

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 4th October 2009

Kingdom, Power and Glory – No Spectators - Releasing Gifts

1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

The title today is "*No Spectators!*" because 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*. By using the address *brothers*, Paul is showing that this is an important section of his letter. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for **Christians**, not unbelievers. "No-one can say *Jesus is Lord* except by the Holy Spirit" (v.3). 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.

God wants to give **everyone** a gift of some kind (v. 6). All Christian people have the gifts referred to, not just some super-spiritual folk. Some theologians would say that this implies that **everyone** has the potential to receive **all** the gifts! One term that's been coined for these gifts is "*Gracelets*" (see Wimber, below). Our spiritual gifts are little bits of grace from God. These free gracelets can transform the way we all live our lives for God: no spectators!

Not all the gifts are the same, *there are different kinds of working* (v.6), so they won't show themselves in the same way in each person. But they are there. Our part is to recognise them and work with God to develop them. The point of the gifts of the spirit is *the common good* (v.7). They are Tools, not Trophies! If we pray for the Holy Spirit and nothing seems to happen 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. We may be disappointed when we don't feel anything or get a dramatic gift like speaking in tongues or prophecy or healing. But 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.

God gives the gifts *to each one as He determines* (v. 11). So we may not seem to have the gift we particularly want. 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 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 2 Cor 12:9 *my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*. It's all too easy to assume that our natural talents are our spiritual gifts but they may not be.

Let's explore for a few minutes some of the less obvious gifts. We have in v. 8 the message of wisdom, which seems self-explanatory, but we also have a *message of knowledge*. Messages of knowledge may be more targeted: this 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. 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.

The spiritual gift of faith: surely we all have faith? Yes, and our faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. So can we ask the Holy Spirit to give us more faith? A verse in 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: see **John 15:26**. 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.

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. 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 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. See **1 John 4:1**.

Tongues just means using another language, given to you by God- a language that you don't understand yourself. 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. 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.

Look at **1 Cor 12 verse 27-28**: this is about gifts leading to ministry. Some ministries may be publicly recognised and people will be given specific jobs and titles. But gifts are given to all for the common good, 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! *More on this from next week's sermon.....*

Witness: questions to discuss

Before discussion, read the Bible passage and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Consider one or two questions below – don't feel you have to use them all but do consider the key question! Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer and ministry.

1. **Ice-breaker:** what was the most exciting gift you have ever been given?
2. Look at other lists of spiritual gifts in the NT: 1 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?
3. 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?
4. 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.
5. 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?

Key question: *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?*

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