

## **“Many Gifts”**

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

June 10, 2007

We begin this morning where we left off last week, considering the work of the Holy Spirit within the body of Christ – that is, within the church.

Hear 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

The problem with preaching this passage is that there are too many choices of where to go. The illustration is so rich, you all are already running ahead of me to figure out what it is I am going to say.

Remembering that we are focusing our attention on the work of the Holy Spirit, it is important to start by repeating the point of last week: there are many gifts, but one Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit keeps us united; “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” The common good is expressed in achieving the chief end of mankind, which is, “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Glorifying God is not a solitary endeavor, it is a corporate endeavor. Glorifying God is personal, but it also is expressed with other believers together.

Yet in a group we cannot simply sit back and watch as others are glorifying God, as if that counts as our ministry, too. When we come here to worship, we are presenting ourselves before God and laying our lives before him. What do you bring when you come to worship?

### **1. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in you is a necessary part of worshipping God.**

So often, I hear, “I don’t have any gifts.” As we have been working on our Project 6:15 redevelopment program, we did a survey that revealed that this congregation’s weakest point was realizing and putting into practice the spiritual gifts of the people.

So, I know that some of you are out there thinking that you do not have gifts. I have heard people say, “I do not have any gifts.”

For what it is worth, that statement is never made with a tone of joy and celebration. It is usually dejection, frustration, or a sense of alienation.

“Yes, but I really do not,” is the next line of this dialogue. Then, we go down the checklist that Paul had provided earlier, “the utterance of wisdom – no, that’s not me; the utterance of knowledge – no, that’s not me, either; faith – well, I don’t think so, it does not feel very strong; healing – no; working of miracles – definitely not; prophesy – are you

kidding me? No; discernment of spirits – no; speaking in tongues – no; interpreting tongues – no. I don't have any of those, I must not have any of them.”

Here's the thing: Paul is not giving an exhaustive list. It is illustrative; these are examples of a much larger list. And, you may not be the best judge or best person to discern the gifts you have been given.

Although I understand the feeling of “I do not have any gifts,” I need to caution all of us to let that feeling go. I know – easier said than done. However, consider this:

- Paul states as a fact that everyone who has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is given a manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good. That's not an opinion, that's not a hope, that's a statement of what is. Saying that “ok, that's true, but it does not apply to me” means that the Bible is wrong. To hold fast to that position is not humility -- you are actually standing against God.
- To not discern and use your gifts for the common good hurts everyone around you. You have a ministry that God has given you; if you do not do it, it will not get done. That hurts all of us.
- To feel isolated from God and from other believers hurts you personally. Generally, people who do not feel that they have gifts have already been hurt – either by the church or by some failure in the past. But to continue in that self-imposed prison is to hurt yourself.

So, if denying our gifts means that we stand in opposition to God, hurt all the people we know and love, and is damaging to ourselves: anyone want to stay with that belief?

OK, then, embrace the manifestation of the gift the Spirit has chosen to allot to you. You are a part of this body of believers and we – and I – need you. It is a POSITIVE need. Without you, we are not whole. “And if the ear would say, ‘because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?” Your gifts are good. Your gifts are God-given. Your gifts make this body of believers more complete.

I think I understand how Paul must have felt when he was writing this letter. I feel like I am lecturing you to accept GOOD news. God *has* given you the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit *has* allotted something to you for the common good (thus, you belong), and what you give is good for you, too!

## **2. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in others is necessary in God's plan.**

If all of us are necessary, all of our gifts are important for the whole body to be healthy. This is the next thing Paul tackles. There are no unimportant gifts.

This was the sin of the church of Corinth and it is still a sin in the church today. We fall into error when we celebrate *the people* to whom God has given specific gifts rather than

*praising God* for the gifts themselves. Look at the latter part of the passage that Paul writes. He says, “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, the gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.”

From a human standpoint, we see the flowchart of the corporation’s hierarchy. Pretty clearly, at the top, are the apostles, prophets and teachers.

Guess what: that’s how humans see it; not how God sees it. Are the gifts important? Yes. But the apostles, prophets, and teachers are *the servants* of others. Standing up here does not make me more important in God’s eyes, nor does it mean I am greater than you. It does mean that I have this function, this service, this gift I can offer to the common good. Praise God for the gifts; do not worship the apostles, prophets, and teachers to whom those gifts are given to build up the body of Christ.

In a few verses, Paul will make this exact point (in 15:9): “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain.” Boy, do I understand that. I am here by the grace of God and no other reason.

Jesus warned about the scribes, “who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at the banquets!” Why? “They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers.” (Mark 12:38-40)

You all treat me very kindly and – I will admit it – I am grateful and enjoy it. You treat me with respect and honor. That is nice and I appreciate it. However, if I *ever* think that I have earned it or deserve it or in any way require it, I pray that God would raise up the person to rebuke me directly. I stand here by the righteousness that is reckoned to me: not of my own merit; rather, because God has redeemed me and allotted to me this gift: this gift meant to encourage, equip, and exhort you to fulfill the ministries that *God has created you* to enjoy.

To make the point clear: Each one of you has a ministry, a ministry God uniquely prepared for your service. Each one of you has gifts to offer. The body cannot be healthy without you.

The world may not recognize the gifts, may not see value in their expression, or understand what is happening when they are offered in worship; but believers can testify to the power of God revealed for the common good when the faithful share their gifts.

Let me use this example: I had a conversation this week with a man in this congregation who talked about praying for his alcoholic, abusive brother-in-law for seventeen years – until recently when the man received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, was transformed, and began a new life. The man in our congregation laughed as he said, “He’s now more excited than I am about the goodness of the Lord.”

Paul actually includes perseverance in prayer as a gift of the corporate body of Christ in his list in Romans 12. I think of Linda Seaver and her faithful ministry with the prayer chain as another example of this expression of the importance of EACH person's gifts. Through the prayer chain we can testify about healings, reconciliations, miracles and wonders that God has done in this congregation. It is a fleshing out of this body illustration, that "the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

We do have examples of "rejoicing together." Yesterday was the Preschool Graduation. If ever you want to see rejoicing, come to a Preschool event. Singing together about, "This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made" as well as Mattilda the Gorilla, there was such joy in the faces of these children who clearly loved being together. Then, as the diplomas were handed out, there was the crush of adoring parents with more cameras than a press conference. "When one is honored, all rejoice together."

The flip side was there, too. During the picnic, I talked with the husband of one of our preschool teachers – he is a part of the Border Patrol and was stabbed with a knife about two months ago. The knife just missed his heart. He talked about that experience and how important the prayers were. He talked about how his life was transformed by the experience, and he was moved by the love expressed by all those who were praying for him. "If one member suffers, all suffer together..." Yet, even as we suffered with him, the body was strengthened. He now shares that testimony as a regular part of his conversation. "What was intended for evil, God intended for good."

Like prayer, there are many gifts not public and known. When Paul talks about the parts of the body that seem weaker and have less honor, he is thinking (within the context of the illustration) of internal body organs. Kidneys. Gall bladder. Stomach. Thyroid. There are very few pictures and monuments erected for these parts of the body; songs are not sung (like they are for the heart, eyes, etc.) yet try to function without one. Who are these people? Look around.

It is remarkable how many of you have the gifts that Paul has listed previously and are unaware that you are exercising them. One of the ways we – Chula Vista Presbyterian, that is – need to get better is by telling – out loud – each other what we discern as each other's gifts. Often, we become aware of our gifts because someone else tells us how they see us; in a way that we had not seen ourselves. I pursued ministry only after a number of people told me, "You ought to consider being a minister." It was not on my radar screen until others raised it to my attention.

Helping others discern their gifts requires a couple of things: that we actually take time to get to know one another, that we are willing to risk sharing our assessment of one another, and that we are willing to hold each other accountable.

The Old Testament shows us how this works. The people have come through the Red Sea out of Egypt, they have worshiped at Sinai, they have built the Golden Calf that Moses destroyed with the first two tablets of the Ten Commandments, and renewed the covenant

with the Lord. Two specific individuals are raised up with two specific skills: skills others do not have but skills that others recognize that these two have. Just because the two have these skills does not mean that everyone else's skills are not important; indeed, the others are important to provide all the things necessary for these two to shine.

Also, to digress for a moment, consider the raw materials that Bezalel and Oholiab used in their construction: the best that the people had offered. The people gave of their material possessions willingly and generously for the purpose of celebrating the goodness of God. They gave because God commanded them to give (see Exodus 35:4-5). It is not any different today; God still commands us to be giving.

Often times, people think about giving and discovering their gifts like they think about sticking a toe in the pool, there is the fear that you are going to get pulled all the way in. Well, let me take the mystery out of that for you: you will, it is the best thing that could happen to you and you will love it. Utilizing the gifts that God has given us is living into being the creatures that God intended us to be: fulfilled and thankful.

### **3. The body of Christ is a community of givers of the grace we have given, we are not individual consumers of God's goodness.**

God uses our gifts to accomplish his purposes; to manifest his glory; to use us as instruments of his grace.

There is nothing more humbling or a greater blessing than to be used by God to bring someone to salvation. Whether it is by inviting someone to come to church, whether it is by giving financially in support of mission, whether it is by volunteering time to help kids or our seniors; whether it is by serving in some capacity – when you see a life transformed, it is like that Visa add: priceless.

There is tremendous joy in a gathering of believers who bear witness to the power of God. A couple of weeks ago, John Finch gave his testimony. I heard about it for days; how moving, how encouraging, how powerful. We inspire one another.

People who come back from mission trips – whether just a few hours or years long – cannot help themselves but talk about what they have witnessed God doing. It is funny; even when they are telling you about what they did, it is like they were only an observer. They talk about “while I was doing...I saw this person...” and it is wonderful and it is powerful and it is a testimony about grace. They come home and people ask, “Why would you spend your vacation doing that?” And, all of a sudden, they talk about how this was better or more meaningful than any vacation they have ever taken. “Would you do it again?” I have asked people – even people who have had difficult or hard trips. “Absolutely,” has been the answer every time.

When we use our gifts for the glory of God, we find that we are among those who are blessed. Stick your toe in the pool and get pulled all the way in? You bet. It is the best thing that could happen to you. It is the best thing that could happen to us.

## Conclusion

As you go forward from our worship together today, spend some time contemplating what gifts God has given you. Take a moment to tell someone else – whether it is a “thank you” for a kind word or for a moment of compassion extended. Encourage someone else in a gift that you have seen in them. We are one body. We have many gifts. God has given us each other and commands us to love one another. Go and do just that – in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.