



6. A Passion for Gifts 2 (Rom 12:3-8, 1 Cor 12:1-13, 27-31; Eph 4:7,11-13)

Props: Computer, computer software, printer. For quite a few years now computers have started to become part of our homes as well as our offices. I run some message boards for AOL on the technical side and each Christmas we get a huge rise in activity as people get given one of these and don't quite know what to do with it. It's one thing to have a gift, but it gets more complicated when we want to use it.

Last week we started looking at *A Passion for Gifts*. We explored that we have a God who is a gracious God. He shows His unmerited favour to us – that's grace – *charis* - and He gives gifts to us - *charismata*. Gifts are an outpouring of God's grace. And we saw the kinds of gifts that God has given us – eternal life, His presence and most of all His Son. Then we explored how God has equipped us to serve Him and one another in the context He has put us – as part of His body, the Church.

We are all part of one body and God has richly equipped each one of us to function as part of the body of Christ. Last week we saw that if we are Christians, we have all been made members of His body – not members of a club, but limbs and body parts, without which the church of God cannot move properly.

We must understand, this is the scriptural view of the local church – a body – and it works best when the constituent parts operate in the gifts God has given them. If you don't do God's will and play your part, then the church doesn't function. It's quite unlike many ideas of church we may have come across in the past where the Minister and a few faithful cronies did everything and the congregation were consumers. But that isn't scriptural and not a healthy way to be church.

The picture of church in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 is a body where we are all participants in the body, building one another up, supporting one another and reproducing. **YOU MATTER** because God has equipped you to be a means of growth to this fellowship and to one another.

And that's the exciting thing about gifts – God gives each one of us gifts – without exception. They are of His grace, so it doesn't matter who we are and what we have done. He equips us now for His service. We have to identify and use them – and it is as simple as that.

I first thought I was going to continue on this theme in a rather complicated fashion rather as I would teach a Bible study. But instead I want to open our eyes and hearts to the possibilities that operating in the gifts God is freely given us actually presents.

You may be saying to yourself – “me, gifted?” No. Actually, there is a saying even in secular education *everyone is good at something*” But actually God has gifted everyone with something. And look again how the gifts are all mixed up in their lists - practical with “spiritual” Here's just a straight set of lists of gifts given in Paul's letters. As we can see, gifts are Trinitarian. Each Person of the trinity gives gifts but as you might expect, it all overlaps as we have one God with a unity of purpose.

Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament

Rom.12.6-8

(Gifts of the Father)

Prophecy

Serving

Teaching

Encouraging

Contributing to needs of others

Leadership

Showing mercy

Eph.4.11

(Gifts of the Son)

Apostles

Prophets

Evangelists

Pastors

Teachers

I Corinthians

(Gifts of the Spirit)

1 Cor 12.8-10

Message of wisdom

Message of knowledge

Faith

Gifts of healing

Miraculous powers

Discerning of spirits

Kinds of tongues

Interpretation of tongues

1 Cor 12.28-30

Apostles

Prophets

Teachers

Working of Miracles

Gifts of healing

Prophecy

Helping others

Administration

Kinds of tongues

Interpretation

Descriptions as of NIV

Look carefully, because it's an eclectic mix. Within here we see gifts of leadership – God has equipped people. You see the miraculous. You see the unusual. But in them all there is also the rather mundane. Some are very specific. In Ephesians 4 Christ gives us people who are gifted: *And it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors and teachers, to perfect the saints, to do the work of ministry, and to build up the body of Christ*

Apostles, prophets and teachers are people with roles, but on the other hand many on the lists are abilities people acquire by the Spirit, and then when we come to gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor 12, we see that we have a list of things that can be very flexible, very wide and may almost be one-offs or given as needed and seem to be the sort that can be given to any Christian.

Why such a big mixture of such different kinds of gift? Let's go back to the computer. Having a computer is one thing. You need the know-how to make it work. You need the right bits and pieces to make it serve your purposes. To print out a sheet of paper, I needed a whole load of things to do the job. It involves big things like the computer and little things like the printer ribbon or data cable. Little things you don't see but can't do without.

As God's people all the where-with-all for God to work in Swaffham and bring lost people to Jesus and to see them grow is spread between a whole load of different people. It isn't vested in one person. It's divided. And we have to work together in the gifts God has given us to get the answers and function. Different tasks take different combinations. We may think we are insignificant, but by His grace, God has made us an important part of His church. One way this is put in some places is that we are all supposed to be *Ministers*. Now isn't the Minister the leader. Well, a minister ministers to people. If you use your gifts, then because the vast majority of gifts are aimed at serving others, then you minister to them. Every member of the body ministers. If you are not a minister, then you are a member (a limb) that isn't functioning and the church, the body, loses as a result. We are all different but it's in our diversity comes unity and strength.

Working and functioning together is a basic principle of life, spiritual or otherwise. I was watching the film *Finding Nemo* yesterday. Marlon had found his son Nemo and they were swimming home with some cod when they are trawled. They were doomed? Not to Nemo! He got all the cod to swim downwards together. One fish couldn't do much by himself, but the whole shoal broke the trawl net by working together and they escaped.

So as we look at the diversity of gifts this morning, what may we conclude about them:

● The gifts are as diverse as the purposes of God

Now what you can see here are three different sets of passages and four lists on the gifts God gives His people to build up the church. Why? First of all, Paul was not trying to write a theological book on what gifts are and what we do with them. He was responding to pastoral issues that involved people using, or trying to use what God had given them to serve Him and serve one another. And that is what is at the core of gifts. God does not distribute a portfolio of gifts in the local church – we don't have to have a certain number of each – but gifts are given to equip the church for doing God's will. You see, in human terms, our church rules say that we must have a pastor and we must have deacons. Church societies must have a secretary and treasurer. And all the rest of it.

That's not the working of God. We have a God, Father, Son and Spirit who graciously gives us what we need and when we need it, whether that be the

formality of leadership, the practicality of helping, showing mercy, service or administration, or just speaking words of knowledge or discernment, healing people, or allowing people the ability to speak in tongues. He provides what is needful to serve Him, to serve His people and serve His purposes. All He wants are churches of people who are prepared to let Him do His will be receiving and using the gifts they are being given.

As a church we are trying to move forward and seek God's will. As we look in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 then we see God equips His church to serve and be a body but giving us the diversity to operate. He raises up the people and/or the giftings to allow His purposes to work forward.

This is an important principle in body ministry. If a ministry should go forward, or should continue if those running it leave, then God will provide the people – and if He doesn't, then maybe it should close or never come into being. We have had many ideas over the last two years or so. Some we have embraced, like village work because God gave us people with the call and gifting to do that. On the other hand we would desire to do much more significant youth work than at present, but God has not raised up someone with the appropriate gifts and calling.

● God speaks to His people by His Spirit

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. 2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3 Therefore I tell you 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. 4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom

I find it interesting that most of the issues that people have with gifts today were also issues back with Paul, particularly in Corinth. That's why the letter was written! Why did Paul need to deal with the situation at all? It would seem because there were certain people who considered they God had given them words to speak. It may have been a prophetic message, it may have been an interpreted tongue. What's more, there were plenty of claims around about healings and the like. They may well have used the manifestation of such gifts in their life to lord it over others. They were coming under criticism from others who were claiming that they were over the top and a deterrent to unbelievers.

What of those who were from a background where these were not common – maybe Jews for example who were well versed in the written word of God? Or, what of those whom God had gifted in other ways and were less comfortable with power manifestations. It was giving problems in the church. Kind of familiar isn't it?

Remember, Paul here is dealing with exactly what many of our churches face today – ours included. There were some moving in these kinds of gift and others who weren't. What do we make of them? Where is truth and where is the counterfeit? It's an important issue and we'll explore it a little now and give it some more attention next time.

This is Paul's response *Therefore I tell you 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. 4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same*

Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Firstly look at what is being said and done. Is Jesus being glorified? Is His Lordship being promoted through a word of knowledge, prophecy, miraculous sign or tongue (or for that matter in teaching, serving, administration, giving). Is He authoritative in it all? Is He being glorified in it all? This is because secondly: *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.* God doesn't just do things OUR way but in lots of ways that suit HIM. So as we see people doing different things to us, whether that be operating in certain gifts, or maybe even seeing things and doing in a different way to us, then is it because they are doing it according to the flesh, or to the world, or to the devil – or maybe it's just that they are doing it because God does things as He will and doesn't follow our human conventions even though we dress them up spiritually e.g. The Baptist way, the charismatic way. It's funny how some people make big things about the way God should work, but we can look back in history He's never followed the conventions of what WE think. He chooses who He will. Contrast George Whitefield, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards in the 18th Century. They had hugely different theologies and denominational backgrounds. But The Spirit used each man mightily – and not a tongue in sight!

That said, in every generation there is the prophetic, there are words of knowledge, there is discernment and there are miracles. We can recognise God speaking through His people and He wants us to be aware that He speaks by His Spirit to His people – and therefore we should seek Him! All the gifts in the early part of 1 Cor 12 are given to us to God wants to speak to US. He has given these gifts so that people can be raised up to speak a prophetic word etc. The Spirit manifests miracles where appropriate to His purposes. God wants us to be taken into all these gifts for the common good.

What Paul is saying here is *here are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.* As you sit and listen to what I am saying this morning, you do so from a perspective – maybe it's Baptist or perhaps it is Pentecostal or Brethren, Anglican or just kind of evangelical or charismatic. *Paul is challenging us to* see what God is like and broaden our spiritual horizon. As we see what God is doing in other places or in other people's lives – ask yourself where God is in this. Is Jesus Lord? Is He being glorified? If so praise God and go with it and let God open your mind more to what He's like.

The Giver is more important than the gift

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

And now I will show you the most excellent way. 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Those not moving in the gifts sometimes feel confused or even inadequate when they see other Christians involved in gifts that seem miraculous. All sorts of accusations fly. Like I said earlier, 1 Corinthians 12 is very familiar territory and was written to stop this kind of thing in its tracks. God by his grace and by His sovereign working does according to His way and grace. 11

11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. If you don't move in miraculous gifts – it doesn't mean that you are a spiritual nothing. It gets my goat when I come across some Christians who look down on others because they don't move in certain gifts. What gift you have is given by God's grace – as the Spirit determines – just use it according to the measure of faith God gives you. That's what He asks and that what counts. ***It's no the gift we honour, but the giver*** and the motive with which we use the gift as Paul says in chapter 13. Some of the most godly people I have ever come across have never used a tongue, never presided over a healing and never uttered a word of prophecy – in fact, they weren't even leaders of a church and they've never taught!! Honour the giver – not the gift! If God wants to you speak in tongues, heal the sick, drive out demons or raise the dead; then by His grace He will give you the gift and the power by the Spirit to do it. Otherwise stick with what you've got and honour Him in that. Don't hanker after and be upset by what you don't have. It's true it says desire the greater gifts – and that's not tongues - but gifts are given as the Spirit determines.

There have been effective churches without miraculous manifestations. But there are effective churches with them. There are dire churches without miraculous manifestations – but some of the most troubled and schismatic churches have ever come across have been ones that have supposed to have been moving in the Spirit. We'll explore the reasons why abuse of gifts happen and what the consequences are the week after next.

That said these words are give in order that we may desire the greater gifts – to widen our horizons, not just so we can see and understand what God can do, but we might understand what God is doing and let Him add to the dimensions of our faith by doing so. But let's be faithful in what we know we have first. Why should God trust us with even greater things when we can't be trusted in what we already have?

What do we conclude from this morning. God gives you gifts so that you can serve Him. Are you doing that are are you despising the gift and the call God has for you? . It may be a small service but by not doing it you may be hindering His work. Let's be faithful in what we have been given and move in that – and not compare ourselves to one another.

God wants to take each of us further in our relationship with Him. He wants to widen our horizon. He speaks to us by His Spirit and gives us one another to speak through. He wants us to move and operate in the gifts – more of them, all of them, because they are given build up the church – let's not keep our repertoire narrow.

But in everything we do, whatever gifts we have, however we operate them, the giver is greater than the gift and everything He does is controlled by His motive. He's a loving God who gives gifts graciously. Therefore we reflect His love as we live and move as members of His body.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.