laidley Baptist Church.

Each one of us has to play our part as the Body of Christ. We are all different, yet we contribute in unique ways to the health of the body.

Can I encourage you to play your part?

**CONCLUSION**

We have spent 4 weeks looking at Spiritual gifts in the New Testament. I pray that you have a much better understanding of the topic, not just so that you can ‘know’ more ... but so that together we can minister more in the life of the Body of Christ as we reach out to help and save others.

Let’s pray

*Loving Father, thank you for teaching us from your Word about the gifts you have poured out on your people by your Holy Spirit. May they be used and applied by each of us in the growth of your kingdom. Reveal to each one their unique place in the Body of Christ. Mature us so that we will no longer be children in the faith, but through the interdependence of each of us, we may become a healthy and vibrant Church displaying the love of God to all who encounter us. Bless your people through this week. Use them to show grace, love and kindness on the roads they travel. Encourage us, equip us and mobilize us for your sake. Amen

**Closing Song ~ Potter’s Hand**