

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 12:7-9 - The Spirit's Gift of Words of Knowledge, Words of Wisdom and Faith

So this morning we're going to look more closely at the spiritual gifts that Paul mentions here in 1 Corinthians. We're going to spend a fair amount of time unpacking each of these gifts because I think it's going to be helpful for us to understand the section.

One of my biggest struggles with the book of 1 Corinthians for many years was simply understanding what this whole section in chapter 12-13 was talking about. There's a lot of pieces to put together and I want to do that in a helpful and methodical way.

But in doing that I think we might miss the forest for the trees. In fact, I'm sure we'll miss the forest for the trees so let me talk about the forest here for a few minutes - the big picture.

The big picture in this whole section - as you might expect from the rest of 1 Corinthians - is that as believers we should be unified in every way. Everyone who truly believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ is part of the same family of God and that unity should be expressed in every way.

The Corinthians were divided over their favorite teachers, they were dividing over the Lord's Supper, they were dividing over spiritual gifts - like most of the evangelicalism we see online today, they were trying to find every possible reason they could to create factions.

And the big picture here is that it is absolutely ridiculous to create factions over spiritual gifts because the Holy Spirit who gives us these gifts does so precisely to create unity in the Church.

Whatever gift we have or others have is designed by God to create unity in the church and build up the church. The analogy he'll use in the next section is that the church is like a giant human body. Jesus is the head that controls the body and we're all these various body parts: hands, feet, ears, eyes, so on. And we work together. We can't say we're unimportant and we can't say others are unimportant.

And I think has huge application for us today, frankly, because many churches divide exactly along the lines of spiritual gifts. We talked last week about the labels we use to define our position on spiritual gifts:

Cessationists believe that the more miraculous gifts have ceased - healings, tongues, prophecy, exorcism, miracles, so on.

Continuists believe that they continue, at least in part, but are not necessarily something we'll experience at every - or any - gathered worship time together.

Charismatics believe that these gifts will be present regularly at worship services.

And Pentecostals not only believe that they will be present, but should be encouraged. And in some segments of Pentecostalism - and I believe this is a bridge too far - they believe that every believer will be able to speak in tongues and prophesy.

But many churches divide over their view on spiritual gifts. I think Paul's point here is precisely the opposite: gifts are not given by God for division but for unity and maturity and service.

What was going on in Corinth was an absolute mess, likely far worse than anything we'll ever work through. And yet Paul doesn't say, "Alright, you tongue speakers, head over to this church building over here. And you prophesy folks head over to this building. And you guys with the lowly gift of teaching and mercy just stay here."

He doesn't do that. He does the opposite. He says we all need each other. Together. In the same fellowship. Respecting each other, and loving each other. And when we gather subjecting ourselves to God given principles that govern how we express the work of the Holy Spirit inside of us. Even genuine manifestations of the Holy Spirit are subject to regulation.

So all that to say: the big picture here is one of unity. And we see unity even within the Trinity. Notice Paul grounds the spiritual gifts in the nature of the Trinity. Notice here we see all three persons of the Trinity working in the church. **Read 4-7**

So there's diversity and unity. Let's talk about diversity first because we see diversity in two ways.

First we see diversity even within the Trinity itself. This is an important distinction in Christianity: we worship exactly one God. We are monotheistic. Mono theism means one God. Yet our God is three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Actually Paul reverses the order in **Vs. 4**. He says we have the same Spirit - talking about the Holy Spirit. We have the same Lord, talking about Jesus. And we have the same God who empowers all of these in everyone.

We do not worship three gods. That would be polytheism: multiple gods.

We worship the Father who is fully God, the Son who is fully God, and the Spirit who is fully God. But they are the one God. The Spirit is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, the Father is not the Spirit.

And there's no illustration that gives any of this justice. The egg analogy - yolk, shell and the white stuff - doesn't do it justice. Water/ice/steam doesn't do it justice. Three overlapping circles doesn't do it justice. We just have to be okay with our limited understanding of the Triune Godhead. Three in one, one in three.

But even within the nature of God there is variety, there are distinctions. The Father did not die for our sins, neither did the Holy Spirit. The Son did.

And it was the Spirit who moved in the prophets to create God's Word, not the Father nor the Son. It's the Father who sent the Son into the world to save his people from his wrath.

Why is all of this important? Because although there is one God, there is variety even within the Godhead. There's eternal diversity within the persons of the Trinity. God loves variety. He loves differences that compliment each other. Just look at all of creation and the incredible amount of variety of animals and weather and planets and stars and molecules. These are all an expression of God's creative act all of which he deemed very good. God's happy about variety.

It shouldn't surprise us when it comes to the Body of Christ that there is variety as well.

The other way we see variety is simply how these gifts are described. Variety of gifts, variety of service, varieties of activities.

These are all different ways of describing Spiritual gifts. Remember spiritual gifts are just abilities given by the Holy Spirit to the Church to build up the church.

We could call them gifts, which focuses on where they originate from. These abilities are given to us by God. That's their source. None of these abilities come from us, they all flow from God the Holy Spirit.

We could call them service. That's the heart behind every gift: to serve other Christians specifically. If you are an administrator, the goal is to serve the body of Christ through your administration. If you have hospitality, the goal is to serve the body of Christ through your faith. If you are a leader or teacher - again the goal is serving. It's not about the person who has the gift, but the person who is served by the gift.

The word for service here is *διακονια* - where we get our word deacon. A deacon is a waiter of tables, someone who's job it is to tirelessly and selflessly serve others.

Which means, when you became a Christian you entered into a life of service to the body of Christ. You should be serving in some way the body of Jesus with the gifts that the Spirit has given you.

Thirdly, we could also describe spiritual gifts as activities. These spiritual gifts we have aren't just happy thoughts, or sending good vibes or good juju or whatever people are sending these days. It's action.

DC Talk had a song back in the day called Love is a Verb. Love works and expresses itself in different ways.

So there's diversity. But that diversity leads to unity. Notice the focus in this section on how all these gifts come from the Holy Spirit. **Read 7-11**

Same Spirit, same Spirit, over and over. Six times in this section Paul makes it clear all these gifts are from the exact same Holy Spirit. Every time we use our gifts it's a manifestation of the Spirit.

You ever want to know what the Holy Spirit looks like? He has no physical form. But we can see him physically at work when the people of God use their gifts to serve one another. When we use our gifts we are manifesting the work of the Spirit in us.

And the thing we need to understand is that these gifts are given for the common good. **Read 7, 14:4-5, 26**

So that's the big picture here: the Spirit gives these gifts that we would be unified together. The Corinthians wouldn't have needed an explanation for many of these gifts because they knew them intrinsically because they saw them used a whole bunch.

Okay, with that, let's look at these. There are 9 gifts mentioned here, we're going to get through 3 this morning.

1 & 2) The first 2 are a word of wisdom and a word of knowledge. **Read 8**

Now here's a fun little tidbit for you, we have absolutely no idea what these 2 gifts are. Not with any certainty anyway.

These gifts are not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible and Paul gives no elaboration on either of these. He just mentions them and assumes the Corinthians know what he's talking about.

Let me make a few observations, but know that most scholars admit we just don't know for sure.

First of all, it seems as though that this isn't just talking about someone who is wise in a general sense or knowledgeable in a general sense. Just knowing things isn't necessarily a work of the Spirit. It could be, but not necessarily.

Wisdom is applying God's truth usually in a complicated situation. If you've ever asked God for wisdom or someone asked you to pray for wisdom it's usually because the situation they're facing is complicated. They have to balance a lot of interests or information to come up with an outcome that pleases the Lord. That's hard.

Solomon was known for wisdom, specifically in dealing with the 2 ladies who were arguing over the baby. Remember that? He had that wisdom because God gave him that wisdom. So it could be that someone is just wise in a generic sense.

But I'm not convinced these gifts are simply being wise or being a brainiac. Why not? Because Paul could have simply said "wisdom" and "knowledge." But he says **a word** of wisdom, **a word** of knowledge.

It seems as though the emphasis here is on a continuous gift, but we might say a more spontaneous kind of word that is wise or a spontaneous word that is knowledgeable.

So it may be that Word of Wisdom is a spontaneous working of God to give a person or a group of people profound wisdom for how to work through a situation. Everyone is stumped and all of a sudden someone has a moment like Solomon where the whole situation is completely solved with a simple solution that maybe wasn't obvious at first.

A Word of Knowledge may be the same kind of thing where God just supernaturally brings something to mind that the person didn't know through normal means.

I've known of people who have had things come to mind that they didn't know through normal means. The information just popped into their head.

There have been plenty of people who have reported that while preaching or doing ministry or just driving down the road something comes into their mind. And it's information about a situation they couldn't have possibly known any other way and lo and behold it's true.

Charles Spurgeon, the great London Preacher in the 1800s said he had these experiences a handful of times in his ministry. He'd be preaching and God would bring some sort of random information to mind while he was preaching. Spurgeon would convey the information while he was preaching and almost always there was someone there who fit the description and it was this jaw-dropping moment.

You ever have those times when I'm preaching or someone else is preaching and you're like "how does he know this about my life??" It's he stalking me outside my house? I don't have this gift, okay. You preach long enough you're going to make everyone feel conviction.

These were exact details of a person's life that weren't generally shared - their job, their particular situation, the timing of things that you could only know if you had followed them around.

Remember in John 1 when Phillip goes and tells Nathaniel he's found the Messiah? And Nathaniel's like "Can anything good come from Galilee?" But he comes anyway and Jesus says "You're an Israelite with no deceit - you're honest - I saw you under the fig tree before Phillip came to you." And Nathaniel's like "Jesus, you **are** I the Son of God!" There was something going on under the fig tree that Jesus knew about that he could have only known by divine revelation. And Nathaniel knew it and proved that Jesus was God. That's the idea. Most believe that's this gift.

Jospeh had this kind of gift, Daniel had this kind gift - both in term of dreams. Others did as well.

Now, two words of caution. First, just because something comes into your mind doesn't mean it's true. You meet a person at the store and you're thinking "Yeah, i'm pretty sure he's got someone buried in his backyard." Probably not true. Especially when something like this happens it's best to be suspicious of it and cautiously investigate. Our minds get filled with a lot fo things, and we need to be cautious assuming they're from God.

Second, vague ideas aren't necessarily from the Spirit. I had a pastor once who believed he had the gift of a word of knowledge. And one Sunday morning he came into the congregation and said the Lord had given him a word of knowledge that someone had shoulder pain and needed prayer.

Now here's the deal: could God bring that message? Sure. But there were 1,000 people in the congregation. How many people out of thousand have shoulder pain. I was 28 and I'm pretty sure I had some shoulder pain.

We're not talking vague, we're talking very, very specific details.

I like the experience of Spurgeon for a couple reasons. First of all, Spurgeon was preaching before the modern Charismatic movement began in the early 1900s. He wasn't looking for some wild movement of the Holy Spirit. This happened spontaneously without him seeking the gift. And he was a Calvinistic baptist - he would have been comfortable in our church, and we'd be comfortable in his. He didn't some weird theology, he was solid.

Maybe you've had experiences like this. A hard situation and God simply gives you an "Aha!" Moment where all of a sudden the way of wisdom seems clear. Or maybe God reveals something to you that you couldn't have known any other way except for divine work. I think if you've had these moments - and to be clear I've not had one that I remember - I would only caution you to test to make sure it is in fact God at work and not your own flesh or your own presumption. We don't want to blame God for bad decisions we make but seem wise in our own eyes.

So this is the general consensus as to what these gifts are. We don't know for 100% sure, but it seems likely.

3) Faith. Read 9

So the next gift we see from the Holy Spirit is the gift of faith. What that means is that among Christians, there are some people who just have a massive amount of faith in the Lord and what he will do. It just exudes from them.

Now, I want to make a quick distinction here, because I think this is important. I don't think Paul is talking about saving faith here. Every Christian has saving faith - that's what it means to be a Christian. **And** to be sure: saving faith is actually a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Look at Phil 1:29-30 for a moment. Here Paul is encouraging the Philippians to be faithful even in the midst of persecution. And he says that persecution is actually a gift from God just like faith is a gift from God. **Read 29-30**

So here Paul says the surprising thing is not that God has granted us faith to believe in Jesus - that we know. The surprising thing is that God has also granted that we suffer for his sake. God has given us suffering, various kinds of suffering, as a gracious gift to bring him glory.

And that word "granted" is literally a grace gift. A lavish gift from God. Faith is a lavish gift from God and suffering is a lavish gift from God. When you were saved you didn't conjure up faith to believe in Jesus. Faith was not the thing that you contributed to the salvation equation. How do we know that? Because we were all spiritually dead! God gave us faith, he gave us new life.

Look at Eph. 2:8-9. This is the classic passage on how someone is saved. We're all very familiar with it. But sometimes I think we miss some plain truths when too familiar with a passage. **Read 8-9**

So a person is saved by faith in God's grace. By having faith - by trusting, believing - that our sins earn us hell but that God mercifully poured out his wrath on Jesus. We have to trust that in order to be saved.

There's no works that we can perform to get on God's good side. No works we can perform to be saved or earn heaven. It's all by believing in God's grace. But look what he says again: **Read 8-9**

"It is the gift of God." What's the gift of God? Salvation? Grace? Faith? This is a really cool thing in the Greek grammar. The "It" in "It is the gift of God" doesn't point to any one thing. It's generic, neuter. Paul says all of this is the gift of God: Jesus, grace, faith, Sonship, adoption, the Holy Spirit in us. All of what God has done is a gift to us.

Titus 3:5: He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Every aspect of our salvation, all the way down to the very faith we have in Jesus, is a gift of God. And specifically it's a gift of God the Holy Spirit. Every believer experiences this gift of saving faith - that's actually why we're called **believers**.

But what Paul is getting at in **1 Cor. 12** is that among those who are saved, there are some who have an extraordinary amount of faith. They just trust in every way for God to provide everything.

I know a guy who has a ministry. And oftentimes he doesn't know where the next check is coming from or how he's actually going to make ends meet. He has a larger family and things just work out.

DA Carson, in his commentary on this section, mentions George Mueller. If you want a great biography, check out *George Mueller of Bristol*. George Mueller was the head of an orphanage. And he refused to ask for financial gifts, he assumed that if God wanted a person to give money they would. Me? I'd be asking for cash left and right. Not George.

There would be times when there was literally no food in the orphanage and they'd set the table and pray and wait for God to provide. And on at least one occasion a milk truck just happened to break down right in front of their house. Had to drink the milk or it would all spoil. Another time a bread truck dropped off the rest of their load. George Mueller's life was just a series of miraculous provision after miraculous provision. He had great faith and because of his great faith God did some amazing things.

And I mentioned this last week, but let me remind you, sometimes the gift of faith seems like the gift of foolishness. "George, why didn't you ask for help?" You know how he would have answered? "I did ask for help - from the only person who matters." Sometimes we don't understand gifts and how they work in other peoples' lives, but they do.

And faith is a gift that God gives out to bless the people of God. **Look** down at **13:2. Read**

Paul quotes Jesus with a faith that can move mountains. There are some people I go to when I'm having a tough time not because I need counsel but because I need prayer. Why do I go to them? Because it's almost like they really, really believe what they're asking God for. They have faith.

We can ask for this faith as well:

Remember the guy in Mark 9 who comes to the disciples with his son? His son basically has seizures: he falls down, foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, becomes rigid like a board. He'll convulse and throw himself into fire or water? Remember him. Turns out his son doesn't have epilepsy, he has a demon. And he asks Jesus "If you can help me, please do something." And Jesus says "If?" "If I can help you? All things are possible for the one who what?" Believes. Who has faith. And the man cries out, "I believe, help my what?" Unbelief.

"Give me more faith." He's come to Jesus because he does believe Jesus can do something but he knows his faith is small. So he asks Jesus for more faith.

You know that we can ask for that too? Maybe you don't have the gift of faith but you know you need more, it's okay to ask. It's okay to ask for any of these gifts. In fact Paul says at the end of the chapter that we should earnestly desire these gifts.

Why? They're good gifts.

They're for our benefit. They are for unity and they are for the glory of God. Let's use them well.

Pray