**Gifted to Serve**

**I Corinthians 12:1-27**

It happens every year and multiple times during the year. We are at a loss and so end up scrambling at the last minute for something and usually wind up with anything. It’s not intentional, it’s just that we can’t seem to come up with a solution. Sometimes and with some people it's really easy. At other times and with other people, we have no clue. If you are wondering what in the world I’m talking about, it is the selection of gifts. Be it birthday, anniversary or Christmas, some people are just hard to buy for. We think we have a great idea only to have it bomb. I’ve given up on certain gifts for Robyn, like styles of clothes. I know her favorite color is yellow. I might as well just buy it and donate it to the Salvation Army right out of the shopping bag. She can be really hard to buy for. Part of the dilemma is that she doesn’t care about gifts. So it’s a challenge. What she does like is anything that will make her life easier.

When we buy gifts for whatever the occasion, we want there to be some purpose, some use for that thing we bought. We want the person to like it, and find some use for it, to be a benefit to them. We might take a lot of time thinking and researching a gift before we make a purchase. At times, we even ask the person what they would like.

Our discussion today brings us to another passage

on the topic of fellowship and how we are to relate to one another with gifts that have been given to us. There are three primary passages on this topic, but we are going to focus on **I Corinthians 12:1-27** and what it has to say. The other two are found in **Romans 12** and **Ephesians 4**, which I encourage you to read sometime this week. Each of these three texts speak to unity, diversity and maturity. Without maturity in the believer and in the body of Christ, there will be an imbalance between unity and diversity. **Romans 12** also includes the importance of humility when exercising one’s spiritual gift.

When it came to spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church, humility was lacking. They had questions about spiritual gifts so Paul wrote to correct some erroneous ideas in how they were using and misusing those gifts. Looking at **I Corinthians 12** as it relates to the fellowship of the church, I want to address three points from the passage:

The ignorance around spiritual gifts

The implementation of spiritual gifts

The illustration for spiritual gifts

We’ll then close with a fourth point, not found in the text but implied throughout and that is the implication from spiritual gifts. Or, when the church is acting as it should in the use of spiritual gifts, what are the results that should be evident.

Now, I do want to say this up front. Our text includes a list of spiritual gifts, but it’s not an exhaustive list. Some are what we would call sign gifts. Others are called serving gifts. Romans and Ephesians include other gifts as well. My intent this morning isn’t to discuss the individual gifts or to debate whether all gifts are still for today or if some are no longer valid. My focus is why we have been given gifts and how they are to benefit the body of Christ as an essential part of fellowship.

So let’s look first, then, at the ignorance around spiritual gifts in **verses 1-3**.

1. **THE IGNORANCE AROUND SPIRITUAL GIFTS – vv. 1-3**

In this letter to the church at Corinth, Paul is

addressing a variety of important issues from division caused by cliques, their immaturity in the faith that presents itself in worldliness, sexual immorality among church members that hadn’t been addressed, the conscience of weaker believers around food offered to idols, and how to conduct themselves appropriately in worship and during communion. The issue of spiritual gifts will be the topic of discussion from **chapters 12 – 14**. He begins by stating **“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.”**

To begin with we need to see their pursuit.

1. **Their Pursuit – v. 1**

There are two primary Greek words for ignorant.

The one is where we get our word idiot. It’s used to describe a person who is foolish or stupid. The other word is what Paul has chosen to use and refers to a person who lacks understanding. It literally means **not to know**. It’s the root word for agnostic. Paul didn’t want these believers to be ignorant or agnostic when it came to spiritual gifts. He didn’t want them to have any uncertainties, doubts or confusion about them.

John MacArthur adds “The church cannot function, and it certainly cannot mature, without properly and faithfully using the gifts God gives His people for ministry. Satan will try to counterfeit the Spirit’s gifts, and he will try to induce believers to ignore, neglect, misunderstand, abuse, and pervert them.”

That was the case in Corinth. So what Paul says on the topic is critical. He wanted them to have a clear understanding of the function and importance of spiritual gifts.

Back in **1:7** Paul says this church lacked nothing regarding spiritual gifts. They knew about spiritual gifts but had come to the place in the life of the church where they were misusing them.

Now, I think it’s also important to understand the term gift. It comes from the same word used for grace which helps us to understand that gifts are an endowment given by God. Like salvation, they are unmerited. Like the fruit of the Spirit, we can’t develop them without it coming from God. Spiritual gifts are a manifestation of the Holy Spirit who empowers a person to serve the needs of the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are a gift of grace, but this church was pursuing after them as if they had a say in which ones they would possess and practice.

Paul also stressed in **1:7** that spiritual gifts should be used until the Lord returns. But they needed a course correction on the use of those gifts and a reminder of where they came from. As we’ll see, they really emphasized what we’ll call the showy gifts to the exclusion and undermining of other spiritual gifts that, to them, seemed less important. It was causing disunity. That was their pursuit, but then Paul speaks about their past.

1. **Their Past – v. 2**

Paul draws a correlation between their past life and practice in paganism with their present life and practice in the church. These believers had come from the practice of idolatry. The term **“led astray”** was used to describe prisoners being led away under armed guard to prison or execution. They were captives. Without Christ, a person is held captive by Satan, whether he admits it or not, which includes having a depraved mind and heart. **Jeremiah 17:9** tells us that the heart is deceitful above everything.

**Genesis 6:5 “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”**

Paul reminded them of what it was like when they lived as pagans worshipping false idols, idols that couldn’t talk or hear and the influence such worship had on them. Many unbelievers think that being a Christian is restrictive and that they are the ones who are really free. But Satan has so blinded them to think their life is free, when in fact they are actually bound in sin. They have no choice because they are a slave to sin. **Romans 6:17** says they are slaves to sin. They are both bound to and blinded by sin. **Ephesians 4:17-18** calls it ignorance and a hardness of heart. It is nothing but deception.

What made pagan worship so appealing was the

ecstatic nature of their worship. Part of their rituals included getting into an emotionally charged frenzied state. Now as Christians, some of these believers had fallen back into some of their old pagan beliefs and practices during worship combining it with Christian worship, even using some of the spiritual gifts to whip themselves into an emotional frenzy. Paul reminded them that the idols they worshipped in the past were dumb, meaning they were speechless or literally without a voice. Idolatry can never satisfy the needs of a person because they are impersonal. Where did the real power come from? We see that in **verse 3**.

1. **Their Power – v. 3**

If a person is truly indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that person will never curse Jesus. And neither can any person genuinely say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. The word for Lord is the same as the term Yahweh in the Old Testament. It was considered too sacred a name to pronounce or even write down and so they used only consonants – YHWH. It is the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush – “I AM”. It speaks of His being or existence and is the name by which God made His covenant with Israel. It is the name by which He declared being the Almighty.

Through the Spirit, when we say Jesus is Lord, we affirm both His humanity and authority. Paul is saying that some claimed on one hand to speak by the Spirit either through some prophecy or some teaching but who would turn around and severely condemn Jesus. In this way, they were cursing Him. They spoke against His nature, character, and work, claiming that He was only human or only God. But the person who is truly born again, with the Holy Spirit living in him, will rightly acknowledge Jesus is who He claims to be both in His humanity and deity.

When Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of the Living God, Jesus said he didn’t come to that conclusion by man, but that the Father revealed it to him. We can only acknowledge that Jesus is Lord

through the Holy Spirit.

There was a measure of misunderstanding around spiritual gifts by the Corinthians that Paul wanted to clear up for the benefit of the church. He then tells them the proper use of spiritual gifts in **verses 4-11**.

1. **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS – vv. 4-11**

Notice Paul’s emphasis on the role of the Trinity in the implementation of gifts. Father, Son, and Spirit are all involved. And these verses show both the diversity and the unity in gifts. Just as there is both diversity and unity in the Trinity, so there is diversity and unity in the body of Christ when it comes to spiritual gifts.

Consider first, the way of God in spiritual gifts.

1. **The Way of God in Spiritual Gifts – vv. 4-6**

As I said before, these are gifts of grace given by the Holy Spirit. Paul points out that there are different kinds of spiritual gifts but it is the same Spirit who gives them. There is a variety.

He then says there are different kinds of service or applications for each gift, but there is one Lord.

And then there are different kinds of workings, but the same God.

Now let me back up a moment and speak about gifts as a whole. I want to be clear that spiritual gifts are not the same as a talent or a skill.

We might watch a sporting event in which the announcer will say that a particular athlete is gifted in his or her sport as if it’s a rare thing.

We might listen to a musician playing a classical composition and conclude that the person is especially gifted.

We hear that term bantered about with scientists and salesmen and teachers and in many disciplines.

But the reality is that while they may have special skills in a particular area, it is not a gift as we understand the word as it is used in Scripture. Please keep in mind that any skill or talent or ability we might possess has been granted by God and still includes the need by those individuals for regular practice to keep that skill sharp. An unbeliever can be as skilled in some area as a believer.

Spiritual gifts come only after salvation and only by the Holy Spirit. They are not natural abilities and don’t come through practice and the Trinity is involved in both their endowment and their employment. They are gifts of grace through the way of God in the believer.

Then in **verses 7-10** we notice the work of God in spiritual gifts.

1. **The Work of God in Spiritual Gifts – vv. 7-10**

**“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”**

Every believer has been given a spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit. Every believer. There are no exceptions and no exclusions. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, at your salvation you have been given a spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit.

In a previous church we were doing a study on spiritual gifts, and one woman, no matter how much I tried to convince her from Scripture and from this passage, adamantly denied having a spiritual gift. To deny that is to deny the truth of God’s Word and to deny the power of God in your life to give you a gift. As a Christian, you have a spiritual gift.

The word **“manifestation”** means to make known, to reveal, to make clear, plain, obvious, or evident. The Holy Spirit is not going to keep your spiritual gift a mystery. He will reveal what your gift is. If you don’t know what your spiritual gift is, then spend time in prayer asking the One who has given you a gift to make it known. Spend time in God’s Word and through it He can reveal it to you. And then actively engage in serving somewhere or somehow in the church and it will become clear to you how you have been gifted.

Maybe you think your spiritual gift is teaching. Plug yourself into a teaching role and see if you really enjoy that. It might be in the study of some topic, but you don’t feel comfortable in front of people. Remember that while there are a variety of gifts, the employment or use of that gift is seen in so many different ways.

Two people may both have the gift of evangelism. But where one enjoys speaking to large crowds the other is gifted in speaking one on one with others.

There are a variety of gifts within the body of Christ because there are a variety of needs within the body of Christ that are met in different ways. Just because one person doesn’t use their gift the same way you use your gift, doesn’t mean that their way is inferior or wrong. God uses both for His purposes. Spiritual gifts are the capacity to serve in some way and the Holy Spirit will reveal them to you. If He doesn’t or if you don’t use them, then the body is not being built up and supported or cared for as God intended gifts to be used.

Think about spiritual gifts in this way from what John MacArthur writes: “Each gift the Holy Spirit now gives to believers had its perfect expression in Jesus’ own life and ministry. His church continues to live out His life on earth through the power of His Spirit working through His gifted people. Spiritual gifts are the Lord’s primary channel of making Christians become Christ in the world, His visible and manifest body.”

Essentially he is saying that we are Christ to the world when we use our spiritual gift.

Again, if you claim that you don’t have a spiritual gift, you deny the truth of God’s Word and the work of His Spirit in your life.

And that brings us to the will of God in spiritual gifts.

1. **The Will of God in Spiritual Gifts – vv. 7b, 11**

**v. 7 “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”**

**v. 11 “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.”**

You do not choose your gift and your spiritual gift was not given for your benefit, but for the benefit of the church. That’s why your presence is important. If you aren’t here, then it leaves a hole in the body for someone else to fill. Others are left to pick up the slack. Instead of being a joy to exercise your gift, it can become a drag.

My car has a lot of miles on it. I’m closing in on 270,000 miles. Over the past several months it has developed a little problem. It’s starting to leak transmission fluid. Occasionally when I pull out of the driveway, when the engine is cold, the transmission will slip and I’ll just coast. The engine is running, but the car isn’t going because it’s not in gear. The car can’t function as it should because one part is not doing its job.

It’s the same in the body of Christ. When one member isn’t using his or her spiritual gift, the body can’t function together as it should. That’s why we need each other. That’s why regular times together in fellowship whether it be studying, praying, eating or whatever, is so important to the overall health and well-being of the church. Your gift is for the common good.

And notice please, from **verse 11** an important principle. Each gift is given as it is determined by the Holy Spirit. We don’t choose our gift. The Holy Spirit knows the needs within the body of Christ and has endowed and empowered each one of us with a gift to benefit the body. If you aren’t using your spiritual gift, then the body is missing out on something. It’s not as healthy as it could be. And when we try to use our spiritual gift in our own power, we lose the desire and it can become selfish. Our spiritual gift is for the benefit of building up the body of Christ. Out of a diversity of gifts comes unity in the body.

Paul condemned the Corinthian church because they were seeking some of the showy, visible gifts for selfish reasons. They liked the gifts that put them in a position to be noticed. To show how spiritual gifts were to function in the body of Christ, Paul gave them an illustration for spiritual gifts.

1. **THE ILLUSTRATION FOR SPIRITUAL GIFTS – vv. 12-27**

Ronald Raegan was called the great communicator.

Paul should be called the great illustrator.

He referred to the Christian life as a race comparing it to the discipline necessary to compete in the games.

He compared the Roman armor to that needed by the Christian when facing an unseen enemy.

Here he likens the body of Christ to the human body. Both are one, yet comprised of many parts. So in **verses 12-18** he speaks of the complexity of the body.

1. **The Complexity of the Body – vv. 12-18**

My twin brother has taught anatomy and physiology at both the High School and College level for over 40 years. He knows the organs and muscles and blood vessels and bones and how they all connect and what they do. It is as the psalmist says, fearfully and wonderfully made. Every part has a function. Every part is necessary. It is incredibly complex. When you have an injury and something isn’t working right, you appreciate when it can get fixed so it can function again. Otherwise, it is left to other parts of the body to pick up the slack. I am grateful that they could reattach my rotator cuff and with therapy get me functioning again. It was a pain when it was injured and it was a pain when I couldn’t use it. So there is both a unity and a diversity in the body that is important.

Just as the human body is complex so is the body of Christ and we are all put into the same body through the baptizing of the Holy Spirit. That simply means the work He does by placing the believer at the moment of salvation into the body of Christ. It is one body, with many members. A believer in Africa is as much a part of the body of Christ as is a believer in Chile or Montana. We are all part of the body, but we all have different functions to support the local body of believers. Paul again, reminds us that it is God who has arranged the parts in the body as is necessary for the spiritual benefit of the body.

Paul addressed not only the complexity of the body, but also the concern in the body.

1. **The Concern in the Body – vv. 19-27**

Even though it is made up of many parts, it functions seamlessly together when there is unity. Each part knows its place and doesn’t try to function as another part that it was not intended for. My alternator can’t function as a transmission. My brakes can’t function as a steering wheel. Each part has a specific function for the car to operate correctly. Some of you have probably found in tearing something apart and putting it back together that you invariably have a bolt or screw left over. You may conclude that it isn’t very important only to find out later that one little part held the gizmo to the watcha-ma-call-it. Every part helps the whole.

These verses speak to the concern in Corinth that some were claiming certain gifts were not as essential to the church or even necessary at all, so downplayed them while elevating other gifts.

Paul’s illustration points out that while some gifts were visible and other gifts were not, didn’t diminish the value of those gifts that were not visible. He also stressed the importance of diversity in gifts by noting that just as the body couldn’t be made up only of an eye or an ear neither could the body of Christ be a body if it was only comprised of one gift. It is ludicrous to think that one part of the body could tell another part that it wasn’t needed, neither can a person with one gift tell a person with another or similar gift that it’s not necessary.

Some gifts that seem unimportant or are not visible may in fact be extremely crucial to the function of the body or in this case the spiritual body of Christ.

We would all agree that we can’t see our heart, but we would all equally agree that the heart is necessary for the function of the body.

The same with the lungs or the gray matter between our ears.

Paul concludes this section by stating in **verse 25** that there should be no division within the church. Every gift is important for the benefit of the church.

Every gift is to be used for the benefit of the church.

When my shoulder suffered injury, my whole body suffered.

When one part of the body of Christ suffers, the whole body of Christ suffers.

When one part is honored, every part rejoices.

When I ran track and I received a medal for placing it wasn’t just my feet that went up to the podium to get the medal because it pounded the track. It wasn’t just my heart or lungs that beat and took in oxygen to make it possible to win. The whole body was involved in the honor of receiving a medal.

When one member of the body suffers, we are to suffer alongside. When one member is honored, we all rejoice with that member.

The church was ignorant around spiritual gifts.

They were told the importance of implementing their spiritual gifts as they were given for the benefit of the body. Gifts were not for the benefit of the bearer or user. They were positioned in the body of Christ at the will of the Holy Spirit. Just as God designed the body with many parts, so the body of Christ is designed with many parts.

God is the giver of the gifts – that’s divine endowment.

God is the power for the gifts – that’s divine enablement.

Whenever we attempt to use our spiritual gift in our own power there will be misuse and disunity.

The importance of fellowship can’t be overstated. Using our spiritual gift provides support to one another as we encourage each other by using them.

What then is the implication from spiritual gifts?

1. **THE IMPLICATION FROM SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

Let me close by giving you some benefits to the body when we use our spiritual gifts as God meant.

When we allow God to empower us in using the gift He has given there is evidence of His work in the church and to the community.

1. We will receive a blessing when we use our gift and so will the person who is the recipient of our gift.
2. The Spirit controlled church becomes a vibrant witness to the community because of the unity and support we are to each other.
3. The Spirit controlled church using its spiritual gifts as God intended will experience love, joy, unity and fellowship. That fellowship will be deep and vibrant as we look for ways to help the body of Christ. Love for one another will be selfless and sacrificial.
4. The Spirit controlled church is worshipful. It will be God-centered, not self-centered, as was the case in Corinth.
5. The Spirit controlled church is obedient. It believes and behaves according to the commandments of the Bible.
6. The Spirit controlled church is submissive, which is a willing obedience that stems from a

heart that desires to please God.

1. The Spirit controlled church serves each other.

The spiritual immaturity in Corinth was evident in the selfish misuse of spiritual gifts. From this text, Paul points out that we are to be one body, yet interdependent on each other through the mutual use of our Holy Spirit giftedness. We are strategically placed within the body for the good of each other and for God’s glory.

Let me close with this thought from John MacArthur: “Questioning our spiritual gift is questioning God. He is disobedient who does not

use his spiritual gift.”

If you are not sure what your spiritual gift is, spend time praying to the One who gives out the gifts.

Study the Bible while praying so that God’s

Spirit can show you through His Word what your

gift might be.

Ask other mature Christians who through observation may guide you to know your spiritual gift.

Go out and serve. What you find joy in doing may be the confirmation you need to know your giftedness.

Do you know what your spiritual gift is?

Are you using your spiritual gift?

God wants you both to know it and to use it. The body may be lacking in some way if you aren’t. It’s use benefits and builds up the body. That’s the unity we experience through our diversity as part of our fellowship together to mature each other in Christ.