

Spiritual Gifts in the Church

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[0:00] Well, everyone has different gifts and abilities, don't they? For example, some of us can sing, while I cannot. In fact, I remember one time we were just not long started our 4pm service in the afternoon, and the person who was coming to sing and play the piano had a cold.

She turned up for rehearsal, and she said, I'm not sure I'm going to be able to sing today. And I said, oh, that's okay, I'll step in, I'll sing. And then after just one song, just one song, she said, it's okay, Andrew, I'll sing.

Her voice with a cold was better than my voice without one. And in fact, there was someone from the 9 o'clock congregation who's here with us today, actually. I don't think he remembers this, but he ended up sending me an email with the names and details of a singing coach.

All right, I've got the point, I've got the point. We all have different gifts and abilities. And sometimes we can look at the gifts of others and think, I wish I could do that.

And sometimes we can even look at our own gifts and abilities and think, I'm not very good. They're not very impressive. I don't feel like I have anything to contribute.

[1:16] I don't feel like I belong. I remember one time, a guy who was at the 4 p.m. service, he came to me and he was thinking of leaving the church because he felt like he didn't belong.

He knew that a lot of people at this congregation knew a lot about the Bible. They had the gift of knowledge, if you like. In fact, many of them had been to Ridley and studied at Ridley. He had not.

And so he felt like he did not belong. I will come back to him later. And well, in our chapter today, it has something to say to those who might feel like that. And in fact, it has something to say to us who may not.

In other words, it has something to say to us all about gifts and why we come to church. And we'll see this as Paul addresses the Corinthian church who have a very messed up view of spiritual gifts.

You see, it seems these guys are up to their old tricks again of trying to outdo each other in terms of gifts. Like last week, where the rich thought themselves superior and so were mistreating the poor when it came to the Lord's Supper.

[2:21] So this week, it seems those who had more impressive looking gifts like speaking in tongues were then looking down on those who did not have such gifts.

And those who did not have them then felt like they were not very spiritual at all. And so Paul actually begins our chapter by reminding us that actually every Christian, no matter what gift we have, every Christian is spiritual.

So point one, verse one. He says, now about the gifts of the spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when we were pagan, somehow or other, we were sorry, you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.

Therefore, I want you to know 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.

Now, Paul in verse one, where he says now about gifts or literally now about the spiritual, he's addressing the issues they wrote to him about. You might remember way back in chapter seven.

[3:27] He actually starts chapter seven now about the issues you wrote about. And so ever since chapter seven, he's been addressing different issues like marriage, like food sacrifice to idols, like the Lord's Supper and so on.

And today he comes to spiritual gifts and actually runs chapter 12, 13 and 14. So this topic is today in the next two weeks. But he begins here by talking about what really makes someone spiritual.

After all, verse two, they used to follow idols. And so they have a rather warped view of spirituality. Therefore, verse three, he wants them to know. Spirituality is about having the spirit that is saying Jesus is Lord.

Because no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit who enables us to believe. And to say it, to live it.

Now, just to be clear, Paul does not mean that. He's sorry, rather, Paul does mean a person is spiritual if they genuinely say Jesus is their Lord, if they're a genuine Christian.

[4:37] Because anyone can just say the words, can't they? In fact, I heard of a lady who had trained her pet cockatoo instead of Polly wants a cracker to say Jesus is Lord. Now, does that mean the cockatoo has the spirit and is it spiritual?

Of course not. But if a person genuinely confesses Jesus is Lord, if they're genuinely a Christian, then it's a sign that they have God's spirit and therefore are spiritual.

You see, every Christian is spiritual. In other words, this also means, by the way, that true measure of spirituality is not what kind of gifts we have or don't have.

It's how much we allow the spirit to work in our lives. That is, it's how much we live with Jesus as our Lord. How godly we are. That's the true measure of spirituality. But Paul's point here is that the Corinthians should not be dividing themselves into the, you know, the super spiritual and the not so spiritual based on what gifts they have.

For it's not the Corinthians who had impressive gifts like tongues who are spiritual. Rather, every Christian is. Because we all have the spirit. And what's more, every Christian is united, equal part of the body, just with different gifts.

[5:53] So point to verse four. He says, there are different kind of gifts, but the same spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

There are different kinds of working, but in all of them, in every one, it is the same God at work. Here, Paul repeats, is talking about the idea of same and different.

You see the words that are repeated there? Same and different. And so, verse four, we have different gifts, but we're actually united because we all have the same spirit. Or verse five, we have different kinds of service in the church, but we are actually united because we all serve the same Lord Jesus.

Or verse six, we work in different roles in the church, but we are united because we all, the same God works through us all. There is unity, you see, in our diversity.

In fact, Paul even hints at this by the way he mentions each person of the Trinity. Do you notice that? Verse four, he mentions the spirit. Verse five, the Lord Jesus. And verse six, God the Father.

[7:02] Just as there are different persons in the Godhead and with different roles, and yet there's one God, so also the church. Our gifts don't make us more spiritual or superior to others.

Rather, like the Trinity, even like men and women we saw a couple of weeks ago with that controversial passage, we are united as equals, just with different roles and gifts. And so the Corinthians who spoke in tongues should not look down on those who did not.

Especially when they remember that gifts are just that. Gifts. They didn't earn them. In fact, the word for gift here comes from the word for grace.

And so they ought not to think they're more spiritual than others because these gifts are not earned. They are given by God's grace. And what's more, they're also given not for their own good to puff themselves up, but they're given for the common good to serve others.

Verse seven. Now to each one, each person, the working or the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.

[8:14] I think this is the key verse of the chapter. The Corinthians were using their gifts to show how spiritual they were. But Paul says they're not even given for you. They're given to you for others, for the common good.

There was an announcement from an American company called Praise God Research. It's a bit of a silly thing, but here is the first slide. Praise God Research is proud to announce the discovery of an entire new set of spiritual gifts amongst some southern churches.

And then it goes on the list some. So the next slide. Private evangelist. An overwhelming number of southern church members reported they possess the gift of being a private evangelist. They share the gospel, just not with anyone.

One church member commented excitedly, when I'm by myself watching TV, I like to exclaim, Jesus is Lord. Though usually only the commercial breaks. Or the next slide.

Private service. An equally impressive number claim to have the gift of private service. And the gift of private service is so liberating, one church member said. Because the other people involved were always the real challenge for me.

[9:23] But once I was free to serve by myself and to myself, I really saw my spiritual gift come into full bloom. And then they listed other private gifts as well.

And then on the next slide, the article ends by saying, more research is called for this in this area. But this much is certain is an exciting day for private spiritual gifts. Of course, it's meant to be ridiculous, isn't it?

Because the whole concept of private gifts, according to the Bible, is an oxymoron. It's a contradiction in terms. Gifts are not given for our private good.

They are given for the common good. And this means then that we actually come to church not to serve ourselves, did you realize? But to serve others.

Just as Christ came not to be served, but to serve us by giving his life as a ransom for our sins. A lot of Christians these days have this worldly consumer mentality where they come to church to consume for themselves, but then leave without talking or encouraging others.

[10:32] And they say, I come to church to worship God, not meet other people. In fact, I actually met with someone just last Friday afternoon who said that very thing to me.

But that's a consumer mentality. In fact, I saw this slightly amusing video which kind of made the same point. It's on the next slide. Have a look. Imagine a church where every member is passionately, wholeheartedly, and recklessly calling the shots.

I have a busy work week, and by the time Sunday rolls around, I'm tired. So how about a church service that starts when I get there? Can do. When you arrive, we begin.

Financially, Sherry and I don't give a lot to the church, but we'd sure like to know who does. All right, if you join now, you'll know what every person gives in detail. When I'm in the church service, can my car get a buff and a wax?

Not just that, but an oil change and a tune-up. How about tickets to the Super Bowl? That's asking too much. I'm serious. If I'm going to join, I want tickets to the big game. All right, you join now, and we'll get you there.

[11:39] I like a pony. Look in your backyard. Me Church, where it's all about you. Now, hopefully, again, you realize it's a send-up.

You get that, right? But sadly, a lot of people, a lot of Christians these days think like that. If the church doesn't work for me, I'm out of here. But that's not the picture we're given in the Bible, is it?

Rather, we are gifted to serve others. And it's interesting, as we serve others, they end up serving us, and we're encouraged. That's the way God has organized it to work.

And can I say that I'm actually really thankful for the way so many people here do serve. It's terrific. It's really encouraging. And in a few weeks' time, we're having Thanksgiving Sunday, as I mentioned.

There'll be an opportunity, another opportunity, for other people to sign up to serve in different ways, whether by welcoming or reading the Bible or morning tea or whatever. In fact, one year, I was so encouraged because we had so many people sign up to read the Bible that they only got one go every three months.

[12:52] Isn't that a good problem to have? But one area we really need more help with is pastoral care. We have a growing number of folks in nursing homes and the like.

So we have a growing need for help with people to visit them, to just perhaps pray a short prayer with them, to encourage them. I know many of you already help in this area, whether it's by giving lifts or visiting or encouraging.

That's terrific. Thank you. But for those who don't, why not consider this as a way of serving? Now, I realize, of course, that we may already serve in a ministry or not have the confidence to get up front or may not have the health to serve the way we used to.

That's okay. But we can all say hello, can't we? We can all talk, can't we? So why not make it your goal each Sunday to come to church and ask just one person how they're going or to greet just one person to encourage them?

Because God has given you to the church, not just for you, but for us, for the common good. And that's part of the reason why we have a brief greeting time, actually, in our service.

[14:08] So that you have an opportunity to use your gift of your mouth to encourage others. It's also why I want to encourage you to start wearing your name tags again. We haven't mentioned name tags for a long time here, and I know they're a bane of existence for many of us, but it'd be great if you could wear a name tag.

And if you don't have one, there's a clipboard out the front of the office. As you leave, just put your name down and we'll get you one. Because we come to church to serve others for the common good. But the big point of this section is really that Christians are united by the same spirit, just with different gifts for the common good.

And so Paul repeats this unity and diversity idea in verse 8 to 11. Have a look there. He says, To one there is given through the spirit a message of wisdom.

To another a 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.

[15:19] And he distributes them to each one just as he determines. You see, God has made us different. Deliberately so.

Of course, when we look through a list like this. We immediately start to think which one we have, don't we? Which one do I have there in this list? Which one applies to me? And when we look through and we see that none of them do.

We think, oh gee, I'd really like to have one. Especially verse 10, the miraculous powers. How good that would be. You know, if you're a Collingwood supporter. Bang, different outcome yesterday. And then if nothing applies to us.

We can also wonder what gifts we do have. If any. But we've got to remember, this is not a complete list of gifts. There are other lists in the chapter as well as the Bible.

So on the next slide in Romans 12. Paul lists some different gifts. Some of which we recognize. Like teaching. Or serving. Or even simply encouraging.

[16:19] Is there. Whatever it is. A spiritual gift is any ability. That the spirit prompts us to use for the common good.

That's what a spiritual gift is. Any ability the spirit prompts us to use for the common good. And so the difference between those who do the flowers here at church. And the non-Christian florist down the road.

Is that the spirit has prompted those who do it here. To use their ability for us. For the common good. And that makes their ability a spiritual gift you see.

That's how it works. Now every ability is given by God. Some abilities. Like the miraculous powers in verse 10. Are clearly given supernaturally. But most of the time.

They're given to us as part of our personality. Which means some abilities come more naturally to us than others. But it also means like most abilities.

[17:18] We can actually get better at them. By practicing them. Can't we? If we're willing to try. Because it is also possible to ignore the spirit's prompting.

We may have the ability to play an instrument. But think. Oh no. I don't really want to do that in church. It requires too much practice. I'll get too nervous. I'll just ignore that prompting. But we can do things like that.

Can't we? And so whatever ability we have. We are all. And we all at least have one. The ability to speak and encourage. The question really is. Will we listen to the spirit's prompting and use it for the common good or not?

Well whatever ability we have. Even if it seems bog ordinary like encouraging others. It still means we're an equal part of the church. And actually indispensable.

And so every Christian belongs to the church. And is needed by the church. So at point three. Verse 12. He says. Just as a body. Though one.

[18:19] Has many parts. But all its many parts form one body. So it is with Christ. For we are all baptized by the one spirit. So as to form one body.

Whether Jews or Gentiles. Slave or free. And we're all given the one spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part. But of many.

And so Paul here likens the church to a human body. Doesn't he? And like there is just one body with many parts. So also the church. He's made a similar point back in verses four to six.

But given our tendency to compare ourselves. And to think our role or gift is. Makes us inferior to someone else. Paul it seems has to repeat it here. And remind us that we are all of equal worth.

We all form one body. Not different bodies. We're all together. Equally. Like men and women. Like the Trinity. Like the body. We're equal but different.

[19:19] Which means no matter what gift we have. We still belong. See verse 15. Now if the foot should say. Because I'm not a hand. I do not belong to the body.

It would not for that reason. Stop being part of the body. It's by nature part of the body. And if the ear should say. Because I am not an eye. I do not belong to the body. It would not for that reason.

Stop being part of the body. Paul is saying. Whether we feel like it or not. The reality is. The spirit has united us together. As one body. That's who we are.

We belong. In fact. When it comes to the human body. Did you realize scientists. Have even worked out. A purpose for the appendix. There's a purpose for the appendix.

It actually belongs to part of the body. It's also in church. Just because we don't have the gifts. Other people have. Or ones that seem less impressive than others. Does not mean we are any less part of the body.

[20:17] For the spirit has united us together. As one. And what's more. The church needs us. To have different gifts. To function well. Verse 17. If the whole body were an eye.

Well. Where would the sense of hearing be? And over the page. If the whole body were an ear. Where would the sense of smell be? But in fact. God has placed the parts in the body.

Every one of them. Just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part. Where would the body be? As it is. There are many parts. But one body.

See Paul is saying. That God has deliberately made us. Different. So that we can work together. In a complimentary way. If we're all an eye. Then we'd miss out on being able to walk.

Speak. Eat. Hear. All those other things. It's kind of like a footy team. I was kind of hoping Collingwood would win. And then. I wouldn't get in so much trouble.

[21:14] But. You know. It's like the Eagles team. Right. One team. Made up of different players. With different roles. Working together. In a complimentary way. To win the game. Same with the church.

I mean. Can you imagine. If everyone here. Was really good at welcoming new people. But no one. Could pray. Or read the Bible. Or play music.

Or lead singing. Or preach the word. Or anything like that. Or do morning tea. What would we be welcoming people to? Nothing. There'd be nothing else to happen.

Or if everyone could preach. But no one could welcome. Or serve. Or do anything else. Then the visitors would never come back. Because we never stop talking long enough. To love and serve them. So just as the body needs different parts.

To help it function well. So also. The church needs different people. With different gifts. To function well. Which means the church needs you. See verse 21. The eye cannot say to the hand.

[22:14] I don't need you. And the head cannot say to the feet. I don't need you. On the contrary. Those parts of the body. That seem to be weaker. Are actually.

Indispensable. He says. See we need each other. To work for the common good. I remember. When Michelle was running. My wife Michelle. Was running a play group here. Before we had to close it down.

There was a lady. Who came to. Do morning tea for the kids. To cut up fruit. She's actually part of this. Congregation here today. And she was very quiet. She just did it in the background.

No fanfare. Just served quietly away. Cutting up the fruit. And in the world's eyes. Cutting up fruit. Is not a spectacular gift. Is it? But I tell you what.

When you've got a bunch of hungry kids. It's indispensable. Or it takes others here. Who are more frail at our church. Who are physically unable to do a lot.

[23 : 09] I know of one person in particular. Who's like this. But she spends a lot of time. On the phone. Ringing others up. Encouraging them. Supporting them. Even praying with them. Over the phone.

In the world's eyes. Using a phone. Is hardly an impressive gift. Unless it's one of those modern ones. You have to work hard. To figure out how to use it. But in the world's eyes. It's hardly an impressive gift.

But in terms of the good she's done. Indispensable. That God has wired our human bodies. In a way where each part. Is shown equal concern.

See verse 23. And the parts that we think are less honourable. We treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable. We treat with special modesty.

While our presentable parts of the body. Need no special treatment. But God has put the body together in this way. Giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it. So that.

[24 : 06] There should be no division in the body. But that its parts. Should have equal concern. For each other. Paul is saying here. That our human bodies have.

Some parts that are presentable. Some parts that are less presentable. The presentable parts. Are given honour. By the very fact that. Well we present them to the public. And the less presentable parts.

You know the parts we make sure we cover up. With clothes and things like that. Well. Even by covering them up. Even by treating them with special care. Is a way of giving them honour.

And so God has wired our own physical bodies. In a way where we show. Equal concern for each part. Whether by presenting them. Or by showing special honour to them.

And again. This is what the church is to be like. So those who have gifts that are presentable. Perhaps. Whether they're up the front. Or at the door. Welcoming. Or serving morning tea. Or even talking to each other.

[25 : 03] They don't need special honour. Because often people just thank you for doing that. It is a matter of course. Which is terrific. By the way. But those who seem less presentable.

In the world's eyes. Are those that we treat. Or at least should treat. With special honour. And so at my old church. There was a man who. Was mentally handicapped. And he used to wear pants.

That were too short for him. And so you could always see. That he forgot to wear socks. With his shoes. Because his pants were above his ankles. He never combed his hair. He never brushed his teeth. He always.

He didn't put deodorant on. If I can put it like that. In the world's eyes. He was unpresentable. And the world would shuffle him away. And yet at this church.

They treated him with special honour. They made sure he had a lift home. That he had food to eat. They would even celebrate his birthday. With a birthday cake. And sing happy birthday.

[26:00] Which they didn't do for every other member. Because they were presentable. And in doing so. They. The church showed. Equal concern for this member. Who was in the world's eyes.

Unpresentable you see. And even this man. Had a role to play. For he taught people. To be patient. And to love. He also had this line. Which he always repeated.

He says. We must pray. We must pray. He did. Over and over again. And it was actually a good reminder. Yeah actually you're right. We should pray. The point is. God has arranged our physical bodies. Where each part is shown equal concern.

And so also. In the church. In fact God has arranged it. So that if one part suffers. We all suffer. Verse 26. If one part suffers. Every part suffers with it.

If one part is owned. Every part rejoices with it. And we know that's true. With our own bodies. Don't we? I mean. When you stub your little toe. The rest of your body reacts. Doesn't it? You know.

[26:56] Your eyes water. You hold your foot with your hand. Or you put your other foot on top of it. A lot like that. You let out a cry with your mouth. Or perhaps some other word you shouldn't have let out. Even when one part suffers.

The whole body reacts. And when one part is honored. The whole body rejoices. I've had a sore back for a couple of weeks. And just the last couple of days. It's come good. And my whole body is rejoicing.

It's the same in the church. The point is. Just as God has arranged it. So each physical part. Belongs to the body. Is needed by the body.

Even the appendix. And he's shown equal concern in the body. So also God has arranged it. So each person in the church. Belongs. Is needed. And is to be shown equal concern.

In Christ's body. For as Paul concludes. He reminds us again. That we are one. That we all belong together. Just with different gifts.

[27:52] Verse 27. Now you are. The body of Christ. And each one of you. Is a part of it. And God has. Placed. Or appointed in the church.

First of all. Apostles. Second prophets. Third teachers. Then miracles. Then gifts of healing. Of helping. Of guidance. Of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Or no.

Are all prophets? No. Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? No. Now eagerly desire.

The greater gifts. Here Paul again reminds us. In verse 27. That we are all. Part of the body. We all belong. To the church. But then in verse 28.

He just says. God has arranged it though. So that we are different. With different gifts. To work together. For the good of the church. In other words. We are equal. But different. But why then.

[28:48] In verse 28. Does Paul number. Some of the gifts. You know. First. Second. And third. And why then. In verse 31. Does he say. Seek the greater gifts. Well.

The first. Second. Third. I think. Are a chronological order. Those gifts. That appeared. After Christ. And helped bring the church. Into existence. By preaching the word. But the greater gifts.

Are simply those. That have a greater effect. In building up the church. What gifts are those? Well. They are the word gifts. That's why in verse 28. The first.

Second. And third. Apply. To those gifts. That speak. The word of God. These are greater. In their effectiveness. To build the church.

It does not mean. Then. That the people. Who have them. Are superior. That's how the world thinks. Rather like. In chapter 11. With men and women. Or with the Trinity. Or the football team.

[29 : 45] Our role. Does not determine. Our worth. Rather. We are equal members. Of Christ's body. In God's eyes. What's more. Paul says. In verse 31.

We should all. Desire these greater gifts. These word gifts. For we can all. Use our mouths. To speak God's word. To each other. As we read. On the last slide. In chapter.

Colossians chapter 3. Let the word of Christ. Twell among you. Richly. As you teach. And admonish. One another. We're to do it. To each other. Through wisdom.

Through psalms. Hymns. And spiritual songs. You see. As we. We are all. To take part. In these greater. Gifts. These word gifts. To build the church. To build each other. So the picture.

Paul has in mind. Here is not. Of some people. Being greater. Than others. No. No. But rather. Of all people. Using these greater gifts. For the good of others.

[30 : 41] What does all this mean for us? Well firstly. Are you spiritual? That's the first question. You've got to work out. That is. Have you confessed Jesus. As your Lord? Which means you have the spirit.

For without this. You are not part. Of the body of Christ. You don't actually belong. To the body of Christ. Actually. And you don't have. Eternal life.

So do please. Believe in Jesus. If you don't already. Second though. For us who do. Then. Do we realize. Why we come to church? We come for the common good.

And not just our own good. Just as Christ came. Not to be served. But to serve. So also. We come to church. Not for our good. But for the good of others. And in the process.

We are actually encouraged. To. And so. Come Thanksgiving Sunday. Think about. How you can serve. Here at church. And even if you don't. Sign up for anything. Because your health.

[31 : 35] Won't allow it. Or whatever it is. Think about. How you can come. And encourage. Just that one person. Smiling at them. Saying hello. How are you to them? And thirdly.

If we come to church. For the common good. Then do you realize. That we need you. To keep coming to church. And you. Need us. So keep coming to church. You see.

You are a vital part. Of the body of Christ. We need you. To keep coming. To keep using your gifts. For the common good. In whatever way you can. The guy I mentioned. At the start. Realized.

That it was good. To have different gifts. He realized. He had the gift. Of welcoming. Which was terrific. We didn't need. Any more people. With Ridley certificates. Okay. We had enough. But we needed more welcomers.

And so he stayed. Until he actually. Moved from Melbourne. The point is. No matter what gift you have. We need you. Even if it seems weak. To the world.

[32 : 30] It is indispensable. To God's church. But you also need us. You need us. To serve. And encourage you. You see. God gives us.

One another. To help one another. Persevere. To heaven. What's more. You need us. To help. You grow. As a Christian. I mean. How can you grow.

In service. If you don't come. And serve. How will you grow. In love for others. If you don't mix. With others. You see. We are God's. Gift. To each other. We are one body.

In Christ. With different gifts. To work together. For the common good. That God's church. Might grow. And God's name. Might be glorified.

Let's pray. Our gracious father. We do thank you. For this reminder. Today. That we are. One body. In Christ. But made up. With different gifts. And roles. Deliberately so.

[33 : 25] As you. Have arranged it. But you have. Deliberately done this. For our good. That we can work together. To encourage one another. And grow. Not grow for our glory.

But grow for yours. So please help us. In this we pray. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.