



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 12:1-10

Topic

Paul points out to the Corinthians that the way they were exercising spiritual gifts at their public meetings was not profiting others

Title

“How to Lose Your Non-Profit Status”

Introduction

I have to be extra-careful again about using ‘bad’ words. My granddaughter busts me every time I use either of the “s” words - stupid or shut-up.

It’s pretty humbling to be disciplined by a 4-year old!

The apostle Paul used a word that we might flinch at using with one another. It’s the word “ignorant.” He said to the church at Corinth in verse one,

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

“Ignorant” can describe *a lack of information* or it can mean *ignoring* what is known.

First Corinthians 12:1-10
“How to Lose Your Non-Profit Status”

I'm going to suppose that the Corinthians lacked information "concerning spiritual gifts" and that is why they were abusing certain of them in their public meetings. Chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen provided them all the information they needed to overcome their ignorance.

There continues to be a lot of ignorance concerning spiritual gifts. Christian assemblies are all over the map in their acceptance and exercise of the gifts listed in the Bible.

Chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen still give us all the information we need to overcome ignorance.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Does Not Want You To Be Ignorant That His Gifts Communicate His Glory, and #2 God Does Not Want You To Ignore That His Gifts Are For The Common Good.

#1 God Does Not Want You To Be Ignorant That His Gifts Communicate His Glory

(v1-6)

After nineteen hundred years of exposition and experience Christians continue to disagree over the exercise of the gifts.

Two major positions have emerged. There are those we might call charismatics and there are those we might call cessationists.

- The word "charismatic" comes to us from the Greek word *charisma*, the word for spiritual gifts. Charismatics are those who believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in Scripture are still functioning today. Sadly, many charismatics act like *charismaniacs!* Their ignorance is that they promote the unbiblical exercise of certain gifts and they accept all manner of wild phenomena as valid without any biblical basis.
- "Cessationists" are those who believe that certain gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased to function in the church today. They confine gifts like miracles, healings, tongues, and prophecy to the apostolic founding of the church in the first century. Their ignorance is that they overlook church

history, they overrule personal experience, and they take Scripture out of context to prove their points.

Who is right?

We will see in these chapters that **all** of the gifts listed in the Bible were being exercised at Corinth. Paul was not a cessationist! He gives no indication anywhere in these chapters or in any of his other writings that any of the gifts would cease before the coming of the Lord for His church.

But Paul had to correct the Corinthian's unbiblical exercise of the gifts. That tells us Paul was not a charismaniac!

We want to be charismatics like Paul - neither cessationists nor charismaniacs. All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to us today, and we want to exercise them according to the guidelines clearly set forth in the Bible.

Paul will begin this discussion by grounding our understanding of God's gifts upon doctrine rather than experience. He does that because the problem in Corinth was not cessationism; it was charismania.

He didn't need to stir them up to discover gifts. He needed to settle them down as to the proper exercise of the gifts.

Why were they so extreme in their exercise of certain gifts? There may be a clue in verse two.

1 Corinthians 12:2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.

The Gentile believers at Corinth had been saved out of Greek mystery religions in which wild spiritual experiences were considered normal. These people were accustomed to being "carried away" in experiences that were called either *ecstasies* or *enthusiasms*.

- "Ecstasies" were supernatural contacts with the pagan deities. Through frenzied hypnotic chants and ceremonies the worshippers experienced semiconscious euphoric trances.
- "Enthusiasms" involved chanting, divination, and dreams.

Ecstasies and enthusiasms were coveted spiritual experiences. In them you were carried away by the power of the deity - whom we recognize as a demon - having no control over what you said or did.

The Corinthians brought this background into the church. They were used to being carried away in their worship, having no control over what they said or did. They carried this practice over into their exercise of spiritual gifts as Christians.

In practice this manifested itself in their public meetings by most everyone speaking or singing in the gift of tongues simultaneously. While they believed it to be evidence of their spirituality Paul will say, in First Corinthians 14:23,

1 Corinthians 14:23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

This still occurs today. Many people have told me that they went to a church meeting only to be frightened away by all manner of weird seemingly out-of-control unbiblical behaviors that were touted as spiritual.

Paul's correction for charismania is the principle he set forth in verse three.

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Anyone can say the words, "Jesus is Lord," whether they mean them or not. In the first century, when annually you had to declare that "Caesar is Lord" and swear allegiance to him, these words took on a more powerful meaning.

Regarding their meetings and the exercise of the gifts, this verse establishes that any manifestation attributed to the Holy Spirit will be consistent with His mission to bring glory to Jesus.

Was someone actually saying Jesus was accursed? Probably not. I think what Paul meant was that if the Holy Spirit is truly gifting someone to speak or to serve, then their speech or service will not cause Jesus to be “accursed.” Instead it will bring glory Him as Lord.

We already noted that by their simultaneous speaking and singing in the gift of tongues people were saying that the Corinthians were “out of [their] minds.” **Their behavior was causing Him to be “accursed” by association with their weirdness.** It wasn’t, therefore, Spirit inspired. It couldn’t be.

In this verse Paul was telling the believers that they must test every exercise of the gifts against the basic principle of whether it brings glory to Jesus as their Lord.

Charismatic congregations often ignore this principle. Many continue the practice of simultaneously speaking or singing in tongues to this day. It does not bring glory to the Lord no matter what we might think. It is not spiritual according to the Word of God.

We will see later that there is a proper way to exercise the gift of tongues in the public assembly. It is one-by-one, in an orderly manner, with an accompanying gift of interpretation.

Speaking of bringing glory to the Lord, Paul next took a moment to give God glory in the next three verses.

1 Corinthians 12:4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.

1 Corinthians 12:6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

We worship One God Who has revealed Himself in three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is from the Godhead that gifts originate. It is to the Lord they should bring attention and glory.

His gifts can only bring glory to Him when they are exercised properly, biblically.

These verses contain a wonderful theology of the gifts, speaking as they do of the "diversity," or we could say the *variety*, of "gifts... ministries... [and] activities."

- There are a variety of "gifts." Paul mentions nine in verses eight and nine; at the end of chapter twelve, in verse twenty-eight, he adds three more. There are more gifts listed in Romans chapter twelve; in Ephesians chapter four; and in First Peter chapter four. (Those lists are probably not meant to be exhaustive).
- There are a variety of "ministries." The NIV Bible translates the word "ministries" as *service*. We each serve the Lord in different ways, depending upon how he has gifted us. If we remember this, we will not compare ourselves to others and covet their gifts. The gifts God has chosen for you are the best gifts.
- There are a variety of "activities." This means that people with the same gift will exercise the gift differently. The Holy Spirit respects your unique personality. Don't try to copy the way someone else ministers. Don't feel more or less spiritual based on the style of your ministry.

These verses are important in context for this reason. Folks most often learn about gifts by observing their exercise in the meetings of the church. There is therefore a tendency to *copy* and *covet* what we see rather than let God use us as He sees fit.

The Corinthians were copying what they'd learned in their former mystery religions. New converts were then coveting and copying the gifts being publicly exercised.

While we can and should learn by example, it must be a proper, biblical example. Even then God doesn't want cookie-cutter Christians.

If you were in the church at Corinth, a charismaniac church, hearing these verses you'd be challenged to think about whether or not your exercise of the gifts was bringing glory to Jesus. It wouldn't matter what you thought, only what He thought based on what was being taught by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

If you were a later Christian, in a cessationist church, hearing these verses you'd be challenged to think about whether or not your elimination of certain gifts was bringing glory to Jesus. How can it glorify Him to willfully ignore gifts He is still giving His church? It can't.

#2 God Does Not Want You To Ignore
That His Gifts Are For The Common Good
(v7-10)

If your goal is to bring glory to God, then your exercise of His gifts in public will **always** be for the common good of others.

1 Corinthians 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

"Manifestation" means that the Holy Spirit makes God's presence known through the exercise of the gifts. Here is an example. Many times on Sunday morning folks come up to me after the teaching and claim that I was speaking directly to and about their lives. What is really happening is that the Holy Spirit is manifesting God to them - making God known through the exercise of the gift of teaching along with the word of wisdom and the gift of prophecy. The result is that you are ministered to as God Himself has been speaking directly to your heart.

In other words, the exercise of the gift of teaching is for your spiritual "profit." The focus of the exercise of the gifts in public is *always* on others, to whom God wants to manifest Himself.

One author put it this way: "Spiritual gifts are not toys you play with, they are tools you build with."

Paul listed a few of those ‘tools’ in the next several verses.

1 Corinthians 12:8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,

1 Corinthians 12:9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,

1 Corinthians 12:10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

We’re going to look at this list of gifts, and the other lists of gifts, in our future studies. We’ll give working definitions for each of them.

Today we simply note that they are listed to illustrate Paul’s point that you exercise gifts in public for the common good. The Corinthians were already familiar with all these gifts. The “word of wisdom... the word of knowledge... faith... gifts of healings... the working of miracles... prophecy... [and] discerning of spirits” are all others-oriented. Their exercise was for the benefit of others.

“Healings” is an obvious example of that from this list. When you exercise a gift of healing, someone who was sick or infirm is benefited. It is for their good, and by extension for the common good, and God gets the glory.

But then Paul mentioned the gift that was causing most of the trouble in Corinth when he said “different kinds of tongues.” If all these other gifts were for the common good, **then so must “different kinds of tongues” be exercised for the common good.**

You’d catch the drift here if you were in the church at Corinth. The exercise of the gift of tongues at their meetings was most definitely *not* for the common good.

Since we’re not in the church at Corinth, I’ll give you a sneak peek at Paul’s basic understanding of the public gatherings of the church.

He will tell us that when we are gathered together, only speech that is intelligible, only speaking words that are understandable, is for the common good.

“Different kinds of tongues” meet that criteria if there is also “the interpretation of tongues.” If there isn’t, then Paul will tell them to not speak in tongues in the public assembly. Period.

It’s very simple, really. If and when you exercise gifts of the Spirit in the public assembly it **must** be for the common good as defined by the Word of God. Part of that definition is that the words you speak must be able to be understood by others.

Those are God’s rules, not ours. He gives the gifts and He certainly can regulate their proper use. Anything else is an abuse of His gifts.

Privately you have more liberty, especially with the gift of tongues.

But publicly, when the church gathers, when there is a meeting of Christians, then God is only truly manifested when you do so for the common good.

When it comes to the exercise of the gifts in the public assembly, most of us need some challenge. We all tend to lean one way or the other - towards charismania or towards cessationism.

Let God show you which way you tend to lean so that you can bring your understanding of the gifts and their exercise into the proper biblical balance.

It’s important we stay balanced for lots of reasons. One, I think, is that our balanced public exercise of God’s gifts will carry-over into our daily experience of walking in the Holy Spirit.

And, really, that is the goal. We want to always, everyday, be walking in the Holy Spirit, recognizing His prompts to notice someone Jesus wants to touch with His love and grace.

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