

“Many Gifts, One Giver”

Ask congregation to look at the epistle reading and the partial list of spiritual gifts found in the bulletin.

Introduction: A Gifted Church

I have a friend who is a member of a Baptist church in Fargo, North Dakota. The interesting thing is that he doesn't live in Fargo. He lives in Thailand. He is a missionary that is supported by that one congregation. As I understand it, nearly all his support comes from that one congregation.

Not only does this congregation support him and his family, it supports another missionary family that does work in the United States. So there are two missionary families supported by one congregation.

This is a congregation that is committed to reaching people with the Gospel. The members have spiritual gifts that are put into action so that people who have never heard of Jesus can be saved. The people in that congregation must have the spiritual gift that Paul calls the gift of contributing (Romans 12:8).

Gifts of Grace

Today I would like to talk about spiritual gifts because our epistle lesson is one of several key passages on spiritual gifts. The first thing to understand about spiritual gifts is that they are gifts of grace. The Greek word *charis*, from which we get the charisma, means grace. The word for spiritual gifts that Paul uses here means literally gifts of grace.

Grace is something that is freely given. You don't earn it by working hard. Therefore, we shouldn't take credit for having these

gifts. We shouldn't think that we are better or worse than anyone else because of the gifts we have (or don't have). Rather, we should thank God as the source of these gifts.

Pride over Gifts

The people in Corinth didn't seem to understand this. Some of them were proud because they had certain showy gifts, like the gift of tongues or the gift of healing. They looked down on people who had more mundane gifts like the gift of serving.

Paul wrote to them in part to discipline them for this attitude. He didn't allow them to be proud about a gift because pride implies that the gift comes from the person rather than coming from God. Only God deserves the honor for a spiritual gift. Sometimes people would try to show off their gift in front of the church but Paul would not allow it because this would not honor God.

The purpose of spiritual gifts is to build the church. If they are used in a selfish way, they will divide the church more than build it up. That's why Paul is so strict in many of his letters.

A List of Gifts

You may be wondering what the spiritual gifts are. There is no definitive list of spiritual gifts in Scripture but there are four key passages that are commonly used to draw up a list of spiritual gifts. You should have this list in your bulletin.

From Romans 12:6-8

1. prophesying, 2. serving, 3. teaching, 4. encouraging, 5. contributing (financially), 6. leadership, 7. showing mercy,

From 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

8. wisdom, 9. word of knowledge, 10. faith, 11. healing, 12. miraculous powers, 13. distinguishing between spirits, 14. tongues (languages), 15. translation (of languages)

From 1 Corinthians 12:28-30

16. apostles, 17. administration,

From Ephesians 4:11

18. evangelists, 19. pastors

Gifts Today

As you look through this list, you may notice that not all these gifts are in operation today. Remember that God gives spiritual gifts to build the church so he may change tools from time to time. Like a master builder, he uses the right tool for the right job. Usually, there are many tools being used at once but they might not all be used at any given time.

A good example is the gift of prophecy. In the Old Testament, there were times when prophecy was common and times when it was not. When there was no direct revelation, people had to rely on God's written word.

In the New Testament, Peter hinted that the time for direct revelation was coming to an end when he said Christians have "*the prophetic word made more certain*". (2 Peter 1:19) What he meant is that the Bible is more reliable than direct revelation because it doesn't change over time and it is not based on just one person's experience.

The same can be said with the gift of tongues. Sometimes it is unclear when Paul says tongues whether he means human languages or ecstatic, non-human languages. One thing is clear though. Paul always required a translation to a common, human

language if tongues were used in public worship. We don't know to what degree the gift of tongues is in effect today but we do know it should always have an interpreter if it is used in public.

Conclusion

As you read over the list of gifts, I hope you are able to find some gifts that you have. I am sure that you have at least one because all Christians have at least one.

Through many people with many gifts, God builds his church. If we all had the same gift, we wouldn't be able to do much but working together we can impact our community and even the world for Christ. Like my friend's congregation, we can make a difference even as one congregation.

Before I conclude, let me remind you of one of our nation's mottos. It's not, "In God We Trust," as you might expect but another motto, "E PLURIBUS UNUM," which you can find on any U.S. coin. It means from the many one.

The same can be said about spiritual gifts. From many gifts, God builds one church. There are many gifts but one Giver. Because of this Giver, and not because of the gifts themselves, we can be sure that the church will stand strong.

