

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 on September 11, 2016 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: 1 Corinthians – a 21st Century Church

Today's Focus: Spiritual Gifts 101

“The Holy Spirit Loves Diversity”

I'm going to tell you the name of a man with a very special gift. His name is Brett Goode. How many of you know who Brett Goode is? Anybody? Brett Goode is the long snapper for the Packers. That's right, the long snapper. His special talent is crisply spinning a football along a smooth trajectory. It's pretty much the single reason he's on the team. Yet it's a pretty important talent when you think about it. Imagine what happens if Mason Crosby lines up for a game winning field goal but the football sails over his head and he never gets to kick it! I would imagine for a guy like Brett Goode that he'd be happiest tonight if, after the game, you didn't even know who he is because that means everything went smoothly.

Yes, a long snapper is a valuable, if often overlooked, member of a football team. And if you think about it there is a great variety of gifts needed for a football team to be successful. In fact it takes people of all different shapes and sizes. It takes people with all different kinds of gifts and abilities. Some players have a variety of gifts. Some have a more singular, specialized gift. Yet every single player has something important to contribute even if it's a single gift like a long snapper. A healthy team is one where everyone recognizes their gifts and uses them working together in harmony for the common good.

In a way this is the very thing that we're going to be talking about the next 4 weeks as we enter a new section of 1 Corinthians, chapters 12-14, that has to do with spiritual gifts or the gifts that the Spirit of God gives us. So today I hope to introduce us to this new topic and help us all start to see that *The Holy Spirit Loves Diversity*. He loves to distribute a wonderfully diverse variety of gifts to every believer in Jesus...including you and me!

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. So here again is another place where Paul starts out a section of this letter, 1 Corinthians, and says, “Now about this or that.” That's because this was apparently another topic where some members of the church there in Corinth had asked Paul to help clarify some questions that they had.

Because here's what I think was going on. If you've been with us on this journey from the beginning you might remember that way back in chapter one Paul said, **“You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed”** (1 Cor. 1:7). In other words God had richly blessed the believers there in the Corinthian church. They lacked nothing. The Holy Spirit had poured out all diverse gifts with lavish variety among people from different backgrounds in their church. This was meant to be a beautiful thing just as the church itself is

meant to be a place of beautiful diversity where people from different backgrounds can discover and use their different gifts in the service of our common Savior. But there was a problem there in Corinth and we just start to get a sense of it today.

In a nutshell the problem was that some people in the church were treating certain spiritual gifts as if they were better than others. Specifically, it seems some people were implying that unless you could speak in tongues or other languages that you hadn't learned before then you were somehow a second rate Christian. Like maybe even you weren't a Christian at all if you didn't have this particular spiritual gift. So can you see why some people might have wanted to ask the Apostle Paul about this?

²You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

Right away here we learn something wonderful, comforting, and true. There is only one gift of the Spirit that every believer must have. You know what it is? Faith! Faith in Jesus Christ who died for all our sins on the cross. Faith in Jesus Christ who defeated death once for all on Easter morning when he left the cold dark shadows of the tomb behind for good. Faith to be able to say, "That risen Savior, Jesus Christ, is my Lord. Because of him I know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that when I die...I will go to heaven." The faith to believe this...is a precious gift of the Holy Spirit. And it's the one gift that everyone has to have in order to see heaven. No more. No less.

In Bible 101 class we spend time together unpacking another important verse that teaches this: ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast"*** (Ephesians 2:8-9). What's the gift here? It's faith. Trusting in Jesus, having confidence in Jesus. Why is it a gift? Because we can't come up with it on our own. On our own we were dead in our sins just like the Corinthians were used to worship idols before the Holy Spirit planted faith in their hearts. On our own just like the Corinthians we are unable to believe in or love the one true God, our Creator. We are by nature selfish, conceited creatures who think first and foremost always for ourselves and look out for our own selfish needs and desires, always comparing ourselves with each other to feel better about ourselves. But then through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit of God opens up our hearts to believe in him and our mouths to confess his saving name. What does faith do? It receives God's free grace. The result is that no one can boast. So why we would elevate certain gifts above others as if we had something to boast about?

If we all start in this same place—that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him but that it's the Holy Spirit who has called me by the Gospel....If we all start here...then we are in a place where—without comparing ourselves one to another,

without comparing our church to another, without complaining about what we have or don't have—we can celebrate the beautiful reality that *the Holy Spirit Loves Diversity*.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

The word “different” here in Greek implies variety. Diversity. *The Holy Spirit Loves Diversity!* And why should we be surprised at this? Just look at the creative variety of people in our world! I love how during the Olympics you can see how many different people there are all over the world—people of all different shapes and sizes and colors yet each and every one a special creation of God who quite obviously delights in diversity. And this is true of spiritual gifts as well. There are diverse gifts that God delights in distributing to every single member of the church.

Friends, do we need to hear this message today? I think so. I'm thinking especially of two ways: First, when we make it seem like in the church certain gifts are valued more than others. I know I'm guilty of this. The long snappers in the church often go overlooked and under-thanked, yet without them using their gifts behind the scenes we wouldn't even be having church today or Victory Kids today. But also I think we need to hear this so that we don't fall into the trap of thinking, “Well because I don't have those gifts then that means I'm a nobody.” Or “Because I'm not as gifted as those people, I'm just a second class Christian or I don't belong.”

Yet, friends, that's not true. God values you and me so much that he sent us his Son. He values you and me so much that he has poured out on us the Holy Spirit. And through holy baptism he has made you to belong in the family of God. The Holy Spirit loves diversity. Along with the faith he planted in your heart to believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit loves to distribute a wonderfully diverse variety of gifts to people in the church and that includes you!

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,^[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues.^[b] ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

So let me make a couple comments here. Like he does in other places the apostle Paul is simply giving us a sample list here of spiritual gifts. In other words this short list is by no means exhaustive. These aren't all the spiritual gifts that there are, not even close. But this list makes sense especially for the Corinthians because of their particular hang-ups. Remember that they were caught up with the gifts that seemed most outwardly impressive—such as speaking in

tongues, or such as gifts of healing or miraculous powers. Paul's point is not to get hung up on any particular gift or get caught up comparing our gifts with the Corinthians but to help us recognize that the Holy Spirit is the one in charge of distributing spiritual gifts just as he determines.

The whole point of this section isn't to elevate some gifts about others but to say, *The Holy Spirit Loves Diversity*. He loves to distribute a wonderfully diverse variety of gifts to people in the church. Each of us gets at least one. And friends, that means you.

I want to tell you about George. George Kunert. He was short man, slight of frame. I only knew him as this little old grandpa figure. He was an usher at my home church where I grew up. Although I came to learn...he was much more than an usher. I mean yes he was the guy would hand you a bulletin when you walked in. And yes I learned he often cleaned and organized and did many thankless jobs behind the scenes. He was a tremendous "fix it" man whenever anything needed repair. But his greatest gift I believe was....the gift of encouragement.

Let me explain. For over 100 years my home church never had a person go on to be a pastor. But when I started going to school studying to be a pastor, George always made it a point to seek me out and ask me how it was going. He would then tell me to keep at because I was going to be a good pastor. Even when I was away at college and would only come home occasionally...he would somehow always find me and speak a few simple words of encouragement. When I preached at home church for the first time while at the Seminary he told me to keep it up. I truly think of George as one of the kindest, gentlest, most encouraging person at my congregation and he was always serving behind the scenes.

He died two years ago. I found out when I Googled his name. In reading his obituary I learned some incredible things about him that I never knew and never would've guessed. When he was 22 a year after being married, he was drafted into the service. The year was 1942. He served in the Army as a staff sergeant from March 25, 1943, until Nov. 14, 1945. While serving, he was wounded numerous times for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, a Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Clusters, a Good Conduct Medal and a Combat Infantry Badge.

I had overlooked all this in seeing George...I never imagined he had a been a soldier who fought in WWII...but George never overlooked me. He treated me with kindness and respect. He encouraged me down a path of being a pastor because he must have recognized some spiritual gift that God had given me. He used his spiritual gift of encouragement to help me discover and use mine. Friends, that's the beauty of the church being the church. People with different backgrounds. People with different gifts. But one and the same Holy Spirit who has called us to faith in Jesus and put us together on the same team to serve one another in love and to share His victory. How cool that *The Holy Spirit Loves Diversity!*