

GIFTED AND GROWING**1 Corinthians 12:1-31a****(Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-31a)**

INTRO: I had lunch the other day with a friend who is interim pastor of a church where nothing is written down but everyone knows who does what, when, and how. Everyone knows except him, because it's not written down. He finds out who does what, when, and how, by trial and error. From what he can tell, it would seem they perform their role in the church, not so much out of calling, but more from rote and duty – a “this is the way it's always been done, so that it how I do it too” way of thinking. His concern is, as the little church dwindles in numbers as its members age, how will those roles be passed on. It would be maddening for a lot of pastors, but my friend is able to handle it. And besides, they're very nice people, and that makes it easier.

I can look back over my life, from the church I grew up in, to the ones I have ministered in over the past 40+ years and I can point out saints who invested in those churches with their heart and soul out of devotion to Jesus. I can think of my first pastor, Jacob Bowers, who was my dad's senior pastor, and also an encourager who exuded the love of Jesus. I recall the first Sunday School teacher I can remember, my own grandmother, Katie Tyson, who is remembered in biographies as “a friend of children”. I can remember John and Crete Esh who led the youth group at Centerville BIC with love and patience. I can think of Dr. Glen Hoffman who was a medical doctor and also the choir director and chorister at Palmyra BIC who led us with a quiet dignity. Others stand out too, but I don't have time to expand on all of them, because there are so many that impacted me, and Kathy, and our kids, and you.

Yes – you can make a list too of the saints who have impacted your life. They utilized their gifts selflessly, and almost, seemingly without thought – the gifts God gave them were so much a part of who they were, it was almost automatic for them. It has been said that nothing works like the local church when the local church is working right, and this is because God's people are unleashing the power of the Gifts of the Spirit they have. A church like that, indeed a church like ABC, is a church that is gifted and growing.

We know by now, after six months of studying 1 Corinthians that the church in Corinth was a hot mess. They were struggling with falling back into the old worship patterns because they were flirting with the pagan religions they had left to follow Jesus. They were also dabbling in pagan sexual practices – once again flirting with disaster. All the way back at the beginning of the letter Paul was addressing the comparison game they played by picking and choosing who was the best teacher among Paul and his preacher colleagues. And in the chapter we just completed Paul had to harshly take them to task for the mockery they had made of the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. It was selfishness upon selfishness and he needed to have a talk with them about the need for the unity that comes from each Christ Follower utilizing their gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit of God.

Now, while I am very grateful we do not have the same struggles as the church in Corinth, we can always do with some brushing up on the gifts of the Spirit. So here goes. . .

We need to know about the gifts of the Spirit

- There is an adage that we hear all the time – if you want it done right, you have to do it yourself. There were people in Corinth, and it is still a huge issue today who thought they alone were capable of doing God's work and wanted to do everything. The problem with doing everything yourself is that sooner or later nothing gets done right. It's not a matter of if it will happen, it's a matter of when it happens. A church that has a few doing a lot will fall into exhaustion and will fail. The way to be growing is to know our gifting and utilize it.
- Paul makes an interesting observation in verse 3 when he says *Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.* 1 Corinthians 12:3. It's an interesting truth. The same mouth, directed by the same heart cannot make such conflicting statements. So if you are ever worried about a person's condition before Christ, listen to what they say about Jesus. From their allow God to be the judge.
- But something else that comes out of that statement is that we are on this mission together as parts of the Body of Christ. We each have gifts we are to use for the kingdom and *the same Spirit distributes them* (v. 4).

- Paul gives a list of gifts with brief descriptions and while I'm not going to examine them one by one, I will say this about them, THE LIST IS NOT EXHUSTIVE! We have a limitless God and so there is no limit to the gifts he gives to his church for doing his bidding. So, we can do a study of the gifts as we have in the past and will surely do again, but not today. That is not the focus of Paul's message or mine. The point is we need to be the functioning and efficient parts of the Body of Christ.
- Yes . . .

One body, many parts

- And not only that, all the different parts of our body need one another. Yes, we ALL need each other. Kenneth Foreman says this, about the concept of the body of Christ. "Many thoughts arise from this one figure of speech, one of the most fruitful and suggestive in the New Testament. The main thought in this chapter, obviously, is that in the church, as in a living body, there is unity and variety. Note how Paul keeps his points aimed at Corinth, that split-apart church, he's not writing an essay for theologians; he is the practical pastor, saying what needs to be said to a particular congregation. And so far as we have the same diseases, we need his diagnosis and our help by his prescription." Yes we do. Frederic Godet says this, "A body needs many components to carry out its varied functions. God in his wisdom provides them all and fits and places them for their own tasks. The emphasis is on God's plan, choice, and appointment. If all organs were alike, the result would be a creature with only one sense organ, such as is found in the lowest forms of life."
- It is God's choice and appointment and we should bask in the careful assignment he's given us. And that's why the gifts and the use of them should never be a cause for strife or jealousy. Don't wish you had someone else's gift. The church is no place for competition. I wish I could play music like Ron or make furniture like Bob Beaty, or sing like Lydia, or make lasagna like Betty Stine, or pray like Lori, or on an on. But those are the particular gifts given to someone else. I have my own that I do well.
- Here's is a major point Paul is making here: No gift is more important! In fact, our gifting reveals our interdependence. Using the perfect illustration he uses the human body to show that there is no need for one member or organ of a body to brag of its importance. Each part of the body is useful to all the rest but in turn needs the rest. We NEED each other, and the Kingdom needs us. All of us. In Ephesians and Colossians Paul reminds us that Christ is the head of the church; the church needs him and he needs the church insofar as we are carrying out his mission. But here the emphasis is on our need of each other. Though we all receive our true self from Christ, not one of us can live as a Christ Follower—a living, serving Christ Follower—without joining with and working with other Christ Followers. There is no such thing as a church of one member.
- So each one is given gifts for the common good so they are never to be used for personal ambition or selfish gain. Never. They are for the Kingdom.

Conclusion: I'm wrapping up already. Paul summarizes his teaching in verse 27 with *Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it*. Each one is a part! He has not written anyone off, even with all the strong teaching he has used in this letter. Then he concludes with the fact that God has established the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ and we should not fall prey to the temptation to have the gifts of others or to think our gifting is better than others'. This is counterproductive and indeed destructive. In the final verse of our text he tells us to desire the greatest gift which EVERY Christ Follower must have. We will cover that next week. For now let's know our gifting, use those gifts so this portion of God's Called Out Ones will be gifted and growing. Amen.