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Sermon Summary

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1 Corinthians Ch. 12 Spiritual Gifts

Introduction.

In 19th century someone in their wisdom thought it would be good to introduce rabbits to NZ. Within a few years, rabbits had invaded the place. So they introduced stoats. A few years after that, they found that bird numbers decreased. Why chase rabbits when you can eat birds that just sat there? It seems dumb now, but what was not realized back then was just how inter related our environment was. If you introduce one thing, it impacts on another. The environment is a highly inter related system. Each part of the system impacts another part. And when you start mucking around with it, there are significant consequences. Our bodies are also complex inter related systems. If even something small is damaged in our bodies, it impacts the whole body. Le Stubbing your toe. It seems that God designs highly inter related systems. And the church - called the body of Christ - is an example of this. It is designed to be highly inter relational. We live in a culture that has traditionally valued independence. But the reality is that we are designed as humans to be interdependent. God said "It is not good for humans to be alone." And the reality is that we are all very inter dependent on one another. We need other people to grow, to learn from and for our emotional health. And yet somehow we have created often a form of Christianity that says that it is just about me and God. I can be a Christian but I do not need the church. This is an oxymoron. We cannot love God and not love his family. Our Christian faith is worked out in relationship with other. It is not a solitary pursuit. Yet increasingly our lives have become so busy and complex that we have lost any sense of community.

Read Chapter 12.

The NT language for gifts is broad

Every Christian has the gift of eternal life Romans 6:23 charisma gift of grace

The Holy Spirit is a gift given to each Christian

One's station in life married, or single is a gift.

Ministry is a gift Ephesians 3:7-8

People are gifts to the church

Activities are gifts i.e. 1 Cor 12; 28 mercy etc.

A gift is the way the Spirit works through a person for the good of a community. We don't own gifts for a life time. As the Spirit works through you, you are a gift to the community. It is OK to try to figure out what gifts you have to bring to the community. But don't stress about it. A better question is. Am I being a gift to this community? What am I doing to build this community up? Some people are takers who want to be given gifts by the church while some people are just pains. Paul says everyone has at least one spiritual gift. Christian

1. All the gifts can only be worked out in relationship with other Christians. A gift of helping is useless without someone to help. A gift of teaching is useless without someone to teach. The gift of mercy is useless without someone to show mercy to

2. The sole reason they are given is to build up the church. These gifts form an inter connected system. So if you are not using your spiritual gift, you are impacting the whole system. We can't say, "Well, it doesn't matter lots of other people," "I don't know what my gift is." "I don't have any spiritual gifts." If you say this you are making God out to be liar. Word of God is very clear that every Christian has a spiritual gift whose purpose is to build up the church. So if you don't use your gift, the church is weakened. It is not working properly. We need to be very careful when we start complaining about the church. The church is not the staff. Or the building. It is us. And if the church is not very strong, it is because we us, are not using the gifts that God has given. Do not complain about the church if you are not using your spiritual gifts. Romans 12:3-8 and Ephesians 4 Paul is very clear. Each Christian has a very clear responsibility to use the gifts that God has given them. If a gift is not building up the church, but causing division something is very clearly wrong. This is a tragedy, an abuse. The gifts are for building up the body of Christ. To exercise a gift because it is my right and because God has given me this gift, and it cause division is an oxymoron. It cannot be. Gifts are not for the individual to feel good about themselves. They are only for the building up and strengthening of the church.

3. There is no room for pride. All gifts are given by God. You did not earn them or do anything to get them. They were given to you by God. The Corinthians had elevated certain gifts it appears. One interesting thing about this passage is it needs very little cultural interpretation. Issues are the same today. God gives gifts to whom he pleases. There is no gender involved, so we see female women apostles, teachers, pastors in the New Testament. We do the same as the Corinthians, We think that person is very spiritual because they prophesy or heal. We elevate the so called supernatural gifts. We are to honour the gifts that are more in the background.

4. This passage is also very clear. No one person has all the gifts. There is not one or two super pastors who have it all. Neither does everyone have one gift, like tongues. Idea promoted in some circles that everyone can have the gift of tongues is just not right.

In recent years we have created church around a strong charismatic leader. Personable, super gifted, strong leaders. We have sought out such individuals, who are so called anointed. We have built our faith around these. This has meant that we don't need to exercise our gifts. Or use our discernment. We live off their spirituality. We can sit in the pews and soak up their spirituality. This is so far from what God intends the church, his body to be like. Fortunately for us, you don't have such a leader, so safe. The church is meant to be like our physical bodies. Or like the created environment. A highly inter related system. Where if one part hurts, we all hurt. And if one part rejoices, we all rejoice.

5. There are 3 places where we get lists of gifts in the New Testament. They are all different. That suggests strongly there is no set list of gifts.

1 Corinthians 12 Wisdom Knowledge Faith Healing Miracles Prophecy Discernment Tongues Interpretation
Apostles Teaching Miracles Healing Helping others Administration Tongues

Romans 12 Prophecy Service Teaching Encouragement Giving Leadership Mercy

Ephesians 4 Apostles Prophets Evangelists Pastors Teachers

Others mentioned Celibacy /Marriage 1 Corinthians 7:7 Voluntary Poverty 1 Cor 13:3 Martyrdom 1 Cor 13:3

Tongues, healings miracles more supernatural. Others appear to give people an extra measure of what all Christians have. I.e. wisdom, knowledge, faith, helping, giving, serving, encouragement, mercy Some are more closely related to leadership apostle's teacher's administrators. Some are not clear Despite books written about these gifts, we only have these lists to go by. So hold lightly how we define these.

Any kind of ability that is used for God's purposes could be considered a gift. Music, intercession, practical skills, computing. I think we have limited the list too much. We have tried to make too strong a line between natural and supernatural. Some people are very good with computers. Often it is not actually taught. Many of the smartest computer people don't have degrees. They seem to have an ability. Where did that come from? It is a God given gift. But if that ability is used to hack into people's computers and cause havoc, clearly it is not being used by God. Counterfort. But used for God's glory, to extend the kingdom, aid and build up the church, it is a gift from God of great value.

All the gifts have counterfeit expressions. Prophecy, healing, tongues. An administrator can cause immense damage with their gift, if it is not used for God's purposes.

So I think we should get less hung up about the lists. Don't categorize them. Why. Bible doesn't do it.

Other places Paul talks of the gift of marriage, of singleness, and of hospitality. In Exodus we read of the Spirit of God anointing craftsmen to build the Ark of the Covenant. So let's hold the list lightly. What abilities and gifts has God given you to build up the body of Christ, the church, and to extend the kingdom of God?

6. Gifts are not the same as offices. Two key offices of church leaders Elders. Deacons. Criteria for these roles is spiritual and personal maturity more than any gifting. So you can have a pastoral gift but not be a "pastor" Elders are called to pray for the sick, without having a gift of healing.

7. A Difficult Bit. Verses 28-31 First we have the gifts of apostles, the prophets, and then teachers.... To say that this is an ranking of the gifts seems to be the exact opposite of what this passage is all about. Some say it is more around chronological order. I.e. Apostles are Church planter, prophets are people that speak the word of God that brings conviction, then teachers are needed to strengthen the church. This seems the best explanation.

V31 "Eagerly desire the most helpful gifts." These seems out of order as the passage is saying we need all the gifts. So why then say seek the most helpful gifts? It is not clear what he is saying here. Most say that he is contrasting the gift of tongues with other gifts. Corinthians we hung up about the gift of tongues. Partly due to their cult worship background they really esteemed and valued tongues above all other gifts. What we can say from this passage is this. It is Ok to ask God for certain gifts. But it is God who gives them, not ourselves. We can't give ourselves gifts as it were. If I claim to have a gift of teaching, but everyone falls asleep, then I don't have the gift.

I.e. the test of if someone has a gift is this: is the body being built up. If it is not, we don't have the gift, or we are not using it in love.

Conclusion. Key Question I want you to ask from this passage Are you a giver (a gift) or a taker? Of course if you think about it we need to be both. All givers need a taker. There are some seasons when we take more than we give. I.e. when Sick, struggling. But are we taking - receiving others gifts, but not giving. What are you doing to build up this community? What are you doing to Encourage, to serve, to help, to heal, to bless, pray for to build, to contribute, to give. We will only ever be truly healthy as a community when every person is contributing. We will only ever be healthy as a Christian when we give and take. If we just sit and take, we become fat and lazy.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Discuss the idea that people today are often drawn to the "super charismatic" pastor and what the dangers of this might be.

Do we still elevate some gifts above others in the church? How? When we do, what impact does it have?

Discuss the idea of taking a looser view of what is a spiritual gift and what is not, rather than trying to fit things into the lists given.

What questions do you have about spiritual gifts from this passage, or from what you have seen? Can others in the group help?

How do we create an environment in church where every person and their contribution are valued and honoured?