**One Body, One Spirit**

1 Corinthians 12:4-13

We often talk about spiritual gifts in the same way we do personality and temperament.

* Oh, you’re an ISFJ? That’s so interesting! I’m an ENTP!
* You’re a beaver, I’m a golden retriever!
* You’re a 7 with a 2 wing, isn’t that sweet. I’m a 9 with a 4 wing.
* Oh, you’re so assertive, you must be a high “D”; I’m more conscientious so I’m more of a “C.”

Remember back when there were only **four personality types,** and they were easy to remember because someone named them after animals? Lion, otter, golden retriever, beaver. Nice and simple. Now there are layers upon layers of complexity and analysis into the human temperament! It’s not just whether you like people or tasks, whether you are a thinker or feeler - now there are 36 different STRENGTHS you have to factor in, with their corresponding weaknesses.

Now, there’s nothing wrong with knowing your inclinations and preferences. It’s important to KNOW THYSELF. But the end result of a lot of this self-analysis is to exacerbate what is already the main orientation of our culture - the GLORIFICATION OF THE SELF. Many of us love to **hold up a MIRROR and admire ourselves** like Gaston in in Beauty and the Beast.



We often approach spiritual gifts in this same way, and as we’ve seen the last two weeks, the Bible immediately corrects us on any thinking that would ***make gifts about us instead of about GOD and the BODY.***

“By the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think with sober judgment.” Romans 12:3

Someone said it well - the call of the Bible is ***not to “think less of yourself but to think of yourself LESS.”*** That is the mark of true Christian maturity and humility - it’s not that you come to increasingly dislike yourself but that you increasingly come to think so much of God and others that your SELF becomes more of an afterthought - you think of yourself LESS. Lord, let it be!

It’s significant that in three separate letters, to three separate churches, Paul wrote with almost exactly the same point: **don’t make spiritual gifts about YOU but about the body!** As you exercise your gifts, use them for the common good, to build up the whole church - not to draw attention to yourself.

Paul spent more time on **the issue of UNITY** in 1 Corinthians than in any other letter. His concern for unity in the church there was the main reason he wrote that letter.

“I appeal to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you ***be united*** in the same mind and the same judgment.” 1 Corinthians 1:10

The church in Corinth was ***fighting over which church leader was the best*** between Peter, Paul and Apollos. The “super spiritual” faction set those names aside and said, “We follow CHRIST alone.” You can almost feel the early tremors of denominationalism starting right away in the early church. But Paul brings them back from all of that bickering and comes ***back to the clear, simple gospel of Jesus Christ*** and Him crucified. He said, “Don’t quibble over little details like speaking in tongues, not speaking in tongues - focus on the main thing - Jesus and the cross!”

Instead of making it all about Jesus, the believers in Corinth were ***boasting and bragging*** about their leaders and about themselves. Paul nips that in the bud saying that Christians should boast in one thing and one thing only:

“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord… Let no one boast in men.” 1 Corinthians 1:31; 3:21

The church in Corinth was obviously **very concerned about being SPIRITUAL**. That’s why ***speaking in tongues*** became divisive then as it still is today - because some had that gift and felt more spiritual because of it, while others didn’t have that gift and were being made to feel bad because they didn’t. You can read those instructions in chapter 14. Our focus today is chapter 12 - and what jumps off the page in 1 Corinthians 12 is TRUE SPIRITUALITY.

**11 times** in this one chapter Paul mentions the Holy Spirit. Pop quiz from 2 weeks ago - how many times does Paul mention the Holy Spirit in ***Romans 12***, the other prominent passage in the New Testament about spiritual gifts? Not once! He just calls them “gifts” there, not even “Spiritual gifts.”

Paul’s message in 1 Corinthians 12, as illustrated by the 11 references to the Holy Spirit, is that this is God’s work from beginning to end. God plans, God initiates, God empowers, God works. It’s all about Him. It’s not about us. So don’t make it about us!

We’ll see today **three INITIATIVES of God with spiritual gifts**. First:

1. God **Gives** us gifts according to His will and by His Spirit

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good… who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” 1 Corinthians 12:7,11

This chapter opens with Paul saying, “about spiritual gifts I don’t want you to be ignorant.” The word for gifts here is **CHARISMATA** - which means more than the simple word gift since it is derived from the Greek word for GRACE, CHARIS. Most translations render this word as “spiritual gifts” but more literally these are “gifts of grace,” or just “graces.” The point is, they are undeserved, unearned provision from God.

Just as we didn’t do anything to earn our salvation and eternal life, so none of us did anything to deserve our spiritual gifts. ***God gave us these special, Spirit-empowered abilities simply out of the overflow of His generosity.***

That’s the first thing to notice here - **GOD GIVES**. It’s not about us discovering, or us developing, or us deserving these gifts. There is no mention of any of that. Paul assumes the believers KNOW their own gifts and will grow in them by using them. But what he wants to make clear is where these gifts come from - the Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but the same God who empowers them all…” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Now, aside from again illustrating the Trinity - that this is an initiative of the full Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit) - Paul is making clear in this threefold repetition - ***IT’S NOT ABOUT THE GIFTS, IT’S ABOUT THE GIVER!***

If you focus on the gifts, you miss the whole point. It’s about the One who gives us the gifts! Yes, Paul mentions a short list of spiritual gifts, but he makes no effort to define or describe them. And in Romans and Ephesians the lists are different. So, the point of verse 4 is clear - ***“there are lots of different gifts - don’t get hung up on whether you have one particular gift!”*** Later in this chapter he illustrates that with the human body - “what if the whole body were an eye?” ***How well would that work?*** We are all very thankful that our bodies are made up of many DIFFERENT PARTS. We would be strange creatures indeed if we were just covered in ears or covered in hands or covered in mouths.

**Focus on the GIVER not the GIFTS.** That’s an important principle for the whole Christian life! If we get hung up on the blessings God gives us, or the blessings we want him to give us, we will miss the point. The gifts of health and work and family and fruitfulness - are just that - they are blessings - they are manifestations of God’s goodness to us. If the blessings in your life move you to worship and thankfulness, good! But these gifts only have that positive effect when we don’t focus on the gifts but instead on the giver.

Notice verse 2-3. “When you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols… therefore I want you to understand”:

1. God **Gives** us gifts according to His will and by His Spirit

“No one speaking in the Spirit ever says, ‘Jesus is accursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except in the Holy Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:3

Before he even gets into the issue of spiritual gits, Paul first makes it absolutely clear that this whole category of life in the Spirit falls under the LORDSHIP OF CHRIST. Whatever you think about the Holy Spirit, whatever you have experienced with spiritual gifts and miraculous signs - the essential test of whether something is legitimate or not is whether it honors Jesus Christ as Lord.

When I was in college, I had **a professor who was Pentecostal** - which meant to me that he was fun to pray with, high energy. He led a weekly prayer time called SPIRITUAL WARFARE. I thought it was good entertainment. This professor took a few of us to a revival at a nearby town to hear this lively preacher. It was one of those events that after the singing and preaching they cleared out the chairs and the preacher got out his handkerchief and went around praying over people, obviously hoping they would fall down or something.

I went the first night and found it all very interesting and exciting, so I brought Kristin the next night. She was immediately concerned about what was going on. Afterwards, as we talked about it, she said, “We sang songs about the Spirit, to the Spirit; we heard a lot about the Spirit and even more about this preacher guy - the piece that was almost entirely missing was JESUS. We hardly sang about Jesus, pretty much no one talked about Jesus. It seemed that event wasn’t really about Jesus at all.”

That experience has stuck with me for over 20 years. It’s the right thing to look for in any church, any worship service, any special event, any small group or Bible study - is this thing about JESUS? **Is Jesus the center of attention?** Are the leaders here drawing attention to themselves? Is there talk about “spirits” without reference to Jesus?

The Bible is clear - ***the Holy Spirit will ALWAYS bring glory and attention to Jesus.*** Always. If you ever run into a spirit that is not bringing attention to Jesus, guess what? That is not the Holy Spirit. It’s one of the other ones.

1. God **Gives** us gifts according to His will and by His Spirit

“God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” 1 Cor. 12:18

So here is the first initiative of God: He is the One who gave us the gifts - entirely according to His sovereign will. And let’s be grateful for that! ***We don’t get to choose*** our gifts, and if we did, we would choose poorly - like the fool in Indiana Jones 3 who chose the fancy goblet and then dissolved into a pile of dust.

God is the Giver. **Praise God for ALL He has chosen to give you** - according to His sovereign will and by the power of His Holy Spirit. Christian maturity is coming to the place that you can ***GIVE THANKS for everything in your life***, including the painful parts. Certainly, when we think about spiritual gifts, it should fill us with gratitude for the wisdom of God in designing the body of Christ exactly as He has!

God GIVES us gifts. His second initiative:

1. God **Empowers** us to serve the Body of Christ

“There are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” 1 Corinthians 12:6

The words in verses 4-6 are interesting:

1. Gifts - charistmaton
2. Service - diakanon
3. Activities - energematon

We talked about the gifts already - charismata - gifts of grace. Service is also familiar - it’s where we get the word DEACON. The third one here “activities” is energematon, which sounds like our word ENERGY. I wish it was Energon, like the cube that powers the Transformers. It’s certainly the basis for the word Energon. And it does refer to power, workings, movements.

Gifts; service; activities. All different kinds of each. Whatever you call them, it is GOD who gives them and God who EMPOWERS THEM. Since God not only supplies the gifts but also the power to use them, it’s only fitting that He also provide the directions for how these gifts are to be used: to build up the body of Christ

As we learned last week, **spiritual gifts are not to build up your self-esteem**, they are to build up the church of Jesus Christ.

1. God **Empowers** us to serve the Body of Christ

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 12:7

The whole book of 1 Corinthians is about **UNITY**. It’s about the whole church in Corinth. Different gifts and differently gifted leaders were actively dividing the church into factions in the name of “wisdom” and “spirituality.” Paul cut through that as forcefully as he could by saying true wisdom and true spirituality do not divide, the gospel unites!

* There are not many Saviors, but only One Savior!
* There is only One Lord!
* Only one God!
* Only One Spirit!
* Only one Body!

Listen to the repeated refrain of verses 8-10.

1. God **Empowers** us to serve the Body of Christ

“To one is given through the Spirit… to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit…” 1 Cor. 12:8-9

And in case we missed the point, he concludes the gift list by saying:

1. God **Empowers** us to serve the Body of Christ

“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” 1 Cor. 12:11

One Spirit. The same Spirit. One and the same Spirit. ***Christ is not divided!*** The Godhead, though three persons, is eternally and perfectly unified! ***The body of Christ is not divided***, there is only One Body with Christ as its one head and the Spirit as our one spirit.

Then after going through some silly examples of bickering - eye against hand and head against feet - Paul gives the application in verse 25:

1. God **Empowers** us to serve the Body of Christ

“That there may be no division in the body but that the members may have the same care for one another.” 1 Cor. 12:25

The whole point is ***to love one another*** - to serve one another!

* If I start using the **pulpit** to identify and tear down certain people or groups in the church, you would be right to call me on it!
* If we had a gifted **Sunday School** teacher who started teaching a rigid Calvinism that condemned anyone who didn’t ascribe to the 5 points, we would question the use of that teaching gift.
* If we had people with gifts of **mercy** who started spreading gossip instead of love, we would rightly wonder if they were using their relational abilities for the common good.
* If we had **deacons** who started signing their names in big black permanent marker on the walls next to projects they had finished, we would worry about their sanity for one thing but then also be concerned about their motives - especially the ones who put their names in different places around a bathroom.

Our gifts are not intended to draw attention to US, nor should they ever divide the body - the gifts are designed to unify, serve, and bless the whole church family. That we would all “have the same care for one another.”

Thankfully ***Oakwood does a great job with this!*** Our worker bees do an awful lot of work, which is why our campus looks so nice these days, doesn’t it? Our extraverts work the doors and help welcome people. Our musicians use their many talents to lead us in worship. Our administrators keep track of the millions of little details so the big picture characters like me don’t float away on our hot air balloons. Our TreeHouse team invests lovingly in the children of Oakwood. And our PowerHouse volunteers encourage and train our teenagers.

Oakwood is a wonderfully involved church family with a variety of gifts and so many faithful servants who use their gifts for the common good!

God gives the gifts. God empowers the gifts. One more initiative of God. Turn back to 1to chapter 3.

1. God **Produces** the results so He gets all the glory

“Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” 1 Cor. 3:7

To those who were elevating him or exalting Apollos Paul knocked their legs out from under them saying that he was nothing special, nor was Apollos or any other leader in the church. **All leaders are just humans** - selfish, sinful, prideful, weak and wounded - so don’t put your hope in human leaders! Yes, Paul said, “I planted the church there.” But then Apollos came along and watered the seed of that church. And after him other leaders will come to do their part. It doesn’t matter who the main teacher is, because the power isn’t in any human teacher!

The power that matters is the only power that can change lives - and that is the power of God! ***Only God can change a heart!***

* Only God can open blind eyes so they begin to see the truth about Jesus.
* Only God can soften the heart so a proud sinner begins to feel conviction about his sin.
* Only God can open deaf ears so a wicked lover of the world is able to hear and understand the good news of the kingdom.
* Only God can take someone who was filled with selfishness and pride and begin to fill them with love and joy and peace and patience.

We are the tools God uses - but **His power is what matters**. How much can a hammer do without a person to wield it? How much can an axe chop down without a lumberjack to swing it? What is more important, the tool or the worker?

Yes, that is what I am saying: **YOU ARE A TOOL**. And so am I. We are tools - instruments in the Almighty hands of God Himself! Whether you plant the seed or water the seed, it doesn’t matter. You and I are not what’s important. The power is in the seed itself - which is the GOSPEL. And God is the one who lets that seed take root in the heart of a person, germinate and begin to grow in their life - like a tiny mustard seed that grows and spreads until it fills your whole yard.

So after calling for unity and fighting against divisions in the church, addressing one issue after another right down to what kind of meat you should eat and which kind of market you should get it from, Paul summarizes his message in chapter 10:

1. God **Produces** the results so He gets all the glory

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Cor. 10:31

It’s not about eating pork or beef or only vegetables - it’s about glorifying God.

It’s not about speaking in tongues or not speaking in tongues - it’s about glorifying God.

It’s not about leading or following - it’s about glorifying God.

It’s not about more visible gifts or less visible gifts - do you get the point? It’s about glorifying God.

Here is our summary:

1. God **Gives** us gifts
2. God **Empowers** us to serve
3. God **Produces** the results

Spiritual gifts are not really about us at all - they’re about ***the amazing generosity and creativity of God!*** He is the Giver. He is the source of power. He is the One working in us and through us to change hearts and lives.

If we keep that part in line, then everything else will sort itself out. As you serve in different ways the Lord will lead you to where you can make the most impact. As you love people in the body, they will notice the things you’re best at and encourage you to do more in those ways.

When the body of Christ works as it is supposed to, there is a wonderful culture of mutual encouragement - as each part does its assigned work - without jealousy or competition, without bickering or posturing - because we do it **all FOR THE GLORY OF GOD**!

I recently listened through the podcast, ***the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill***. 15-20 years ago you might have heard of a rapidly growing church in the northwest called Mars Hill, led by pastor Mark Driscoll. He was a big deal for a few minutes.

What the podcast so vividly demonstrates is the change that took place in Mark Driscoll. In 2002 or 2003 he was already being invited to big Christian conferences, but he was ***deliberately critical of the mega church movement***. He warned other church planters and mega church pastors - “Don’t make it about you! It’s foolishness to rest the success of the whole church on the personality or gifts of one person.”

But even after making wise warnings like this, Mark ended up making the precise mistake his younger self warned against. 10 years later he scolded his media team for not promoting him enough - he said, “I am the brand. You promote the church by promoting me.”

Success is a dangerous elixir. **Francis Chan** felt the allure of success and realized that his notoriety was neither good for him nor for his church - so he left and went to China for 2 years, living in absolute obscurity. Then he came back and started a small house church network in San Francisco. Chan’s book, *Letters to the Church* is an insightful and timely warning to pastors and churches to beware of the cult of personality, the allure of success.

Driscoll became enamored with his own name, his own brand, his own success. Driscoll exalted himself - and God has no choice but to oppose those who exalt themselves.

Chan realized the dangers of those things and deliberately disappeared. He “made himself nothing.” He took the path of Jesus.

“For decades church leadership like myself have lost sight of the powerful mystery inherent in the Church and have instead run to other methods to keep people interested. In all honesty, we have trained you to become addicted to lesser things. We have cheapened something sacred, and we must repent.” Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church*

Driscoll ended up causing great harm to the people in his church and thousands upon thousands who looked up to him.

Chan continues to encourage and guide the church from a position of relative obscurity, leading a simple house church network.

***What about us?*** Will we follow the way of the world and seek to exalt ourselves? Or will we follow the way of the Lord Jesus and humble ourselves, for the glory of God? If we’ve learned anything these last three weeks, it’s that the spiritual gifts are not about us - they are about God. It’s about the GIVER, not the GIFTS. God gives the gifts. God empowers us to use the gifts. And God alone produces the results that really matter. So, all the glory goes to Him!

Let’s pray!