

The Evidence and Gifts of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:1-7

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12 please. This is the first of four sermons on the Holy Spirit. A few different people have talked to me about the Holy Spirit recently, and some teaching on the Holy Spirit seemed like a good idea.

The evidence and gifts of the Holy Spirit, that's the title today. Believers think and talk to each other about the Holy Spirit in ways that cause division among believers between the haves and the have-nots. Some *have* the important work of the Holy Spirit, and some do not *have* that.

Some people basically say, "It's sure too bad you're not more like me, you don't have from the Holy Spirit what I have. I am not sure you have the Holy Spirit at all." And the other side says to itself, "I sure wish I was more like those people, with their gifts and experiences of the Holy Spirit. I'm not sure I even have the Holy Spirit."

So we get the spiritual elites, those that have the right gifts and experiences. And then the shamed people, the have nots, plead with God to make them like the others.

Does that sound familiar to you? I have been in those settings. Something much like that was going on in the Corinthian church. Those believers were wrong about three Holy Spirit things, and our Scripture today, 1Cor 12:1-7, corrects all three.

One, evidence. They thought *the evidence* of the Spirit's power was the Spirit's gifts. That is not true, but that is what they thought. They thought *the evidence* of the Spirit was the gifts.

Two, importance. This has to do with *comparing* gifts to teach other. They thought some spiritual gifts were *more important than* others. Not true. The gifts usually seem unequal to people, but in fact all spiritual gifts are equal to each other.

Three, purpose. They thought *the purpose* of the gifts was for the enjoyment and encouragement of the one who had the spiritual gifts. That is not so. Using our spiritual gifts can bring joy and encouragement to the gifted believer, but that is *not the purpose*.

The Evidence of the Spirit - 1 Cor 12:1-3

12:1 *Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.*
² *You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.* ³ *Therefore 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.*

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. They were uninformed: about the evidence of the Spirit's power, about the importance of different gifts compared to each other, and about the purpose of the gifts. This Scripture wants to give believers better information about the Holy Spirit.

Vv2-3 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore 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.

Scholars debate what's behind the line "Jesus is cursed." Here's the best explanation I've read about these two verses (and I've read quite a few). We have, in this order, pagan worship experience, Jewish worship experience, and Christian worship experience.

Pagans: Many of the Corinthians had been Gentile idol worshippers before Paul preached in Corinth. Some dark deceiving spirits led them to worship lifeless idols.

Jews: Others in the Corinthian church were Jews, and had been a part of the synagogue where Paul first preached; see Acts 18. To Jews, Jesus was not Christ and Lord. Jesus was cursed.

Believers: But to Christians, Jesus was Lord.

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. This begins 3 chapters about spiritual gifts, 1 Cor 12-14. There is not really any doubt, by the time we get to the end of ch 14, that in Corinth, tongues had become too important, and produced considerable disorder and chaos, and inequality. In Corinth, tongues had become the real evidence of the Holy Spirit.

Paul was not against the gift of tongues. He says in 14:18 that he spoke in tongues more than any of the Corinthians! Though not in the church. Tongues is from the Holy Spirit.

But: What is the *evidence* of the Spirit's presence and power? Tongues? No. Another spiritual gift? No. The evidence of the Spirit is that someone can say "Jesus is Lord." They are not just words. Making the words come out of my mouth means nothing.

Romans 10:9 *If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* Don't divide mouth and heart here, rather this teaches that being saved involves mouth and heart together. When we believe and declare, our whole person is involved.

When we say *Jesus is Lord*, what does that mean? It means this: *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. I want him to have all my loyalty, and to rule every part of my life.* That's what *Jesus is Lord* means, in NT terms: *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. I want him to have all my loyalty, and to rule every part of my life.*

In Rom 10, "Jesus is Lord" involved our mouth and our heart. In Php 2, its knees and mouth.

Php 2:9-11 *God exalted Christ to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow, [knees] in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that: Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

If you want to summarize the teaching of the whole NT in three words, that's it. *Jesus is Lord*. In three words, this is what the early churches believed. And they used those very words to say it.

Romans 10:9 *If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* This is about salvation, and about baptism. In the early church, when you were ready to say this to God, you were ready for baptism.

When you could say, *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. I want him to have all my loyalty, and to rule every part of my life*, then they baptized you, and you were saved.

No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. It takes more power and work from the Holy Spirit to produce that heart-felt confession than anything else he does. If you can say that and mean it, you are living in the fullness of the Spirit's power. Saying this and meaning it this way is the unmistakable evidence of the Holy Spirit.

I will say this again, and if these words describe you, say "Amen" - *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. I want him to have all my loyalty, and to rule every part of my life.* [Amen] Everywhere this is true, those people are living in the fullness of the Spirit's power. No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a Holy Spirit miracle in each believer.

[All the commentaries agree on this, and they also agree that in discussing spiritual gifts, this part does not get said nearly enough. I agree That's why I'm pushing this.]

The evidence of the Spirit's presence and power is a person who declares that Jesus is Lord, and serves Jesus the Lord. That's the first information the Corinthians and we need to absorb.

Varieties of Gifts and Service and Working 1 Cor 12:4-6

In the matter of Jesus being Lord, all believers are the same. No one gets there without the Holy Spirit, and no one is a believer at all without that confession. But, after that, it goes in many different directions. Great variety among believers.

12:4-6 *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.*

In Greek, each sentence starts with the word "differences," making that word important.

Differences of gifts there are, but the same Spirit distributes them. Differences of service there are, but the same Lord. Differences of working there are, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

The same Holy Spirit, the same Lord, the same God, do all kinds of different things. Spirit and Lord and God want it that way. **If I want** you to be like me, I am fighting the plan of Spirit and Lord and God. Spirit and Lord and God want difference, difference, difference.

If I want to have the same spiritual gift and experience as you have, I am ignoring the plan of Spirit and Lord and God. Spirit and Lord and God want difference, difference, difference.

Some churches are noisy and exuberant and have all kinds of excitement in of their gatherings. There are other churches that find that distracting. Coming to God that way does not appeal.

The way to be the same as each other is this confession: *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. I am loyal to him, and he shall rule my life.* After that, variety is good.

Some churches value spontaneity, and prefer to make up their prayers at the moment. These churches find that liturgy is empty, and ties them up. Other churches find the spontaneity empty, and limiting, because only those that can speak easily and quickly have a voice. Those churches love to use the ancient prayers, and worship God that way.

Arrogance between churches in any of these matters is totally unacceptable. This joins us: *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. I am loyal to him, and my life is his.* We are baptized on that basis. After that, the Spirit wants great variety. No spiritual gift is more important than any other.

Some seem more important, and God works against that. 1 Cor 12:24b-25 *God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.*

We need to live this out. Do we think the one who studies and teaches the Scripture has a more important spiritual gift than the ones who makes soup and casseroles and take them to others?

Do we think the one who leads our praise is more gifted than the one who sets up the chairs? The one who has dreams and speaks in tongues is more gifted than the one caring for toddlers in the back room? Lose all that. The real expression of the Spirit's power is what joins us: *Jesus is Lord.* God says: no division in the body, all its parts shall have equal concern for each other.

Concordance Study of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Vv4-6 mention each member of the Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. In this case, *Spirit* and *Lord* and *God*. I noticed a long time ago that the NT talks about the Father and the Son a lot oftener than it talks about the Spirit.

I am thoroughly orthodox in my views of the Trinity. The ancient creeds of One God in Three Persons seems just right to me, I have no hesitations there about One God in Three Persons. But, the NT is mostly binitarian, not trinitarian. By that I mean, for the most part the Scripture leads us to the Father and the Son, and says quite a bit less about the Holy Spirit.

I was teaching 1-2 Corinthians several years ago when I first noticed this, so I did a concordance study of this in 1-2 Corinthians together. The Corinthian letters speak of the Holy Spirit as often as any of the NT letters. How often do 1-2 Corinthians speak of the Holy Spirit, compared to the Father and the Son?

Four times as often. For every once that 1-2 Corinthians mentions the Holy Spirit, it has spoken of Christ about four times, and has spoken about God about four times.

Last week I did the same comparison in the book of Acts. Acts speaks of the Holy Spirit more frequently than any other NT writing, so I wanted to know how Acts checked out. Here's what I found: for every one time that Acts mentions the Holy Spirit, it speaks of Jesus the Lord three times, and God the Father about three and a half times. Let's round that off to three.

Even Acts tends to be binitarian not trinitarian. For every once it speaks of the Spirit, it speaks three times of the Lord Jesus and three or more times about God the Father.

And Acts and the Corinthians Letters mention the Holy Spirit more often than the rest of the NT. The NT average on this will not be three or four to one. It will be six or eight to one.

Think about this. The Holy Spirit inspired all these writers, led them to write down the truth. Does the Spirit want us to talk about the Spirit as much as about the Father and the Son? Based on the writings, no. The Spirit wants us to know that it is Present, and the kinds of things it does.

Mostly, though, the Spirit wants us to live out the lordship of Jesus and in that way fulfill God's plan for us. The Spirit urges us to bow before God and the exalted Son. When we do that, the Spirit is a complete success, and delighted, even the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts.

First correction: the *evidence* of the Spirit's presence and power is not any gift, but the confession, *Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. I want him to have all my loyalty, and to rule every part of my life.* The Spirit is alive and well in all such people.

Second correction: all the spiritual gifts are equal. All our service requires the Spirit, the Lord, and God the Father. In the congregation, churches should prefer gifts that strengthen and encourage one another, so in the congregation prophecy is better than tongues. Otherwise all gifts are equal. Among those who say, *Jesus is Lord*, there are no spiritual elites.

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts 12:7 (the third correction) - *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* The purpose of gifts is to serve one another. We use gifts for the common good. In the church, prophecy speaks to the people to strengthen, encourage, and comfort. 14:3. We have gifts to serve each other.

Love: Four places in the NT letters speak of spiritual gifts, and every one of them speaks of loving each other, either right before or right after the spiritual gifts. Romans 12 says this right after spiritual gifts: *Love must be sincere. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves* (Rm 12:9-10). Spiritual gifts are part of how we love and honour each other.

In Eph 4:1, we read this just before the spiritual gifts teaching: *Live worthy of your calling. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love.* And a few verses later we read about the unique grace Christ gave to each one of us, our spiritual gift.

1 Peter 4 also speaks of gifts. It begins this way: *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.* Above all, love each other deeply. And then this: *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.*

In 1 Cor 12-14, the whole chapter in the middle, 1 Cor 13, teaches the importance of love. The most important thing is to love each other. Spiritual gifts flow out of that.

The best way to discover your spiritual gift is to forget about spiritual gifts, just serve the Lord by loving and serving his people. And after a few years of serving the Lord by loving and serving his people, look back and remember what you've actually been doing. That will be pretty close to your spiritual gifts.

But many believers serve the Lord and his people faithfully, and never think about spiritual gifts, and have no idea what their gift is if you ask them, and they are no less led by the Spirit for that.

Brothers and sisters, let's not be uninformed. No spiritual gift is more *important* than another. All body parts shall have equal concern for each other.

The *purpose* of the gifts is the common good, to serve each other.

The *evidence* of the Spirit's fullness and power is the confession: *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. I am loyal to him, and my life is his.* The Spirit is alive and well in all such people. If this is you, and you're not baptized, you should be baptized. Amen.