

Power and Glory 4: No Spectators – 1 Cor 12:1-11 Oct 4th @ 9am

Last week we had Harvest festival and this week we are back to our series about the Power and Glory of the Holy Spirit. Jeff 2 weeks' ago and Pat last week talked about *living on the edge*, echoing a phrase Simon had used, and I'm unashamedly going to use this phrase again today. The title Paul Bryer has given today is "*No Spectators!*" because in our reading we see that the Holy Spirit is not just a passive guest in our hearts and lives, He wants to transform us with power by giving us gifts, so that we will indeed move out of our comfort zones and live on the edge. Jeff also said that Holy is more important than Happy. I'm sure many of you will have heard the phrase about the Holy Spirit, that He comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable. Well, I hope you're sitting comfortably, and then we'll begin!

Let's PRAY....

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers – and sisters as well – that's how St Paul begins this chapter, and by using the address *brothers*, Paul is showing that this is an important section of his letter. So I'm going to do a bit of ground-work, and you'll need to forgive me if for some of you this is a recap and something you're already familiar with, because I'm sure there are others here who are not so familiar with these truths. So, my dear brothers and sisters, the first thing to notice is that this section about the gifts of the Holy Spirit is something for **Christians**, not unbelievers or pagans, as St Paul puts it. If, as I hope, you have said in your heart, "Jesus is Lord!", if you have decided you want to follow Him, even if you don't think you are very good at it, well then you do have the Holy Spirit in you. He is there: v, 3 says: "No-one can say *Jesus is Lord* except by the Holy Spirit. So that's step one - the Holy Spirit is already in us if we are Christians. All that follows about gifts and ministries is founded on Jesus being our Lord and Lord of the church, and it's important to realise that if spiritual gifts do not point to that, then they are not from God.

The second thing I'd like us to notice is that God wants to give **everyone** a gift of some kind. Let's read again v. 6: talking about the Spirit, St Paul says "*There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men*".

OK, it means us girls as well, let's take that as read. But notice the ALLs. All men, all Christian people, including you and me, have the gifts referred to, not just some super-spiritual folk. And some theologians would say that this implies that **everyone** has the potential to receive **all** the gifts! That's quite a thought, isn't it? One term that's been coined for these gifts is "*Gracelets*". Our spiritual gifts are little bits of grace from God – gracelets! It's an evocative name that implies joy and gifting and something we can all look forward to freely receiving. Yet these free gracelets can transform the way we all live our lives for God. No Spectators, remember!

And yet, thirdly, notice that not all the gifts are the same, *there are different kinds of working*, it says, so they won't show themselves in the same way in each person. But rest assured, they are there. Our part is to recognise them and work with God to develop them – and Simon will go into more detail about how we do that next week. All I will say at this stage is that one of the best ways of doing this is in a home-group. You can't very easily practice a spiritual gift for the good of others if you are simply a passive spectator, for example listening to me on a Sunday morning, even if that's a very pleasant experience! If you are not in a home-group, please do consider joining one, even if just for this term. Have a word with one of us or with Sylvia Yelland who co-ordinates small groups for us. That way you will have friends and a safe place to explore and discover more about your own and other's spiritual gifts.

The 4th thing to notice in these few opening verses is that the point of the gifts of the spirit is *the common good* (v.7). They are Tools, not Trophies! Simon a couple of weeks ago

mentioned the fact that some people pray for the Holy Spirit and nothing seems to happen and it might be because we want a manifestation of the Spirit for the wrong reason, maybe to bolster our own faith or to prove to others what super Christians we are. And we may be disappointed when we don't feel anything or get a dramatic gift like speaking in tongues or prophecy or healing. But the Holy Spirit gifts us *for the common good*. If there is a particular work God wants us to do in building up the body of Christ, and we agree and co-operate, walking with Him in faith, He will make sure that we have the spiritual gifts we need to do the job. We are Christ's hands and feet on earth, we're the means he chooses to use to build His Kingdom, and God will give us specific spiritual gifts to do the job. So that might mean we have a gift that seems apparent for a long time, or even always, but it might also seem to be a temporary gift, for a season, a gracelet, while we do whatever God has in mind for a time. Remember: tools not trophies!

Notice too that God gives the gifts *to each one as He determines* (v. 11). So we may not seem to have the gift we particularly want. Our presenting gift may seem rather ordinary to us and we might want a more up-front one. Or by contrast, we may wish He'd given us less to do and fewer gifts, as we'd rather take a back seat thank-you very much! We might be given a gift that God develops out of a natural ability, or it might be a gift that seems to defy all logic. In fact, in my experience, God will sometimes gift someone in an area where they would naturally be weak, so that they and we are in no doubt that the power and the glory belong to Him. As St Paul said in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, (in 2 Cor 12:9) *my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*. It's sometimes all too easy to assume that our natural talents are our spiritual gifts but they may not be, and by working in our own strength we can run out of steam and exhaust ourselves.

The list of Spiritual gifts in verses 8-10 is not exhaustive and also not the only one in the bible. But let's explore for a few minutes some of the less obvious gifts, what they actually are.

We have in v. 8 the message of wisdom, which seems self-explanatory, but we also have a *message of knowledge*. So what's the difference? Well I guess wisdom is a gift given to share in a public or private setting but messages of knowledge may be more targeted. In my experience, this latter gift will usually be given for a particular moment or person. It's as if you had insight into a situation that you could not otherwise know about. So when we pray for people, this is a good gift to ask God for! It means we might have a thought or a feeling or a word, or perhaps a picture, that comes into our heads and that can shed light on what is happening for the person you are ministering to. It may not even make sense to us, but if we feel it is from God then it can be right to mention it and see whether it connects with and helps the person. I have known God speak like that directly into people's hearts as they realise that He has a special message for them, using someone who knows nothing about it but who has been open to God's prompting. Be assured, if someone comes to one of the ministry or leadership team for prayer, whether it be at the Communion rail or a more extended time of ministry or prayer for healing, we will have been praying for just this gift.

Going on to v. 9: the spiritual gift of faith is an interesting one: surely we all have faith? and yes, we do, and our faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. So can we ask the Holy Spirit to give us more faith? I think a verse in what's called Jesus' final discourse, when He's saying and praying about final things with the disciples at the Last Supper, may help throw light on this. It's in **John 15:26** Page 1083

But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you."

That's quite a statement, isn't it? God's Holy Spirit will teach us all things and remind us of everything Jesus said. For the first disciples, about to witness Jesus' death, this was

vital, as they would need to remember things Jesus had done to teach the church later on. And St Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled the disciples to overflowing, immediately exhibited this gift in preaching to the crowd about who Jesus was - and Peter was an uneducated fisherman. But think of the implications for us: if you and I are to be taught all things and could remember everything Jesus had said, that gift of the Spirit would certainly grow our faith! So it's a gift we can all ask for, in the confidence that Jesus as well as St Paul thought it was vital.

To go back to our list and v9: Healing, miracles, and prophecy are reasonably self-explanatory but what about *Distinguishing between spirits*?

Distinguishing between spirits in v. 10 is about being able to tell whether something is of God or whether it is a deception by Satan. It's as well to be aware that if we ask God's Spirit to gift us and we start to use those gifts, Satan won't like it. He may well try to deceive us and we may find ourselves being tempted more often – Satan will use what-ever is our weak point to try to distract us from being an active Christian. We have probably all heard of Christians and other religious people - including false Messiah's like the one recently in the local paper - who've had weird ideas and gone off at a tangent in the wrong direction. So when we get ideas and we're not sure whether they are from God, we need to test them. In fact it tells us in 1 John 4 verse 1 that we are to test the spirits (page 1227)

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

So this is a very important gift that we can ask for, especially when we get ideas and want to know if they are from God. And of course you can also speak to a mature Christian whom you respect, who will usually also have developed this gift.

Now to tongues – well, that just means using another language, given to you by God; a language that you don't understand yourself – although someone else might, as it can be a real foreign language. Interpretation of tongues is when you know from God what the message is when someone else has prayed in public in a *non*-recognisable tongue. For those of you who think this is all too weird and one step too far, please be assured that with the gift of tongues you are not babbling out of control and you can start and stop at any time you want to. It's just that the words you use come out as a foreign language. Nevertheless, there has been much discussion about whether **all** Christians can have the gift of tongues and what it might be used for. But don't be worried or frightened about the gift of tongues. Sandy Millar, from Holy Trinity Brompton church, in his Prayer Ministry video that some of you may have seen at our Time Together evenings, quotes a former Bishop of Coventry saying,

*"Delirious emotionalism is **not** the chief danger of the Church of England!"*

But *delirious emotionalism* can seem to be prevalent in some churches and clearly it was a problem in 1st century Corinth! If you read on to chapter 14 you'll see that there was probably over-use of this gift in Corinth: 14:3 says *I would like every one of you to speak in tongues* – and this implies that not everyone did, although many did – *but*, St Paul continues, *I would rather have you prophesy*. So why might we want this gift, why ask for it? Well, why not? Speaking in tongues can be used for prayer and for praise as well as for prophecy, and is especially good when you feel you've run out of things to say. On a personal level, I have often used this gift during worship and it is good to know that I don't have to compose eloquent prayers but that my spirit can join with God and express my love for Him without my mind having to be working too hard. But the gift of a tongue has also been a great comfort to me when I have been in distress and not known how or what to pray to God. Praying in tongues, knowing that the deepest cries of my heart are being heard, has been very comforting.

Just before we finish, I'd like to look briefly at 1 Cor 12 verse 27 to the end of the chapter. Let's read it (p.1153)

READ vv 27-28.

This is about gifts leading to ministry. We are all part of this body of Christ's called the Church. We all have gifts from the Holy Spirit and we all have a part to play in building up the body and expanding God's kingdom. One gift may lead to another and, vitally, gifts will lead to certain ministries both in a church setting and out of it. Some ministries may be publicly recognised and people will be given specific jobs and titles, as it says here, but more often others will be operating their gifts and ministering in secular areas. Gifts are given for the common good, as we've already said, so we can expect God to use them in us wherever we are, wherever he has put us and wants us to minister. We don't have to be in a formal setting, or even at a home-group to pray for someone to be healed, to ask for wisdom or a word of knowledge or the discernment of a spirit. We can and should expect God to bless others through us wherever we happen to be. Wow!

That leads me finally to our **Key Question** for this week, which you'll see in our termly booklet: *I don't have confidence or certainty, so I end up just doing nothing! How do I break this cycle? How can I know if God is gifting or anointing me?*

Well, to recap: spiritual gifts are for everyone! So yes, you are included! There are no Spectators. God has gifted you and will continue to anoint you with gifts and a ministry for the common good. They are tools not trophies. If you are not sure which gift or gifts God has for you at this moment, don't forget to pray and ask God to show you what He wants you to see – but pray expecting an answer and then give it a try. And ask a Christian who knows you, maybe in a home-group – he or she may well have recognised what you haven't seen. And Simon will say more about all this next week, so watch this space!

Ice-breaker; what was the most exciting gift you have ever been given?

Many Old Testament leaders were flawed individuals who were anointed by the Holy Spirit to do God's work (e.g. Moses: see Exodus 4) Can you identify the particular gifts they were given using the lists written by St Paul? Look at other lists in the NT: I Cor 12 v 28; Rom 12 v 6-8; Eph 4 v 11-12. Which of these do you see in others? In yourself? N.b. The only gift in all four lists is prophecy - why do you think this is?

Have you ever heard or experienced the gift of tongues? How do you feel about it and why? Be honest and share your thoughts – then pray about them, asking God to show you what He wants you to learn.

Sandy Millar, from Holy Trinity Brompton church, in his Prayer Ministry video that some of you may have seen at our Time Together evenings, quotes a former Bishop of Coventry saying, "*Delirious emotionalism is **not** the chief danger of the Church of England!*" In what sense may the reverse be true?

Recommended reading: John Wimber: *The Dynamics of Spiritual Growth*. Chapter 28