

1 Corinthians 1:2-4

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[0 : 00] If you could turn back in your Bibles, 1 Corinthians chapter 14. You can probably already see that 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 as a unit is dealing with one issue, or one main issue, spiritual gifts and life in the church.

So this is the final part of this passage. We're going to read chapter 14, well actually chapter 13, verse 13, through 14:26.

We'll end at verse 26. And now these three remain, faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.

Indeed, no one understands him. He utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement, or comfort.

[1 : 18] He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself or builds up himself. But he who prophesies builds up 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 the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets so that the church may be built up.

Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?

Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there's a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?

So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly, there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.

[2 : 26] If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I'm a foreigner to the speaker, and he's a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in the gifts that build up the church.

For this reason, anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.

If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say amen to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you're saying?

You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not built up. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue.

[3 : 38] Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil, be infants, but in your thinking, be adults. In the law it is written, through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners, I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. And so, if the whole church comes together and everyone, excuse me, everyone speaks in a tongue, and someone who does not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you're out of your mind?

But, if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, well, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and that he will be judged by all and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare and so he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, God

is really among you.

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a psalm or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. That is God's word. You can keep your Bibles open here because we're going to contemplate and we'll look at a number of passages within that section.

[5 : 12] This morning, we looked at the kindness of Jesus as he poured out his spirit onto his believers to equip us to serve each other and this is known as spiritual gifts.

Jesus has gifted each of us in some way to help each other. Look at chapter 12, verse 1, the way this whole passage starts.

Paul writes, Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. I don't want you to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. Why?

Why not be like so many churches, blissfully unaware of this thing called spiritual gifts? Why not be ignorant? Well, as we saw this morning, it's the reigning Jesus who is active, who's doing something and it is these things called spiritual gifts that he is doing in his church, equipping us.

So that's a major reason to not be ignorant of spiritual gifts. Jesus is active in these. There's more, however, more reasons to not be ignorant of spiritual gifts.

[6 : 22] let me mention three types of statements that we find in 1 Corinthians 12. And if you want, you can write these down.

I'll mention the references, but I'll just summarize. The three types of statements that Paul makes about spiritual gifts that help us see that these are important. We need to think about them.

We do not need to be ignorant of them. The first type of thing that he says over and over again is that the spiritual gifts are God's activity and will or purpose.

This is what God is doing. This is what God is doing as he desires. So for example, in chapter 12, verses 4 to 6, the gifts are given by the triune God, by the Spirit, by the Lord, and by God.

Probably a reference to the Spirit, to Jesus, and to the Father. It's the triune God who is doing these things. In verse 11, you can see that.

[7 : 29] All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one just as he determines. It's the Spirit's will, his desires, and his action that is taking place in these gifts.

So we better not be ignorant of what's going on, of what they are. Again, in verse 18, but God has arranged this body just as he wants.

It's the same type of language. Again, in verse 24, but God has combined the body and the parts in such a way just as he wants. Or in verse 28, God has appointed in the church, and he lists a number of gifts.

You can see this repetitive theme throughout this whole chapter. God's active. It's his will, his purpose, and his activity. So if we're ignorant about the spiritual gifts, then we're ignorant of what God is wanting for his church.

Ignorant of his ways. A second type of statement that we find throughout chapter 12 is that the spiritual gifts are given for the common good, for the benefit of each other.

[8 : 37] That's the purpose, the primary purpose of them. That was one of the main things we looked at this morning. So in chapter 12, verse 7, all of the gifts are given for the common good.

In verses 12 to 27, he describes the body and all of its parts that are meant to function together and be a unit, work together, and it's through the gifts that that happens.

In verse 25, the reason God gives gifts is so that there would be no division. We need the other person. You're not me, and I'm not you, and we have different gifts, and neither of us should say, I don't belong here because I'm not as cool as that person.

I don't have that gift. But also no one should say, I don't need you because I don't value your gift. God has arranged the body so that there is no division.

We need the people with different gifts. And so that we would have concern for others. We cannot say, we're better off without that person here.

[9 : 40] So, should we be ignorant of spiritual gifts? In other words, do we want to stilt good for the church? Do we want to hamper the body's functioning?

We can remain ignorant about spiritual gifts, or if you're not, we can, the rest of us, we can be ignorant of these, but we'll be hampering good for our community. A third type of statement about why not to be ignorant of these things called spiritual gifts is that at a number of points we're told

eagerly desire them.

So, chapter 12, verse 31. Eagerly desire the greater gifts. Or again, chapter 14, verse 1.

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. So, those two statements at least, eagerly desire the spiritual gifts.

Do we? Should we be ignorant of the spiritual gifts? If we remain so, we should say to the Bible, no, I'm not going to desire these.

[10:52] I'm not going to be eager for them. So, that's why, you can probably see why Paul says, I don't want you to be ignorant about these. These are a blessing. This is God's activity.

And it's for our good. But I think we typically are fairly ignorant about them. I'd be willing to be challenged on that. But I would bet that perhaps especially in a lot of Presbyterian churches, we don't know much about spiritual gifts.

We're fairly ignorant about them. And I think one of the main reasons for that is that there's a debate among Christians about the spiritual gifts. And it's such a heated debate that we just avoid the topic often.

And we avoid passages like 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. We like chapter 13 because it's about love. But 12 and 14, that's about tongues and prophecy and so we just don't even contemplate.

Much. The spiritual gifts. Because of this debate, what is the debate? Some of you will be very familiar with it but others might not have ever heard that there is a debate. Some Christians think that some of the gifts of the Spirit that have been mentioned here have stopped.

[12:03] That God gave them at the beginning for a particular purpose and once they serve that purpose in the beginning they stop. And God is not giving certain gifts again.

He's giving the others but there are certain ones that don't continue. This is called cessationism if you want the big word. They have ceased. The ones that are typically mentioned are the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy.

But there are a few others like the gift of miraculous powers some people argue has stopped. Other people, other Christians disagree. And they say, no, no. All of them continue.

God hasn't stopped any of them. Tongues and prophecy are still around. All of them are still around. So this is a debate between churches. Cessation or continuation. And there's a spectrum.

There's some people kind of in the middle. Like, well maybe he's stopped some of them but he's God he can do whatever he wants so maybe they'll pop up somewhere in the world. But that's the debate.

[13:03] Very roughly put. The key to the disagreement is how do you understand what's taking place in tongues and prophecy and miraculous powers?

What are they? I mean, what's actually happening when somebody in the first century or now speaks in tongues? What's actually happening? Or when somebody stands up and offers a prophecy to the church what are they doing?

These different Christians who are in debate disagree on what was actually taking place. So those who think that certain gifts have stopped they say well prophecy and the gift of tongues what was happening was God was giving revelations of his son of who his son is revelation of who we are in Christ revelation of what will happen in the end all those things that would later be written down in the New Testament but until they had the New Testament these certain gifts prophecy and tongues and others were given to help the early church until the New Testament was written but once that was written then those gifts are no longer needed because we have the New Testament and if those continue one would think that the sufficiency of the New Testament is challenged if tongues or prophecy continue new revelation no we've got the Bible so that's a certain way of understanding what the gifts are those particular gifts and so naturally they've stopped if that's what they are people who believe that they have continued tongues and prophecy and healing perhaps disagree they say well that's not what they were they're not new revelations about who Jesus is or about who we are as Christians or the end times they're glimpses of encouragements or something to strengthen Christians sort of like what we would do on a casual basis but amplified by divine power and in a special way they're encouragements and blessings to Christians it's not new revelation that's what they are so they disagree at what the gifts actually are doing and so they think that they can continue without crippling the sufficiency of the New Testament so it's a debate and it's a deeply rooted debate and it's a passionate debate personally

I'm not very satisfied with what either group typically offers as an explanation but that's my personal opinion I'm not satisfied with what either typically say but I'm mentioning it to you because I think

this is one of the reasons why we are fairly ignorant of spiritual gifts we don't talk about them much because we're in a group in a context that mostly think that certain gifts have stopped and that others have continued but here's the point it's such a hotly debated topic that the term spiritual gifts have become associated with just those few tongues and prophecy and maybe some of the others so when somebody says like when I said to some people this week to different people I'm going to be preaching on the spiritual gifts the reaction was whoa really that's controversial well actually only a few a few gifts are controversial all the others are not controversial in any way we have so associated the term spiritual gifts with the few that are debated that we that's what we think tongues and prophecy so when you mention to a charismatic church do you all have spiritual gifts they think yes we have tongues and prophecy and when you mention to a cessationist church do you have spiritual gifts no we don't have tongues and prophecy but what about all the others

I mean for instance we read about them this morning what about teaching is that still around oh yeah everybody agrees with that serving the spiritual gift of wisdom administration that's a gift that the spirit gives to his people faith mercy leading pastoring evangelizing healing perhaps the gift of encouragement the gift of distinguishing between spirits the gift of contributing to the needs of others you know even marriage and celibacy are called spiritual gifts those obviously continue so almost the vast majority of spiritual gifts there's no debate about but there's such hot debate about a few that we typically hear the term spiritual gift and we back off and we don't really wrestle with this passage much but it has so much to offer despite what you think about that particular debate and that's what I want to focus on the remainder of our time can we learn anything from 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 despite what position you take on the debate whether you think certain gifts have stopped whether you think all of them are still going regardless can we glean anything from this section of God's word that on the surface is all about tongues and prophecy there are actually some very fundamental issues going on that I think we need to pay attention to regardless of what we think about that particular debate

[18:37] I'll mention three things that we can keep in mind that come from this passage regardless of what you think of the debate and these are each practical thinking about how do you use the gift that God has given you in the church how do you use it well these three themes that come from this passage I think would be helpful for us to keep in mind regardless of what your gift is and you have a diversity of gifts and regardless of what you think about a few first whenever we seek to employ spiritual gifts whatever our gift is or gifts are keep in mind the primary point this has been the theme throughout to build up others to edify the church that is the the heart of this whole passage over and over again whatever your gift is keep in mind that the primary point that God gave it to you is so you could build each other up in maturity for example chapter 12 verse 7 to each one the manifestation of the spirit the spirit working and visible through us is given for the common good we've read that before chapter 14 verses 1 to 5 listen to the repeated phrase it's about tongues and prophecy but listen to the repeated phrase it's to strengthen others that's what makes one greater than the other it's to build up the church it's so that the church may be built up time and again on the surface it's about tongues and prophecy but the issue is that the core of the gift is for building the church up so whatever our gift is when we go to use it to talk to someone to encourage them or to offer our service or to offer our administration abilities or whatever our gift is teaching keeping in mind primarily this is to build you up to build another up in chapter 14 verses 12 to 13

Paul writes since you're eager to have spiritual gifts try to excel in the gifts that build up the church now usually I don't try to criticize a translation because for the most part they're very very good and accurate even if there are little ways that I would word it differently myself it's typically great this particular verse that's not a very good way to translate it so I'll give you another option which I think is more to the point chapter 14 verses 12 to 13 the NIV reads well that begs the question are there gifts that are not intended to build up the church that's what made me stumble on this verse at first I thought well the gifts are all supposed to build up the church what does this mean try to excel in the ones that are supposed to build up the church are there others well the way it's probably better to translate this is this since you're eager to have spiritual gifts strive toward building up the church so that you'll abound it doesn't say anything about certain gifts or others since you're eager for spiritual gifts strive toward building up the church so as to abound that's the heart so whatever our gift keep that primary point in mind the second thing that's a first thing that's all throughout this passage is that primary reason

God has given us the gifts so when you step into church before I move to the second point when you step into church our eyes should turn away from ourselves to God of course because we're here to praise him but we're also equipped by him to bless each other so the moment we step in these doors or start interacting with Christians elsewhere our eyes turn away from ourselves and seek how can I bless others by whatever gifts God has given me quickly turn our eyes outward so now the second practical thing that comes from this passage 1st Corinthians 12 to 14 regardless of what gift you have or what gifts you have regardless of your opinion on the debatable points the second one is this practically use your gifts it might seem like an obvious point let me read you a passage in 1st

Timothy Paul writes this to Timothy in chapter 4 verses 13 to 15 Paul Paul writes until I come devote yourself to the public reading of scripture to preaching and to teaching do not neglect your gift which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you be diligent in these matters give yourself wholly to them if Paul can give that challenge to Timothy don't neglect your gift be diligent in using it devote yourself wholly to using your gift well that seems to suggest that perhaps a lot of people do neglect their gifts they can be neglected and not use diligently so this is a challenge comes from first Timothy but it's all throughout first Corinthians use your gift you have one or more God has equipped you be diligent and devote yourself wholly to blessing others with whatever gift

God has given you so that's that's one way to think of practically using your gift is don't neglect it devote yourself to it but also there are already a lot of concrete opportunities for you to actually use your gift the church here is already doing a lot of things there are so many opportunities that you could offer yourself to they're already set in place waiting for you but I want to encourage you in another way also as a personal task scope out the particular needs in the congregation and if there's not a need being met by something the church is already doing see if you can offer your gifts to fill to fill that need personally scope out what needs to be done for example is there somebody who has a particular a particular what's the word well I'll say need and you have the gift of contributing to the needs of others

[26 : 05] God has given that to some people find people who have a need but it's not being met and go to them and contribute according to your gift or does someone seem weighed down a bit too much and you have the gift of service seek them out somebody their needs are not being met and try to serve them in a manner that brings glory to Christ and matures them in the Christian walk or what if there's somebody in the congregation somebody who's typically criticized by a lot of other people for whatever reason and you have the gift of encouragement seek the person out use the gift practically actually do it actually talk to them and encourage them in a manner that strengthens them in Christ what if somebody that you know is eager to know more about the Bible or about

Christ and you have the gift of teaching well start meeting with them talk to them start teaching in that manner use whatever gift God has given you practically to benefit others don't neglect it devote yourself wholly to it God's given it to you for a purpose so those are the first two principles that come from 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 keep the main thing in mind to benefit others and actually use your gift to build others up and the third thing and this is the one that I'll start drawing things to a close with pray for more gifts that might shock some of you pray for more gifts from the spirit somebody might respond wait a second I thought that it was God who determined what gifts to give to whoever he wants so what do you mean ask for more well it's true it is God who determines what gifts to give to whom for example in chapter 12 verse 11

Paul says all of these are the work of one and the same spirit and he gives them to each one as he determines or 12 18 God has arranged the parts in the body every one of them just as he wants so it's very true God is the one who gives gifts but we're told to eagerly desire the spiritual gifts even the greater ones and in chapter 14 verse 13 look at what he says chapter 14 verse 13 for this reason so as to excel in building up the church anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says that little glimpse it's about tongue so a lot of people turn it off immediately because I don't think those are still around but what's the point what's the principle or what can we glean from it he says pray ask God that you can be given the gift to interpret it's up to God whether I give it to you or not but there's this point in this passage pray for other gifts pray for particular needs that you could be equipped to meet the needs ask God for more so as we scope out the needs of our brothers and sisters as we eagerly desire to help them by God's power and as we practice diligently whatever gifts he's already given us also let's pray that he might give us more

so that we can be better equipped to help each other grow in Christ because that's the heart of God's gift to the church of spiritual gifts so Paul says at the beginning of this whole passage brothers and sisters I don't want you to be ignorant about spiritual gifts so what can we do about that we'll pray that God would equip you in a particular way that is helpful use the gifts that God has already given you practice them and keep in mind the primary point of these gifts building others up for God's glory I'll close with the passage from Peter that we read this morning in 1st Peter chapter 4 listen carefully and receive this as your encouragement and your challenge each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others faithfully administering God's grace to each other in all of its various forms if anyone speaks he should do it as one speaking the very words of God if anyone serves he should do it with the strength that God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ to him be glory and power forever and ever amen to them so that to be honest