

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (11-4-1999 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

1 Corinthians 12:1-11  
Spiritual Gifts (part 1)

Introduction

1 Corinthians deals with a series of problems in the Corinthian Church. It also deals with many controversial matters in our own age – morality, divorce, marriage and re-marriage, not using freedom if it harms others, the Lord's Supper, head-covering by women. Now Paul deals with spiritual gifts - a very live issue over the last 20 or 30 years.

For centuries 1 Corinthians 12-14 were passed over in silence. But now they are a talking point everywhere. This renewed interest has had a variety of effects. Sometimes it has brought life and vitality to a church which was dead and formal, and brought joy in Christian living, joyful worship and transformed lives. Christian fellowship has become real, and the silent Christian is now an effective witness, he finds prayer a joy, and has unity with the other Christians in shared experience. In other cases, it has brought abuses, neglect of and undermining the authority of the Word, division, and empty emotion with little substance. Counterfeits and abuses and fanaticism appeal to certain temperaments.

This subject is bristling with problems. There are some matters we have perhaps not made up our minds about. How far do these things apply to the first century, and how far to the twentieth century? Where do we draw the line?

Today going to deal with the first half of chapter 12, dealing with the gifts mentioned here, and certain questions which arise. Next time going to look at the second half of the chapter, the gifts mentioned there, and deal with other questions, especially the baptism of the spirit.

Many deep issues are found. How far are people robbing themselves of blessings by belittling these chapters? How far are people deluding themselves and led astray by counterfeit experience? Is the Bible sufficient, or is God continuing to reveal new truth through prophecies, visions, and tongues? Is conversion not enough? Do we need a second blessing? Are there first-class and second-class Christians?

The subject caused problems at Corinth. Paul had heard of the problems, and here is his reply.

Gifts described

In the early part of the chapter, nine gifts are listed. We are not going to deal with healing, miraculous powers and prophecy till next week.

- (a) Wisdom. Ability to utter wise saying in a way that solves a problem or shows the way forward in a difficult situation. C.f. Solomon dealing with the problem of the two women claiming to be the mother of a baby (1 Kings 3:16-28). Also, the Council of Jerusalem debating about admitting Gentiles, James

speaks wisdom to arrive at a peaceful formula – Gentiles to be admitted, but to avoid conduct which would offend Jews (Acts 15). Wisdom is insight which enables a man to speak to another about the Gospel at the right time and place, with the right approach. Tasteful, yet zealous, under the Holy Spirit.

- (b) Knowledge of things which are supernaturally divined. C.f. Elisha telling the King of Israel words which the King of Syria had spoken in private (2 Kings 6:12). Also, Peter able to say to Ananias and Sapphira that their hearts were not right with God (Acts 5:3). And Jesus knowing the Samaritan woman had had five husbands, and that the man she was now with was not her husband (John 4:18). In personal counselling, people have knowledge which enables them to put finger on the real cause of the problem, and penetrate through all camouflage and deceit and pretence.
- (c) Faith. Not the ordinary gift of saving faith, because we all have that, but a special ability to trust God when everything is against us. C.f. Noah believing God would send a flood when it had never rained on earth before, and all men were mocking and scorning him for building an ark (Genesis 6-8). Or Abraham leaving Ur at God's call when it was economic madness to leave expensive home for an unknown future (Genesis 12:1). All the heroes of faith recorded in Hebrews 11 were sure of God and His promises, whatever appearances were to the contrary. They were sure of what they could neither see nor prove. We could include the Reformation martyrs. Also Hudson Taylor, founding and maintaining the world's largest missionary society in China, with no financial backing, refusing to make any appeal for money, but sure that God's work done in God's way would never lack God's supplies. George Muller, his huge orphanage work, for which over £1,000,000 was "raised" by prayer and faith alone. He used to return gifts of money if he suspected they were given for the wrong reasons, or if the giver was in debt. Plenty of missionaries and Christian workers to this day live by same principle of faith. They have no salary, and make no appeals, just pray and trust the Lord. Expect great things from God. A regular diet of Christian biographies will strengthen your faith and enable personal spiritual growth. Same faith is needed in local church when faced with church's budget and discouragement in Christian work. Every aspect of the life of the spiritually minded local church needs to use and practice faith, in general and specific issues. The most insignificant member may well impart such faith to the whole fellowship at crucial moment of decision making.
- (d) Discerning of spirits. The church has always had to contend with the subtlety of Satan and evil spirits. He does not always come as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8); sometimes he is an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). We must not be gullible and easily deceived. **Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world** (1 John 4:1). There are men professing to be in Christian work, yet they are impostors; cults and movements claiming to be of God, and concerned for His cause and Gospel – but they are not what they seem to be. Things claiming to come from God but psychologically induced or from downright evil sources. The slave-girl at Philippi said about Paul and Silas, "These men are servants of the Most High God, proclaim the way of salvation" (Acts 16:16-18). Her statement was sound and true, but the source was an evil spirit, which needed to be cast out. The Holy Spirit helps us to discern the difference.

(e) Tongues and their interpretation. Also mentioned later in the chapter. Much fascination about speaking in tongues at present. Yet it is at the bottom of Paul's list. He does not give it prominence that many people do. Many speak a lot about it, and the great blessing it gives in private prayers, which can be very liberating, enriching the spiritual life, praising God at greater depths than ever known, bringing the Lord very close. But it is not to be exercised in public worship unless an interpreter is present; otherwise it is no more than unintelligible ecstatic utterances and babbling. Some have asked for this gift, but have not received it. Some have received it and given up its use, and been none the worse for that. Others take a very different view – that it means the ability to speak and preach the Gospel in other languages as on the Day of Pentecost, not the ecstatic utterances which many people call tongues. This gift was given at the beginning of the church, like miracles and healings, to show the Gospel was of God. It is no longer needed, because the New Testament is complete, and the Gospel established. Some former tongue-speakers confess to it having become like a drug addiction, wanting larger and larger doses to satisfy. It has disrupted churches, destroyed careers, and fractured personal relationships. Those who have examined it say it is linguistic nonsense, and not a language in any sense. It is not a supernatural gift because it is a learned behaviour.

#### Some questions about gifts

The definition of gift - χάρισμα – is “grace gift”. How many gifts are there? There are four lists on the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 12 contains the most famous, but also important are Romans 12:3-8, and shorter lists in Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. There are at least 20 or more gifts in these lists, allowing for some overlapping. But these are only a selection. We learn from church history of gifts given to Christians which are not in the Bible lists. Was not Charles Wesley's ability to write hymns as much a gift of God's grace as his brother John's gift as an evangelist? And what of the gifts of Christian singers, musicians, writers and other forms of Christian service?

There are many different kinds of evangelistic gifts – crusade evangelism, home friendship, literature, etc. God is a God of rich diversity and manifold grace and wisdom. Let us not limit Him. He is a generous giver. C.f. different kinds of gifts, service and working. But same Father, Son and Holy Spirit behind all (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Some are supernatural gifts. Others are natural skills and natural talents taken by the Lord, redirected, empowered by Him and used for His glory and service. Dr Saul Chadwick, “Every part of my being wakened up. I did not get a new set of brains but a new mentality... I am a new creature with some natural qualities energized, quickened, into bigger vitality and effectiveness that nobody would ever have dreamed possible. That is what happens to those upon whom the Spirit comes.”

The purpose of gifts is that the Lord might build up, strengthen and make the church effective. They are for the common good, that believers might mature and then be more able to reach out to the lost. We all need one another. Everyone has a part to play. No place for isolation. All are important for,

*“There’s a work for Jesus  
None but you can do.”*

The body needs the foot, hand, eye, ear, nose, etc. All are vital. All belong to the body of Christ. All should feel for one another and support one another.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Easier to do the latter. But great grace is needed to be pleased with other’s success and popularity. (Jealousy is a very real factor in Christian work.) Gifts are to build up the church, and for God’s glory, and they are not for own glory and self-importance.

All biblical gifts still available. Some had special purpose at the beginning of the church, e.g. miracles. Others are for all time.

The source of gifts is the Holy Spirit. **He gives them to each one, just as he determines.** God assigns, arranges, composes and appoints (1 Corinthians 12:11,18,24,28).

It is the Christian’s duty to contribute to the church’s life and work. All have gifts for the life, health and growth of the church. Pray for gifted workers. Leaders should be on the lookout for gifts, and encourage them. Do you know your gifts? Are you using them? **Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you** (2 Timothy 1:6).