

“Concerning Spiritual Gifts”

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

For many, the issue of spiritual gifts is one for which they are very passionate. It is a divisive issue in far too many churches and has caused many to simply give up trying to serve the Lord. As is the case for anything that divides – that is not of the Lord. The result of division (for reasons other than true, doctrinal heresy) often brings reproach on the name of Christ. We’re not dealing with difference of opinion here, nor are we dealing with issues of conscience or personal convictions or view. What’s dealt with here, as in the entirety of the book of First Corinthians is an issue that was out in the open, clearly causing disorder and confusion. As stated in 14:33 – “God is not the author of confusion” – so if He isn’t that only leaves one other being that could be – the devil.

The first three verses of this chapter serve as an introduction to chapters 12-14, as they draw the attention of the reader/hearer away from the abuse of the Lord’s Supper and directs it back to the beginning of the letter and the issue of whether the believers were growing in their spiritual life or whether they were still carnal. The point of the letter was to get the believers in the church at Corinth from the latter to the former – from carnal to spiritual – and a big part of that move will be seen in the use of the spiritual gifts for the furtherance of the cause of Christ.

Along with dealing with either immature Christians or those that were still carnal, or had returned to that state, the Apostle is dealing with those that “professed Christ” yet obviously did not “possess Him.” They were Christian in name only and their

actions and speech demonstrated that. The letter to the Corinthian church was one that was written for believers but, as is the case with other letters Paul wrote, he has teachings here (particularly verse three) for those that are not truly born again, yet are part of the church.

Too many Christians are not serving. When you ask them to do something they say, "Well, uh, sorry, but that is not my spiritual gift." Trouble is they seem to think they have no spiritual gift because they say that about everything. Brethren, I tell you the truth in Christ that are no such gifts as pew warming and sermon or music listenin'!! All of the spiritual gifts are proactive. You will be doing something. If you tell me that you are sold out to the Lord and not doing anything I will try not to be rude and call you a liar, but I will have to ask you to explain your definition of consecration to me.

By Charles R. Swindoll, Copied from Sermon Central

There are three words to consider from these three introductory verses: learn, leave, lead(ing).

Because of the connection between this text and all the way back to chapter three, I want to take this time and go back to that text and see how the contrast between spirituality and carnality is still impacting the church, and the life of the believer. That text deals more with the carnal while the one before us deals with the spiritual.

Refer to message on 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 - "Spiritual" or "Carnal?"

I. LEARN – VS. 1

A. Many in the church were "ignorant" of the issue of spiritual gifts. This is not a derogatory term dealing with their intelligence – it's simply saying they did not yet understand what this subject meant.

B. Much of the attention for this verse is given to the words "spiritual gifts," but that is not as much the emphasis as is the issue that they were without understanding ("ignorant") on the issue of spiritual gifts.

1. Most commentators will point out that the word "gifts" is italicized in some English versions of the Bible because there is no corresponding Greek word, and it was supplied by the translators for understanding. Some go so far as to say that it doesn't actually deal with spiritual gifts, but spiritual things more generally. A simple, cursory reading of the rest of these three chapters would seem to show differently. The reason "gifts" is supplied by the translators is because it does appear in the Greek text in verse four, and clearly points to that word.
2. The word for "spiritual gifts" is πνευματικῶν – a plural adjective that is literally translated "spirituals." Since the English word "spiritual" has no plural spelling, it is necessary to supply either a different ending ("spirituality" is how some see it but that isn't the best view) or an additional noun for the adjective to modify – hence, "gifts," drawn from verse four.

Yes, there are more things dealt with in these chapters than just the spiritual gifts, but that is what was not understood by the church at that point, and is still the stumblingblock today, all too often.

3. We will look in more detail to the issue of the "spiritual gifts" in the next portion of this letter. Suffice it to say at this point that every believer is equipped with at least one spiritual gift at the moment of salvation when the Holy Spirit indwells them.

What is found in the remainder of the next three chapters, is based upon this biblical principle of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Based upon that foundational principle, we will look at what it means to be "indwelt by the Holy Spirit" in a separate message.

C. "Brethren" – seems redundant but is inserted here, again, so that the reader/hearer would know that this was given to the believer, and that the issue of not understanding was something they could overcome because they were indwelt with the Spirit. This goes back to chapter two and reminds them that they were "spiritual."

1 Corinthians 2:10–14

¹⁰ But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

¹¹ For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

¹³ Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

¹⁴ But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

D. "I would not have you ignorant"

1. "I would not have you" – it was the Apostle Paul's desire that the believers in the church, beginning with the leadership of the church, have the complete understanding they should have on the subject of the Holy Spirit's work in their individual lives as well as in the church as a whole.
2. "Ignorant" - ἀγνοέω – compound word in the Greek:
 - a) First word is the alpha privative and stands as a negation in its use here, providing a view to the opposite of the word it's modifying.
 - b) The second part of the word is the word νοέω – a word for the mind, or to exercise the mind, and is seen as to perceive, to understand, to apprehend.
 - c) The Apostle isn't condemning them for being unintelligent (as already pointed out) but is writing this to point out that he

doesn't want them to be without understanding any longer on the issue of their usefulness in the church, and for the ministry of the Lord in their everyday lives.

- d) Why they were ignorant of these spiritual gifts (spiritual things, as some see it) is unclear. It is most likely he had taught them, or at least had taught the leadership of the church and expected them to teach the believers; or they had been taught and simply stayed willfully ignorant; or, most likely, the leadership themselves didn't understand it to the extent they should have so when they tried to teach it, the student simply didn't understand. Either way, they were ignorant of it and that needed to be corrected.

II. LEAVE – VS. 2

A. They should, by now, have left their old lives, and the culture of idolatry that was so prevalent for them. This is just a reminder that they were to have put that behind them.

Philippians 3:13-14

¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

B. This verse shows that a good portion of the church was made up of Gentiles – enough so that this problem of a lack of understanding of spiritual gifts was more concerning to them than it was to the

converted Jews in the church. Their background was creating more problems with it than that of the Jews, primarily because of the evil spiritual influence out of which they had been delivered.

C. "Ye were Gentiles" – pointing to the fact that they were no longer "without" – they were no longer considered anything but believers.

D. "Carried away unto these dumb idols"

1. "Carried away" - ἀπαγόμενοι – "In the mid. ἀπάγομαι, literally to lead oneself away, go away, used metaphorically meaning to go astray, be seduced" (Zodhiates). To be carried away, "being led at will, blindly transported hither and thither" (Alford).

Unfortunately, there are many believers, and many churches, that are still in this state of being "carried away."

[Ephesians 4:12-14](#)

¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

¹⁴ That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

2. "Unto these dumb idols" – making a point

to show that the idols they once worshipped were without any ability whatsoever, even the very basic of abilities – to make noise. Whatever they were in worshipping those idols, they no longer were.

Psalm 115:5

⁵ They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not:

Psalm 115:7

⁷ They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.

Psalm 135:16

¹⁶ They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not;

Habakkuk 2:18–20

¹⁸ What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?

¹⁹ Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

III. LEAD(ING) – VS. 3

A. *What is leading us? Or, more to the point, by whom are we being led?*

B. *"Wherefore" – goes back to verse two*

and the idol worship from which the Gentiles had been delivered.

"Since the heathen idols cannot speak themselves, much less give spiritual gifts to others, these must necessarily be among Christians only" (Wesley).

C. "I give you to understand"

1. The word for "understand" in this verse (γνωρίζω) is one most often translated by the word "known," and carries the idea of pushing someone to learn, leading them to know and understand a matter, both by experience as well as intellect.
2. The church in Corinth may have known this intellectually but they seemed to be struggling with understanding – making it relevant to their lives.
3. The issue of spiritual gifts was one that had been misrepresented, it appears, by some in the church (most likely some of the leadership) and the result of that was this misunderstanding of what the influence of the Spirit really is in the life of the believer.

D. What he says in the latter part of verse three is where their confusion began and that is the purpose of the next three chapters – to both explain what is meant in verse three as well as to clear up the confusion and misunderstanding.

E. "No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed" – this goes to the

indwelling of the Spirit in the heart of the believer – a subject to be dealt with next.

1. "No man" – not gender specific – most translations translate this as "no one," because there were women that were involved in these gifts, and not just men.
2. "Speaking" - λαλῶν, λαλέω – this word implies the act of utterance (J-F-B), to discourse, to speak ("the act of utterance absolutely" – Alford). The opposite of this word (with the alpha privative) is the word for mute. This word is simply used for the utterance of the sound, without regard for content or intent.
3. "By the Spirit of God" – most have this as "in the Spirit of God." Either way, the meaning is the same – under the influence of the Spirit.
4. "Calleth Jesus accursed"
 - a) "Calleth" – λέγει, λέγω – as opposed to the word for "speaking," this word (most often translated "say," in its various forms), is one that "refers to that which is uttered," (J-F-B) as opposed to the simple act of uttering. This word deals with the content or intent of what is said – the intelligence behind the discourse. The history of the word – its etymology in Greek – originally carried the idea of "to lay or let lie down for sleep, to lay together, i.e., to collect. Finally to lay before, i.e., to relate, recount" (Zodhiates). It came to mean "say" because of the idea of laying something down in a sensible, logical, understandable way.

- b) "Jesus" - specifically, His earthly name, rather than the term "Christ," which would be the name used for His office. "Not Christ, the Name of office, itself in some measure the object of faith, - but Jesus, the person Name, - the historical Person whose life was matter of fact" (Alford).
- c) "Accursed" - ἀνάθεμα - anathema - in its use here, this means worthy of the curse, or deserving to be cursed; detestable. David Lipscomb considers this to be a word that was used showing Jesus as "the source of evil."

The genuine test of true spirituality turns upon the attitude of the soul toward the Lord Jesus Christ. It is astounding that some of the tongue speakers in Corinth had (presumably) blasphemed the name of the Lord himself, "anathema" meaning accursed! If this seems astonishing, then let it be compared with certain "charismatics" of our own times who deny many of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity "in the name of Christ"! As Russell pointed out, Paul did not refer to those alone who actually used the words "Jesus is anathema," but to all those who practice "what amounts to the same thing." To deny or renounce Christ's teaching would be the equivalent error. (Coffman)

F. "And that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost"

1. There is no definite article before "Lord" in the Greek - the word order is simply κυριον ιησου - Lord Jesus, or Jesus is Lord (the verb "is" being supplied by the context). It not only is to recognize the earthly name "Jesus," as we saw in the previous clause, but it emphasizes that no one can factually call Jesus their Lord

without the Holy Spirit's influence in their lives. In other words, we cannot, will not, make Jesus Lord of our lives if we are not truly born again by the Spirit of God.

2. This verse is not saying that a person cannot utter these words in a literal sense, for that would obviously contradict other Scriptures, and the Bible can't contradict itself – so there must be more to this than what appears on the surface, so to speak. One of those texts would be Jesus' own words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter seven.

Matthew 7:21

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

- a) The key is in the phrase "but by they Holy Ghost." The only one that can say truthfully that Jesus is the Lord is through the manifestation of the indwelling Spirit of God. The words are only truly possible through the Spirit, and if the words are there then the life will demonstrate those words (making Jesus Lord of one's life). If there is no change in a person's life, if there is no indication they are born again, then their words will simply be without substance, no matter how often they claim that Jesus is their Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

James 2:14–20

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

- b) In his ministry as the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist made a point to the Saduccees and Pharisees when they came out to hear him that just claiming to be of the Father wasn't enough, that being baptized by him wasn't enough – that their life had to prove out their belief (which it clearly did not).

Matthew 3:8

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Those fruits are then described for us, in part at least, in Luke's account of the same instance in the ministry of John the Baptist.

Luke 3:10-14

¹⁰ And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

¹¹ He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

¹² Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

¹³ And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

¹⁴ And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

(1) People in general (mainly Jews – vs. 10-11 – the fruit is to do good and show love to others.

(2) Publicans (politicians, tax collectors at the time) – hated by the Jews – vs. 12-13 – be honest.

(3) Soldiers (Romans) – vs. 14 – be kind and be content.

One thing to keep in mind is that all types of people were in this group. It didn't matter who they were, they all had "sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

G. If you're truly born again by the Spirit of God, being then indwelt by the Spirit, there is no way you can say that Jesus is "anathema." I don't believe it would be

possible to say that even in times of crisis of faith – it would just not be possible. ON the same token, if you are truly born again you will have no trouble making Jesus Lord of your life. You may not be sinlessly perfect, and you may struggle with sin, but you will demonstrate by a clear change in your life that you are born again.

Conclusion: Do you have a desire to learn more about your spiritual life and your spiritual gifts? Do you want to know more, or are you content with your level of knowledge? If you're content, then you are in the same position the believers in Corinth were – you are still carnal.

Have you left your past life behind, to the best of your ability, or have you brought it back into your life, and, more importantly, into the church? If so, you are not yet spiritual.

What, or who, is leading you in the choices you make and the things you say? Your speech will betray who you are, at some point – either for the good or the bad. If you are truly saved, your leading will show that you have a desire to learn and grow. If not, your leading will show you are still of "your father, the devil."