



Indispensable?

1 Cor 12:1-11 & 25-30

200 YEARS VIDEO

Comment on how we confuse church with a building. It's people and it's why we celebrated our Bicentenary 4 years ago and not today.

Series over past few months – been about the fact that God places his people in fellowship with one another as church – EKKLESIA – and we find God's people are called together locally as part of church.

UNITY

We saw how God has called us together in unity. If you are a Christian this morning and God has called you to be part of this church, whether you are a member or not, then you are part of this body; here to serve the purposes of God in building one another up and speaking the Good News of Jesus into this community. Church is people, not a building.

DIVERSITY

A little while back when we delved into this chapter in 1 Corinthians we found that even though we are part of one body, we are diverse – different from one another – and it's like that by design. We saw how diversity in the church is its strength - as a result we are called to love and respect one another as people all called to be part of one body. But unity-diversity? How does it add up? How can you have both together? Let me summarise it in a few verses from Romans 12:

Romans 12:4 -6 We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body.

So God has made us unified through being diverse – part of one body – and that's what makes church work. But there's more to it than that. It is God who creates the diversity so as to make the body function most effectively in union with Christ and He does it through the Holy Spirit making the differences.

WE ARE EACH EQUIPPED BY THE SPIRIT TO DO GOD'S WORK

In the world, we are diverse for a lot of reasons – race, gender, social class, education, age and all the rest of it. We use them to divide ourselves from others for whatever reason. Sometimes the reason is noble and sensible such as separating children and adults when it comes to teaching on a Sunday. Some reasons are less than noble such as discrimination on the basis of race.

VRESE Let's look at that Romans verse again and add one more verse to it.

Romans 12:4 -6 We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us.

So we are to use our gifts according to the grace God has given us. Let me put that in terms of the verses from 1 Corinthians we read earlier.

1 Cor 12:4 There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. 5 There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. 6 There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. 7 The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. 8 The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom etc.

Let me focus on one of those verses

7 The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.

I've spoken on the fact that each person who trusts and follow Jesus has the Holy Spirit of God living in them. He;'s present in each of our lives. His presence is something we should all sense. It's through the Spirit we understand the things of God. It's through Him we grow and flourish as God's people. It's through Him we are equipped to live in a way that honours God. It's through the Spirit that we were baptised – immersed – into the body of Christ. Made part of it. There is no such thing as a Christian who isn't part of the church of God. And there's no Christian that shouldn't be part of a local expression of that body. If you find someone who's not part of a local church, then they are moving outside of what God wants for them. The *Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.*

In other words, the Spirit equips us in one way or another for the good of all. How. By giving us gifts that we may serve one another. Gifts are given by the Spirit. We all have them. The emphasis Paul gives is that EACH person has gifts. And if we look at the gifts we find that they are a mixture of spectacular and mundane: *The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. 9 One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person he gives the power to heal. 10 The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he*

gives the ability to speak in strange tongues, and to another he gives the ability to explain what is said.

27 All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it. 28 In the church God has put all in place: in the first place apostles, in the second place prophets, and in the third place teachers; then those who perform miracles, followed by those who are given the power to heal or to help others or to direct them or to speak in strange tongues. 29 They are not all apostles or prophets or teachers. Not everyone has the power to work miracles 30 or to heal diseases or to speak in strange tongues or to explain what is said. 31 Set your hearts, then, on the more important gifts.

There are a few passages in the NT that outline gifts of the Spirit. I'm not going to go into them today. Other than the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each of us. As with all gifts, we have to first understand what we're being offered, and then accept it. Many believers think they don't or can't have such gifts. We have a generous God who wants to give.

As an aside, if you read books or listen to sermons on gifts, they often speak in terms of your gift – singular. In practice that doesn't usually happen – God's more generous than that – He gives gifts – plural. Don't look for one – there may be a few!

Look down to the last verse we read and we'll find that we should ask. Love is a guaranteed one to ask for. But we have a God who is generous. No-one of us is devoid of gifts. But do we know what they are? Have we accepted them? Are we using them?

If we're not then we're losing out on all the potential and all the blessings that the Holy Spirit wants to bring to us and through us. And worse, the body of Christ loses out because the *Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.*

WE EACH HAVE AN ESSENTIAL ROLE TO PLAY

Each person who's part of this church has an essential role to play. The Spirit is offering you the equipment for it. So if you're not exercising your gifts then why not? Do you know what they are? If you do then seek what the Spirit wants you to do with them. And avoid excuses:

- I'm not a member. If you belong here – if God has called you here - then maybe you should be. If not, then what are you doing here as you must be called somewhere because you'll never be called nowhere.
- I'm retired. There's no such thing as retirement in God's Kingdom, but there is such a thing as changing calls and changing ministries according to the grace God has given you.
- I'm sick, weak, have issues – let the Spirit deal with them and besides, even if you're bedridden, you can still serve the common good – you can pray.

Our gifts however small they may seem to us, when put into action build up the fellowship. Our gifts, whenever they are ignored diminish the fellowship. You are essential whether

you feel it or not. Allow the Spirit to use you to serve the common good.

GOD HONOURS US ACCORDING TO THE GRACE, NOT THE GIFT

I've got to say when you look at some of the gifts in 1 Corinthians and elsewhere that they are quite supernaturally spectacular – miracles, words of knowledge, healing, prophecy, tongues. They are gifts that the various generations can sometime struggle with. I sometimes find that many believers feel inadequate that they don't see much evidence of these gifts in their lives or their church. They think that the people who have these gifts are somehow more spiritual than they are and as a result are more blessed because they have these spectacular gifts. Rubbish! A gift is just that a gift. The Holy Spirit gives gifts according to grace not merit. Let me give you Romans 12:6 again *So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us.* God has given us gifts. Whether that is one of leadership, or helping people, or performing miracles, it's according to grace – His unmerited favour – and God honours us for how we accept and use the gifts He's given us.

The problem at Corinth was the other way around and I've come across that too. There were people who spoke in tongues and thought they were superior to those that just did all their speaking in Greek. They lorded themselves over others because of having this gift. Paul had to drop them down a peg and pointed out that their misuse of the gift was causing problems in the church and driving unbelievers away.

Yes, it is possible to misuse the gifts God has given and when we do so, we again diminish the work of God. I'd like you to take a look at this. It's a hedge clipper. It's very useful to clip hedges with. It's blades are very sharp. But you must know how to use it. Why because if you use it badly, you can damage the hedge, damage the clippers, cut the cable of injure yourself and someone else.

The Spirit gives us gifts, He equips us with tools. How we use them seems to be up to us to a greater or lesser extent. If we use them in the Spirit, then we build up the church, but if we use them in the flesh – ouch! The church will be damaged. Church history from Corinth or now is littered with the failure of gifted people who used God's gifts, brought blessing to many, yet through their own actions destroyed themselves because they took their eyes off God and the gifts destroyed them. Ministers who fell, people who hung on when they should have stood aside, churches broken into factions, marriages destroyed, families torn apart, friendships ended.

INDISPENSABLE?

I've used this word a few times this morning. I actually drew back on using it more, preferring the word essential. Why? In one sense each of us are absolutely essential to the work of God here. I can't stress that enough. Never underestimate yourself – or overestimate yourself for that matter. But God has a purpose for this church and we shall be exploring it in a month's time when Tim Lovejoy, comes to talk about our mission and

outreach as a church. Everyone is essential. In that sense we are indispensable because if we aren't fulfilling our role and using our gifts, or even misusing our gifts, then this fellowship is diminished.

On the other hand, no-one is indispensable as far as God. If we don't fulfil His plans, then there is always someone else He will raise up. But we've lost out and the church has lost out in the meantime.

Look down the 200 year history of this church and you'll find a history of great things achieved, but also things that could have been. But God is merciful and we're still here. Let's be challenged this morning as we reflect on our own role, our own gifts and look forward to how God may use each of us to build up His church here and extend His kingdom in this part of Felixstowe.

Preached by Mark Reid

MRBC Felixstowe 30/9/12

(c) Mark Reid 2012 some rights reserved cc-by-nc-sa

12:1 Now, concerning what you wrote about the gifts from the Holy Spirit. I want you to know the truth about them, my friends. 2 You know that while you were still heathen, you were led astray in many ways to the worship of lifeless idols. 3 I want you to know that no one who is led by God's Spirit can say "A curse on Jesus!" and no one can confess "Jesus is Lord," without being guided by the Holy Spirit. 4 There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. 5 There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. 6 There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. 7 The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. 8 The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. 9 One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person he gives the power to heal. 10 The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he gives the ability to speak in strange tongues, and to another he gives the ability to explain what is said. 11 But it is one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person.

27 All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it. 28 In the church God has put all in place: in the first place apostles, in the second place prophets, and in the third place teachers; then those who perform miracles, followed by those who are given the power to heal or to help others or to direct them or to speak in strange tongues. 29 They are not all apostles or prophets or teachers. Not everyone has the power to work miracles 30 or to heal diseases or to speak in strange tongues or to explain what is said. 31 Set your hearts, then, on the more important gifts.