

“CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: I Corinthians 12:1-11

Introduction.

After my sermon last week about who are you and what are you doing here, a church member told me a story about Albert Einstein getting on a train and when the conductor came by to validate his ticket, he couldn't find his ticket. Finally the conductor told him, "It's alright Mr. Einstein, I know who you are." Mr. Einstein was still concerned, "Yes, I know who I am too but I don't know where I am going."

We talked about the value of knowing who you are and what you are doing here and where you are going, meaningful origin plus meaningful destiny equals meaningful life.

All of this was very clear to Jesus as we read in John 8:12-14:

John 8:12-14 Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." 13 So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." 14 Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, *for I know where I came from and where I am going*, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.

When you know who you are and where you have come from, why you are here and where you are going you experience greater peace, joy, rest; freedom from stress, pride, envy, competition and frustration. Knowing about spiritual gifts is a key part of this. They tell us about why God created and saved us and why we are here now.

Concerning Spiritual Gifts, Ten Truths from Scripture.

I Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

About spiritual gifts we shouldn't be uninformed so I *ten truths* from Scripture concerning spiritual gifts. If you are so inclined you can fill in the blanks on the back of your bulletin.

Let me begin with an expanded definition. This is more comprehensive than the one Pastor Al has in his book for our class, it builds on his.

A Definition of Spiritual Gifts: A supernatural (beyond the natural, above normal, God-empowered) gift or ability given at conversion to a Christian by Christ through the presence and

power of the Holy Spirit, to be evidenced in his/her ministry (gifted people find ways to serve), for the building up and maturing of the body of Christ so that Christ is honored and God is glorified.

Ten Truths about Spiritual Gifts.

1. Only believers have spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 2:14 *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

We are talking about spiritual gifts, gifts given by the Holy Spirit to those who have the Holy Spirit. Only Christians who profess sincere faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord have the Spirit.

Spiritual gifts aren't magic, they only operate in the context of a personal relationship with God. This relationship with Jesus is vital, in fact, it's primary. We must seek the Giver before we seek the gifts, and more than we seek the gifts. We must seek the Guide before we seek guidance.

Desire to know Christ, to be in close personal love relationship with the God who called and created and saved you and He gives your life meaning and purpose.

Non-Christians have abilities, skills, natural talents, but they don't have spiritual gifts. Christians have abilities, skills, natural talents, and they have spiritual gifts, and it's common for our spiritual gifts to be matched with or compatible to our natural abilities and talents.

2. Every Christian has at least one gift.

1 Corinthians 7:7 *I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.*

1 Corinthians 12:7 *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

God has not overlooked you. That you don't know what it is doesn't mean you don't have one. Every believer has at least one and most, if not all, Christians have more than one and even several.

Some people have the tendency to think that mainly ordained pastors have spiritual gifts, or only those super saints or strong Christians have spiritual gifts.

Paul makes it clear, each one, male and female, young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. As Peter preached on Pentecost from the prophecy of Joel, God said in the last days he would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. What God did at Pentecost He is still doing.

Gifts are not an exclusive privilege for pastors or elders or Sunday school teachers or some class of super saints. There are no second-class citizens in the body of Christ.

As Paul tells Timothy, fan the flame of the gift of God that is in you (II Timothy 1:6).

3. No one receives all the gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:27 *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

I Corinthians 12:17-20 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

So we need each other. The gifts I don't have show me what I need from others. There are no solo Christians or churches with only one gifted person. God never intends for us to live in isolation, He intends for us to live in community.

Only Jesus has all the gifts. There are some throughout redemptive history to whom God gives many gifts, like the Apostle Paul. But there is no one who has them all and needs help from no one else.

4. No single gift is given to everyone.

1 Corinthians 12:29-30 *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues ? Do all interpret?*

I Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

As God's grace is varied, so there is a variety of gifts and an inter-dependence in the body. We are to depend on one another and to serve one another. Our gift is necessary and needed.

5. You can't earn or work for a spiritual gift.

Ephesians 4:7 *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*

If you have received the grace of God then you have received the gifts of God and they are just that, gifts. This isn't about deserving; it's about receiving.

The main word that Paul uses for these gifts is charisma or charismata (I Corinthians 12:4), from which we get our word, charismatic. Charisma refers to God's gracious work, it's something bestowed by God's grace. Eternal life is a charisma, and so are each of the Spirit's gifts.

II Corinthians 4:7 This all surpassing power is from God, not us.

6. The Holy Spirit decides what gifts I get.

1 Corinthians 12:11 *All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*

I Corinthians 12:18 *God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*

As we heard John the Baptist say last week, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven” (John 3:27).

The other NT word for the gifts is pneumatikon (I Cor. 12:1) which means spiritual things and emphasizes that the source is through the Spirit, according to the Spirit, by the Spirit (12:8-9).

We don't decide, we don't get to pick and choose, they are sovereignly ordained and decided. He's the potter, we are the clay. We shouldn't be vain or bitter. We shouldn't boast or be envious. Don't compare your gifts to someone else's and judge some better or more desirable than others. All are gifts, powers from the same Holy Spirit, all are equal in value and importance and necessity in the body.

I Corinthians 4:7 What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

7. The gifts I'm given are permanent (certain, continuous).

Romans 11:29 *for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.*

Irrevocable means not to be repented of, regretted or taken back.

“Those to whom He has given the Holy Spirit...may rejoice in the certainty of the continuance of these blessings” (Hodge, *Romans* on 11:29, p. 382).

That you have spiritual gifts is a given. As long as you have the Spirit, you have spiritual gifts. It is possible for some gifts to come and go according to the needs of the body and for the common good. But you will never be without one.

8. I am to develop the gifts God gives me.

1 Timothy 4:14 *Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.*

I Timothy 1:6 I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.

They come in seed form. Like a muscle they have to be exercised. They can also be neglected.

Romans 12:6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

I Peter 4:11 whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.

As our faith and understanding and spiritual maturity increase so our ability to use our gifts increases. My gifts to preach and teach have improved and increased over these many years.

We should be intentional in developing our gifts, through reading Scripture, taking Sunday School classes, working with others with our same or similar gifts, experimenting, gaining training through experience.

During college and after I volunteered with Young Life as a youth leader for four years. That was a very valuable experience as I learned I didn't have gifts for that kind of ministry and it helped me to focus on pastoral ministry. It also gave me a greater appreciation for those who have that gift, like Dan Houston.

“It's easier to discover your gift through ministry, than to discover your ministry through your gift.” (*SHAPE*, p. 19)

9. It's a sin to waste the gifts God gave me.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 *So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*

Since they are for the common good, we hurt and hinder the body of Christ when we neglect or waste what He has given us to be used for the sake of others. Needs go unmet, burdens are not carried or relieved, salt and light are not given. The body suffers when parts of the body don't do their part.

10. Using my gifts glorifies God and grows me.

John 15:8 *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

I Peter 4:10-11 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

It's a win – win, God is glorified, the body is built up and we are blessed.

This is why we should be informed about spiritual gifts, to pursue a God-centered, God-glorifying vision for all of life, our own life, our families, and our church. Nothing less than the highest and the best for every facet of our lives.

Striving and longing to do everything we do to the glory of God and striving and longing to give God all the glory due His name is truly the highest and best for us all. Did you notice the Trinitarian nature of the gifts in verses 4-6?

I Corinthians 12:4-6 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same *Spirit*; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same *Lord*; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same *God* who empowers them all in everyone.

We live in a world at war over whether the triune God will be glorified or we will, which is to say Satan. There is battle waging. In this culture to give all glory to our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a subversive act, a revolutionary act.

Everything we do is part of this battle. That is why Scripture makes it so clear. Make sure that whatever you do, whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. Fan into flames the gift that is in you for the glory of God and the sake of Jesus and His Church, by the power of the Holy Spirit who is in you.

II Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Prayer: Father, you are the giver of every good and perfect gift and you delight to give beyond all we could ask or imagine. In the name of Jesus we ask you to pour out your Spirit in abundant measure and by your Spirit we ask you to fan into the flames the gifts you have already given to us. Glorify yourself in your Church and remove every hindrance, every sin, every cause for pride or boasting. Come, Holy Spirit, fall afresh upon us I pray, in the name of Jesus, Amen.