

Title: It takes a church – pt.1

Text: 1 Corinthians 12.1-11

Theme: Spiritual Gifts

Series: 1 Corinthians #53

Prop Stmt: Since spiritual gifts are so important, they invite all sorts of debate.

People do not counterfeit things that have no value. Take a baseball player who only pitched in three major league games and was sent back to the minors and never called up again. No baseball card vendor is trying to sell a fake rookie card of that player because there is no value to the real thing, therefore, there is no motivation or market for a counterfeit.

What do you think about spiritual gifts? Whoa! That question has led to many intense discussions, hasn't it? This is not a new debate. That question reveals a battleground back in the church at Corinth. Much of the book of 1 Corinthians is a written response by the apostle Paul to a letter from the Corinthian church. In that letter from the church to Paul, the people were asking questions about matters that they were fighting over. We reviewed these last week: To marry or not to marry; to eat meat offered to idols or not, etc. Clearly there are two sides to the issue of spiritual gifts. There is evidence for this in the words that Paul uses here.

Look at the opening phrase of v.1 – “Now about spiritual gifts” and compare that with the opening phrase of v.4 – “There are different kinds of gifts.” In our translations it looks like the same word, but in the original language of the NT, Paul uses two different words that are translated as gifts, both of which are extremely important to the discussion. I think what is happening here is that in v.1, Paul uses “their” word and in v.4, he uses “his” word.

I do believe that this really helps us understand what is going on in this text; which is why I am going to go into a bit of a technical explanation.

The verse 1 word is pneumatikon (pneumatics – air) Spirit. Because of the ending of this word, which is either masculine or neuter, it could be translated as either spiritual people or spiritual things. That has been the source of much research and for good reason. I think that spiritual gifts is the better translation, but the most important thing to keep in view is that Paul is answering their question, and the Corinthians were using this word. The question was referring to what does it really mean to be spiritual? The question that they were asking had two different sides to it. One side was coming to this issue by saying something like, “Is it not true that spiritual gifts are genuine evidence of faith?” While the other side was saying something more on the line of, “Certainly, you cannot be serious by suggesting that these “gifts” are true evidence of faith can you?” So, Paul opens the chapter by saying, “Ok, about spiritual gifts” using the word that they had used.

The verse 4 word is charisma. This word is in the family of word that is based on charis. This is the word for grace. Charisma means the gifts that grace brings. Grace (charis) is a concept, and grace gifts (charisma) are evidences of that concept. Therefore, listen

carefully, a charismatic is one who believes in the gifts that God gives which are evidence of His grace to us. For example, Paul uses this word in 1 Cor. 7.7 to refer to the gift of marriage and the gift of singleness. How many of you are married? Will you raise your hand? Keep your hands up. How many of you are single? Will you raise your hand? According to 1 Cor. 7.7 you are a charismatic. Why? Because you raise your hand in church? NO! That has nothing to do with it. You are one who is the recipient of a gift of grace from God.

1. Spiritual Gifts are Important. v.1

Now, I want to deal with things that come from the Spirit, so that you know who or what is truly from the Spirit. There are people who claim they are from the Spirit, and they claim that what they have is from the Spirit, but how are we to really know? I do not want you to be without knowledge regarding these things.

Is Paul referring to spiritual gifts or to spiritual people? The language that he uses could be translated as either, and in the end, it really does not matter. The meaning of the text is the same.

2. Spiritual Gifts can be Abused. v. 2-3

Paul is clearly appealing to some pre-Christian experiences as a basis for this warning. At the very least Paul is saying that before you became followers of Christ, you, apparently rational, logical beings were somehow influenced to worship pieces of rock that were stone-dumb. It is possible that Paul is actually referring to the huge parades and festivals that were held in the Corinthian community to these idols. You, used to be led along, swept-up into the frenzied worship along with everyone else of what? An idol that cannot speak!!! But, I think that this reference to their past is more than a warning shot about the fact that these people may not be the brightest bulbs in the chandelier as they were claiming.

Paul is warning them now about something that they used to experience. In other words, there was something in their current worship experience that was being influenced from their previous pagan worship experiences. What that was, is difficult to pin down exactly. But at the very least we know that these idol festivals involved frenzied actions, that supposedly revealed a ranking of who the most devout were. The more carried away, the higher the status of the worshiper. These community worship events became major public venues for the religious leaders to demonstrate their secret knowledge, power and influence. The reference to the mute idols is more than saying these idols are stone-dead. I think that Paul is also pointing out that since these idols cannot say anything for themselves, their followers, have to do all of the talking, which is why the whole thing ends up being nonsense.

This is what sets genuine Christianity apart from all other religions. We do not have to create a religious structure. We do not have to construct this elaborate spiritual system. God has spoken. God is not mute. God's Word produces life. God breathes and

universes come into being. God exhales and Adam breathes. God breathes out and there is life! The Spirit of God did the same sort of thing with holy men of old who were carried along by Him and wrote this living, pulsating book called the Bible. This book is like no other book, but this unique book has dual authorship. It has the Divine Source operating through human instrumentality. God is the hand, man is the glove. How do you become alive spiritually? The Spirit breathes the very life of God into you and you receive spiritual eyes, spiritual ears and a spiritual heart. You can see, you can hear, you can embrace and believe in Christ and you do and since you are regenerated or born again by the Spirit, you then accept Christ as Savior and Lord and you are declared righteous in His sight, adopted into the family of God and sealed by the Spirit. God's Word is true power. The idols of this world do not have this power. They have influence, but not because it is genuine influence. They only have influence to the extent that they can get you to believe and embrace the lie.

3. Spiritual Gifts must be Appreciated. (v.4-6)
4. Spiritual Gifts have a Purpose. (v.7, 11) (transition verse and emphasis and transition again)
5. Spiritual Gifts are Diverse. (v.8-10)