

Sermon prepared for Grace Church on 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 by Jonathan Shradar

We have all come from varied and different places spiritually to be here, opening the word of God together. Some first encountered religion in the Catholic church where tradition and symbols ruled, some of us grew up in Pentecostal churches where nothing ruled but the moment. Some have been part of reserved Presbyterian or Lutheran congregations and still others of us have been part of self-labeled prophetic movements. And the lucky few, who have recently come to faith in Jesus arrive here with little baggage and much expectation. And we are together, the church today. (Maybe a few still weighing the options)

Most of our histories share similar central tenants of the faith - salvation through the work of Christ alone, through grace by faith. The importance of the church as a community of believers. But the differences unfold when we talk of how to live in response to this salvation and how the church is to function. And specifically we may agree totally on how God the Father and God the Son exist and have worked to give salvation, it is when we contemplate God the Holy Spirit that the louder voices of our experience and what we have been taught protest.

As a church though we desire not to be shaped by experience and other voices alone, we desire to be shaped by the Bible and what it says of our lives together and our response to the gospel of Jesus and how the Spirit of God empowers that.

This is what we declare to believe, Confessional Statement: **“The Power of the Holy Spirit.** We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the other Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service. *The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the body and for various works of ministry in the world. These gifts should be eagerly desired.*”

By these words we claim that we believe the things we see in the New Testament, the miraculous things accomplished and empowered by the Holy Spirit continue today. They are still active and available for the church and we have arrived at a section of Scripture that lays out for the church how the Spirit works in the church, and how the church works through the Spirit. In our study we will encounter interesting things, perhaps things new to some of us, and through a different lens for others. But it will all be for our health and if we heed the call to appropriately lean into

the power of the Spirit, the church will experience vibrant life and purpose, which is our prayer and pursuit.

The Spirit gives gifts to glorify Christ for the good of the church.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. [2] You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. [3] Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. [4] Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; [5] and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; [6] and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. [7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [8] For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10] 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. [11] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” (ESV)

Paul once again shifts to one of the issues the church asked him about in their letter to him. It fits appropriately in this section on worship in the church, what Corinth and we are suppose to look like when we gather together and when we endeavor to experience life with one another. There are many things we share in common with the mentality and experience of the members of the church in Corinth. We live in interesting political and economic times. We have ever before us enticements to follow after lesser things and a culture that tells us every whim and inclination should define us and be the truest thing about us. There is better news though for both Corinthian believers and us today, that there is something truer to be known and pursued, union with Christ and his people.

But in Corinth there was a different level of spiritualism, or mysticism that left members of the church jockeying for titles of most gifted, or most powerful and where they struggled with social stratification during the Lord’s Supper, they also struggled with spiritual stratification in pursuit of the miraculous, the “spiritual things” of the church. They have asked Paul to give them guidance - what about the gifts?!

Where Corinth may have swung too far, we have probably swung in the opposite direction. Maybe we are more enlightened or have just seen these types of things abused enough to approach them differently. Talk about gifts of the Spirit and people be like "cashmeousside" how bout dah.

Paul brings all of us to the better way for the body of Christ; **The Spirit gives gifts to glorify Christ for the good of the church.** He gives the Source, Scheme and Scope of gifts and we will think of our Syllabus - how we engage the gifts.

1) Source - Who gifts come from

Paul begins the discussion on Spiritual gifts with the source of the gifts to make clear that unlike their previous pagan days, the miraculous was not something they could muster up or force, it was solely a gift from God. Effectively this ends the “spiritual competition” that was going on in Corinth - those once known to be led astray to mute idols, to self-generate dramatic expressions of the mystical or submit to demonic influence, were brought into something different - into real spiritual life given to them.

And the source is the Trinitarian God - some people suggest that the Trinity - God in three persons, is not something found in Scripture but that is silly, here it is. Starting in verse 4 there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit, there are varieties of service, but the same Lord (being Jesus), and there are varieties of actions but the same God who empowers them all in everyone. Gifts, just like the grace that gives us salvation, are a gift that can't be earned, required or won with the perfect sway of the body or incantation of words. However diverse the gifts, however different the people both in background and in abilities, it is all the work of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And what great assurance this is to believers. That we are empowered by this active God in our lives and the church - everything done is accomplished (at least it is meant to be) by the strength and generosity of the God who gives. And the benchmark of being gifted, of living in the Spirit's empowerment is calling Jesus Lord. Where some movements demand the presence of other more demonstrative gifts to validate the Spirit's presence in your life, Paul makes clear that if you say “Jesus is Lord!” that you say it in the Holy Spirit.

Do I know Jesus as Lord - as master of my life - and proclaim him to be? I am gifted by the Spirit to do so. Not only is this assurance of your salvation but also of the Spirit's work in your heart. This is such good news for Corinthian believers stuck in routines of working themselves up in worship, to prove their spirituality. Paul is saying you are spiritual, you are sourced by God in your declaration of Jesus as Lord. And this is the place of equality in the church, that each is gifted in the exact same way to make much of Jesus.

“Whatever other spirits, divinities or demons they have previously encountered, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is committed to proclaiming that Jesus is Lord.”

This burning desire of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus is Paul's overall criterion of genuineness in this matter of spirituality. This is why the giver gives, this is why you have the involvement of the Father, Son and Spirit in the life of the church, to glorify Christ, and all the gifts serve this purpose, to glorify Jesus which is for the good of the church.

2) Scheme - What gifts are for

12:7 “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

First of all when we ask from this text what the gifts of the Spirit are for we notice WHO the gifts are for. “The same God empowers them in everyone. To each...”

These gifts are for the whole of the church, not just a class of people but each and every believer in the church is gifted by the Spirit - all hands on deck, for the common good of the church.

Paul brings the Corinthians back to the good of the community, not the personal whims of the individual. Where they are used to living religiosity as an individual enterprise, they now have a role to play in the church, for the good of everyone.

When I think of how some Corinthians were probably approach the miraculous gifts and even what we witness in some corners of our world today I think of the encounter with Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8. There is this magician doing tricks for a living - and he sees the work being done by the Apostles and he wants in, because what a show that would be! He offers to pay for the Spirit... and they tell him to go repent of his wickedness because he was motivated by self, not the glory of Christ for the good of the church.

Gifts are given in order that a believer might contribute to the “common good.” The end goal of one’s identity and abilities is not the building up of self but the building up of others.

Spiritual gifts in me are not for my benefit but the good of the church, and spiritual gifts in you are not for your benefit but mine - This is why there is a church! This is why Paul makes a big deal about coming together in unity and care for each other, because being empowered by the Spirit with specific gifts, in every way that we are, is for the common good. This frees us from thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, and having the same purpose as the gifts, to benefit the church, other believers.

And we can see some of the ways the church benefits in what the gifts are.

3) Scope - What gifts look like

Spiritual gifts are not something on top of grace or better than grace, but are manifestations of God’s grace to his people. Playing out for others to see and benefit from.

As both Creator of our natural abilities and Redeemer of our whole being so that we receive new abilities, God works in a variety of ways to produce many diverse examples of his grace in action in the church. Given by Spirit not once, but when he is inclined to give them - some consistent and some rare.

Here Paul gives nine examples of this rich variety. We also see three others lists in Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:7-11 and 1 Peter 4:7-11.

We see great variety in the gifts and no list is comprehensive or exhaustive. There are gifts based on understanding and articulating truth. Some that are based on understanding and supplying basic needs for one another and some that are based on understanding direction and group needs. The nine listed here are probably those noticeable in Corinth and still available today and each works for the common good all by the same Spirit.

Utterance of wisdom - Such a person will sometime manifest a specific gift on a specific occasion, as the wisdom of God is communicated with succinct and precise clarity, so that this particular speech reflects the wisdom of God. Such a word of wisdom will shed light on one confused situation, bring perspective on another, provide an irrefutable frame of reference in a third.

Utterance of knowledge - The Holy Spirit is concerned to equip the body of Christ with knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, both in the wide arena of truth and with specific knowledge of specific facts.

Faith - Paul isn't talking of faith that is the fruit of salvation, described here is the unique occasion of increased or miraculous faith that looks at God's character and stands firmly on God's promises. It... looks through the immediacy of the situation to 'him who is invisible' and brings the confidence that God will move in apparently impossible situations... distributed by the Spirit as he chooses to boost the flagging morale of his people.

Gifts of Healing - "not THE gift" - the Lord is the healer; and he distributes gifts of healing through members of the body of Christ to those who are sick. The gifts are for the sick, not for those chosen to receive the gifts. Through prayer for one another - praying not with healing as a caveat, but with a confidence that could only come from the Spirit.

Miracles - 'inworkings of powers', impressive and beyond the ordinary - to be exercised in the worshiping life of the Christian community - including healing.

Prophecy - Paul in 1 Corinthians refers generally to speech that reports something that God spontaneously brings to mind or "reveals" to the speaker but which is spoken in merely human words; it is also generally the teaching and preaching gift given to build up, encourage, and comfort the gathered community. Congregational mic.

Discernment - Knowing if something is of the Lord, conforming our thinking and practice to the teaching of Scripture.

Kinds of Tongues - The gift of contention in our day which Paul will discuss in more depth later - "Speech in a language the speaker does not know, and that sometimes does not follow the patterns of any known human language (1 Cor. 13:1). Paul sees this gift as a means of expressing prayer or praise to God in which the speaker's human spirit is praying even though the speaker does not understand the meaning."

Interpretation - If tongues is going to have value in bringing the common good there needs to be an interpretation so that the community can be edified by them.

All of them, and all others, work revealing something beyond human ability, highlighting Jesus, and are given for the good of the church. And each members is given a gift to benefit the body. Now we all have abilities and personalities that serve the church, but these gift are beyond those and should recognize them when they are at work in us and others.

Samuel Chadwick on his own discovery of divine power (gifts) “Every part of my being wakened up. I did not get a new set of brains, but I got a new mentality. I did not get a new faculty of speech, but I got a new effectiveness of speech. I did not get a new dictionary, but a new Bible. Immediately I was a new creature, with the same basis of natural qualities, energized, quickened, reinforced into a bigger vitality and effectiveness that nobody would ever have dreamed possible. That is what happens to those upon whom the Spirit comes.”
This is what God has in mind for those that call Jesus Lord. That they would be empowered to build up the church, to proclaim Christ and experience his goodness and grace in our life together. Oh that we would have more experience of this gifting...

This is exactly what the church is meant to look like and this is us equipped to care for each other and bear each others burdens. The Spirit giving us gifts to handle the messiness of community among people that know they are in need of a savior and aren't afraid to say so, live genuine and transparent before each other.

This is a community willing to ask for prayer and to pray with one another - for healing, for restoration of relationships, for repentance. This is a community experiencing miracles of love and protecting each other from evil influence. This is a community with hope to share for each other and the neighborhoods the Lord places us.

In equality with one another, gifted, benefiting from how the Spirit empowers each of us. This is the super-charged, Spirit-charged church bringing Christ glory.

The Spirit gives gifts to glorify Christ for the good of the church.

4) Syllabus - What we do

First off, come to Christ - ask the Spirit to empower you to proclaim that Jesus is Lord. Know that Jesus lived obediently in your place and was your substitute on the cross, taking on the punishment for sin that belonged to you. Believe in his resurrection, that he gives new life to you now through the Spirit. And don't just recite the words that he is Lord, actually let him be Lord of your life, of everything about you, of your plans, your past, your perspectives. Surrender it all to Jesus and know you have been gifted by the Spirit.

Then as believers, as the church: If these gifts are real, and we believe biblically that they continue today, why would we avoid them. We should follow the guidelines that Paul will lay out and pursue the Spirit for these gifts for the common good.

If Christians are not exercising and using their particular gifts, whatever they might be, for the common good, they are depriving the rest of the body.

To distance ourselves from other Christians is to waver in our allegiance to Jesus as Lord.

"Romans 12 suggests that determining and then faithfully using one's spiritual gifts is the next most important task in a Christian's life after the fundamental cognitive and moral transformation that accompanies conversion. **Romans 12:6** "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:" (ESV)

1 Peter 4:10 "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:" (ESV)

Go for it, but how? One cannot merit or earn a grace gift. It is something that is given that one does not deserve (just like salvation). **1 Corinthians 12:11** "All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." (ESV)

So we seek and wait. We petition the Spirit asking for gifts, for faith for miraculous intervention in our lives, for prophetic truth, for comfort in prayer, and ministry to one another. The prayer doesn't need to be for a specific gift, though you may ask that way, but for the right gift for the common good.

Then we trust the Spirit and use the gifts he gives. We dive in with Scripture as our guide and with the good of each other in mind.

"all Christians remain responsible for praying, searching their hearts, trying out ministries, and seeking loving but truthful feedback from mature believers to guide them in ascertaining their distinctive gifts."

In order to achieve unity, members of the body need to engage in the passive act of receiving and the active act of sharing - pay it forward. All in. Each one of us. Not as consumers but as participants.

"The church desperately needs an infusion of the supernatural activity of God into its life and ministry." Sam Storms

Revision 2017; this week we begin our intentional season, leading to Easter, of prayer and waiting on the Lord. We have been at this new iteration of Grace Church for more than two years and we want to solidify the vision the Lord has already given us and seek him for next steps. First comes renewal, spiritual refreshment, healing and restoration. Starting Wednesday, we

remind each other of the promises of Christ, we ask the Lord for them in prayer and we learn to wait on him for answer and awareness of his plans for us.

If nothing more is gained in the season, may it be that as a church we have sought the gifting of the Spirit for the good of the church and the glory of Christ - because everything works when this happens. Lives are changed, captives are set free, the church proclaims Jesus with boldness and the Spirit uses us to expand the kingdom.

Who knows what we will look like as a Spirit-empowered church (a lot like we do now!)

Hacksaw Ridge - Story of a man who serves as a medic rather than carrying a gun, saves some 75 men from a deserted battlefield praying that God would help him find just one more. A pivotal moment, the Captain of the unit is on the radio explaining why he is behind schedule - "because Doss is praying for us..." In that moment there is a sense of unity and divine intervention we could only describe as faith - this is the church, relying on each other and the Spirit for the glory of Christ. Praying for each other and heading into battle side by side.

May the Spirit give us the gifts we need for our good and Christ's glory.