

The Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12 v 12-31

Context:

The church in Corinth must have been an amazing church to belong to. At the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul states that they had been enriched in every way and did not lack any spiritual gift (1 v 4-7). Wow! And yet, there were huge problems in this church, some of which were caused by the way they handled spiritual gifts. In fact, Paul's great chapter about love, so popular at weddings, chapter 13, was written to address their misuse of God's ministry gifts and to show them a more excellent way. Sadly, spiritual gifts can be a cause of division in churches today, so Paul's words here are as relevant for us as they were when he first wrote them. Let's see what he has to say.

Observation:

1. What analogy does Paul use in v 12?
2. What does Paul say about believers in v 13?
3. What does he say about the body in v 14?
4. What imaginary conversations does Paul envisage in v 15-16?
5. What obvious statement does Paul make in v 17?
6. What conclusion does Paul reach in v 18-20?
7. What further imaginary conversation does Paul envisage in v 21?
8. What comment about this does Paul make in v 22-24a?
9. What has God done according to v 24b and why according to v 25?
10. What is one practical outworking of this principle according to v 26?
11. How does Paul describe the church in v 27?
12. What are the various gifts Paul mentions in v 28?
13. What rhetorical questions does Paul ask in v 29-30?
14. How does Paul conclude his argument in v 31?

Meaning:

1. What role does the Spirit play in the formation of the church as a body according to v 12-14? How does Paul describe both the unity and diversity of the church in these verses?
2. In v 15-17 Paul addresses the danger of low self-esteem, unfavourably comparing yourself and your gifts to others. Why is such an attitude so unhealthy and illogical?
3. How does v 18 encourage us and act as a corrective to low self-esteem in church members?
4. On the other hand, in v 21, Paul addresses the equal and opposite danger of pride, favourably comparing yourself to others and seeing yourself as better and more gifted, and seeing others as dispensable. Why is this attitude so dangerous and illogical and how does Paul confront it in v 22-25?
5. What beautiful vision does Paul have of the church in v 26 and how have you seen or experienced this in action for yourself?
6. Look at the various gifts mentioned in v 7-10 and v 28 and discuss what each one means.
7. Are all these gifts still active in the church today? Which other gifts would you want to add to this list (see also Romans 12 v 3-8, 1 Peter 4 v 10-11, Ephesians 4 v 7-16).
8. What do you think Paul means by 'the greater gifts' and why should we particularly desire them?

Application:

1. To what extent do feelings of low self-esteem or pride hinder your service for the Lord?
2. Do you know what your spiritual gift/s is/are and are you using it/them to serve the Lord and others?
3. How could we encourage more people in our church to discover and use their gifts?
4. Is there a difference between natural talents and spiritual gifts?

Pray:

- Thank God for the gifts of the Spirit.
- Pray for grace to avoid the pitfalls of low self-esteem and pride.
- Pray for more people in our church to discover and use their gifts.