

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-3

Title: Jesus is Lord

Truth: The foundation of all truly spiritual work is this: Jesus is Lord

Date/Location: November 29, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

Chapter 12 broaches a new subject: spiritual gifts. The Corinthians had written some questions about such gifts which we can only partially reverse engineer based on what this letter says in response to those questions. See 1 Cor. 7:1 concerning their letter to Paul. The three chapters from 12 to 14 address these concerns and permit the Apostle Paul to address some serious difficulties in church life.

I. A Call to Knowledge, v. 1

- A. Here is a broad overview of spiritual gifts: They are abilities that are given to believers by God for them to serve God for the benefit of the church. We will learn that every Christian has some such divinely given abilities. God gives them to His people through the service of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every believer and enables these gifts. The abilities can be enabled at salvation, or they can be sanctified abilities or tendencies from one's pre-salvation life. They are centered around the local assembly, either one or more existing churches, or to start new assemblies. These gifts focus on evangelism, disciple training, baptism, teaching, service, administration, edification, and the like. You can find details in 1 Cor. 12-14, Romans 14, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4:10-11.
- B. It seems that the Corinthian believers, though not brand new in the faith, were ignorant about the work of the Spirit in their midst. Their situation is relevant to this day in the church. Too often, we like they are uninformed and unaware of what the Spirit does, how He works, in whom He works, and so forth. The Corinthian church had sprung into existence perhaps 5 years earlier around 50-51 AD.
- C. Who wants to be ignorant? Some people like to be ignorant so they do not have to "deal with something" or so that they can have "plausible deniability" if they are involved in an immoral or

criminal activity. But a Christian person has no such desire, even though the flesh may wish to continue using that “tool” to its advantage. We understand that “what we don’t know *can* hurt us,” which is particularly true if it comes to a knowledge of God! The Apostle does not want the Corinthians to be ignorant, and there is no place for us to be uninformed either.

- D. Do you notice in your translation the word *gifts* is in italics? It is not explicit in the original language but is understood from the context. Paul is writing about *spiritualities* or *spiritual things*. According to verse 7, they are “given” by the Spirit, thus the word *gift* is added for clarification.

II. A Look Back, v. 2

- A. The religious culture from which the Corinthian believers had come, and around which they still lived, was full of false gods, sinful religious rituals, idol worship, temples, immorality, and deception. Included in this milieu were all kinds of strange behaviors that came from the so-called “mystery cults.” These included things supposedly connected to religious experiences such as drunkenness, drugs, hypnotism, chants, prophecies, orgies, hallucinations, interpretation of dreams, babbling and “tongues,” among other things. These things are demonic and cultish instead of godly and Christian. They were marked by a heavy reliance on the senses and emotion, as over against the mind and intellect.

- B. For the detail-minded folks out there, note v. 2 in NKJV and ESV:

NKJV: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.

ESV: You know that **when** you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.

See the difference (in **boldface** type?) The NKJV and KJV are incorrect at this point. The word **when** should be included in the text.¹

¹ It is missing from the Textus Receptus (TR) but is present in the Majority Text and critical texts. In such a case, I consider it a near 100% certainty that the TR is in error. It should be clear from this that I am not a KJV-only or TR-only advocate!

Additionally, note that when the Bible uses the phrase “Gentiles,” it does not mean that we must become Jews to be saved. That idea was dispatched at the Acts 15 council. It uses this phrase to refer to those who are following Gentile pagan religions. It is a general term.

- C. The Corinthians were—before they experienced the salvation of the Lord—living happily in the Gentile, unbelieving, pagan, idolatrous world. They were carried away to the mute idols. Those “gods” cannot utter a single word (Jeremiah 10:3-5). Yet their devotees worship the false gods with fervency that rivals or surpasses any faithful Jew (of the old era) or Christian (of the present era) worshipping the true God. Their worship included such things as mentioned above—strange, bizarre, and wild behavior. The people got “carried away” or were “misled” from corrected behavior. They were led into sinful excesses. This is very similar to the excesses you can see today in emotionally driven churches where “spiritual gifts” are credited (blamed?) for strange outbursts in so-called church services. Such activity bears no resemblance to true Biblical worship which is led by the Spirit; it is holy; it is peaceful; it is calm; it is orderly; it is not “exciting” to the emotions or fleshly passions; rather it is to raise spiritual affections; it is directed toward God; it is not a performance; it is humble; it does not attract attention to the people but rather to our Lord and Savior.
- D. The phrase “however you were led” indicates the diverse ways in which the people had been involved in idolatry. The phrase may raise in your mind a question about the exact mechanism by which people are enticed into such morally dark behavior. How is it that they can be convinced to get involved in idol worship, drug-induced rituals, temple prostitution, and the like? For the believer, it may seem strange. But, given the truth of human depravity, when God’s restraining hand is not upon a person, anything is possible.
- E. An application is transparent here, dear believers. You too can look back on your life before Christ came to rescue you. You can think of how your life would look today if Christ had *not* come yet to rescue you.

III. A Spirit is Known by His Fruit, v. 3

- A. “Therefore” indicates a connection between verses 2 and 3. Reflecting on their past background, they should find no surprise in what Paul is about to say. There is a complete separation between the worship practices of the pagan and the worship of the Christian. You cannot bring those demonic practices into the church. If you do, they will become clear by their fruit.
- B. Paul reveals to them that “no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed.” We surmise that they were bringing their demonic speech, ecstatic tongues, and prophecies into the church. Was this a “spiritual” gift? It is clearly not one from the Holy Spirit. It was only “spiritual” in that it came from a demonic spirit. We do not consider a profession of faith or identification of Jesus as the result of a spiritual gift. The correct knowledge of God and profession of it is something every believer has and does, regardless of specific abilities to serve God.

Incredibly, the church in Corinth was so disorderly that there were false teachers claiming to have a word from God, but they were in fact slandering the name of Christ. They were calling Jesus “accursed.” That is, they used the word “anathema” to refer to Jesus. How blasphemous. That is a word used later in 1 Cor. 16:22 to a person who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ. The ones hurling the anathema at Christ were themselves anathema.

Consider a few other uses of the word to understand the depth of its meaning. Paul hypothetically wished he could be “anathema” so that his Jewish brothers could be saved (Romans 9:3). One who preaches a different gospel is “anathema” (Gal. 1:8-9). This is a very strong language. For someone to call Jesus that word shows that they are demonically motivated, if not outright possessed. There is no Holy Spirit there.

If the content of what one says disagrees with Scripture, it is not of God. You can claim that you are a messenger of God all day long, but if what you say is not truth, then you should be immediately dismissed.

C. Paul also reveals that “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” This is like 1 John 4:2-3 and reminds us of 1 Cor. 8:6. Someone who says and truly means that Jesus is Lord must be doing so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This confession is crucial. Today many want a Savior Christ who is not Lord Christ. But the New Testament is full of references to Jesus as Lord. The basic confession of the gospel, according to Romans 10:9-10, includes this truth. If you want salvation without discipleship and a Savior but not the *Lord* Jesus Christ, then Christianity is not for you. If you are going to decide to follow Christ, you take the whole package—salvation from sin, discipleship (following Christ), and His Lordship. He is what He is, dear ones. He cannot be “split” into Savior and later Lord when it is convenient.

Note the nature of such a true confession. It is not rote, and it is not merely memorized as “the right answer.” It is a heart-felt acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord and an acceptance of the implications of that. Oh, certainly you will stumble and fall and not follow His Lordship perfectly well. But in principle, as a believer, you grasp the idea of the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, second person of the Triune God. You also grasp and accept the way in which that alters your life as His follower. It is deeply affective. See also Acts 2:36, Ephesians 1:20-21, Philippians 2:11.

Conclusion

By reminding the Corinthians of their former false worship, Paul sets the stage for the discussion about spiritual gifts. Whatever spiritual gifts *are*, they are *not* anything like the strange and unholy things that they had experienced in the mystery cults or idol worship services. The content of speech and doctrine connected with true gifts of the Spirit centers around the person and work of Jesus Christ. If the “gift” does not extol Jesus as Lord, then it is not of the Holy Spirit—for the Spirit takes what is Christ’s and passes it to the followers of Christ in order to glorify Christ. Spiritual gifts are not about the recipient of the gift; they are about serving the giver of the gifts!

MAP