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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

#32

**ONE LORD, MANY GIFTS
 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-30**

INTRODUCTION

In this section of 1 Corinthians [1 Corinthians 11-14], Paul is informing the Corinthian church regarding spiritual gifts. In chapter 12:1-3, Paul reminds the Corinthians that genuine spirituality is not defined by possessing any one particular spiritual gift. It seems that some of the Corinthians believed that speaking in tongues marked the truly spiritual person (We will see this more clearly in chapter 14). But not all the Corinthians were gifted with speaking in tongues, therefore a controversy arose. Which group was the most spiritual? Which group truly possessed the Holy Spirit? Paul answers that very question with this statement, *no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit (v3)*. In other words, the evidence that God's Spirit is present is the confession that Jesus is Lord, not the presence of any one gift. Obviously, Paul is teaching the Corinthians that unity is found in this most central confession of the Church, *Jesus is Lord*. Genuine spirituality begins with the life-consuming confession, *Jesus is Lord*.

Now Paul returns to his instructions concerning spiritual gifts. In the rest of chapter 12, Paul's emphasis moves from the unity we have as those who have the Holy Spirit and confess that Jesus is Lord to the diversity of gifts present among those who have the Holy Spirit and confess that Jesus is Lord.

D. A. Carson summarizes the transition from verse 3 to verses 4-30 like this, *I want you to know that all who truly confess Jesus as Lord do so by the Holy Spirit, and thus attest to his presence in their lives; but that does not mean there are no distinctions to be made among them*.

1. GOD GIVES DIVERSE GIFTS TO HIS CHURCH (12:4-11)

In verses 4-6, Paul informs the Corinthians that God is the source of all spiritual gifts. Here is a clear reference to the Triune God's involvement in His Church. In these verses, we find reference to God the Father (v6), Jesus the Lord (v5) and God the Holy Spirit (v4). The Trinity teaches us how to live in community with one another. God does not live in isolation; He dwells in perfect harmony with Himself and He gifts His Church so that we can live and function as the believing community. These same verses emphasize God's plan to gift His people diversely. Just as the Father, Son and Spirit function differently within the Godhead, so we function differently in His Church. We possess a variety of gifts and those gifts produce a variety of results within the Church.

In verse 7, Paul informs the Corinthians of the purpose of their gifts. God gives gifts *for the common good*. When we use our gifts and the Spirit manifests Himself through our works, the result must be *the common good*. We also notice that *each one* is gifted. Every believer is gifted to benefit the larger body of Christ. The Spirit manifests Himself through every believer.

So far, Paul's teaching should have produced humility and unity within the Corinthian church. Humility should have resulted when they learned that God is the only source of spiritual gifts. Whatever they had been given was a gift. They had no reason to boast. Paul also taught the Corinthians that their gifts should be used to promote *the common good*. Oddly enough, the very practice of spiritual gifts had somewhat divided the Corinthian congregation.

In verses 8-10, Paul offers a sampling of these spiritual gifts. This list is not meant to be exhaustive for there are other lists in the New Testament which contain additional gifts. This list is a sampling and the Corinthians would have been familiar with these gifts. Below is a brief description of the gifts listed in verses 8-10.

Word of wisdom- ability to instruct others in practical obedience [8:10-11]

Word of knowledge- similar to a word of wisdom, but with a more doctrinal emphasis [2:6]

Faith- Not saving faith; the persevering ability to believe God for certain things [Matt. 17:19-21]

Gifts of healing- different abilities to heal some diseases or illnesses [notice the plural *gifts*]

Effecting of miracles- miraculous powers to perform what is humanly impossible [plural *miracles*]

Prophecy- spontaneously speaking the revealed will of God as one understands it in a given matter [Acts 11:28] [Acts 21:4 shows why such prophecies need to be weighed by the church due to possible misunderstanding or misapplication]

Distinguishing of spirits- discerning the source of spiritual works and words; from the Holy Spirit or from an evil spirit [Matthew 7:21-23]

Various kinds of tongues- a believer speaks forth a language he has never learned and which he does not understand (Larry Christensen's definition)

Interpretation of tongues- the ability to understand and interpret what the one who spoke in tongues said

In verse 11, Paul again reminds the Corinthians that the Holy Spirit is the source of all gifts and that He sovereignly bestows His gifts upon the members of the Church. They are gifts; not earned rewards. We have gifts because God has given them to us and we should receive them as gifts. Such gifts should be desired [12:31; 14:1] but if you receive a gift, remember that it is a gift and not a wage.

2. GOD GIFTS HIS CHURCH IN THIS WAY TO PROMOTE INTERDEPENDENCE (12:12-30)

We have seen how God gifts His Church, but why does He operate this way? Verses 12-30 teach us that God works to promote interdependence rather than independence within the Church. In verse 12, Paul explains why God gives various gifts which produce various results because we are one body, the body of Christ. Like our physical bodies, the body of Christ requires many parts that accomplish various functions. All parts are unique and important. It is the presence of the Spirit within us that makes us a part of Christ's body. When the Spirit enables our faith, He immerses us into the body of Christ. Therefore, we are now not foremost *Jews or Greeks, slaves or free*, but we are foremost Christians (v13).

In the remaining verses of this chapter, Paul will address the two disputing groups that made up the Corinthian congregation, those who embraced these miraculous gifts and those who were skeptical of them.

In verses 14-19, he addresses those who did not possess some of the more obvious gifts such as speaking in tongues. The clear intent of these verses is to communicate that each part of the body is necessary for its proper functioning. In fact, each of us is placed in a particular role within the body in accord with God's sovereign will (v18). God's plan of diverse gifting is essential and it should be celebrated. No one should discourage a fellow Christian for the lack of any particular gift. The gifts are God's to give as He pleases. The wise man knows that he needs all the parts of his body, even those that are not often celebrated.

In verses 20-26, Paul speaks to those who had the more obvious gifts, particularly those who spoke in tongues as we will see in chapter 14. The main point of Paul's instruction here is that they cannot say to the other group *I have no need of you*. Verse 24 again reminds us that *God has so composed the body*. It is His body and He organizes its parts as He will. All of this results in a body that is united and its members care for one another (v25). These members are so joined together that they suffer when another member hurts and they rejoice when another member is honored (v26).

CONCLUSION

Paul concludes this section in verses 27-30. Here the Apostle directly applies this extended metaphor to the Corinthians and to us. *Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it*. He again emphasizes the diversity of His body by pointing out its various offices and gifts in verses 28-30.

So what can we take from this?

(1) The Holy Spirit is the decisive factor in determining whether one is in the body of Christ or not. He must work decisively to overcome our spiritual blindness and unbelief. In doing so, He indwells us and immerses us into the body of Christ. There is no Christian without the Spirit. Romans 8:9, *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him*.

(2) Christians experience the Spirit's blessings and gifts in different ways at different times. None of our experiences are precisely the same. Every believer has received the Spirit, but since conversion, our experiences vary widely. We must accept this without unnecessary squabbling and we must continue to seek fresh movements of the Spirit as the Scriptures teach us.

(3) Our minds must be consumed with *the common good*. We are individuals called into community. We must now think of others. That's one intended effect of church membership and signing a church covenant; becoming more intentional about working for *the common good*. That certainly involves using our gifts for *the common good*.

(4) There are no Biblical grounds for requiring any Christian to possess any certain spiritual gift. You cannot require someone to speak in tongues as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life. God distributes the gifts as He sees fit. The sign of the Spirit's presence is the confession that *Jesus is Lord*.