

1st Corinthians 12:12-31

“Now, About Spiritual Gifts...Part 3”

Introduction

For those of you who were not here last week and especially for our guests, let me explain that this is our third week of a ten week spiritual growth campaign that bears the name, **“Spiritual Growth through Spiritual Gifts.”**

There are several components to this campaign.

The first is the 26 plus small groups that are meeting all over the city in homes and working their way through a small group curriculum called “Spiritual Growth through Spiritual Gifts.” Gina & Chris Oglesbee led the effort to get these small groups organized and they are being faithfully and competently lead by 26 members of FCC. Let’s give the Lord a praise offering for all these leaders.

Mark deserves special mention here.

There is another piece of the campaign that I want to lift up this morning which I haven't mentioned before. Each day you are receiving by email a devotional written by one of our members. Let's give the Lord a praise offering for Sam & Becki Medley and their committee that have written these devotionals.

Dan & Debbie Smith have worked tirelessly to see that the publicity for this campaign got out in a timely fashion. Let's give the Lord a praise offering for them also.

The last component of this campaign is the series of ten sermons that I am preaching of which this is the third. With regards to that several of you have asked how this sermon series fits into what you are doing in small groups. The truth is that the sermons are running in sort of a parallel track to the small group lessons. By means of these teaching sermons I am trying to introduce this subject of spiritual gifts. We're not going to be able to go very deep into this subject. We are just going to hit the high points. If you figure each teaching time is about 20 minutes and we talk

about the subject for 10 weeks that adds up to only 200 minutes of teaching which is only 3 hours and 20 minutes which is not much time.

The small group lessons are really designed to help you discover what your spiritual gifts are. By means of a series of exercises coupled with a spiritual gifts inventory, you are going to gain insight into what your spiritual gifts are and perhaps even begin to gain some new insights into how and where God wants you to use your spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ, the Church.

The theme verse for this campaign is 1st Corinthians 12:1 where Paul writes “*Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.*” Paul’s concern is for the Corinthian Church, and by way of extension First Christian Church of Nacogdoches, to understand spiritual gifts. A couple of weeks ago, I introduced a definition of spiritual gifts. Here it is:

Spiritual gifts are unique abilities or endowments given by the Holy Spirit to each Christian in community for God’s plan and purposes.

Before I began this morning I want to go down one side road. It seems to me that one of the most common mistakes that Christians make with regards to spiritual gifts lies in the relationship between what might be described as ‘natural abilities or talents’ and ‘spiritual gifts.’ Each of you was gifted at your physical birth with certain abilities or talents. You were gifted with the ability to sing or the ability to draw, or the ability to run fast or hit a ball. That is a ‘natural ability.’ At the new birth, when you were born from above, when you surrendered control of your life and put your trust in God to lead and control that life, you were gifted with certain ‘spiritual gifts or abilities’ that may or may not be connected to your natural abilities.

For example, at his birth the apostle Paul was given the natural ability of public speaking. He had that ability from the moment that he was born. At his second birth, he was given the spiritual gift of ‘proclamation.’ That is a case in which Paul’s natural ability complemented his spiritual gift. He used his natural ability of public speaking in the exercise of his spiritual gift of ‘proclamation.’

But at his second birth, the apostle Paul was also given the spiritual gift of ‘tongues.’ According to our study guide this gift is the ability to communicate verbally with God without using intelligible words. This spiritual gift had no connection whatsoever to any of Paul’s natural abilities or talents. It was a gift of the Holy Spirit pure and simple.

And in particular, not a few of you have expressed genuine fear and anxiety over some of the spiritual gifts that the Bible talks about. What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. Psalms 56:3 says, “Don’t be afraid, just trust that God will use this study to help us understand.”

Last Sunday we spent some time in 1 Corinthians 12:11-30. This morning we are going to spend some more time in those same verses so that can see some of the dangers associated with continued ignorance on the subject of spiritual gifts. We are going to add to our understanding of spiritual gifts this morning by means of our study of these verses.

Without further ado, let’s dig in. Here’s the first danger associated with continued ignorance of spiritual gifts.

1. When spiritual gifts and their proper use are ignored, it can open a doorway for the enemy.

This is so important for us to understand.

Criminals and thieves are always testing doors and windows to see if they are locked. If they find one that is unlocked and unattended, they will enter and take or destroy what does not belong to them.

Peter reminds us in 1st Peter 5:8 to “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

A failure to understand spiritual gifts can be as dangerous for a congregation as leaving a door unlocked can be to a home or business owner. A congregation that doesn't understand spiritual gifts can be just as vulnerable to its enemy.

Apparently the Corinthian congregation was experiencing that vulnerability first-hand. Paul had established the congregation in 48 A.D. He had spent 18 months in Corinth teaching and preaching and fighting against his enemies and

then he had left. Not long after he had left, severe moral and spiritual problems developed in the congregation. It is these moral and spiritual problems that he addresses in the Corinthian correspondence. There was open immorality in the church, fornication and incest. There were abuses of the Lord's Supper. There was worldliness. There was rebellion against duly established congregational and apostolic authority. There were law suits going on between members of the congregation. And not surprisingly there were divisions, parties, factions in the church that were literally at war with one another. When Paul writes the words of verse 15 he is not just making an idle illustration. He is describing what was actually happening in the congregation.

“If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.” Verse 15

One member was saying to another member, “Because I don't have the spiritual gifts that you have I am not really part of the Body of Christ.

By their ignorance they had opened a doorway for the enemy and he was taking full advantage of that doorway to kill their passion for serving Christ, to steal the peace and joy they should have experienced by being part of God's family and to destroy the unity that should have existed in the congregation

I listed three practical doorways that are created for the enemy whenever spiritual gifts are ignored. As I go through them on your outline maybe you'll recognize some of them in your own personal life.

a) Frustration will be created as people try to serve in ministries for which they are not gifted.

b) There will be unused potential because a great many people who don't know what their spiritual gifts are won't be serving.

c) There will be uneven quality as some ministries prosper while other flounder and because they lack properly gifted leaders.

Paul touches on this danger in verse 21.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’” Verse 21

He comes to it again in verses 24-25:

“But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body...” Verses 24-25

He hits it head on in 1 Cor. 1:10

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” 1 Corinthians 1:10

While ignoring spiritual giftedness can open a doorway for the enemy that he will exploit to do all of the damage that he can, the opposite is also true.

2. When the spiritual giftedness is understood and utilized the Church will be built-up.

What was happening in the Corinthian Church was that their lack of understanding and the resulting improper exercise of spiritual gifts was destroying the congregation. Paul tries to help them and us to see that when properly understood and exercised the spiritual gifts would build up the church.

He draw a line underneath this in verse 7 of chapter twelve where he writes.

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

He hits this nail squarely on the head in Ephesians 4:11-12 where he writes:

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and

teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up...” Ephesians 4:11-12

The Greek word translated as ‘built up’ is ‘oikoidomeo’ which is a contraction of two Greek words, ‘oikos’ meaning house and ‘domeo’ meaning to build.

Paul is saying that He (God) gave some the spiritual gift of apostleship, some the gift of prophecy, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and some to be teachers to prepare God’s people to do what God has gifted them to do so that the House of God, the Body of Christ may be built up.

Soren Kieckegard tells the story of a man of God was having a conversation with the Lord. He said to God, “I’d like to know what heaven and hell are like. God showed him two doors. He opened one of the doors and the man looked in. In the middle of the room was a large round table with a pot stew which smelled delicious and made the man’s mouth water. The people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They were obviously starving to death and they were

miserable. The odd thing about the scene was that spoons were tied to their arms but the spoons were so long they couldn't reach into the pot of stew and take a mouthful because the handles of the spoons were longer than their arms. The man shuddered at the sight their misery and agony. The Lord said, 'You have seen hell.

Then God opened the second door. It was exactly like the first room. There was the large round table with the large pot of stew that made the man's mouth water at its smell. The people in the room were equipped with the same long-handled spoons but in this room the people were well nourished, laughing and talking.

The man of God said, "I don't understand." "It is simple," said the Lord. It requires but one skill, those in the first room greedily only think of themselves while those in the second room have learned to feed each other.

And while ignoring spiritual giftedness can open a doorway for the enemy and when spiritual giftedness is understood and utilized the church is built up, the greatest truth here is that

3. The spiritual giftedness of the individual members is to be under the control of the head of the Church.

In the verses at which we are looking Paul makes use of an analogy of our own physical bodies to help us understand spiritual gifts and how they are to be used. He says there are many parts but they all form one body. So too there are many spiritual gifts but all of those spiritual gifts are intended to form the One Body of Christ. Using that same analogy, our bodies are controlled by our mind or head. If I tell my hand to move, it moves just as my mind has told it to. If I tell my feet to move me over to here, they move me just as my mind has told them to.

This is absolutely foundational to a proper understanding of spiritual gifts. Our theme verse is 12:1

“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do now want you to be ignorant.” Verse 1

The Greek words translated as “spiritual gifts” in this verse are *‘ton pneumatikon.’* These words literally mean “things characterized or controlled by the Spirit. Spiritual gifts are

abilities/endowments given by the Holy Spirit to each one of us but they are not given to be used for our purposes in the way in which we want to use them. They remain the property of and in the control of the Holy Spirit which is very simply, Christ living in us.

How many of you remember the movie, “Dr. Strangelove?” Peter Sellers played the title role of Dr. Strangelove. He was a mad scientist confined to a wheelchair by a terribly debilitating illness. The individual parts of his body were at war with him. In one of the most hilarious scenes of the movie, one of his hands attempts to strangle him. It grabs him by the throat and begins to choke the life out of him. The other hands attempts to come to his rescue by pulling the first hand off of his throat. These two hands are locked in mortal combat, one struggling to kill him and one struggling to save him.

When we refuse to surrender the control of the spiritual gifts that God has given to us to the Spirit or Christ living in us, then we are engaged in the same kind of mortal combat.

Conclusion

Let us make it our goal to understand what spiritual gifts God has given to us.

And then let us surrender the control of those spiritual gifts into the nail scarred hands of Jesus

So that the body of Christ may be built up in every way unto Christ.