

## ***SPIRIT-THINGS, 1COR.12:1-11***

The Spirit and Gifts #2

◆Intro: Have you ever been on an aircraft carrier? Nor have I, but when I



was in the fifth grade the USS Enterprise (not the space ship) was docked in Pearl Harbor, HA where we lived. Standing on the dock and looking up, it was a mountain of grey metal. You can think of the

hangers (below the flight deck) as parking garages for airplanes. Just for size comparison, the anchors on the bow would take up most of *your*

garage! There are around 5000 personnel on an aircraft carrier. That's easily more than the entire town of the first church we served in Iowa years ago. The machinery isn't your average engine parts. The



catapult that helps the planes lift off is so powerful that they used to say it can throw a Cadillac (remember when they were big and long "boats" in their own right, as cars go? Maybe think Escalade today.) 12 miles!

◆Now, have you ever been on a cruise liner? These are also very large boats, ships really. They also carry as many people.

But there is a huge difference between a carrier and a cruise ship. On the latter, most of the people are merely along for the ride. On the former all of the



people are there on mission. We Christians view ourselves as sailors, or soldiers on mission. The Church is like an aircraft carrier that launches us into many lands and various tasks for the Kingdom of God, which God has planned in advance for our lives to do. (Eph.2:10). If we think of the Church as a cruise ship, then we don't understand the Christian faith very well yet. And if our sole interaction with the Church is limited to what we

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get from it, we don't understand the work of God's Spirit well yet either. God has given every believer a station to man and the ability to man it. We call those abilities, "spiritual gifts".

◆**1. Spiritual gifts are abilities given by God to benefit his kingdom, so if I'm his follower, I have both assignments and the gifts to fulfill them.**

◆By making this point I'm jumping ahead of what Paul works on first in this chapter. Don't worry, we'll come back to that. Paul sets his topic in v1: **πνευματικος** or "spiritual things". Later he uses three other words to talk about such "spiritual things": gifts/charisma , services/diakonia , and workings/energema . You might notice the english terms "charismatic", "deacon", and "energy" in those root words. Charisma or charis is "grace". Deacons are "ministers" or "servants". Energy is "power" or ability. Paul points some of these out:

◆"To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues." 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, NIV.

◆(For now just notice that Paul mentions tongues last.)

◆And a bit later Paul will mention a list of more of these giftings that we find in the church.

◆"And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts

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of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” 1 Corinthians 12:28, NIV.

◆(For now just notice that Paul mentions tongues last. There is a reason for that.)

◆In Romans, and Ephesians, Paul also gives a sampling of gifts, not all, but a sampling.

◆*“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” Romans 12:6-8, NIV.*

◆(You might notice when writing Rome, speaking in tongues didn’t even make it on the list of gifts! We’ll come back to that.)

◆**B.** Sometimes people get confused distinguishing between what we might call *spiritual gifts* and *natural abilities* or talents. It’s not always easy distinguish. There is some overlap, I believe. Suffice it to say that all abilities are gifts from God, even those in unbelievers. But the Bible indicates that every believer is given ability that when applied to the building of God’s kingdom, the Holy Spirit can and does infuse beyond the power of the person. Have faith in that. Some people have the gift of humor. They can make us cry with laughter. Now that’s not necessarily a spiritual gift. But when they offer that to God’s service, the Holy Spirit can do far more with it than they imagine. God works in that. Some have the

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creative gift; they see colors that go together, they can make a teenage boy's room look like you might even want to live there! My father-in-law had what I'd call a god-given math gift. That man could do an equation in his head. ["Hey Dad, whats the square root of 137?" "Lets see, that'd be 11.7."] Is that a spiritual thing you ask? Not necessarily. It doesn't appear on any biblical lists. But maybe God infuses you with a servant heart; some call it the gift of "helps". And maybe you use your math skill to help someone create a budget. God can also flat out give you a new ability you never had before to use for building up his kingdom. *Christians need to realize that we each are intentionally given something (and can receive more things) that the Spirit can infuse and use.* That's why in the Discover Your Shape class we'll look at a whole gamut of things about you:

- ◆ Spiritual Gifts
- ◆ Heart (what you're passionate about)
- ◆ Abilities
- ◆ Personality
- ◆ Experiences

◆ All of these make you who God has wired you to be and will lead you toward your calling on the ship called the Church. You may have a gift of teaching, and the ability of story telling and a passion for older people, and experience with many aging relatives as you grew up. All this may be pointing your shape toward ministering in a retirement home. Put you in a *nursery*... and you may need therapy soon! You may have an uncanny ability to fix engines and a spiritual gift of serving. You may be called to ministry of helping folks with their cars. This may or may not be your

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occupation! Doesn't have to be. Can be. The point is, knowing how God has developed you, leads you to your place of ministry. All believers are called to ministry.

◆**C.** Lets be careful to make a distinction in terms here. Gifts of the spirit are not the same thing as fruits of the Spirit. Paul says in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The "fruits" define how a christian is. The "gifts" define what a christian is able to do. So lets not tell ourselves, "Oh good, I have the gift of creativity and I'll just focus on that and I needn't worry about being gentle, or patient, and the like. No, that would be a mistake. In fact, Paul makes pretty clear in the next chapter (13) that the fruit of the Spirit is far *more* lasting than giftedness! The fruits are eternal. The gifts are temporary! Look

◆*"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing... Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away."* 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 8, NIV.

◆This all tells us something about spiritual gifts; they are given so as to produce spiritual fruit in the world! The battle in this world is against sin and for godlikeness. It is not to achieve talent! It is to live in love. God

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wants you to produce Kingdom character in this world. It is good for his creatures and it honors his name.

◆**2. Spiritual Gifts always point the God who gave the gift, so don't get caught up in gift-glorification. Glorify God.**

◆See, when we get caught up in the abilities we miss their real purpose, to help people know and love God.

◆**A.** The Corinthians had what some have called the “gift glorification sickness.” They were teaching that to really be spiritual you have to have one particular gift. Their gift of choice was speaking in tongues. Believe it or not, it's an easy one for churches to fall into because it is amazing. Lets get some background. In his letter to Corinth it is clear that the Corinthian church wrote to Paul asking for advice, or intervention in their own arguments and division(7:1). For example, from chapter 6 we can tell that some decided that you could be “spiritual” and it didn't really matter what you did with your body, which wasn't spiritual, kind of a platonian dichotomy really. So they felt their faith didn't have to curb their sexual freedom. Paul counters this of course. From chapter 7 it is evident that some were teaching that to really be “spiritual” you shouldn't get married. Paul counters that too. Chapters 8 and following deal with matters of worship practice, with chapters 12-14 focusing on one really big issue: spiritual tongues, or “utterances”. Now tongues may not be the only gift folks single out as pointing to “real spirituality”.

◆I knew a group of churches in Iowa that emphasized reformed doctrine and the necessity of having a vision from heaven or they considered you an unsaved person bound for hell. All through history

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believers in Jesus have been sucked in to emphasizing something, usually setting themselves apart as special: Christ plus \_\_\_\_! You gotta be baptized by dunking, or you gotta wear clothes from the mid 1800's, or you better worship on Saturday, or you need to be premillennial. Now, none of these are not necessarily sinful practices, but when they become our litmus test for really being "spiritual" we are in the danger the Corinthian Church had. Theirs was "you gotta speak in tongues."

◆ Paul directly counters this. Verse 2: he reminds them they used to be pagans who worship idols. Now idols didn't even speak. But don't let that fool you into thinking there weren't powers at work. People don't keep bowing before idols if it has no affect whatsoever in life! Paul points out in Chapter 10 that the powers involved in pagan worship were demon powers.

◆ *"Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons." 1 Corinthians 10:19, 20, NIV.*

◆ In demonic worship it's quite common for a demon to speak through the person involved in the occult, in a voice not their own! So Paul is reminding them, "Hey, just because you have supernatural speaking ability doesn't necessarily make you "spiritual". After all demons do the same thing. So don't go making tongues your measure of being spiritual!"

◆ On the contrary, Paul explains, everyone who confesses that Jesus is lord has the Holy Spirit already in them (v3). And this basic confession of faith far outshines any gift. Furthermore, gifts are for

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what, -to let you know you're something, spiritually speaking? No, but to edify other people!

◆“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 12:7, NIV.

◆“He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.” 1 Corinthians 14:4, 5, NIV.

◆“*So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.*” 1 Corinthians 14:12, NIV.

◆In summary then, powers and abilities are not the evidence that God is in the mix. (that is actually a pagan fascination, and they called their powers “lords”.) Whether Jesus is exalted as Lord of the universe is the evidence of true spirituality. The real reason for the spiritual gifts is the edification of the church and the exaltation of Jesus’ among her.

◆B. What does this all mean for us?

◆1) Avoid gift-superiority. The Corinthians were caught up in being the hot, happening church where you had to have tongues to be spiritual. You know what that means, don’t you. People who aren’t as “spiritual” are considered lesser. Pride rears its ugly head. When pride shows up, people don’t love each other well. They are too important, or too busy for some of the church members. Or some tasks are beneath them ‘cause they’re



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happening folk. What happens then? Well lots of menial things don't get done. Tables don't get wiped. Doors don't get locked. Coffee pots don't get washed because those are not "big" responsibilities, or particularly spiritual. But let me ask you, what if everyone on and aircraft carrier aspired to being a pilot, the top gun hero type? How well would the carrier operate. I mean it's not like its a simple little boat, now is it. Jr. doesn't say, "Hey dad, alright if I take the carrier for a spin this afternoon?" No it takes 5000 people to get that fighter pilot airborne and he knows it! Flight deck signal man. Radar operator. Ship commander. Catapult operator. Mechanic. Garbage collector!

◆2) Its easy for followers of Christ to sit on their gifts and do nothing out of a lack of appreciation for what God has put in them. Call it gift-inferiority if you want. Avoid gift inferiority! "Oh, I can't sing or preach so there's really nothing left to do. I'll just be a consumer Christian since I have nothing to contribute." A person like this not only deprives the rest of the church of their special contribution, but also becomes easily bitter, complaining, and divisive, and that hurts everyone.

◆Back in march of 1981 President Ronald Reagan was shot by John Hinckley Jr. and hospitalized for several weeks. The nation's chief executive was out of commission and yet the government continued on. Also back in that era the garbage collectors went on strike in Philadelphia. The city was caught in a literal pile of decaying trash that became a health hazard. If there was such a strike nation wide the country could be paralyzed! So who is more important – the

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President of the garbage man? So it is in the church of God. Every part does it's work. Each gift has significance.

◆ *“And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,” 1 Corinthians 12:21, 22, NIV.*

◆ **Conclusion:** God’s body is more like a Carrier than a Cruiser: We are out to make the world different. We are on assignment. Get ready to launch, people! WT Purkiser said, “Every true function of the body of Christ has a member to perform it, and every member has a function to perform.” Lets say you'r a girl. You can't tell yourself you have nothing to offer because you're not a man and men do the work of God. God hasn't left you open for that. Lets say you're old..., like at least older than me! You can't say, “Well now its time for the young folks to step up to the plate. I've done my part.” No, it's always time for the young folks, and it's always time for the old folks to man the stations God wired them for. That's part of the beauty of God's family where each does it part! And what if you're in High School? I've actually heard Christians say this to young people: “You don't need to tithe of your income to God's kingdom, your just a student.” That's not in the Bible. Or, “Don't worry about sharing your faith as a young person. There'll be plenty of time for that later.” That's not in the Bible either! If you are God's, you are a minister, you have callings, and you have talents and the rest of us need you. Maybe you might want to find out what those things are?