

“Now concerning spiritual gifts...”

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[0:00] Let us pray.

O Holy Spirit, we thank you that in the fulfillment of our Lord's promise, you have come to us, the church.! We thank you especially for your work in this church, in this parish.

[illegible]

Are there entry-level tier one gifts? Are there higher-level gifts? Which of the gifts communicates to everyone else that you are a mature Christian?

That you know what you're doing? That you've been at this a while? These were likely some of the topics of discussion in the Corinthian church.

[1:40] And in this chapter that we're in here, now chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, it's on page 1139 of your pew Bible, by the way. I encourage you to open along and follow. So these are the questions the Corinthians were likely asking themselves.

In fact, they wrote a letter to Paul asking these questions. And I think he's answering some of their questions. In this section of 1 Corinthians, in this chapter we see Paul now confront another of their arrogant questions and wrong thinking and attempt to correct it.

Essentially, Paul wants to answer their question of what does it mean to be spiritual in the church.

Paul moves on from the previous section to a different topic now in chapter 12.

And he says it in the beginning of chapter 12, verse 1. Paul, now concerning spiritual gifts. Brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. The phrase, now concerning, shows that Paul is, in fact, responding to a question they likely raised in a letter to him.

Paul, now concerning spiritual gifts. And some in the Corinthian church had the wrong view of spirituality in the church. And I dare say that the same problem is prevalent in the modern church today.

[3:08] And Paul's teaching in this section is to confront their wrong thinking. And perhaps in God's mercy and kindness, to confront some of our wrong thinking in regards to this as well.

So some among them probably thought, some in the Corinthian church, some of them probably thought they did not belong in the church. Because they were useless, they thought.

While some thought that they belonged. Belonged. And were more important. And this was based on their spiritual gifts.

And so, depending on what gifts you have, they view some as more valuable and more important. And this viewpoint is based on whether they have the super spiritual gifts.

They've determined among themselves what those gifts were. And we'll see. We'll see as we get to... Someone's competing with me for your time this morning.

[4:15] We'll see as we get to chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians that part of the main view of their wrong view is that they prioritize some gifts.

Particularly speaking in tongues. We'll get there in chapter 14. But here, they have in their mindset there are some super spiritual gifts. And then there are some mundane spiritual gifts.

That has nothing to write home about. And Paul, like earlier... Remember what Paul earlier said to them in chapter 3. Paul referred to them as spiritual toddlers.

In chapter 3, he wrote to them, he said, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh. As babies in Christ. And it's because of their worldliness.

They are unable to eat solid food. They still need a milk bottle. Paul says to them. Have you ever talked to a 4-year-old who is self-assured in how much he knows?

[5:20] It's not that the 4-year-old doesn't know anything. He knows a lot. In fact, he's at the stage where he's a sponge. And he takes everything in. But the truth is that at 4 years old, he still has a lot more to learn.

A lot more to know. And he's at the stage where he needs help. He needs help to learn how to apply the knowledge he's taking in.

To apply it rightly. And the funniest thing is when that child gets puffed up about what he knows. It's comical. It's funny a little when the child is so self-assured and acts as a know-it-all.

And it's funny because for obvious reasons. Right? But it's also quite dangerous for the child if you leave him at that stage.

If you don't immediately let him know that he knows nothing and must still listen to his parents. Or else, he's at it for a short life of pain and misery. Well, that's a picture I'm familiar with as a parent of a 4-year-old.

[6:34] And that's the job of a parent, actually. To disabuse the child of his or her arrogance. Of course, such a mindset is largely non-threatening in a 4-year-old.

It's funny. It's benign. But that mindset is not so benign in an adult or in a church that is given to immaturity.

And that's the case in the Corinthian church. They're so taken up with their spiritual abilities. And they have spiritual abilities. Remember Paul's thanking God on their behalf for the gifts, the spiritual gifts that God has blessed them with?

But they're so taken up with these spiritual abilities, spiritual gifts, really, that they're boasting in them and weighing themselves against each other in the church. The spiritual gifts have become like baseball cards.

Remember when you were a child, you remember collecting baseball cards and you flaunt your particular cards that you have. You probably have a mint-conditioned card and you try to take it to your friends.

[7:47] They can't touch it. They can only see it. And you pride yourself in having ownership of that mint card and you want to make your friends envious. But that's what some of the Corinthian church were doing about their spiritual gifts as well.

The Corinthians were fascinated. And just so you know, the reason we call them gifts is because that's exactly what they are.

The Greek word is charisma. Right? So we often use this word charismatic Christians. In fact, all Christians are charismatic Christians. Because if you're in Christ, you've been given gifts and they are freely given.

You know another word for freely given in the Bible? Grace. Undeserved. Unearned. Unmerited. These gifts are freely given by God the Holy Spirit distributed to His church.

Unearned. Unmerited. And yet, they're taking pride in it. And lording it over one another. Regarding it. The Corinthians were fascinated with the fantastical.

[9:02] Just like the church today in some ways. They chased spiritual experiences. It was like a drug to them. We have to confess that that tendency is still pervasive even today in the church.

When God has promised God Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ has promised that He is objectively, do you hear that? He is objectively present when His people gather together in His name.

He is present in the word preached, rightly preached, and He is present in the sacrament rightly administered. Christ, our Lord, promised that He is present among us.

Objectively. But those real and objective means of grace are to many of us in the church today dull.

And so we come to church and we look for subjective experiences.

And we use terms like, well, I didn't really feel God in that service. Well, God is there in that service.

[10:10] When God's word is rightly preached, when the sacrament is rightly administered, when His people are rightly gathered to worship Him, He's promised objectively to be present among them. But yet, so many times we look inward and base whether God is present in our midst on our subjective feelings, and we end up chasing emotional experiences.

And the problem, and you can see it around today, is that you keep, as a drug, you keep chasing it and you need more and more to fill you up.

Now, Paul says to them in the Corinthians, and he says to us too, in verse 2, he says to them, you know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to mute idols however you were led.

Paul reminds them that in their pagan religious experiences in which the same experiences were the norm, even in their pagan worship, it's the same thing.

they chased emotional ecstasy, and their religious pagan worship was marked by that, sort of trans, being in trans-like states, losing their minds, and all of those things in worship, giving over to all sorts of different experiences.

[11:35] experiences. And Paul points out to them that the experience is, that the chasing for experience is not particularly a Christian phenomenon.

They did the same thing while they were pagans. They even, and they did experience all sorts of things while they were pagans. All sorts of sort of out-of-body experiences in their pagan worship. All sorts of strange things. And yet, these things that they experienced in their pagan worship, Paul says, surmised, they were empty. At the end of the day, they were empty and purposeless because, why?

Their gods to whom they were worshipping were mute idols. Mute idols are the best and worst. They were communing with demons. We saw that previously.

And so, Paul wants them to, in fact, redefine what true spirituality is along biblical lines. Spirituality is not based on subjective experiences, but upon an objective truth.

[12:46] Remember that Paul has said earlier in this letter, in chapter 2, from verse 10 to chapter 3, verse 4, he says to the Corinthians, he reminds us as well, that the Holy Spirit, who is the mind of Christ, he is the one who searches the depths of God.

The Holy Spirit is the one who makes the things of God known to us. And according to Paul, you cannot be spiritual. Full stop.

You cannot be spiritual unless you have the Holy Spirit. You cannot know God, you cannot know the things of God, you cannot know the depths of God, unless the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit makes it known to you.

And how often have we heard the phrase in our day, the phrase that goes like this, I'm not religious, I'm more spiritual. We've even heard it in the church.

I'm not religious, I'm not spiritual. Well, Paul wants us to understand that that's such a nonsensical jargon to say. from a Christian worldview, from a Christian standpoint, from a biblical point of view, there is no such thing as spiritual unless you have the Holy Spirit.

[14:06] So all that the world does out there, all the spiritual searching and endeavors in the world, it's tantamount to being led astray to mute idols, according to Paul.

It's nothing. it's not spiritual by God's standard. For Paul, there are only two categories of people.

The Bible only has two categories of people. Those who are worldly and those who are spiritual.

And those who are spiritual are those who are in Christ, who have been given the Holy Spirit.

Those are the only two categories. Hence, verse 3, Paul now comes to his main idea in verse 3.

This is kind of like his thesis statement for this whole chapter.

Therefore, he says in verse 3, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus is accursed. Excuse me.

[15:14] And no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit. I'm going to read that again.

Verse 3, Therefore, I want you to understand no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus is accursed, and no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit.

So, for Paul, anyone who is spiritual, as we've said, must have Jesus as Lord, because it is Jesus as our risen and exalted Lord who sends the Holy Spirit to his church.

So, if you trust in Jesus Christ, if you confess him as Lord, you are only able to do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And Paul has here, by confession, he has more than just verbal confession of Christ's worship in mind. After all, anyone can mouth Jesus as Lord.

But Paul here is talking more than that, more than just a verbal confession. Paul is talking of a confession that is marked by a transformed life. In the Corinthian world, for example, when they will say Caesar is Lord, to say Jesus is Lord is to set yourself in opposition from the trajectory of the world, to make yourself stand out and in a good way.

[16:33] To say Jesus is Lord is to commit your life and trust your life to him. It's the same thing today. To say Jesus is Lord is not just a verbal proclamation, but it is to trust him with yourself.

To give yourself to him, to surrender your will to him, to have him be Lord over your life. And that's what Paul means here when he says no one who does that can do that without the Holy Spirit. His point is this. If you are a Christian, if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit.

Because you cannot be one without the Holy Spirit, without the Holy Spirit works in you. And here we're faced with a lot of wrong teaching concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit that is pervasive in the church today.

We've come to maybe 100, 150 years ago now, we've adopted this sort of new teaching of Christians who have come to faith in Jesus Christ and now needing a second sort of coming to God in the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

[17:54] There is no such teaching in the Bible. Once you come to faith, this is why verse 3 is crucial for us to understand.

The very coming to God in salvation is by the work of the Holy Spirit. You have the Holy Spirit if you are a Christian. You don't need another baptism of the Holy Spirit in order to have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is yours. It is the deposit of Christ himself as the first fruit of your inheritance. In him. So it goes counter to the teaching.

And often times a lot of that teaching comes from what we have read in Acts. In the book of Acts we saw that the apostles or the disciples were in an upper room waiting for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

But here is the crucial thing. We have taken what we see in Acts, passages that we see in Acts, which are meant to be descriptive. We have taken them as prescriptive for the whole church going forward.

[19:00] But even if you read Acts, you will note that often times in the book of Acts, whenever there is actually the baptism in the Holy Spirit, for example, when the people in Samaria, when the gospel went out to them, and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Or when Peter went to Cornelius and preached the gospel, what happened at Cornelius' household? they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. It was at the preaching of the gospel, mind you, first of all, it wasn't a second order thing that needs to happen afterwards, but what did the baptism of the Holy Spirit communicate to the apostles about these Gentile Christians?

It communicated to them that they were now part of the covenant family of God. In fact, the baptism of the Holy Spirit rightly confirms that these people are Christians, that they had the same inheritance as Jewish Christians did.

This was then in Acts 19, Acts 15 rather, this was the proof at the Jerusalem Council. The same Holy Spirit that has brought us who were Jewish in our sin and death and alienation from God, the same Holy Spirit that has brought us from life and from death rather, into life, that same Holy Spirit we've seen it at work among the Gentiles, among the Samaritans, among Cornelius, the Roman centurion.

We've seen them also, God, our Lord Jesus Christ has poured upon them the same Holy Spirit confirming that they themselves are also in Christ.

[20:40] And so wherever you see the Holy Spirit at work, it is confirmation that these people are in Christ. Christ. And this also leads us to a second thing. It's an anathema almost.

When we as Christians, we might be, we tend to say such things as, well, those people are not my kind of Christians. It's very easy to say that in our days.

Well, those people, no matter what category makes you say that, those people are not my kind of Christians. Christians. Well, the point that Paul is making in these verses is that if you have the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, indwelling you, you are in Christ.

So all those who are in Christ are your kind of Christians. You might differ from them in one thing or the other, and this should make us humble, so that we do not condemn those whom Christ have bought with his precious blood, those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

And so here is where we as a church, here at Holy Trinity, I want to make us see that there is no such thing as a second baptism of the Holy Spirit.

[21:59] If you're in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit will feel there is infilling of the Holy Spirit. If you read the same Acts, you will read that on two occasions, Apostle Peter was filled, filled by the Holy Spirit.

And so it is right and good for us to pray for the continual filling of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit doesn't fill those whom he does not reside in in the first place. And so as a Christian, if you want more of the Holy Spirit, write, it's right and good to go to God and ask for more filling of the Holy Spirit.

So Paul continues and here is where he's now having set the standard for the Corinthian church to let them see that there is no first tier, second tier, there's no such thing in the church of Christ.

We're all in Christ, we all have the same spirit. Now he goes in verse 4 to 7, he says, now there are very varieties of gifts, but the same spirit, and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all and everyone.

To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good. There is a double importance in these verses. First, you see as a grand work, a grand work of Trinitarian theology running through, right?

[23:28] Varieties of gifts, but the same spirit, that is Holy Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord whom we serve, Jesus Christ, he's our Lord.

And there are varieties of activities in the church, but it is the same God, God the Father, who empowers them all and everyone. And so you see the trinitarian God at work among us, his body. And then the second thing is that we see an interwoven in this, in the old chapter 12, and ongoing, we see an interwovenness of unity in diversity.

There are diverse ways of serving in the church. We see a rationality behind the gifts as God assigns them to the church, right?

We assign these gifts by God the Father in service of our one Lord Jesus Christ, who the church belongs to, he's the Lord, and these gifts are distributed by God the Holy Spirit, as he sees fit.

[24:37] Make note of that, as God the Holy Spirit sees fit. Not because, oh, I think that person is special, I'm going to give him a special gift. No, that one, I'll give you a mundane gift.

There's no such thing in the church. the Holy Spirit gives the gifts to all as he sees fit. That's how the gifts are distributed in its many varieties.

And we must not look, when we go to the second half of chapter 12, we'll see more of the unity. But here I want us to see the diversity in focus, the diversity of these gifts.

Verse 8 to 11, For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.

Look there, diversity, but who's given it? The one Spirit. To another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

[25:40] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as demerit.

Is that what it says? No. As he wills. As he wills. That is, as the Holy Spirit wills. So Paul lists all these spiritual gifts in these passages.

By the way, oftentimes you see, there are seven times in the New Testaments that spiritual gifts are listed. None of the listings are uniform. They're all different from one other. Some of them have the same gifts, but others in some other listings.

In Ephesians, for example, you see the descriptions of spiritual gifts. They're never uniform. And what that communicates to us is that they're not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive.

These listings of these gifts. They're not meant to be. So you don't go and read, well, I don't have any of these, or I only have one of these, or but I have this, but that's what I have.

[26:48] What I think is a gift, it's not a gift because it's not listed. No, none of the listings are exhaustive or comprehensive. And so the question that we ought to ask for ourselves as the people of God and as the Church of Christ is this.

Do I have a gift? Well, what's the answer to that? The first thing is, are you in Christ? Do you confess Christ as Lord? Do you confess Jesus as Lord?

If that is yes, then the second, then the question is, do you have a gift, is also what? Yes. Because you've been given the Holy Spirit, we distribute gifts to the Church.

Are my gifts the same as yours? No. It wouldn't be helpful if we all have the same gifts, maybe the same high-powered gifts in whatever we think is high-powered.

How would the Church function if we all have the same spiritual gifts? Would that be a healthy church, do you think? No. Here's the wisdom of our Lord in the diversity of gifts that He's given.

[27:58] And note here, too, that it's given for, what what is it given for? Is it for the recipients of the gifts? Is it for the Has God given me the gifts that He's given me in the church for my sake?

No. For my edification? No. Has He given yours for your sake and for your edification? No. It is given for the sake of the other. So, God, in His wisdom, has made you and fashioned you in the way He has done.

and He has given you gifts for the up-building of His church. Not for your home's sake, but for the sake of your brothers and sisters in the body.

Here's the beauty of it. And now you see why, how immature, how infantile it is for the Corinthians to be boasting in their gifts.

gifts, to be taking pride in their gifts, as if it makes them more special than their fellow brothers and sisters.

[29:11] Or maybe to be searching and looking for other gifts and not being grateful for the ones that God has given them. Now you see how infantile it is and immature it is for a church that believes, or a Christian that believes, that others in the body are of less value.

because they don't have the kind of gifts that he or she has. The latter off of chapter 12 will sort of show us more of that, but here's the point in these verses, in this first 11 verses of chapter 12.

God Himself has given us gifts. Are you putting God's gifts, that is charisma, the charisma He's giving you, I intentionally use that word, charisma, we interpret to mean different things, but the gifts, the charismatic gifts He's giving you, the free gracious gift He's giving you, are you putting it to use in the church?

That's the second question. Do you have a gift? Yes. What are you doing with that gift? Are you putting it to use in the body? God's gifts outside of the arena in which God has given you for you to utilize them?

So are you putting God's gift to use? That's the second question you have to ask yourself. Well, that then means you have to ask yourself, am I part of the body of Christ? Am I part of the body of Christ in a way in which I am immersed and given of myself to that body and serving others in the body with the word that God has given me and the gifts He has given me?

[31:04] Or am I hoarding that word God has given me? Now, there is no I can't, none of no other person can answer that, those questions for you.

You must come to God and you must ask Him to make it apparent the gifts He's given you. To then help you to utilize them for the sake of the body of Christ.

But it is true though that within the body, as you immerse yourself in the body, there are gifts that will be discoverable by the body.

If you have a gift of encouragement, those gifts will come out if you're immersed in the body. If you have a gift of administration, those gifts will come out if you are part of the body and you're giving yourself, willing to to walk in communion with others within the body.

Those gifts will come out. It's not a forced thing. It's God who has given it and organically it will come out within the body. And as it does, it is up to all of us.

[32:25] And one more thing I want to say before we pray. These gifts are not determined by office. Right? So for example, while there are requirements for a pastor to have the gifts to be able to teach.

Paul tells us that in 1 Timothy. But it doesn't now mean that only pastors can have the gifts to teach. In fact, there are many ways in which we teach God's word and we bring people up in Christian maturity within the body.

We have Bible studies in the church. We have, we're raising up our children to know and learn and know God. If you're a parent, you have to teach in the baptism of vows that you make for the, for your children.

You, you vow to raise them up in the knowledge of God. There is no mundane gifts.

God exemplifies himself in this, in the way he is fashion his church in his diversity. God delights in that diversity as we exercise that our diverse gifts for the glory of Christ, for the edification of the body.

[33 : 45] Let us pray. Lord, we do thank you that you have called us to yourself in Christ. We thank you, Lord, that you have given us your Holy Spirit.

Lord, we confess, Lord, that we, in our sinful nature, are sometimes weary, or we look around us at others, and we are sometimes envious, or maybe we take wrongful pride in the gifts you've given us.

Help us, Lord, to grow in maturity. Help us, Lord, to realign our thoughts and minds towards Christ. And help us, Lord, to use the things you've given us to exercise it for the upbuilding of your church, and to the glory of your name, and to the advancement of your gospel.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.