

11-16-14

Concerning Spiritual Things

1 Corinthians 12-14

On Christmas Eve, at the last minute, a new husband remembered he needed to buy his wife a present. He tended to be a bit tight and was unable to decide exactly what he would get. He went into an upscale department store, went to the cosmetics counter and asked the clerk, "How about some perfume?" She showed him a bottle that cost \$200. He declared this was too expensive. The salesperson returned with a bottle for \$100. "Still too expensive," he said. In exasperation, she came back with a bottle for \$10. The man rejected that one and said, "I want to see something really cheap." The clerk handed him a mirror.

We're going to look at a whole different dimension of gifts today. Spiritual gifts. We will look together at 1 Cor. 12-14 – Yep, three chapters. Obviously, we can't get into detail on all this material. Each chapter could be the source of several sermons by themselves. However, I think there is a continuity between these three chapters. In fact, I believe Paul's answer to the Corinthian's question is embedded in all three chapters together.

Let's read just the first three verses of Chapter 12. I think this tells us a lot about what's to follow, and very rarely is this portion of the text addressed.

READ: 1 Cor. 12: 1-3 (NLT)

Now dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us, I don't want you to misunderstand this. You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshipping speechless idols. So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

This portion of the chapter is often glossed over and not addressed, but I would like to take some time to embrace these three verses in regards to the overall text found in chs. 12-14. First the word "gifts" does not appear in the original language. It has been inserted by translators of many versions of our Bible. It's not a bad meaning to convey, but actually the original text just says, "Now about spirituals," or "spiritualities," or spiritual things.

I mentioned before that we can tell when Paul is about to address a new question that the church sent to him by the introduction of the words, "Now about..." or "concerning..." Chapter 12 introduces a new answer by the opening words, "Now about or now concerning spiritual things..."

At first glance these opening verses seem off topic. What does what he is saying here have to do with him then describing manifestational gifts of the Holy Spirit? As with many tough passages in scripture we can only get a good grasp of why this is included is to understand the

entire section in context – chapters 12-14 – and do a little research into the historical context of the time period and culture that Paul is addressing. We had such an experience at our men’s retreat when our guys were together discussing a verse and giving opinions and application to their own lives.

Our speaker at the retreat taught us about “Walking in our anointing” in one of the sessions. He spoke from this chapter and taught us about spiritual gifts. We took time at the end to pray for men who wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit and receive a promised gift from God.

When we read these three chapters in one sitting, we start to see Paul is addressing an issue with speaking in tongues and the church. Is this gift real and available and in operation today? Absolutely! Why would God give all the other gifts and not this one too? Can this gift be abused and misunderstood? Absolutely! This was the case in the Corinthian church and is the case in many churches today. Let’s read about the manifestational gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us and what they are for in the Body of Christ.

READ: 1 Cor. 12:4-11 (NLT)

Vs. 7 – A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.

Read verse 7 over and over again on your own until that sinks in. These gifts of the Spirit are not given for you alone. They are not given so you can prove you are spiritual. They are not given to keep to yourself. These are manifestations of the Holy Spirit for a specific purpose in the church and must be used help one another in our walk with God.

We don’t receive all of these gifts at once, and we don’t have to have one as a prerequisite to others. The Spirit gives what He chooses to whomever He chooses when He chooses for a purpose. Some of these gifts are more easily recognizable than others. Take tongues for example. It’s very obvious if someone is babbling on in some foreign language. Therein lies the rub (as they say). Since this is an obvious gift, it can be desired by people and displayed by people, many times with wrong motives. In many cases it can become a “hey look at how spiritual I am – I am speaking in tongues.”

How can we dispute if someone speaking in tongues is legit or not? We only see and hear the manifestation, but we have no idea what is being said. Therefore, this gift should only be used in the church if there is interpretation, usually by another person with that gift given at that moment for that purpose, so the church congregation can be edified and addressed. Because of this, and the abuse of this gift, denominations like us Nazarenes play down this gift and do not utilize it in our corporate services. Pentecostalism goes to the other extreme and insists that tongues is the initial sign that one is baptized in the Holy Spirit. In fact, they believe unless one speaks in tongues (unknown languages) they are not truly baptized in the Holy Spirit and may not be allow to hold offices in the church or serve in certain capacities. This is absurd. My close friend sought this gift with all his heart and didn’t receive it. He was distraught over this. He was not allow to hold office in our men’s group because he didn’t speak in tongues. Yet he was

gifted in other obvious ways. He was an evangelist, and on fire for God. He disciplined me, yet he was held back in our Pentecostal environment because of this one thing. They are primarily talking about a personal prayer language, in our text Paul is talking about the manifestation of the Spirit in this way in the corporate worship service.

One time over 30 years ago, at a special evening prayer service in a different denominational environment, I was given this gift at a point in the service where we were praying for God to manifest His presence with us and speak to us – This was an acceptable practice. As we waited I suddenly became overwhelmed with the presence of God and felt the Spirit welling up inside me. I thought I was going to explode, but I was also very timid and concerned that there would be interpretation or else I was out of line. I could have squashed this, but I knew what was happening and didn't want to miss the blessing either. I spoke forth what I started hearing and it flowed almost without me controlling it, but I was still in control. It wasn't a long winded utterance. After a couple of seconds of pause, the interpretation came and was on target like a laser addressing something as encouragement to the church. I was relieved and blessed. I almost hoped God would have chosen someone else, but maybe that's why He chose me. That was a one-time event. It has never happened to me again. Some of these type of gifts can be given only once for a purpose and then another gift given for another purpose. They are manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the service.

I had no idea what I was saying; the congregation had no idea what I was saying. It would have been useless chatter if not for the interpretation. This is critical in the church service.

Paul then goes on to teach about the parts of the Body of Christ as the parts of the human body. God has placed all the parts where He wants them to be so the body functions properly. Similarly, in the church, God has placed the gifts in us to function in the church as a whole and well working body – complete in Him and complementing each other for the mutual good. Everyone is different by God's design and everyone has a purpose and gifting in the church.

READ: 1 Cor. 12:27-31

Paul tells us plainly, not everyone has all the gifts. He is instructing the Corinthian church that not everyone has the gift of tongues, which they were holding to and which Pentecostalism still holds to today. This would be a cause of division rather than unity in the church. And then he begins to instruct them how they should behave that leads into chapter 13 – the Love chapter.

“But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all.” Or - a most excellent way (KJV).

This verse is the connector to chapter 13 and shows us we are still on the same subject/topic.

This most excellent way is the way of Love. Love should be the motivator of all we do in the church. It is never about ourselves. It is always about Jesus and each other – Love God – Love others – a is the greatest commandment and ruling law to this day. That will never change, since God never changes. Paul instructs that all these spiritual gifts don't mean a thing if we are not governed by love. In addition, they are all temporary, but love is forever.

READ: 1 Cor. 13:4-8 (NLT) - Paul's definition of the characteristics of Love.

This short little chapter contains a powerful teaching regarding the difference between spiritual gifts and spiritual being – The character God desires and even requires in His children. Then Paul sums up this teaching with the following popular verse.

13 – Three things will last forever – faith, hope, and love – and the greatest of these is love.

This verse then ties us to chapter 14, which starts off continuing this thought...

14:1 - Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities (or gifts) the Spirit gives – especially the ability to prophesy.

Then Paul explains why, in his teaching to the Corinthian church on their misunderstanding and abuse of the gift of tongues. So this is still all part of his answer to their question regarding spiritual things – especially some issue about tongues. He moves back to the main answer. What is most important is that the church is built up, the congregation is encouraged, the body is strengthened and unified. Tongues can't accomplish this without interpretation, so be careful about the gifts and ensure they are used according to God's will and purpose and not just to show off or demonstrate your own spirituality.

READ: 1 Cor. 14:2-5 (NLT)

Paul repeats in this section a couple of times how important it is that the church be strengthened through the use of the gifts. That's what they are for. Speaking in tongues is useless in the church setting unless there is interpretation for the congregation.

v. 9 – It's the same for you. If you speak to people in words they don't understand, how will they know what you are saying? You might as well be talking into empty space.

So Paul admonishes the church regarding their desire for these special abilities. The church was so hung up on spiritual gifts and especially tongues, that Paul had to address this in his answer to them that we are reading today in these three chapters.

v. 12 – And the same is true for you. Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church.

v. 18-19 – I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you. But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten-thousand words in and unknown language.

Paul said that one should pray for the gift of interpretation as well as tongues. He went further saying that he both prayed in tongues and with understanding. Tongues can get the attention of an unbeliever, but then they have to hear with understanding what is being said for it to have an impact on their lives. So Paul concludes this way ...

READ: 1 Cor. 14:22-25 (NLT)

He ends his corrective teaching with these two verses...

14:39-40 – So, my dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues. But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.

With all that said as background, let's go back to the first three verses in chapter 12 and see what Paul is talking about...

12:1-3 - Now dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us, I don't want you to misunderstand this. You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshipping speechless idols. So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

The Corinthian's were not new to ecstatic spiritual experiences. In fact they came from that kind of pagan religious setting. That is why Paul is so concerned in his answer to their question. In their past rituals it was common for people to exhibit all kinds of manifestations. Some would go into a trance. Some would speak in foreign languages. Some might have their eyeballs roll back into their head while they were spiritually overwhelmed. So this business of tongues was not new, but they were asking how this related to their new experience as Christians and members of the Church. Should they forbid this act since they couldn't guarantee someone wouldn't come in with a false message that might curse Jesus or should they allow it and discern the content if there was interpretation?

Paul explains regarding their concerns that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus. Even if they didn't know exactly what they were saying, they could not curse our Lord if they were in fact speaking by the Spirit of God. The same holds true today. By the same token, no one can really say that Jesus is their Lord except that they have been born again and speaking by the Holy Spirit within them. Again, the same holds true today.

I hear this today in a similar scenario... Yeah, but what if ... Not to worry. If you are truly saved by the blood of Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit within you and you cannot accidentally curse the one who saved you. Because the Corinthians were once led astray to idols, they were concerned about these things as they joined in corporate worship in their new life. If they were to speak a word in an unknown language and were really true believers in Christ, they need not be concerned about what they were saying. It would align with God's will. However caution must be followed here, and all things must be tested to ensure the truth of the Spirit is being delivered. Again, interpretation is required to determine the content of what was being said.

For us – well it is much safer to just eliminate this experience from our worship service then to have to judge on the spot the validity of its content. There is no real need for this gift to manifest in our services. God uses each of us in different way to convey His message to the congregation. I have seen PJ operate under the gift of the word of knowledge numerous times. We also hear the truth from the pulpit as the word of the Lord regularly. Sometimes we experience extraordinary faith and the gift of healing. God is alive and well here at the Church of the Nazarene in Patchogue.

Each of us needs to be filled, immersed in the Holy Spirit. It's true, that when we chose to believe, we were filled with all the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and He resides within us from that point forward, but does He have all of us? Our part in these spiritual things is a further yielding to God of our lives and our actions, so He can use us more effectively to accomplish His purposes among us as the Body of Christ. Are you willing to yield your entire life to Him now?