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Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 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. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

Paul here is starting a new section in this letter on the use of Spiritual gifts in the church. This section goes on right through to the end of chapter 14.

I need to say a bit about the Holy Spirit, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, for the benefit of anyone who is unaware of these things. After his death and resurrection Jesus went back up to heaven, and from there he poured out the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit performs a number of functions for believers. He opens up our eyes to the truth about Christ. He convicts us of our sin. He gives us faith and repentance. He causes us to be born again, and to have a new heart. He reassures us of the love that God has towards us. He helps us to pray. He changes our lives, and produces good "fruit" in us, in the form of loving and right behaviour. And he gives us gifts to enable us to serve Christ and to

build up the church.

It is with this last aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in believers, the giving of gifts for serving Christ, that this section of this letter is concerned. Clearly some of the believers in Corinth were puffed up by the fact that they had certain gifts, as if it was by their own merit or virtue that they had them. Some were using gifts of the Spirit as a basis for showing off. Meetings were becoming disordered as different people competed for the opportunity to exercise their gifts. So Paul has to deal with this disorder in the church's life.

In this passage Paul says that true gifts of the Holy Spirit do not originate with man, and so are nothing to boast about. They are given to men so that, in love, they can build up other believers.

We can divide the passage into three sections:

1. Watch out for counterfeit gifts, verses. 1 – 3
2. True Spiritual gifts are gifts of grace, given by God, verses. 4 – 6
3. There is a great variety of gifts, but all the gifts are from the one and the same Holy Spirit, for the good of the church, verses. 7 – 11

1. Watch out for counterfeit gifts

In verse 2 Paul reminds the believers in Corinth that many of them had previously been pagan idol-worshippers. Those idols were just dumb statues, but behind them, as he said in chapter 10 verse 20, demonic powers were at work. Those demonic powers are capable of mimicking the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit. So he gives the believers a test to be able to distinguish genuine from counterfeit supernatural activity.

This is not the only place in Scripture where we are warned about the danger of counterfeit supernatural activity. It is recorded in Matthew chapter 24 verse 24 that Jesus warned that in the last times false Christs and false prophets would arise and would perform great signs and miracles, to deceive even elect, God's chosen people, if that were possible. Paul also warns in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 9 and 10, that the coming of the lawless one, the antichrist, will be "in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all sorts of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in ever sort of evil that deceives those who are

perishing."

So we need to be on our guard. Just because something might appear to be supernatural, it is not necessarily from the Holy Spirit. How, then, can we know if some gift that someone is exercising is a gift from the Holy Spirit? Paul tells us this in verse 3, "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."

It is recorded in John's Gospel chapter 16 verse 14 that Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will bring glory to Christ. Therefore he will never prompt anyone to say or to do anything which is derogatory to Christ. If you use Jesus' name as a swear word, then be sure of this, the devil lies behind that utterance. I am not saying that you are possessed by an evil spirit, but at the very least you are in the grip of Satan, and either you are very seriously backslidden or, most likely, you are not converted at all.

But we might avoid *saying* anything that is derogatory of Christ but nevertheless by our actions we might do things that bring dishonour on his name. Anything that brings dishonour on the name of Christ cannot be from the Holy Spirit, because he would never dishonour Christ's name.

This has relevance to some things that we see happening in our own day. For example, a few years ago there was a movement which some said was a movement of the Holy Spirit. This movement resulted in people losing consciousness in meetings, waving their arms and legs uncontrollably, barking like dogs and roaring like lions, and laughing hysterically. Meetings would descend into chaos as these different phenomena took place. We must ask ourselves about such phenomena: is Christ honoured by such things taking place? Would he want us to behave like animals? Is he honoured by meetings descending into chaos, with people lying all over the place on the floor and others laughing hysterically? How, then, can such things be a genuine manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit, who is so concerned to honour Christ?

Or, to give another example, occasionally someone whom I can only really call a "showman" comes to town. There is a big blaze of publicity beforehand. Claims are made that this man has the power to heal, and if you come to his meetings, and come up to the front for him to pray over you, you will be healed. There are dramatic scenes of people getting up out of wheelchairs and throwing crutches

away. And the man, who happens to wear a Rolex watch, to be driven around in a limousine and to have a group of henchmen for bodyguards, claims to have an anointing from the Spirit. We need to ask ourselves about such a person: who is the one who gets the glory? Where is the attention focussed? Is it on Christ, or is it on this man? If the attention is focussed on the man, how can the power that he claims has, be the power of the Holy Spirit? Would the Holy Spirit glorify a mere man in this way?

On the other hand, positively, the apostle says that "No-one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. The Greek word which is translated as "Lord" here is a very significant word, because it is the same word that those who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek used when they wanted to translate the Hebrew word Jehovah, or Jahweh, which is the name which God most frequently uses for himself in the Old Testament. So any Jew who was familiar with this translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek, would have instantly recognised what is being said by the phrase "Jesus is Lord". What is being said is that Jesus is God, the sovereign ruler over all, who must be worshipped, served and obeyed.

Paul says that this understanding that Jesus is Lord can only come about by the power of the Holy Spirit. Someone can only truly confess "Jesus is Lord" by the Holy Spirit. That is why, when Peter confessed to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" Jesus said to him "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by men, but by my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 16.16 – 17). This is why also Paul says in Romans 10.10 "if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

This confession must not be a mere outward voicing of the words "Jesus is Lord". Virtually anyone can be got to voice those words. Some well-meaning Christians have gone astray at this point when they have been trying to reach non-Christians. They have got non-Christians to say the words "Jesus is Lord" and then once they have said those words, they have assured them that they are now Christians and that they are going to heaven, whether or not they properly understand what they have said. But as Paul says in that quotation just given from Romans 10 verse 10, the outward confession must be matched by an inward conviction that Jesus was raised from the grave, and as such that he really is the Lord of all.

Paul says that someone who makes a genuine confession of Christ as Lord can only do so by the Holy Spirit. This should give great assurance to some who might question whether they have the Holy Spirit, and therefore whether they are real Christians. Have you come to realise that Jesus is Lord? Do you know that he is the only way of salvation? Do you rely on him, and him only for salvation? Do you earnestly wish to serve him with your whole life? Do you see signs of the Holy Spirit giving you a love for God and others that you never had before? Do lapses into sin fill you with grief? Then take comfort from what the apostle says here, this is a sign that you do have the Holy Spirit. You may not have "dramatic" gifts of the Spirit, but if you have come to see that Jesus is Lord, it must be because you have been born again.

But there is also a warning here: if you do not openly and in a heart-felt way confess Jesus is Lord, you do not have the Holy Spirit. And if you do not have the Holy Spirit, you are not a true Christian. And if you are not a true Christian you are on your way to Hell. Ask God to show you the truth about Christ. Ask him to give you the Holy Spirit, to be born again, so that you might truly know him.

2. Gifts of the Holy Spirit are gifts of God's grace

The second thing we see in this passage is that gifts of the Holy Spirit are gifts of God's grace. Paul says in verse 4 "there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit." The word that is used for "gift" is the word "charisma", which means a gift of God's grace. In other places in the Bible it is used to speak of the free gift of salvation that God has given us, for example in Romans 6.23 where the apostle says "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Greek word "charis", from which it is derived, whose English translation is "grace" means free, undeserved love to those who do not deserve it.

So gifts of the Holy Spirit are gifts of God's free grace. They are completely undeserved. So if we feel we are gifted in one direction or another, this is nothing for us to boast about.

Paul goes on in verse 5, "there are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." Spiritual gifts here are spoken of as a "service". The word that is used here is the word for being a table waiter, and it is the word from which we get our word deacon. It speaks of humble, self-effacing service. This is what the gifts of the Spirit are for, to enable us to serve others and do good to them. They are

not for the purpose of boasting and looking good.

Then in verse 6 the apostle says that there are "different kinds of working, but the same God works through them all." Gifts of the Spirit are gifts of God's working. They are not men's work. And if they are gifts of God's working, again there is nothing for us to boast about.

There is something else that we should note from these verses. All three persons of the Godhead are involved in giving these gifts. In verse 4 the apostle says it is the "Spirit" who gives them, by which he means the Holy Spirit. In verse 5 he says that it is the same "Lord" who gives the different ways of serving, by which clearly he means the Lord Jesus Christ. And in verse 6 he says that it is "God" who works in each one, by which no doubt he means God the Father. So we see that the three members of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are spoken of side-by-side as those who give the different gifts. The Holy Spirit is the direct means of by which these are given to us, as he is the one who lives inside us, but the Father and the Son are also involved in the giving of these gifts. Although we call gifts for service "Spiritual gifts" or "Gifts of the Holy Spirit" they are as much gifts of the Father and gifts of Christ.

3. There is a great variety of gifts, but all the gifts are from one and the same Holy Spirit, for the good of the church

The third section of this passage is telling us that all the gifts of the Spirit all come from the same Spirit, and are given for the good of the church. Paul says in verse 7, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." The whole point of the Holy Spirit giving gifts is that the church as a whole may be built up. He does not give gifts in order to enhance our egos, or to make us feel important.

The apostle then goes on to list various gifts of the Spirit in verses 8 to 10. We need to understand that the list he gives here is not an exhaustive list of all the gifts of the Spirit, because there are some gifts that are not in this list that are in the list in verses 29 to 30. There are other gifts that he mentions in Romans 12 verses 6 to 8, many of which are not mentioned in this passage. So just because you do not have a gift that is mentioned here in 1 Corinthians, this does not mean that you do not have a gift of some sort.

You may be aware that there is quite a lot of controversy in the church today

about the meaning of some of the gifts that are mentioned here, and whether they were given just for the age of the apostles or whether they are for all the time of the church. I am not going to go through these gifts here, and say what each one is, and whether or not it is continuing or has ceased. What I want us to do now is to get the point of what Paul is saying in this passage. What he is saying is that, whatever gift you have, if it is a genuine gift, it is from the same Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit who gave a different gift to your brother or sister. Hear what the apostle says in verses 8 to 10:

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of *the same Spirit*, to another faith by the *same Spirit*, to another gifts of healing by that *one Spirit*, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of *one and the same Spirit*, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines (emphasis added).

You see how he keeps repeating the phrases "the same Spirit" and "one Spirit". It is not that there is one Spirit who gives a message of wisdom, and another Spirit who gives a message of knowledge, and another Spirit who gives faith, and so on, but rather the one and the same Spirit gives these different gifts. So it would be ridiculous for those who have one sort of gift to divide off from those who have another sort of gift, as if the other person had a gift that came from a totally different Spirit.

But not only does the apostle emphasise the fact that it is the same Spirit who gives these gifts, he also emphasises that it is the Spirit, not man, who gives them. Gifts are "given through the Spirit" (v. 8). He gives gifts "to each one, just as he determines." It is the Holy Spirit who decides what gifts anyone is going to get, not any man. No man has the power to confer gifts of the Spirit on any other man. The only exception to rule was the apostles, who as part of their apostolic gifting had the power to confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit on others with the laying on of their hands. But now that there are no more apostles alive, this gifting has ceased, and it is the Holy Spirit, and him alone, who decides what gifts any person has.

This is a very important point, because there are some today who claim to have the power to confer gifts of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of their hands. In so doing they are really laying claim a right and power that belongs only the

Holy Spirit.

The fact that it is the Holy Spirit who decides who should receive what gifts tells us something else very important about the Holy Spirit. It tells us that the Holy Spirit is a person. Only a person can make decisions about who receives what. It is important to assert this, because the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses will tell you that the Holy Spirit is simply God's impersonal force or power. Why do they say this? Because if they admit that the Holy Spirit is a person, then they will be forced to admit that he is also God. And they do not want to admit that the Holy Spirit is God because they deny the doctrine of the Trinity. This one verse alone is enough to disprove the Jehovah's Witness position, because it shows that the Holy Spirit is a person.

Conclusion

As we draw things together today, what are the lessons we should learn from this passage?

1. We need to ask ourselves individually if we really have the Holy Spirit. Do you truly and openly acknowledge that Jesus is Lord? Is this reflected in your life? If you have any doubts about this at all, ask God to save you through Christ, and ask him to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Otherwise you will never be able to serve him as you should, and you will land up going to Hell.
2. We need to have discernment about the claims of others to know the Holy Spirit. Do not go running off after individuals just because they claim to have certain powers. Look at their lives, and judge whether by their lips and by their lives they truly honour Christ as Lord, or whether in fact they are more interested in their own status and wealth.
3. We should remember that any gifts we have are gifts of God's undeserved grace. We have no reason to boast of or feel proud if we are gifted in one direction or another.
4. We should use any gifts that we have in love to build up other people, not to boost our own ego.

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