

GIFTED FOR MISSION: 1 COR 12:1-11

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INTRODUCTION

I've been reading a few books about the state of the church in the UK and it seems that, **if we don't want the church to shrivel and die, we have to shift from 'maintenance to mission'**. What do I mean by this? In maintenance mode we're concerned with keeping things going, making sure the structures and processes are right. As far as we can, we don't rock the boat. We devote our attention to the state of the boat, not concerned if we have an passengers on board! In mission, our aim is to share the love of Christ to the world around us. The church of Christ needs to be faithful to Scripture, open to the Holy Spirit and engaged in mission. The church exists for the world and not the other way round. But this sounds a tall order. How can we be equipped to serve as part of a mission-oriented church? Several things are clear:

- None of can do this on our own
- The clergy can't do it all
- We can't do this in our own strength.

Evangelism and mission are not about selling the gospel to people. Missions is about showing and being Christ for other people. That is, it's up to the local body of Christ to be Christ where we live and where we work, with our families, with our neighbours and with our friends. A local church should be an attractive community in which God is at work.

If we follow Christ we just can't be passive. We are activated and empowered by God to live in a damaged world and to show his love. But, and here's the rub, we can't do this in our own strength. The Christian life is wholly based on God's grace and not our how good we are. It begins by us accepting that we've messed up and asking his forgiveness – which we don't deserve. It continues by us asking him for the gifts that we need in order to be the people he wants us to be. None of us is able to do that ourselves.

Want to look this morning at 1 Cor 12: 1-11, to understand the gifts that God has given us to enable his church to serve Him and the world. Some people find the whole issue of spiritual gifts rather scary. But there's no real need to be scared. We have a loving heavenly Father who gives good gifts to his children. Matthew 7: 7-11 tells us to ask God is a good and generous giver; we can ask Him for things and He will give us good things, not things that will harm us. He doesn't always give what we ask, but he will not harm us. We can rest in his goodness and generosity.

VERSES 1-3: TESTING WHETHER THINGS ARE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Here Paul gives the most test of whether things are from God or not; a general principle. Does what is said or done demonstrate that Jesus is LORD? Paul wants the church to be informed, to understand spiritual things.

What of these words 'Jesus is LORD'? Roman citizens were expected to swear an oath of allegiance and obedience to Caesar, the emperor. What was the oath? 'Caesar is LORD'. Saying instead that 'Jesus is LORD' could actually be rather dangerous. It's a statement of allegiance; it tells where we belong. Thus, a very basic test of prophecy, any word of knowledge; indeed of any act or speech is whether it encourages us to see that Jesus is LORD. If it points us away from him, it's not from him. End of story. No ifs and buts; that's it.

VERSES 4-7: ONE GOD GIVES MANY GIFTS FOR OUR COMMON GOOD

V4: Varieties of gifts: The Greek word translated as 'gifts' in verse 4 is charismata (singular charism). It literally means 'a gift of grace', a gracelet if you wish. God's grace, his love for us, is at the core of the gospel. Followers of Christ were called Christians in Antioch and the word implies that Christians are 'little Christs'. How lovely that God gives charismata, little gracelets, to people who are to live as little Christs. But note that there's not just one gift. All come from the one Spirit (v4). Many gifts one Spirit, but given to be used

V5: Varieties of services (doesn't mean 10:30 & 6:15); talking about the ways in which we serve God and one another. Many ways to serve, but only one God to serve, many things to do, but only one God to give us the power to do them. There's not just one!

V6: Varieties of activities: or ministries in the energy & power that God provides. Not just one!

V7: Manifestation: the word implies things that are visible. Talking about visible gifts, service and activities through the power of the Holy Spirit. **FOR THE COMMON GOOD.**

VERSES 8-11: MANY GIFTS

There are three NT passages in which spiritual gifts are mentioned: here in 1 Cor 12, also in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. Show table.

- 1 Cor 12: the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues

- Rom 12: 6-8: prophecy, ministry/service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, compassion.
- Eph 4: prophets, apostles, pastors/teachers, evangelists (NB these are roles – people can be gifts)

The lists are different, but the context is the same: God give gifts to his church by his Spirit so that the church, the Christian community, can show that Jesus is LORD. As individuals within that church we are called to be little Christs and to do that we need the gifts that he gives us. Are the lists complete? Probably not. Does this mean that we can ignore them? Certainly not, so let's look at the gifts mentioned in this passage.

- The utterance of wisdom: words of wisdom; an insight that can only have come from God
- The utterance of knowledge: words of knowledge that can only have come from God, perhaps rather more specific than wisdom?
- Faith: in one sense, all Christians are given faith by the Holy Spirit, but this seems to refer to something a bit different; perhaps a faith against the odds?
- Gifts of healing: plural. C.S. Lewis tells of how his wife, Joy, was miraculously healed for a time after prayer by an Anglican priest. (A grief observed). Still needed today. A few weeks ago at St Ts we had a healing service, in which people were prayed with for healing from physical and other ailments. Nothing dramatic, just sharing God's love by praying for others.
- Working of miracles: miraculous powers, very evident in the ministry of Jesus
- Prophecy: the ability to tell it how God sees it, whether for now or for the future.
- Discernment of spirits: a really important gift for the church in Corinth, essential for a spiritual leader
- Various kinds of tongues: ecstatic utterances, God speaking through us without our minds getting in the way.
- The interpretation of tongues: an ability to explain what is being said by some speaking in tongues.

SO, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

The church as a community is still made of individuals and it is individuals that God gives gifts to build up the body, to make it attractive. I think that in a congregation like this one, we respond to this in different ways and I'd like to use some labels, which I hope don't upset you.

1. **The experienced enthusiasts:** people who have already experienced the gifts that God gives and long for more, both for themselves and for others in the church. My message to you: 'keep praying, keep using the gifts God has given

you, but don't (which is what Paul says later in this chapter) look down on others who haven't enjoyed the gifts that God has given you.

2. **The leaky jars:** who once knew a close relationship with God and experienced his generous gifts, but have gone off the boil, as if the Holy Spirit's power has leaked away. You know what to do; just do it!
3. **The weary:** who've heard it all before and it didn't help last time, so what's different this time? Friend, these are not gifts for you, but for God's people, the Christian community, the church. How can you possibly serve God without the gifts, the gracelets that he offers – and he gives good gifts.
4. **The scared:** who're worried what might happen if they get involved in this charismatic stuff. In Eph 5: 18, Paul writes, 'Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit'. Isn't it odd that some of us would rather be drunk than filled with God's spirit. How can you possibly serve God without the gifts, the gracelets that he offers – and he gives good gifts.
5. **The puzzled:** who've heard this for the first time today and are not sure what to make of it. Why not ask God to show you what to make of it? Remember, he's a generous and loving God who isn't out to trick you. If you really do want to serve God, to be the person he wants you to be, you can't do it in your own strength.