*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 24 - 29

*First Corinthians Chapter Twelve*

**Monday, February 24 1 Corinthians 12:1-3**

*“Now about spiritual gifts”*

Responding to the Corinthian question about spiritual gifts, Paul continues the theme of behavior in worship from chapter 11. Some in the Corinthian church were apparently equating spirituality with the exercise of the more spectacular gifts in worship. This chapter will insist on the need for diversity of gifts within the unity of the body. Chapter 13 stresses that without love the gifts are worthless. Chapter 14 then focuses on two of the more controversial gifts used in worship – prophecy and tongues – telling the Corinthians to prefer the former to the latter.

Part of the problem with how spiritual gifts were being used in Corinth was that they had not made a radical enough break from their pagan backgrounds, which employed counterparts to many of the controversial gifts discussed here, especially tongues and prophecy. Some of them had undoubtedly spoken seemingly inspired utterances during various Greco-Roman religious rituals. In those settings, participants who had heard of Christ’s claims might well have cursed him, so Paul notes that no one can sincerely do such a thing who is a true believer.

*By the Holy Spirit, we declare Jesus Christ as Lord. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 25 1 Corinthians 12:4-6**

*“Different kinds – same purpose”*

Paul arranges these three verses using Trinitarian language - “Spirit,” “Lord,” and “God” - examining spiritual gifts from three different angles: They are bestowed freely by the Spirit’s grace (v. 4), are intended to be used in a Christ-like attitude of servanthood (v. 5), and are the result of the Father’s powerful working in a person’s life (v. 6).

Some of the gifts were quite spectacular, and those who possessed them had a tendency to be proud. The gifts that were exercised in the context of worship gave high visibility and prominence to those who possessed them, and it is easy to see, knowing the very human tendency to put self forward, how these individuals might begin to think that they were more important than the others. On the other hand, some of the members were given gifts that were exercised in less dramatic ways – in a servant role, for example – and it is easy to see how because of the quiet and unseen way in which they did their part they might wonder if their gift was important and if they were really needed in the church.

*We thank you, Holy Spirit, for giving us gifts for the good of the church. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 26 1 Corinthians 12:7-11**

*“Each of us has a spiritual gift”*

Paul stresses that all Christian have at least one spiritual gift, and it is to be used for the common good (v. 7). In verses 8-10, Paul lists a total of nine gifts, dividing them into three sections: wisdom and knowledge (v. 8); faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, and distinguishing between spirits (vv. 9-10a); and tongues and their interpretations (v. 10b). This list represents the more miraculous gifts, precisely because they were what the Corinthians were overly stressing in divisive ways. Chapter 14 will elaborate in more detail on both prophecy and tongues and on appropriate responses to each.

Paul repeatedly states that all spiritual gifts come from the same Spirit. And because it is the Holy Spirit, and not individual merit, who determines who gets what gifts (v. 11), they cannot be used to mark out anyone for special status within the church. All Christians are given at least one spiritual gift by the Spirit. Some may receive more than one, at the same time or at different times in life.

*We dedicate to your purposes, Lord, your gifts to us. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 24 - 29

*First Corinthians Chapter Twelve*

**Thursday, February 27 1 Corinthians 12:12-21**

*“One body with many parts”*

Paul develops the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ. Just as the human body has many different parts that make up the one body, so the church has many parts (i.e., persons with different spiritual gifts) that make up the body of Christ. He gives a rationale for diversity within unity by speaking of the make-up of the congregation: those who are being saved come from a diversity of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, but all are united in the church by the Holy Spirit when, at the moment of conversion, the Spirit comes to dwell in each person.

In verses 15-21 Paul underlines what is demonstrable with respect to a human body: all the parts serve an important function, regardless of any claims to the contrary. Without the diversity that comes from specialization of function, one no longer has an organism, merely one giant organ, unable to accomplish much of anything. Further, it is not according to human decision-making that the parts of the body of Christ are arranged as they are, but God who has put each part precisely where he wants it.

*We are a diverse congregation, Lord, united by the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**Friday, February 28 1 Corinthians 12:22-26**

*“God has put the body together”*

Where there is seemingly less value, power, or honor in the body, compensation occurs to preserve relative equality. In fact, the true value of a particular body part is often inversely proportional to its outward appearance. When Paul speaks of weaker body parts he may be thinking of fingers or toes, or the less protected organs such as one’s eyes. The “less honorable” parts may refer to internal organs, usually covered by clothing. The “unpresentable parts” most naturally refer to genitalia and the excretory tracts.

Paul’s fundamental concern is that the gifts and/or people the Corinthians are demeaning should be affirmed, while those they are overly exalting should be put in more balanced perspective. Verse 26 rounds out Paul’s discussion of the body with another reminder of mutuality and interdependence. One individual’s joy or suffering should prove contagious throughout the entire community of believers.

*We will care for one another, Lord, without regard for our differences. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 29 1 Corinthians 12:27-31a**

*“A listing of some of the spiritual gifts”*

These verses complete the chapter with one final restatement of the body metaphor and another listing of sample gifts. But this time Paul’s main point is that no single gift is intended for all believers - the rhetorical questions in verses 29-30 all have the implied answer, “No.” This list includes some of the same and some different gifts as in verses 8-10. “Apostles” are those sent out with a divine message – we might call them missionaries or church-planters today. “Prophets” are those who regularly proclaim God’s Word, and “teachers” help those who are hearing God’s Word to apply it to their daily lives.

To take “first,” “second,” and “third” in verse 28 as a ranking in significance would clearly violate the whole point of Paul’s discussion thus far. So it is best to see in this enumerate a chronological priority. To establish a local congregation requires a church-planter, then the regular proclamation of God’s Word, followed by those who instruct in discipleship. Only at this point does a viable Christian fellowship exist to enable all the other gifts to come into play.

*You bless our church, Lord, with the gifts needed to do your work. Amen.*