

Title: Gifts: Grace for God-exalting Unity in Process

Text: 1 Corinthians 12.7-11

Theme: How the gifts work

Series: 1 Corinthians #59

Prop Stmt. God gives you needs and gives you gifts so that together, we become one.

Quick Review:

What are spiritual gifts? *a God-given ability bestowed upon a believer in order to minister to the church.*

What do we know about them? A clear organizational, thematic, or functional order is not readily apparent. It appears that Paul is simply mentioning some, not necessarily all of the gifts that were in operation in Corinth. That does not mean that there is no purpose at all to this order. Fact is, I think that he deliberately chooses wisdom first and tongues last, since tongues was being abused and true wisdom was being ignored. Paul does not function with a dualistic, supernatural vs. natural tension. He does not divide them up between the miraculous and non-miraculous kinds. He simply sees these gifts as evidences of God's grace for His church, poured out by the Spirit for the benefit of the church family at His discretion. The gifts are not items to be demanded and exploited like spoiled children for our selfish purposes.

What is their purpose? To help others and to be helped by others to show the unity of God as we grow into becoming more like Christ.

John Piper made a profound statement in his book, *Let the Nations be Glad*, when he said that "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever." We are doing missions now, because the people of this world do not worship Who they should worship. But one day in eternity, every person will worship perfectly. On that day, we will not longer need to do missions. The same thing can be said about the church and spiritual gifts. We are weak, fragile, needy and broken people, now. We live with the affects right now of a sin-cursed world and they are real and they hurt. But as followers of Christ we also live with the promises and the power of our resurrected and soon-returning King. Right now, we are incomplete in function. Already, we are complete in Christ. In our practical incompleteness, we need the help of each other. In our positional completeness we live with a God-centered hope. All of this comes from living as a community of believers in Christ.

Even the fallenness of this sin-cursed world and all of its decay stands under the Sovereign Lordship and the triumphant victory of King Jesus. Therefore, the real and present danger of this sin-cursed world is crumbling in its power and grip. To say it another way, the power of this sin-cursed world, while crumbling before Christ is still a real and present danger. And we still live with these affects until that which is perfect comes. (1 Cor. 13) We are in Christ. We are united with Christ. We live with benefits of

his victory, even as we experience the consequences of being identified with His sufferings.

One day Christ went into a synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown. News of his preaching and healing ministry had gotten back to his village and so the people were pretty revved up to hear and see what their local boy, done good would do in their city. That Sabbath He read a portion of Isaiah's prophecy which says (61.1-2) "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Isaiah was saying, the Messiah that you have waited for, is here, and it is me. Immediately they spoke well of him. Then he went on. He told them that His ministry would not benefit them because they would not accept Him. At this, they tried to kill Him. Christ brings eternal benefit to those who believe and yet He also stirs up incredible scorn. He receives praises and curses. His life is suffering and death as well as resurrection, ascension and return.

So what should we expect as followers of Christ? Will we be the recipients of all blessing and perfection? Of course not. We identify with the One who suffered for us. And yet, our suffering is experienced in a context of victory. Our struggles are temporary our setbacks are momentary, our conquest, our ultimate prize is certain. These gifts that the Spirit of God has given to the church are not secret keys that unlock for us the passage way to perfection, they are merciful provisions of God given to His children to help us minister to each other because we live in a fallen, broken world.

Again, these gifts are not to be sought after so that we will be sought after and important nor are they to be pursued and desired so that life will now be easy and smooth. The gift of wisdom and knowledge is given to some because we are all in need of instruction and direction. The gift of faith is given to some because we struggle with discouragement and doubts. The gifts of healing are not given because Christ has promised a prosperous and healthy life to every victorious Christian. If there is one thing clear about the gifts of healing it is that Christ expected that there would be people in the church who were sick and were in need of ministry by other believers. No one is sufficient in and of Himself. In our practical incompleteness, we need the help of each other, even as we are already positionally complete in Christ.

1. What do these gifts mean?

- a. **Wisdom** - the God-given ability to understand the many implications of the cross in everyday life.
- b. **Knowledge** – the gift of insight into what God is doing in the world and more importantly, in the church and her individual members.
- c. **Faith** - a special surge of God confidence to accomplish an amazing task
- d. **Gifts of Healing**

Those who approach the gifts from a cessationistic point of view (believing that all miraculous gifts have ceased – formerly called view #1) are tempted to say that the gifts

of healing either do not function today, or they (plural on purpose) function as a gift of sympathy or empathy that works with medical knowledge. On the other hand, it is very difficult for us to think of this gift without TV images of big hairdo religious personalities doing some really weird things that for some funny reason always result in taking an offering.

Notice that in v. 9, 28, and 29, the text says “the gifts (plural) of healing.” Obviously, there were different gifts of healing. Not everyone was being healed by the same person, nor did each person necessarily have the same amount of the gift for the same duration. Just because God used a person as a means to bring about a healing does not mean that person needs to start a crusade and TV ministry. While some may be used by God more than others to minister to the body with this gift, it appears to me that since there are different gifts of healings and presumably different durations and different levels of intensity, we must avoid institutionalizing this gift and labeling people and limiting them as a result. Just because God may have used you to help bring about healing for one person, does not automatically mean that you can do that for every person. Also, remember our study from last week. This gift may or may not be miraculous in nature. Pray for healing and find a good doctor in that order.

We must recognize that all true wholeness, health and healing ultimately comes from God. Health may come through a direct encounter with God as we have seen in the gospels when Christ personally healed, or healing may come through a mediator, as we have seen in Elisha, or that healing may be mediated through medicine and care as Paul instructed Timothy, or perhaps through the prayers of the elders of the church as we see in James. Therefore, while all healing is divine it is not always miraculous. Healing can come from the humble, voluntary and conscientious servants of God, and healing can come even from some unwitting servants of God in the medical community who think they are doing a career, while a Sovereign God is using them to carry out His plan. God has His purposes in sickness and in health. We pray for healing. We acknowledge that God can and obviously sometimes uses others to bring about healing, but we also stand on our tiptoes in anxious anticipation of the resurrection knowing that only then shall we be fully and finally free from sickness, weakness, pain and mortality. We deal with problems and live surrounded by them, but we deal with them in a context of victory. We are concerned about the physical well being of fellow believers, and we acknowledge that there are times when God uses sickness and pain to get a person’s attention and we do not wish to minimize that in the least. However, we must also exercise great caution that we do not give the wrong impression nor place unnecessary distress and false guilt upon a person by making it appear that it is sinful for a Christian to be ill; nor do we want to lay too great of stress and responsibility upon the faith of the individual who is seeking the healing. After all, the gift of faith is obviously not given to every believer at the same time, in the same amount for the same duration.¹ And we need to realize that even death

¹ The previous paragraph was taken from and enhanced (meaning added to, re-worded and elaborated on) “Anglican Church, Great Britain, 1977: *Gospel and Spirit: A Joint Statement*” in McDonnell (ed.), *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*, 2:291-306. This work was cited in Thiselton’s Commentary on 1 Corinthians p. 951.

is the servant of God and a gift that He gives His children as a means to complete their journey of Sanctification. (All Creatures of our God and King – v.6 of 7)

And you, most kind and gentle death,
Waiting to hush our final breath,
O sing ye! Alleluia!
You lead to heav'n the child of God,
Where Christ our Lord the way has trod.

The implication of all that is huge. We are free to pray for healing and to believe God for that. But, our faith is in God, not in the healing. As the 3 Hebrew boys said about the prospect of going into Nebuchadnezzar's industrial sized human incinerator, "Our God is able to deliver us, but even if He doesn't, we still won't worship your idol." God is able, we know that. The question is, is the healing his plan. If you pray and God brings about a healing – praise the name of Jesus. If you pray and God does not bring about a healing – praise the name of Jesus. You did not succeed, when GOD brought about the healing anymore than you failed when God did not. You honored God when you believed and prayed and He answered yes, and you honored God when you believed and prayed and He answered No.

e. Miraculous Powers

This next gift listed (v.10) is a bit difficult to translate since the word "miraculous" technically does not appear in the original language of the NT. Literally translated, this gift is "deeds or works of powers." But, what exactly does that mean?

Once again, I think it is important to note that this gift is listed in a plural form. I take that to mean that this gift is not a one-size fits all gift, but rather, more of a general label that covers a number of things. The NIV translators made it sound as if these deeds of powers were miraculous, and some of them probably were, while the language itself does not demand that all of them were. I think the translation of "actively effective deeds of power" while a bit wordy, captures the whole enchilada.²

Some of the healings that Christ did in the gospels, and some of the healings that Philip and others did in the book of Acts were associated with exorcisms and other evidences of divine power. When Paul and Barnabus were in Cyprus (Acts13), they were being opposed by a sorcerer named Elymas. "Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.' Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand."

² Thiselton, p. 952

What Paul did in Acts 13, what Peter did in Acts 5 when he pronounced the verdict upon Ananias and Sapphira certainly appear to be illustrations of actively effective deeds of power. Were these battles between two earthly persons, or were these battles between spiritual forces? I think it is both. This power to carry out deeds that actively effect the lives of others as it relates to the gospel, may not always be seen in power, but may also be seen in humility. For example, Paul was the human instrument that God used to bring blindness to Elymas in Acts 13, but when Paul was imprisoned in the later chapters of the same book, Paul does not invoke blindness on his captors in order to walk free. Is that because at that point that Paul did not have the use of the gift, or is it because the actively effective deeds of power was put more on display through the humility and patience of Paul instead of through exercising power and authority?

All of these gifts are ultimately given to us by Christ through the Spirit. Christ demonstrated power in his authority over sickness, demons, nature and even life itself. But Christ also demonstrated His power over temptation, trials, and his power in the midst of intense suffering, pain, ridicule and rejection. While His glory was being shamed, He could of called ten thousand angels to destroy his tormentors, but he chose to constrain himself and endure the cross, which is probably an even greater demonstration of an actively effective deed of power.

“I don’t know how you can put up with that boss. I don’t know how you can tolerate that person.” Think of this. Our victorious Christ, died! Our victorious Christ died a humiliating death after being publicly ridiculed and intimately despised. He chose not to speak, nor answer his accusers, when the power of His Word could have instantly changed the circumstances for his immediate favor. He could have called down fire from heaven, and invoked heaven’s legions of angels. That would have been awesome display of power, but would Christ have been victorious? But what made Him victorious? He carried out His calling of suffering and death. He carried out His mission to love us all the way to the end of ends. He went all the way, all out for us. The Spirit gives to the members of his church the gift at times of being able live in light of the victory of Christ. That victory does not always mean financial prosperity, or physical health. That victory often comes on the road of patient endurance that we are able to walk with joy because the Spirit provides his children with the power to be able to live for His glory instead of their own comfort.

In speaking of the faithfulness of God’s chosen and dearly elect, the author of Hebrews 11.35 says, “Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.” No wonder “the world was not worthy of them” (v.38).

Well, we have looked at a couple more of the gifts listed here. We’re not exactly speeding through this, but there are a couple of things that I must point out before we wrap up for today. I think you can see that the very language that Paul uses makes it impossible to construct real tight, technical definitions of these gifts. Therefore, while the issue is very important to the church, we do not need to waste our time, trying to provide an elaborate labeling system on each other because we end up creating cubby holes that simply are not there. These gifts were not given so that we would be narrow-

minded specialists who only do one thing. On the other hand, these gifts were given so that we could humbly recognize that there are others that we need and whom we to depend on. So...

2. **What do we do about them?**

a. Recognize that God is Sovereign

He gives different gifts to different people at different times. This demands sensitivity and humility.

b. Admit that you desperately need the rest of the church

c. Accept that the rest of the church is not just like you.

d. Love the body.

This week I have been thinking a lot about this text and what God desires for us to understand about how our church is supposed to live and breathe. I remind you that every church has a choice. We can be a bag of marbles or a bag of grapes. This passage assumes that we are grapes, because these gifts are carried out in the context of authentic relationships, where we come alongside each other in humble times of need. Ministry to each other in those times is both difficult and truly delightful. I remind you that these are gifts of the Spirit – the Paraclete, the One called alongside to help us. So, the Paraclete gives to us part of Himself in order that we might come alongside of others in their need and help them, and when we do, we become one.

“Surgeon Paul Brand tells a story that provides a gripping picture of the work of the *paraclete*. He was a junior doctor in a London hospital when one day he came into the room of an eighty-one-year-old cancer patient named Mrs. Twigg. Her cancer was in her throat and, as he describes it, this “spry, courageous woman ... had asked that we do all we could medically to prolong her life, and one of my professors removed her larynx and the malignant tissue around it.”

Brand received an urgent summons to her ward one day, and walked in to find her bleeding profusely from her mouth. He guessed immediately that an artery on the back of her throat had eroded. There was only one thing he knew to do to stop the bleeding: apply pressure. They had only to wait for the surgeon and the anesthetist to arrive. Looking into her terror-stricken eyes as she fought the urge to gag, he assured her that he would not remove his finger until it was absolutely safe to do so. He describes what happened:

We settled into position. My right arm crooked behind her head, supporting her. My left hand nearly disappeared inside her contorted mouth, allowing my index finger to apply pressure at the critical point. I knew from visits to the dentist how fatiguing and painful it must be for tiny Mrs. Twigg to stretch her mouth open wide enough to surround my entire hand. But I could see in her intense blue eyes a resolution to maintain that position

for days if necessary. With her face a few inches from mine, I could sense her mortal fear. Even her breath smelled of blood. Her eyes pleaded mutely, “Don’t move—don’t let go!” She knew, as I did, if we relaxed our awkward posture, she would bleed to death.

We sat like that for nearly two hours. Her imploring eyes never left mine. Twice during the first hour, when muscle cramps painfully seized my hand, I tried to move to see if the bleeding had stopped. It had not, and as Mrs. Twigg felt the rush of warm liquid surge up her throat she gripped my shoulder anxiously. I will never know how I lasted that second hour. My muscles cried out in agony. My fingertip grew totally numb. I thought of rock-climbers who have held their fallen partners for hours by a single rope. In this case the cramping four-inch length of my finger, so numb I could not even feel it, was the strand restraining life from falling away.

I, a junior doctor in my twenties, and this eighty-one-year-old woman clung to each other superhumanly because we had no choice—her survival demanded it. Finally the surgeon came, and they were wheeled into the operating room. There, as everyone stood poised with gleaming tools, he slowly removed his finger as her aged hand clutched his wrist. When his finger was totally removed, a smile spread across her bruised lips. The clot had held. She would be all right. With no larynx, only her eyes could express her gratitude.

“She knew how my muscles had suffered,” writes Brand. “I knew the depths of her fear. In those two hours in the slumberous hospital wing, we had become almost one person.”

3

Cornerstone family, that is up close and personal. Physically, I hope that you never have to endure something like that. But personally, I pray that God will bring us into a bond similar to that, but one that holds us together, not because we are trying to hold on to life, but because we are being held onto by God. We can shake our heads in disbelief and disapproval at the continued violence done in the name of Islam. It is despicable and utterly devoid of any moral foundation there is no question about that. But, we are perpetrating a violence of our own. It is the violence of apathy. We don’t care about anything, except the things that really don’t matter. We have given our hearts over to our technology to the point where we know everything about the celebrities and athletes, and even the religious personalities who are paraded before us, but we do not even know ourselves or the people around us in church. The embers of our hearts cool and their deep desires, go unstoked because they go untouched.

God gives you needs and gives you gifts so that together, we become one – because He, the Triune God is One and has called His children to make Him known like that. These gifts have no affect without relational contact.

³Patterson, Ben ; Goetz, David L.: *Deepening Your Conversation With God*. Minneapolis, Minn. : Bethany House Publishers, 1999 (The Pastor's Soul Series; Library of Leadership Development 7), S. 141