

Title: It Takes the Whole Church – pt.2

Text: 1 Corinthians 12.1-11

Theme: The Importance and Nature of Spiritual Gifts

Series: 1 Corinthians #54

Prop Stmt.

It seems that whenever a war breaks out, we get a geography, sociology and history lesson. In the last 2 weeks we have been learning that Hezbollah has been firing rockets at Israel. Where is Hezbollah? Hezbollah is not a where, it is a who. It is a group of Islamic militants. But, I thought that is what Hamas was I thought that it was the PLO is. It is and they are. And, I thought that is what Al-Qaeda is, and the Taliban and the Shiites and Sunnis are. Are these all different names for the same group? No! These are all different groups (except Hezbollah is a Lebanese version of Shiite) who tend to fight each other unless a greater enemy is present. They usually hate, kill, and bomb each other. But, they will stop that for a while in order to hate, bomb and kill Jews and Americans who appear to support the Jews, or who have a military presence in Saudi Arabia.

It helps to realize that so much of the nature and dynamics of these problems is tribal. And each group, faction, clan, tribe is essentially looking out for itself. Unity and commitment are generally experienced only when there is a common enemy or a common problem that has to be addressed.

This is not a problem unique to the Middle East. Our nation was unified when we were attacked at Pearl Harbor and 9/11. But, when we are not being attacked we tend to unravel. Most people have not figured out how to really enjoy true unity in the midst of diversity. The reason for that is because fundamentally, we tend to use our diversity (ethnically, socially, individually, athletically) as a means of ranking ourselves as being more important or more valuable than other groups or other people. Husbands and wives have a difficult time getting along. Families have a difficult time getting along. An Illinois woman is suing her Wisconsin parents for maintaining an icy driveway that she blamed for a fall that broke her ankle two winters ago. This week, a federal judge, set up a trial for November. The 25 year old daughter visited her parents in order to surprise her mother on her birthday in January 2005. But the next morning, she was injured when she slipped and fell on her parents' driveway. She filed suit against her parents earlier this year. The daughter said that a letter from her mom apologizing months after the fall proves that her parents knew they had a defective gutter for years and did nothing about it.

She's seeking more than \$75,000 in damages for medical bills and lost wages.

Her parents said that she can't prove the driveway was icy at the time or that their drainage system was faulty.

Businesses, office personnel, shift workers, have a difficult time getting along. Political parties, city councils, the list is endless. Teams get angry at coaches. Coaches get angry at management. Teachers get angry at a school board, on and on it goes. Sometimes it is incompetence, sometimes it is arrogance, but irregardless, everyone knows it. We can predict it, document it, chart it and even explain it. Our world is powerless to do anything about it. Our attempts at solutions are so sad. "You need to learn anger

management.” “You need to learn communication skills.” Think of it. Let’s sit down with the Taliban in Afghanistan and say, “We are going to teach you anger management because we feel your hostility toward women and the west. You need to learn to channel that anger in positive ways.” Or better yet, let’s get a seminar from the U.N. that announces to the Hezbollah and Israel that we feel that fundamentally what is going on here is a failure to communicate and that kidnapping soldiers, bombing airports and firing rockets is in reality a cry for help and a desperate plea for significance. See where that gets you! The only thing that brings fake peace is power. The Romans figured that out 2,000 years ago. If you mess with the peace, we will mess with you. But fake peace is in some ways better than real conflict, but it is not true peace, or true unity.

But, what would it be like (dream with me for a minute) what would it be like if you lived in a community of people, where each person knew what his or her role was. Each person studied understood, for the most part obeyed and learned to love the laws. And as a result, each person learned to contribute well to the whole community. The people were honest, humble, pleasant, hard working and trustworthy. Each person cared more about how everyone in the community was doing more than they cared about pleasing themselves. People were helped, not stepped on. And the people who were helped did not abuse that help, but looked for ways to help others. Business owners cared for their people and took care of them, and the workers cared for the owners and worked hard for them. Government jobs were not political nightmares, but were true jobs of civil service. Leadership was respected, and honor was given. Sarcasm and law suits were unheard of. That community would be a very safe place for people as long as the people took to heart those laws of the community.

That community is what the church is supposed to look like. That is the picture that Paul is painting here in chapters 12-14. The church is a body of believers who are called out of the world. We are saved from sin and its penalty. We are saved from the wrath of God. We are saved from the realm of Satan, the kingdom of lies, deceit, arrogance and façade. We are saved from darkness, hopelessness, fear, restlessness, meaninglessness, loneliness, isolation and despair. We are saved to God. We are saved to a family, a body, the kingdom of Christ. We are saved to a life of truth, light, forgiveness, reconciliation, hope, meaning, rest, community and security. How we are saved is all based on the cross. Christ died in my place. Christ died to on the cross as the payment for your sins, an act that He did not have to do, but chose to do, because He chose to set His love upon you. You cannot earn or purchase or ever deserve this gift of God. Every person who has come to faith in Christ is in the body of believers. And every person who is in the body, the church is only here by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. Grace therefore, is foundational to understanding the entire picture of the church.

We are a diverse bunch. But, understand this. Please, please understand this. Our diversity is so insignificant when it is stacked up against our unity. What do we have in common? We are born as sinners who deserve the wrath of God? What do we have in common? We have a Savior – Jesus Christ, who is a bigger Savior than we are sinners. What do we have in common? We have a home in Christ, a permanent place where we belong in the body of Christ. We have a present identify, a future inheritance, present

forgiveness, a new name, a new calling, a new position, and the ongoing presence of the Spirit of God in our lives. How are we different? We are different ages – so what! That is temporary. We are different races – so what! That is temporary. We come from different socio economic situations – so what! That is temporary. We have different skills, abilities and giftedness – so what! That’s temporary. You like contemporary music, I like opera (not really), but if I did – so what! That’s temporary. You like the Wolverines, I like the Buckeyes – Now that’s serious! (just kidding). What unifies is so much more significant and eternal than our diversity. So, before you jump into this study and start asking, “What is your gift?” “How many gifts do you have?” Hold the phone for a minute. Look at the big stuff first. The church is like a body that is designed to function as many parts working together for one purpose in such a way, that we enjoy, affirm, appreciate and help each other. The result of that is Christ-exalting, God-honoring relational health. The very words that Paul uses bear this out. What the Corinthians were calling pneumatikon v.1 (spiritual things), Paul calls charisma v.4 (grace gifts). I remind you from last week, spiritual gifts are not a badge of being spiritual, they are evidences of grace. They are a mark of grace.

1. **Spiritual Gifts are Important** (v. 1)

Spiritual Gifts are important because they are given to each believer as a result of coming to faith in Christ and these things that are given to each believer by the Spirit of God are to be used in the church to reflect the very character and nature of God as the church body ministers to itself in a harmonious and humble manner. They are critical to the very life and function of the church. But, because they are so critical...

2. **Spiritual Gifts can be Abused** (v.2-3)

Warning: Looking at the gifts through the lens of your own experience is both narrow and arrogant. The body of believers is diverse. It is not just like you. Now, here is where the believers at Corinth were struggling. Just because a person has a miraculous type experience (gift?) does not in and of itself mean that it is of the Spirit. And, just because a person has a miraculous type experience (gift?) does not mean that it is not of the Spirit. So, let’s all take a deep breath and step back for a minute. We need to reaffirm some things that often get lost in this discussion/debate. We all know that the lightning rod issue is the gift of tongues and some of the other “miraculous” gifts. No one reads this text from a completely neutral and objective perspective. Each one of us is influenced by our experience, or lack thereof. In my case, I acknowledge that I have not personally experienced the “miraculous” type gifts. What I do not want to do, is rule them out based on my experience. But, neither do I want to rule them in based on someone else’s experience. I want the Scriptures to be our ultimate authority. And at the end of the day, there may be a bit of ambiguity that is left hanging in the air. My main goal is not to convince you of my position on this issue. What we can all affirm experientially is that we have gone through some type of conflict in the church that came about as a result of someone sinfully and selfishly pursuing status and recognition. This climbing the ladder to gain attention or favor is something we can all relate to. Dealing with that issue is a whole lot more important than making certain that you believe exactly

as I do about every detail of the tongues issue. And yet, the Scripture does not leave the tongues issue completely open to your own experiential interpretation either. There is some very good material the Bible provides on this, that we must and will consider. But before we do, we need to examine verses 4-6.

3. **Spiritual Gifts must be Appreciated.** (v.4-6)

These three verses are fascinating and will occupy the remainder of our time this morning. A casual observation reveals a Trinitarian formula.

Different kinds (distributions) of gifts	same Spirit
Different kinds (distributions) of service	same Lord
Different kinds (distributions) of working	same God

Verse 4 speaks of the Spirit. Verse 5 speaks of Christ (Lord) and verse 6 speaks of God, which often is used for the Father. Different and same are used in each of the three verses. Gifts, service and working are used to convey the same concept. Ok, from these verses, I have six things to say. TWO warnings and FOUR points.

The two warnings:

The groupings here are not exclusive. In other words, forms of service do not come exclusively from Christ and God the Father is not limited in the only One gives forms of workings. This passage is not given in order to create some technical list. But the other danger to avoid is to think that the language here is completely arbitrary. Service (diakonos – deacon) fits very well with Christ and what we just covered in chapter 11 about the Lord’s Table. Christ served the disciples and during that Passover meal in the upper room told them about the Spirit that He would send and the Father would send to continue the ministry that Christ began. Also, the word working fits very well with the role of God the Father, who providentially is at work putting things together. Now the four points.

A. **Spiritual Gifts have the same ultimate source.**

The gifts (and they are presented as a harmonious diversity enjoyed from a fundamental unity) are an expression of the very nature and character of God. They come from God, who uses the agency of the Spirit as the One who distributes them. But what you have is a practical picture of the Godhead. The Trinity functions perfectly with a harmonious diversity (3 different persons) who are part of the fundamental unity called God – 1 God. The expression, enjoyment and deployment of spiritual gifts is a God-given, God-driven means of reflecting back upon God Himself. This is what it means to glorify God. The God-head is all involved in the gifts, although the Spirit seems to have the lead role in this. The gifts that are given are different.

B. **Spiritual Gifts are very diverse.**

No gift can be elevated above another since all of the gifts come from God. Whenever you have diversity, you have someone who wants to rank them according value and importance. That becomes another window for pride to get it and divide, conquer and destroy. The diversity of gifts from God means that God can be experienced by different people in different ways. Let me explain that statement, because all by itself that statement could be dangerous. Here is what I mean.

Let's say that a person in the church of Corinth has the gift of tongues (languages). And in the exercising of that gift, this person says, "I have never felt so close to God, never so yielded to the Spirit as I did when I had that experience of speaking in another language." Ok, so far, that may be an accurate statement of how they felt. But, if the person goes on to say, "You have to experience it too. There is nothing like it. I thought I knew what it was like to be close to God, never, in my whole life have I felt like this, you have to do it." Now that is wrong. Because this person is elevating that gift above the rest saying, you can only experience God the way I am experiencing God. You have to have the gift of tongues in order to experience God.

Wait a minute, what do you do with the person at the church of Corinth who has not been given that gift? Is he chopped liver? Does he not count? Does he not get it? Does he not matter? The very fact that spiritual gifts are very diverse means that God can be experienced in a variety of ways, and one is not more important, or more significant than the other. However, those various ways of experiencing God all have to conform to His Word. For example...

C. Spiritual Gifts are given for ministry to the body.

Spiritual gifts are not secret, hidden, private, mysterious, spiritual codes that enable you to leap ahead a few power levels on your spiritual life video game. (gifts, service, working) Look at those words again. These things are actually very, very practical. The gifts are given for service and service is expressed in action. When God gives a gift, He always assigns to it a task. Grace is always given in order to produce an action. In fact, when you see how much Paul emphasizes this point that gifts are given to edify and build up the church, I don't think that you can call something a spiritual gift unless it is being used to build up the local church. I am going to develop this more in point #4, but we will not get to that until next week, and some of you won't be here next week. (In fact, some of you may not be here right now)

All spiritual gifts are given for ministry to the body, not for your own private use.

D. Some Spiritual Gifts are exercised quietly. (and are just as important as the ones that are exercised publicly.)

Some gifts are more prominent in their function than others. The gift of prophecy is often expressed in a public setting, while the gift of service is often expressed behind the scenes. There are no prima donnas in the body of Christ.

I have two illustrations, and I am done.

- 1) Why are the Tigers such an exciting team to watch this year? The obvious answer is because they are winning. Behind the obvious is a never-say-die attitude that comes from a mutual commitment to the team. The guys want to make the pitchers look good. They want to hit, bunt, steal, sacrifice, anything to get runs in order for their pitchers to get the win. If you have a bunch of guys who only care about their own stats, you may have impressive players, but you won't have a team.

- 2) This morning Kevin sang a solo as part of a choir song. Now, let's stop for a second. Most people know that churches are notorious for factions, in-fighting, and pettiness. Within the church, the choir and musicians are often some of the worst offenders. Ask a person to move their choir seat and they might quit the church (unless of course you are putting them on the front row). Now, having said that, you need to know that our choir is an absolute joy to work with. So, this illustration is simply that – an illustration. This morning Kevin sang a solo as part of a choir song. The point of the song was not in order to do a solo, but to communicate an awesome truth. But, a solo and a choir was used as the vehicle for the communication of that truth. Now, you may have been so blessed by that song that you may express that to Kevin or to a choir member. But, I doubt that anyone is going to walk up to Paul Curtis or Diane Simpson or Lisa Moen and say, Paul, what a blessing you were to us this week. Thank-you for all that you did. Because most of you do not know that Paul is one of the guys who comes in here and copies the music and rehearsal schedules, and Diane puts the choir music in their boxes and Lisa gets the music out for much of the orchestration. And you know what? Paul, Lisa and Diane and the rest of the people don't care that you know. The big deal is not being noticed, the big deal is communicating the truth. Sometimes we think that the big ministry things are more important than the small ministry things – but they are not. We have a team of workers leaving in a few days to go to Kiev, Ukraine to help do construction work on a church building. Is that exciting? Sure! Should we do that? Yes! But, we also have a guest house that we are trying to get remodeled so that missionaries can have a nice place to stay. It may not appear to be as exciting as going to Kiev because you have not been there before, but it is no less important.

So, if you walk out of here this morning and say, wow – what a preacher or wow- what great music – or wow, what a beautiful building – We have failed in our primary task. The entire team works together some of it is obvious, some of it is behind the scenes but, the diversity is all to be done for the unified goal of putting on display the very glory of the Triune God. There is a hero here, it's just not us.