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## ***Spiritual Gifts—Priorities not Preeminence*** **1 Corinthians 12:27-31**

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PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: The heart of man is sinful. And even once he is saved through faith in Christ, sin still remains. And at the core of sin is a desire to exalt self and not find our heart's desire in the gloriousness of God. How to work out is a multi-colored affair, but in the area of spiritual gifts it shows its ugly head by having some seek to exalt themselves above the rest of the Church. It is this issue that Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 12. How does he address it? By showing that though there is no room for preeminence, there is a priority to some gifts over others. But why? Because some build up the whole body more effectively than others.

### **I. Introduction.**

- A. *Turn your bibles to 1 Corinthians 12 again. We continue today our study of Spiritual Gifts.*
1. Today we will conclude with chapter 12:27-31 (**read**).
  2. He looks at that local church in Corinth and says that it is Christ's body.
    - a. Notice the importance on the local church. Each local church is a visible expression of the body of Christ. In a sense each local church is a miniature of the one universal Church.
    - b. This is important for us to note because of the tendency to underplay the importance of the local church. In our day of independent thinking we all need to think about the fact that as a church we are a visible representation of Christ. We are His Body here.
    - c. And so each person in that church is an important member of that body. All are needed and each one is either helping or harming that body by how they use their gifts.
  3. And then he gives this brief listing of gifted people in the church which we will discuss in detail today. (Read)
    - a. But in this discussion I do not want to miss the key point because it is an important point:

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- b. All of them would agree that not one of them had all these gifts. Therefore, Paul simply is showing that it is wrong for any of them to think that because they have one or two of these gifts that they are somehow more important than others.
  - c. All of these gifts are good. All the gifts are necessary. All of them are given by the Spirit.
  - d. Therefore rejoice in the diversity of gifts in the church. Exalt one another in the church because of each person uniqueness to the life and health of the church.
- B. *Now last week we saw two key points related to the unity and diversity of the gifts given by the Spirit:*
- 1. The Gifts Show Interdependence (19-24a).
  - 2. The Gifts Show Ministry to One Another (24b-26).
- C. *Today we will finish the last point:*
- 1. The Gifts Have Priorities But Not Preeminence (27-31).

## ***Propositional Statement***

Today we have the opportunity to learn two lessons related to the types of gifts that exist in the church. Though there are many gifts present, there are priorities given by God to them and in doing so help us navigate through much of the confusion that exists today in churches regarding this subject.

The first lesson is that we will learn is that there are certain gifts that should be given priority in a church. And the second lesson is that the goal for any church is to see certain gifts in greater prominence than others.

## **II. Priorities But Not Preeminence.**

- A. *Prioritizing The Gifts (28).*
- 1. Paul gives us a listing of various gifts. But notice how he has chosen to do so.
    - a. By giving this numerical value what he is doing is **given the essential value** of the various types of gifts in a descending rank of value.

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- b. Now this seems a little strange at first since the verses above were all spent in trying to show the church that all members were of value and that all were needed.
  - c. Yet Paul does not contradict himself at all; rather, he shows us that though every individual is important in the church, nonetheless, there are some whose gift makes them have greater priority **in the building up of the church.**
  - d. Remember that the purpose of all of this was two-fold, spiritual gifts were to create unity and edify. And certain gifts tend to help with this more than others. Therefore Paul gives them greater priority in the church.
    - (1) One man said it nicely, these gifts are ranked in order of usefulness to the church. (Grudem).
    - (2) **But it isn't just Paul doing this, rather it is God Himself.**
2. Notice the divine appointment of not only the gifts and who gets them, but the value they are to have on the church.
  3. Note first that this again emphasizes the sovereign rule of our Lord. The church is not a man's invention and it is not for man to play with. It is God's church and as a result He alone has the right to determine how it is to function.
  4. The word "appoint" is used in this way several times in the New Testament.
    - a. Acts 1:7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father **has fixed** by His own authority;
    - b. Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit **has made** you overseers . . .
    - c. 1 Corinthians 12:18 But now God **has placed** the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.
    - d. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God **has not destined** us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .
    - e. And, so, here in our passage Paul makes it clear that this prioritization that he is giving is not his, but God's. And by doing so silences the church there at Corinth.

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5. The first three gifts are made very clear, from there the others arrange themselves out, but not quite as specifically as the first three.
  - a. The first in importance was the apostles.
    - (1) There is a view in some parts of the church that there is a place for apostles even now.
    - (2) But this does not seem to fit well with the evidence of the New Testament.
    - (3) What qualified you to be an Apostle?
      - (a) This passage does not say, all we can say here is that it is by the will of God that a person is an apostle. Even Paul says this in Romans 1:1, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, **called** as an apostle . . .”
      - (b) To be one you had to have two basic qualifications:
        - i) The first was to have been directly appointed by Christ. We see this in Luke 6:13, where it was Christ who named the apostles.
        - (c) The second was that they had to had personal contact with Jesus and seen Him after His resurrection (Acts 1.21-22).
    - (4) It was out of this group that God then ordained and appointed some to be Apostles. And this is not just some title or office.
      - i) Rather, the whole meaning of Apostle is one who is sent by another with a message.
      - ii) And the message that was preeminent for these men was the person and work of Jesus Christ.
      - iii) They are not connected to one specific locality, rather, they moved among all the various local churches, strengthening, teaching and helping them.

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- iv) These men were very unique and apparently very gifted. They apparently could heal, do miracles, prophecy, and speak in tongues. They functioned as elders and preachers. In the early church, the buck stopped with them.
- (5) The total number is not absolutely known.
- i) To be sure there were the Twelve, but there are others as well.
  - ii) Paul and Barnabas are called apostles in Acts 14.14. James, Christ's half-brother seems to be one.
  - iii) And then there are also the possibilities of four other men, Andronicus, Junias, Silas and Timothy.
- (6) These men were very unique. The Bible calls them the foundation of the Church.
- (a) This is seen in Ephesians 2. Where the corner-stone of this foundation was Christ.
  - (b) In Rev. 21 in a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem it is written, "Revelation 21:14 he wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them *were* the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."
  - (c) This is another strong indication that the church did not exist prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If it did, then it existed without a foundation.
- (7) There is also a good possibility that in the Old Testament the counterparts for these men were the prophets.
- (a) There is much evidence to point to this: let me just sum it up quickly.
    - i) Both of them were messengers of God who were sent to speak the very words of God.

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- ii) Therefore, when they spoke they were understood to not be speaking on their own, but the very words of God.
    - iii) As a result of this, both Old Testament prophets and New Testament Apostles has absolute authority behind their words. To reject them was to reject God.
  - (b) It is because of this important, authoritative nature of the gift of apostleship that it was ranked as first among the gifts.
  - (c) And because of the limited qualifications, this gift is no longer for the church.
- b. The next group is the prophet.
  - (1) Now this is a very interesting gift and position in the church.
  - (2) I have just told you that the most likely counterpart to the apostle is the Old Testament prophet. If I am correct on this, then what do we do with these prophets?
  - (3) I will discuss this in detail when we get to chapter 14. For it is there that Paul deals with two gifts that were very much in abundance at the church in Corinth—tongues and prophesying.
  - (4) However, in preparation for this, I want to say a few things.
    - (a) First, the prophet in the New Testament is not given the same level of fear and respect that the Old Testament prophet was.
      - i) In the Old Testament it was not uncommon that the prophet was not loved by those in disobedience, but they were definitely feared.
      - ii) And when they weren't, bad things tended to happen to those disrespecting them. (Such as some young men calling Elisha "baldhead" and when he cursed them in the name of the Lord two bears killed 42 of them.)

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- (b) In the New Testament we will see evidence that they would speak, but it was taken under advisement by the hearer.
  - i) In other words, it did not seem to carry authority with it.
  - ii) It was revelation from the Lord and at times it does to predict the future.
  - iii) In Acts 21 it appears that there are some prophesying to Paul and telling him not to go to Jerusalem, but Paul went anyhow.
  - iv) The same prophet made a prophecy in Acts 11 regarding a coming famine. What stood out in that is the general nature of the prophecy and how it did not include any points of action or response.
- (c) In fact, in 1 Cor. 14:29 there were rules that Paul set up for prophesying.
  - i) Only 2 or 3 can prophesy.
  - ii) And then, after they are done, others are to pass judgment on them.
    - a) The word for ‘judgment’ means to weigh the pros and cons, to discern and differentiate.
    - b) This seems strange if all prophecy were the very words of God and therefore authoritative.
    - c) In some way, the prophets in the New Testament were subject to the church and did not possess the type of authority that the Apostle or Old Testament prophet did.
- (5) As a result of these few comments, it is necessary to say that there is good reason to believe that prophecy can exist today.

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- (6) These people, who were both men and women, were used to help direct, build up, encourage, correct, and reveal God's will to that local church.
  - (a) They seem to be recognized in the church and yet did not oversee the church.
  - (b) As I have said in the past, as the apostles died off they were replaced by elders, who were located in each local church.
- c. The third group are the teachers.
  - (1) These are the people who are uniquely gifted with the ability to teach.
  - (2) It is not receiving and speaking divine revelation like a prophet or apostle would do; rather, it was expounding, explaining, developing and applying God's revealed word.
  - (3) When you look at the New Testament you see that this is the primary activity in the church for the building up of the saints.
    - (a) In Acts 2, the first thing that the church did was devote themselves to the apostles' teaching.
    - (b) Paul exalts teaching in 1 Cor. 14:19.
    - (c) Elders had to be able to teach.
    - (d) And over and over again in the book of Acts you see the prophets engaged in teaching.
  - (4) All believers teach in some way or another, but these are the people specially set apart in each church for the task of consistently teaching the rest of the church the word of God.
- d. The next two groups are rather obvious, miracles and healings.
  - (1) Not much to comment on here.
  - (2) However, the fact that the word "healing" is in the plural suggests that people had specific abilities with healing.



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- (a) Most commentators agree that in a sense, they specialized in what they could heal.
- e. The next two, helps and administrations require a little explanation.
  - (1) Helps speaks to those people who are designed by God to give physical and emotional help and relief to the others in the Body.
    - (a) They are the ones who love to encourage and visit others.
    - (b) They see a need and want to fill it.
    - (c) I would say that this is perhaps the most common gift for it is so much needed.
    - (d) Most likely they are usually focused on meeting the physical needs of other believers. We see this today in people helping clean, fix meals, babysit, help repair or build things.
  - (2) Administrations speaks to those people who help keep things running smoothly.
    - (a) The word itself speaks of steerage or piloting a ship. The imagery is one who has the ability to direct and move the church along in a good and proper direction.
    - (b) It is helpful to have deacon who have this gift.
    - (c) It is the ability to keep details in place. Help direct and oversee specific events.
    - (d) They may have strong skills in getting many people to work in an efficient and effective manner.
    - (e) I have seen this gift in action in large churches. Every large church has a person who is called the “Executive pastor” or “Administrative pastor.” His responsibility is to keep together all the many things that are going on as ministry occurs.

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- f. The last one is tongues, which we have spoken on already, and will speak on in detail in chapt. 14.
- 6. Paul then gives them these rhetorical questions in verses 29, but all of them are designed to set up the first part of verse 31.
  - a. This is the last point in this message.
  - b. There are clearly gifts that are to be given priority in a church. And the reason for this is simple. These gifts bring maturity to a church.
  - c. Therefore, Paul essentially says..... (read next point).
- B. *Have A Mature Goal for The Church (29-31a).*
  - 1. No one has all these gifts, nor is it good for everyone to have one of the gifts.
    - a. The very fact that there is not some universal gift helps strengthen Paul's earlier argument that everyone in the church needs everyone else.
  - 2. In this church, it appears that the people with the gift of tongues have run riot. This is seen in chapter 14 where he has to strongly regulate the speaking in tongues.
    - a. Yet look in verse 28 and note where on the ranking they came in....last.
    - b. They don't even appear in the lists in Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, or Ephesians 4.
    - c. Yet, in Corinth they are the gift that everyone wants.
  - 3. But not that Paul has given them this ranking, he tells them to earnestly desire the greater gifts.
    - a. The idea here is simple.
    - b. Paul is telling them that they need to be zealous for those gifts that will bring them maturity.
    - c. It is time to stop all their fighting for preeminence. Stop all this self-exaltation.
    - d. Rather, begin to look for and desire the greater gifts in the church.

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4. I don't think he is meaning that they are to personally ask God for these gifts.
  - a. This is because the Bible makes it clear that these gifts are given by the sovereign will of God.
5. I think it is better to see that he is saying, "be zealous about wanting the greater, more useful gifts in your church."
  - a. The reason is because the exact opposite has been taking place.
6. This then sets him up for chapter 13 and this powerful discussion of the need for love.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. *Though Paul has taught much on the subject of gifts, he has not made his central point yet.*
  1. That now comes in the last part of verse 31.
  2. We will discuss this over the next couple of weeks,
  3. In Chapter 12 he has shown them that these gifts are for the whole Body and that each believer is important,.
  4. He has shown them that though there are many different gifts, there are those that should have a greater priority for any church. It is those gifts that churches need to earnestly seek after.
  5. But he has now set them up for that central point.
    - a. Regardless of any person's giftedness. No matter how great an effectiveness he has on the church.
    - b. You can imagine those with the gift of teaching looking smugly and those with the gift of tongues, who had caused them so much trouble.
    - c. Without the a controlling heart of love it is all just a waste of time.
    - d. And it is here that Paul stops all of them in their tracks. Will they do it in love? And if they say yes, then what does it look like in action?
- B. *I invite you back next week to look at those questions.*

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## Small Group Questions

- How have you discovered the value and necessity of other believers in your life? Explain or give examples.
- Where are areas that you can invest in the lives of other believers at MDF? Are there things that hinder this that can be changed?