

1 Corinthians 12:1-6

“Concerning Spiritual Gifts”

I would suppose that of the various controversial topics found in the pages of scripture that have divided believers throughout the years, *spiritual gifts* would rank right up there somewhere near the top. By and large there seems to be 2 polarizing points of view. You have the cessationist’s perspective which basically says that certain gifts were confined to the apostolic age therefore when the apostles passed from the scene certain gifts did as well. and Primarily the gifts they consider to have passed are what we might call the “sign” gifts. Be it miracles, healings, tongues, or prophecy they will tell you that those gifts have ceased, the problem with that is that you have to ignore church history, overrule personal experience and take scripture out of it’s context to conclude those things. But then you have what we refer to as the *charismatic’s* perspective which teaches that every gift of the Spirit is still in full operation today.

The problem comes in when people don’t really understand what the word “charismatic” means and so they stereotype that word in their mind. and In reality what they think of is what I would consider to be closer to a *charismaniac*. So when someone asks me if we’re a “charismatic” church I always have to ask them to qualify what they mean by that. If you mean, “Do you believe the gifts of the Spirit are for today,” the answer is “yes.” If you mean, “Do you promote the unscriptural exercise of certain gifts and/or accept all manner of wild phenomena as valid whether is has a biblical basis or not,” the answer is “no.”

But I think that these 2 groups tend to feed off of one another in that those who believe that certain gifts have ceased tend to view the charismaniacs as being out of their minds, “Because one thing is for sure, we serve a God of decency and order and that’s anything but orderly therefore God can’t be the author of it so you’ve just flown over the coo coo’s nest. That’s not of the *Holy Spirit*.” Then the other group looks at the cessationists and says, “You guys are dead, there’s no power in your life and you’re just walking around going through religious motions, but the Holy Spirit isn’t alive in your life.” Now *my persuasion as I search the scriptures is that there is error on both sides.*

Because as you just read the scriptures objectively you’d be hard pressed on either side to find balanced biblical support for either position; there is *no scripture* that states that any of the gifts of the Spirit have passed from the scene. Not one, nor is there any scripture that supports an out of control experiential gathering of people, somehow qualifying wild, weird, and whacky behavior as spiritual, or promoted by the Holy Spirit. Remember what Paul said about the fruit of the Spirit there in Gal Ch 5? He said, “...*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*” Gal 5:22-23 What does that mean? It means that those attributes are like the fingerprints of the Holy Spirit upon a person’s life or upon a work that He does. So that if something is going on, and it’s being accredited to the work of the Holy Spirit, yet it’s not earmarked by things like love, peace, kindness, gentleness, or self-control; I have to reject it as actually taking place by the power, or under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

So we want to safeguard ourselves from “taking sides” on the issue of the gifts of the Spirit, we simply want to know, “What does the bible say?” **and That’s what we believe, now you recall that in the beginning of this letter Paul wrote to them acknowledging that they came short in *no* gift, no “Charisma” which is the root of which we get our word “Charismatic” in reference to spiritual gifts. (Ch 1:7) How many gifts did they come short in? *None, not one.***

All the gifts were at work among them, be it healings, miracles, tongues, all of them. Now that tells us that Paul wasn’t a cessationist nor did he believe that the “sign” gifts were limited only to the apostles. Yet he had to write to them to correct their unscriptural exercise of the gifts. ***That tells us that Paul was not a “charismaniac.” and That’s the balance we want to strike, like Paul we believe the gifts of the Spirit are for today, yet we want to be careful to honor the Word of God in the exercise and the operation of them.***

Vs1-3

So though in one respect we turn the page here, in another respect we’re staying right on course. Paul’s overall thrust in Ch’s 11-14 is what? “Proper order” or “Order in the church,” and regarding that aspect of things we’re staying the course. However as it pertains to the primary thrust we’re turning the page. So far Paul has been addressing what? Carnalities, now he turns to the topic of *spiritualities*. He says in Vs 1 (read).

Now you may note that the word, “gifts” in this Vs is in italics. What that means is that it was added by the translators to try and clarify the context but the word isn’t actually there in the Greek text. In reality it’s the plural form of the word “spiritual” so that it would be more accurate to understand this as saying. “Now concerning spirituals, or spiritualities.” You recall way back in Ch 3 he made the statement, “...*you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal...*” 1 Cor 3:3 and Though we’ve been a # of months getting from that point to this one, for Paul he’s writing the letter and it’s what...20 or so minutes worth of reading from that point to this one. **So thus far he’s been dealing with carnalities, now he begins to give instruction regarding spiritualities. Or spiritual things, now he brings up the word “gifts” in Vs 4 so this is true to the overall context but it’s not directly referenced here in Vs 1.**

So he says, “Now concerning spiritualities, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.” and That word “ignorant” carries a few different connotations. For instance it speaks of being in error, “I do not want you to be in error” which is something that they were, they were in error in the way that they were operating in the gifts of the Spirit. Paul says I don’t want you to be out of line experientially as to how the gifts of the Spirit are to operate be it in my life personally or with in the body collectively. **It also implies being unaware, so that Paul is also saying, “I don’t want you to be unaware,” we need to know *about* them, be aware *of* them, we should be learning the proper balance seeing what the Word has to say and show about the gifts of the Spirit. Finally this word “ignorant” speaks of ignoring through disinclination. So that Paul is also saying, “Don’t ignore the gifts, or be frightened *of* the gifts; don’t be disinclined, unwilling, or reluctant regarding the gifts.** In other words God has given you a gift, or gifts of His Spirit and they’re for the purpose equipping you and edifying others, don’t neglect that or be unwilling recognize that. So, don’t be in error, don’t be unaware, and don’t ignore...don’t be ignorant.

Now there are 3 areas that Paul writes of in his letters and says that he doesn't want us to be ignorant in. and They're found in Rom 11, 1st Cor 12 and 1st Thess 4. and Those 3 areas have to do with #1 God's plan for the nation of Israel, #2 spiritual gifts, and #3 the 2nd coming of Christ and the eternal state. **The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul says, "Don't be ignorant on these counts."** Yet what are probably the 3 biggest areas of ignorance amongst Christians today? #1 God's plan concerning the nation of Israel, #2 Spiritual gifts, and #3 the 2nd coming of Christ and the eternal state. **Be aware of what your bible says; get to know the heart and mind of God through the study of His Word.** Now look at Vs 2, (read) Now when he says, "Gentiles carried away to these dumb idols," don't think of him as saying, "Those idols are dumb." He's not saying, "Those silly idols."

He's speaking of the fact that they're mute, unable to speak, unable to lead or guide, they were mere marble, or gold, or whatever. Remember when Habakkuk wrote, *"What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, The molded image, a teacher of lies, That the maker of its mold should trust in it, To make mute idols? Woe to him who says to wood, 'Awake!' To silent stone, 'Arise! It shall teach!' Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, Yet in it there is no breath at all."* Hab 2:18-19 That's what Paul is saying here. Yet we also know that idol worship is very demonically entrenched. **So just because it was a stone statue setting there in the temple, don't think they didn't have spiritual experiences. It might be like unto someone coming out of the occult today, or some super new age mystic religion. and What Paul is seeking to get across here is that even though they've experienced spiritual things in the past, they're background hasn't educated them in the things of the Spirit.**

He's saying, "Hey, you guys were non-believers led about however, worshipping these false gods." and So he wants them to realize that they're not to approach the things of Spirit of God in a light that reflects their spiritual experiences in the past. Their past experience didn't prepare them for an accurate understanding of the exercise of spiritual gifts. **and We should realize that our past can often hinder our understanding as well. You can see how someone from say a new age mystic type background might be a bit confused when it comes to the Spirit of God. How He operates, why, and under what parameters... If you were raised to believe that many of the gifts don't exist, than there's some reprogramming that you have to allow the Holy Spirit to do, it takes time.** If you were raised to believe you weren't saved unless you were speaking in tongues and so for years you faked something in the assembly so you wouldn't be seen as an outcast, then it can take some time for the Holy Spirit to minister His protocol according to His Word, to your heart. and So Paul is saying, "Hey, let's look at this together, I don't want you to be ignorant as to the ways, and the why's of the Spirit. I know you've got some baggage you bring into the mix, welcome to the human race." and So he says in Vs 3 (read)

Now it seems that there was some apparent utterances being made, things going on reminiscent of their days of pagan worship and Paul is seeking to say, "It doesn't work that way." Because in that day if you were what we'd call a "channeler" man you were a conduit, and a voice of the gods. If you had epilepsy they thought you were stricken with a divine disease, (which is why it's easy to see how they coveted the gift of tongues trying to rationalize that in a similar way, though that's completely unbiblical). But ultimately Paul is laying out for us here a broad principle for discerning matters regarding spiritual gifts.

Put simply we're to judge things according to how they relate to Jesus. Do they take away from the person or character of Christ, do they draw attention from Him and place it on someone else, he goes as far here as to speak of someone "cursing" the name of Christ. The Holy Spirit won't do those things, He won't curse Jesus, He won't take away from the person or character of Christ, He won't belittle Jesus, He won't take the attention off of Jesus and place it upon someone or something else. How can I know that? Because Jesus said, "...when the Helper comes, (referencing the Holy Spirit) whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." John 15:26 That word "testify" speaking of giving testimony *of*, or bearing witness *to*. He's going to point people to the person of Jesus Christ Just a little later on in Ch 16 Jesus said, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." John 16:14 So we realize that the work of the Holy Spirit isn't to promote Himself, or anyone else for that matter. He's to *point to*, give *glory to*, and reflect the nature *of* Christ. What's that mean? It means that if the Holy Spirit is doing a work it's going to be conducted and carried out in a manner that's reflective of the nature of Jesus Christ and If I want to know they way Jesus conducted Himself, I should spend ample time in the gospels.

and You know, I've read each of them a time or 2 and I don't recall Jesus ever getting whipped up into a frenzy before He healed someone. I don't recall Jesus ever getting so overwhelmed that He took off running around the temple, there was nothing wild or weird about Him. Unconventional occasionally I'll give you that, but never in a way that phobed people out, people were drawn to Him. He was very practical about the way He dealt with people, got on their level, appealed to their needs. We might say that love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, those were the characteristics that ear-marked His ministry. and Those are the same things that will ear-mark the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

What does that mean? Well if I'm in a worship service and I begin to act out in a way that takes away from the fellowships focus on Jesus and places it on me, even if I have the best of intentions, I have to conclude that though I mean well, it can't be the Holy Spirit leading me into that action, or that posture, or whatever. Why? Because the Holy Spirit issues self-control, and testifies, or draws our attention to Christ. Now in your heart, you might be on your face, on your feet, dancing unto the Lord, whatever. But in the public forum we want to refrain from doing something that's going to take someone's eyes off of Jesus and place them on me. "Well people shouldn't be looking at me; they should be looking at Jesus." That's what I'm saying, but we aren't a people of great focus, it doesn't take much. Believe me I see it every time someone excuses themselves from the sanctuary, you see them out of the side of your eye, or you hear the door close and I lose 2/3s of you. Now did they say, "Hey, look at me!" No, were they trying to take your attention off of the study of God's Word? No, but inadvertently they do, same kind of thing with worship. So we want to be sensitive to the moving of God's Spirit, do our utmost to help maintain that Christ centered environment.

When he says here, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit," he's not saying that no one can mutter a meaningless phrase. Anyone can say those words from their mouth, but no body can issue those words from the deep recess of their heart apart from the reality of the Holy Spirit in their life.

So let that be a bit of a litmus test for you, what do you have to say about Jesus from the heart. Can you say, “Jesus is Lord,” and really mean that with every fiber of your being? If you can that’s right on, praise the Lord. If you can’t than you need Jesus Christ in your heart and in your life. Now he says here,

Vs4-6

Probably one of the foremost things that pops out to us as read through that section are the contrasting phrases, “diversities, but the same,” “differences, but the same,” “diversities, but the same.” and The idea here is that even in the diverse/various and sundry gifts that God gives there is a thread of unity woven in their very fabric. Remember how we discussed the Lord’s supper being something that (amongst other things) is to unify the body? So to with the spiritual gifts, different people may have different gifts, but those differences aren’t to *divide* us but rather they’re to *unite* us. Bring us together, show us our sense of need for one another if we’re to operate in the fullness of the body as God intended.

Something else this should be telling us is that there’s no place then for hierarchy in the body of Christ. But that we all should walk equally in humility before the Lord, now that doesn’t mean that God hasn’t ordained order and authority, but we all serve the same Lord. and None of us are to lord over anyone else, we’re co-laborers in the Lord. and That’s what this is telling us, you see the gifts operating in me don’t originate *from* me, as though there’s some unique reservoir of spirituality in me. No, *God* has gifted me.

and *God* has gifted you, and to the extent that God gifts you, or gifts me, has nothing to do with me, or you, the reasons aren’t in me, they’re in Him. He is the author, and originator of all of it. So where does that leave the bragging rights? In the trash where they belong, we’re all in this thing together, on equal footing in Christ. My gifts didn’t come from some place a little more special than yours did, all our gifts are from the Lord. The book of Eph tells us, “*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.'*” Eph 4:7-8 So you see we can’t go, “Well, I have the gift of evangelism,” and because of that think that we’re a little higher on the spiritual totem pole than the person with the gift of helps, or the gift of teaching. Because each of our gifts originated from the same source, God Himself. Now that means something else as well, because God’s gifts aren’t tied to my abilities, but to His, that means that there is no one (outside of the obvious reason of unrepentant sin) disqualified from being used of God. Often times the enemy, or even our flesh will try to tell us, “You can’t do that.” What’s that have to do with anything, it’s not about what *I* can do, it’s about what *God* wants to do through me. The question is how big is your God? If for your God nothing will be impossible that means He can gift you and use you in awesome and incredible ways for His glory. The bible tells us that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or even think, according to the power that works in us. So avail yourself to the Lord and let God use your life.

Of course you can’t miss the thread tri-unity of God woven into the very fabric of the scriptures as Paul states here in Vs 4, 5, and 6, “The same Spirit” as in the Holy Spirit, “The same Lord,” as in the Lord Jesus Christ, and “The same God,” as in God the Father. The fullness of the Godhead is involved in the gifts of the Spirit and the way that they operate with in the body.

Ok, 3 words we need to see here before we wind down and wrap up. Notice we have, “gifts” Vs 4, “ministries” Vs 5, and “activities” in Vs 6. The word translated “gift” in Vs 4 is the one we would think of when we see this word. It’s “Charisma” which has as its root, “Charis” from which comes the word, “Grace,” as in “Grace to you,” and we realize that grace is the unmerited favor of God. **and So the gifts of the Spirit are really just a further outpouring of God’s grace and unmerited favor in our lives, they’re “grace gifts.” and Paul will mention 9 in the Vs that immediately follow here and then a few more when we get to the end of the Ch, not that this is a list of every gift, he’s sharing by way of example, remember this is about the “how’s” and “why’s” of spiritual gifts.**

The next word in Vs 5 is the word, “ministries,” there are differences of ministries. Now this word, “Ministries” is the word, “Diakonia” and it speaks of various offices in the church, be it the office of an elder or deacon, it also expands to include service in general. and So there are going to be various ways in which we serve the Lord based upon the different gifts He equips and enables us by. **and This is something that’s important to remember because it’ll keep us from comparing ourselves amongst ourselves and coveting the work someone else has. God has a different plan for me than He has for you, so He’s not going to gift me like He’s gifted you, therefore I’m not going to do things exactly like you. and Of course the opposite of that is true as well. You aren’t called to do what God has called me to do, so God will enable you with various other gifts.** In Vs 31 of this same Ch we read, “...earnestly desire the best gifts.” 1 Cor 12:31 Well what are the best gifts, that’s a relative question, it depends on what God has called you to do, because what’s best for me, may not be the most effective for you in your calling. (and We’ll speak more about that when we get there).

But God will enable you to serve Him in the capacity that He has called you to, you can rest assured that to the service in which God *in lists* you, He will *enable* you accordingly.

Which brings us to this final word here, “activities” in Vs 6 it’s the Greek word “energema” from which you may assume we get our word, “energy” or “energetic.” It’s a word of active supernatural power, it’s the same word translated in Vs 10 as “working” with regard to the working of miracles. **and What this is saying is that God pours out His supernatural power in our lives in different ways, to different degrees, but it’s still the same God working in each of our lives. Which again is why we’re not to compare ourselves amongst ourselves, because God may be working differently in our lives through the same gift. Let’s say God has given both of us the gift to teach. But in my mind I can’t even stand in your shadow, I can’t even open my mouth when you’re in the room because I’m just not gifted to the same degree and in the same way that you are.** It’s not unnatural for us to feel these sort of things. But what Paul is saying here is, “Hey, don’t do that, don’t fall victim to that mentality or be intimidated personally, because the same God that works through them is working through you.” He’s just going to use me and speak through me to minister to people in a different way than He uses you. But if you refuse to let Him use your life because of it than the body gets ripped off for the blessing God wants to bring them through your life.

You see God honors our personalities, He didn't create me like He created you, or you like He created me, so why then would He want us to be identical in the way we minister, but unique in our personality. Oh we all stay within the biblical parameters, but we're all going to minister to the Lord, and to His body in a way that's a bit unique unto the way God has created us, and that's ok. It's still the same Spirit, the Same Lord, and the same God who works all in all.

So let's not be ignorant of these things, but just be open *to* the Lord, that you might be used *by* the Lord, however He should so choose to glorify Himself through your life.

Prayer Points:

Father as we spend time considering the things of Your Spirit, open our understanding, we want to walk in the balance of Your Word. We desire Lord that Your Spirit would have the freedom to move in our midst as You should so choose. Convicting us, challenging us, changing us, and Lord we desire to see You magnified and glorified in this place. So help to be sensitive to Your leading, that we not draw attention away from You, but point all the honor and glory and praise *to* You, because You're the only one worthy of it all. Help us Lord that we reflect Your character and Your mannerisms in the things we do, that we not weird people out, or do things that are obnoxious, but that people just see You, and be drawn to You in us.

I want to take just a moment here to acknowledge the fact that Jesus may be drawing you to Himself right now, perhaps in a sanctifying way, perhaps in a saving way, you've never given your heart to Christ. If that's the case I want to give you the opportunity to do that right now. Jesus went to the cross and laid down His life, He gave His life, for you. 3 days later He rose from the dead that you might stand justified before the Living God. God wants to forgive you of all your sin, but forgiveness is only found in the person of Jesus Christ Let me encourage you to receive Him today.