

February 27, 2022
Be More Rudolph
1 Corinthians 12:1-11

How do you follow Jesus in a culture that is not Christian in the slightest? That is divided and polarized? Where, ethically, anything goes? Corinth was such a city. The church itself was a reflection of its broader community: there are disagreements, divisions, ethical challenges ... How do you "let your light shine" when, a someone who loves God, you feel different? How do you "be Rudolph?" The church in Corinth is trying to figure out these questions.

If you read through 1 Corinthians in one sitting, what do you notice (it takes about 1 hour)? Yes, you notice all their issues. But you also notice Paul keeps coming back to:

1. **God.** Paul talks about "God" 113 times in 16 chapters (23 times in Chapter 1 alone).
2. **Jesus/Christ/Christ Jesus/Jesus Christ/Lord Jesus Christ.** Paul talks about "Jesus," "Christ" (or the two together) 69 separate times (19 times in Chapter 1).
3. **The Holy Spirit.** Paul talks about the Spirit/Holy Spirit 31 times.

What's the big picture Paul wants the Corinthians to get? ***If*** they want to be the church of God, the church of Jesus, the church of the Holy Spirit – ***then*** be ALL about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. So, ***if*** we want to be the church of God, the church of Jesus, the church of the Holy Spirit – ***then*** we need to be ALL about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, too.

This is why my sermons this winter are focussing unapologetically on God, Jesus, and the Spirit. I am choosing to try not to get sidetracked into other things. Paul wants us to be "***God's church, called by God to be his own holy people, made holy by means of Christ Jesus, who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ***"(1:2).

In a divided world, Paul wants the Corinthians to unite around God. Around Jesus. Around the Spirit. To be God's light in the darkness. In a divided, ethically weird world, I hope we can do the same. God is the One who created this universe, who loves each of us and all of His creation, who saves us, and who fills us with His presence. Jesus is our Saviour. Jesus is our Lord. No one else. We are called to be God's light in the darkness. To quote Paul, "***I will forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified***"(2:2).

The Holy Spirit is God's/Jesus' amazing gift to us, individually, and as a church. Jesus promises, "***I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor/Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth ... he lives with you now and later will be in you***"(John 14:16-17). The Holy Spirit is God's personal presence. He is with each of us. He is within each one of us. Each of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

February 6, we were reminded a temple is where God is actually, personally present. For the Jewish people, the temple in Jerusalem was such a place; they believed God was actually

present in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum. Jesus talks about Himself as the new temple, God's presence on earth, replacing that stone temple (John 2). He tells of a time when God's Spirit will be within each person: we will be God's temples (John 14-16, Acts 1).

Paul says, *"Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God ... so you must honor God with your body"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). God's Spirit – His personal presence – is within each of us, individually. So we need to live wisely and well.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul teaches we, as a community/church, are also the temple of the Holy Spirit. As a church, God's Spirit is within us. After Paul talks about divisions and polarization within the church (3:1-4), he says, *"Don't you (plural) realize that all of you (plural) together are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God lives in you (plural)?"* (3:16).

Is Paul serious about this? He continues, *"God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple (the church). For God's temple is holy, and you (plural) are that temple"* (3:17). Ouch. So ... if we are causing division or polarization within God's church, we are in a dangerous place.

- The Holy Spirit is within us, **personally**. We are holy. Live accordingly.
- The Holy Spirit is within us, **corporately** as a church. We are holy. Live accordingly.

Spiritual "gifts"?

Another issue the Corinthians are struggling with is the topic of "spiritual gifts." When we begin talking about spiritual gifts, some people can feel awkward.

- Perhaps they've been in churches where spiritual gifts were so emphasized, they were uncomfortable (an overemphasis on tongues, prophecy, or other public behaviours?).
- Or they have been in churches where talk of spiritual gifts was taboo.
- Or someone has told them they should have a gift, but they've never "discovered" their gift. They feel guilty or unworthy. Are they even a genuine Christian?

Spiritual gifts refer to the fact that God's Spirit is at work in us. In each of us. In all of us.

The greatest spiritual gifts God has given us are the gifts of His love and grace.

1. *Our whole being – body, mind, and soul – is God's gift of love to us.* Each of us is God's beloved child, created in His image, created by His love (Psalm 139).
2. *God loved the world so much, He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16). Eternal life is not just about life with Jesus in eternity. It is also about life with Jesus right now.
3. *God blesses each of us with His Holy Spirit.* Each of us lives "in Jesus" at this moment. Through the Spirit, God is personally present within each of us. The Spirit guides our consciences, helping us discern right from wrong. He inspires us to love others, to live holy lives, to resist temptation, to pray for others, to give ourselves for others. We

feel His presence, comfort, strength, peace, and so much more.

All of us who put our faith in Jesus have been blessed with these amazing gifts.

We have gifts in common and particular ones, unique to us, as well: *"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us"*(12:4-6).

These unique spiritual gifts have a specific purpose: *"A spiritual gift is given to each of us **so we can help each other**"* or *"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given **for the common good**"*(12:7). A divided church (like Corinth), needed to hear that. We need to hear that, too. Any good gifts we have are given so we can love, serve, help, build up, bless, and encourage one another.

Some of us have

- **Spiritual gifts:** of compassion, faith, healing, discernment, miracles, intercession
- **Physical gifts:** of manual labour, sports, material resources to support God's work
- **Moral gifts:** of prophecy (seeing how God's truth speaks to our times – in the Bible, the gift of prophecy is much more commonly used to forth-tell God's truth/apply His Word to our present circumstances than to fore-tell the future), discerning and choosing what is best, helping people through difficult choices
- **Intellectual gifts:** of education, learning, wise counsel, clear understanding, insight
- **Creative/aesthetic gifts:** of music, art, drama, literature

Each of us has each of these to some extent. We can further develop them. But some people do have special abilities given by God. They are specially equipped with an ability or talent that is especially given. No matter how hard we try, we will NEVER be as gifted as some people. Some people are given a gift we would not expect, that is not "natural" (either for a one-off or for a long period of time).

For instance,

- We can (and should) all pray for one another. Some people have a special gift of intercession. God gives them with very specific words of encouragement for others.
- We all have education and learning we can share. But some people are really gifted at studying, learning, making connections, and teaching. We can all share/teach. But not all of us are destined to be gifted scholars/authors/teachers.
- We all have resources we can use in God's service. We are all called to give to the best of our ability. But some have been given more and are able to give more.

If God has blessed us with special abilities to do things we could not do on our own, great – use that gift. If not, that's just fine, too. *"All these are the work of one and the same Spirit,*

*and he distributes them to each one, just as **he** determines”(12:11).*

The Corinthians' particular issue is speaking in tongues. These were not “known languages” (like Greek or Hebrew), but unknown languages, inspired by the Spirit. Some people were blessed by God with the ability to praise Him in unknown languages in their worship services. That is great – for some people. Paul broadens the discussion to help them appreciate God gives a great diversity of gifts to His people – there are many, many gifts besides speaking in tongues. They all came from one Lord. They are all used to build up God's people.

Diversity – not uniformity – is essential in a healthy church. If everyone in the church is speaking in tongues – and only speaking in tongues – the church would have no mission in the world. There would be no teaching. No music. No care for the poor. The work of the Holy Spirit is so much bigger than just one gift or blessing.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is giving examples of some of the many gifts God may choose to give His people. But God is not limited to these examples. God has given each of us unique talents, gifts, abilities, interests, skills, education, resources, and experiences. These are ALL good gifts from Him. He can use them ALL for His glory, to build His church.

How do we know what our gifts are? In the New Testament, people don't find their gift through introspection or spiritual gift inventories. Instead, they just get on with their lives – they love one another, serve one another, help one another, care for one another, pray for one another – they just do the things Jesus teaches them to do – and, as they do, God equips them, provides for them, and empowers them.

What experiences/education do you have? What are you good at? What do you enjoy? These are God's gifts to you. As you go about living with Jesus, do the kinds of thing Jesus teaches us to do – loving, serving, praying, helping, caring, encouraging, building up one another. God can use the gifts you have. Yes, God can also give extra special spiritual gifts – perhaps just in a particular situation, perhaps as part of who we are – great. Use them for His glory. But more often than not, God will simply bring along opportunities through which you can use the skills, talents, abilities, and experiences He has already given you.

God HAS gifted you. He has given you His Spirit within you. Simply take the opportunities God gives you to love and serve – right now, where you are. Pray for the ability to do this well. (A friend shared this: *"When you have an opportunity to help someone, do it. That's God answering someone else's prayers through you."*) Do challenges seem overwhelming? You may discover God gives you everything you need to serve Him, here and now. Yes, people may think you are a bit different because you choose to love, serve, help, encourage, and bless others. Let your light shine for Jesus. Be more Rudolph. 😊