

III. Lifestyle Stewardship in Biblical Perspective
Discovering, Developing and Deploying our Spiritual Gifts
“Understanding the Stewardship of Spiritual Gifts—Part 1”

1 Corinthians 12:1–6

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1 Corinthians 12:1-3 says [1] Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. [2] You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. [3] Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

When I prepare for my sermons, I do something that they say ‘don’t do.’ What is that? We are constantly told for sermon preparation or don’t substitute your sermon preparations for your devotions. I actually do this. Every Monday whatever I’m preaching on the coming Sunday is my devotional time. I understand what they are saying and it’s not really for sermon preparation but for preacher preparation. I never want to preach a text to the hearts of God’s people without it first addressing mine. So, I try to marinate myself devotionally in that text. Tuesday morning is my time in the text that I will be preaching on the coming Sunday night. Whenever you do that it starts to evoke certain things in your heart and mind concerning awareness and confession.

Our ministry theme this year is spiritual gift stewardship – discover, develop and deploy them. I have been burdened for it and am glad to be engaged in it but honestly I almost feel like I need to repent because we have been doing a ministry theme each year now for 22 years and this should have never been put off until the 22nd year. That’s how crucial it is. There are four key texts for this theme on spiritual gifts which are I Peter 4, Ephesians 4, I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.

When I looked in I Peter 4 and saw that Peter was getting God’s people ready to be pilgrims on the way to the celestial city of the new heavens and the new earth, plus warning them that everyone who is in Christ will suffer at some time to some degree for Christ in some way, he gives seven things that are crucial to the Christian to be able to stand up, stand firm, speak His truth in love and do His work. As Peter does this, spiritual gifts are number six. This is what I began thinking; if God’s people in a broken world persecuted for Christ as they stand with the adversity of the world, the flesh and the devil against them and spiritual gifts are one of the essentials to be able to stand firm, then why have we not looked at this yet? As a pastor I feel somewhat chagrined that I didn’t see the importance of it before now.

I had touched on this in the past but in this series, we are establishing a theological framework that is crucial. I believe in this study you will see why a theological framework, not a functional framework, on spiritual gifts is where we are to start. Don’t start looking at spiritual gifts practically, but theologically. This is what Paul is doing for us in I Corinthians 12. The four texts of Scripture that we will focus on in this series each have a purpose which I try to highlight.

In the last study we looked at I Peter 4 and in that text, Peter gives us the framing principles and in I Corinthians 12 which we will start looking at in this study, we get the

theological understanding of spiritual gifts. It will take us some time to get through I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 is more or less a distillation of I Corinthians 12 so we won't need to spend as much time in Romans on this. Then the functional dynamic of spiritual gifts is given to us in Ephesians 4 and that's where we will end up in this series.

To catch us up I'm just going to list the principles we looked at in I Peter 4 concerning stewardship – what it means to be a steward from God's Word. We also established a working definition of spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is a God-designed and God-delivered ministry resource from God to be used in concert with other believers enabling Christ's church to effectively exalt Christ by staying on mission, on message and in ministry. We don't design these gifts for God gives these gifts from His varied grace. It is not hand delivered but heart delivered through His work of grace. It is a spiritual gift, not a natural talent although God does give natural talents, we are not looking at natural talents. This spiritual gift is a ministry resource to be stewarded.

Spiritual gifts should not be ignored, misused or abused and it is to be used in concert with other believers. That is why spiritual gifts are compared to members of a body. Your hand does not operate apart from your arm neither do your legs operate apart from your torso. These things are connected and interdependent, they work together in the body of Christ. No believer has all the spiritual gifts and no local church has all the spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are given to the universal body of Christ. The ministry of those gifts, and usually do, can extend outside the body of Christ, but they operate within the body of Christ as we are members one of another before the Lord which helps the body of Christ effectively stay on mission, on message and in ministry as they fulfill the Great Commission.

Stewardship is part of this – how we are to steward our spiritual gifts. Whatever we have came from God and we are stewards of what He has entrusted to us. I am what I am by the grace of God and whatever He has given to you, God has called you to steward it. Here are the four maxims of stewardship. One is that every Christian is called to be a servant and a steward. The key text for this is I Corinthians 4:1-2 which says *[1] This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. [2] Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.* We have an economy of life for Christ as servants to steward what He has given to us.

Secondly, the steward is not the owner. The steward is owned by the owner and the owner owns everything that we have. Paul says in I Corinthians 6:19b-20a, *[19b] You are not your own, [20a] for you were bought with a price.* Therefore, glorify God. We don't own our wives, husbands, children, resources, material things, etc. I understand how we have to operate in the economy of world but in the economy/stewardship of the Kingdom we own nothing. We are open handed before the Lord because He owns us and all that He has given to us. If that was ever grasped it would be life shaking for it would change everything about the way that we live out of love to Christ.

Thirdly, as a Christian steward you manage, mobilize and multiply your God given resources as directed by God's Word. The parable of the talents showed us the one who had two made it into four, the one who had five made it into ten and that is what we are called to do.

The fourth principle is that stewards are accountable to the owner. We know at the Day of Judgment, while the unbeliever is under the judgment of eternity, the believer who has been saved to eternal life by the blood of Christ will be a judgment of stewardship. As I Corinthians 4:2 says, the steward wants to be found faithful at the Judgment Seat. You don't want to be the one who buries the resources God gives you, including your spiritual gift for you want to be a

good and faithful steward that uses all of what God has given you by the power of His Spirit and as is directed by His Word.

One crucial resource that God has given to you is your spiritual gift which you are to be a steward over. I want to now list the five framing principles we learned from our last study in I Peter 4. Each one has received a spiritual gift we are to employ it in serving one another for the glory of Christ. We have natural talents and spiritual talents and God has given them both to us. The first framing principle is that every believer has a spiritual gift that God has given them.

Secondly, spiritual gifts are received from God, they are not invented.

Thirdly, we are to steward the spiritual gift that has been given to us as God's Word directs us to.

Four, there are two interdependent categories – speaking and serving. Spiritual gifts fall into one of those categories. They are interdependent because those who have speaking gifts are serving and those who serve are to speak, but the weight of the gift is either a speaking gift or a serving gift. We see it in the offices of the church as the elders are teachers/speakers and deacons are serving.

Five, we have two indispensable resources for these speaking and serving gifts. One is the Word of God. Let him who speaks, speak the oracles of God and those who serve, serve by the strength which God supplies through His Spirit. So, those are the five framing principles. Now, let's get into our study as we take a closer look at I Corinthians 12.

I Corinthians 12:1-3 says *[1] Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. [2] You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. [3] Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.*

The 'now' here means that Paul has just dealt with something and now he is going to deal with this – spiritual gifts. I think this is really astonishing and informative. There are four texts dealing directly with spiritual gifts. In I Peter, Peter wraps spiritual gifts around the fact that in all things we are to keep fervent in our love for one another. Our spiritual gifts as they are employed are to be manifested with the love of Christ in our relationships with each other. I meet a lot of angry Christians and it's not righteous for it's really the anger of man so many times. As we move forward for the work of the Kingdom together, it's supposed to be above all fervent in your love for one another. In fact, it's supposed to be so evident that Jesus says it's your most powerful weapon. They will come to Him when they see how you love one another. How we do it, doesn't seem to be matching how He does it to us.

Think about the next chapter after I Corinthians 12. It's the great chapter on love which is I Corinthians 13. I Corinthians 13:4-7 says *[4] Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* Ephesians 4 talks about unity in the body and then ends with this verse in Ephesians 4:32 which says *[32] Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* Speak truth and love to one another. Even the text on spiritual gifts ends this way; as your gifts are being used you build one another up in love.

Romans 12 is kind of a distillation of I Corinthians 12 and it has the same pattern. Romans 12:1-8 talks about spiritual gifts and we'll get there soon in our study. Then Paul gives the mark of a true Christian as he starts it off with Romans 12:9-10 which says *[9] Let love be*

genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. [10] Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. This matter of the spiritual gifts is put in the sandwich of the love of Christ that is to be evident among the people of God.

Paul spent 18 months in Corinth in ministry and the only place he spent any longer was Ephesus and there he spent three years. When Paul left Corinth he was sent a letter from them because all kinds of issue came up, plus there were divisions, factions and people who were exalting themselves and attacking others. There were all kinds of problems of confusion and chaos so they sent him a letter with seven questions. I Corinthians is Paul's sermon in the opening four chapters and then beginning in chapter 5 he starts answering each of those questions. Each question when it's being answered starts with the phrase, 'Now concerning...'. In this study we are at the question they asked him about spiritual gifts for the church was in utter chaos because of the abuse of spiritual gifts as they imported the pagan world and life view into the understanding and use of spiritual gifts. Paul helps them correct that.

There are two key words here in I Corinthians 12 that identify the reality of spiritual gifts. One is the word *charismata* which comes from the Greek word *charis* which means grace – grace gifts. Peter told us these were gifts from God's varied grace so they are called gifts of grace. There are also called *pneumatikos* which means spiritual gifts. The reason Paul addresses his audience as brothers in I Corinthians 12 is because if you are not a Christian you don't have a spiritual gift. Even though the Corinthians have problems with this Paul is still trying to love them as brothers.

Paul goes onto to tell them in I Corinthians 12:1 that he doesn't want them to be uninformed. We get the word agnostic from this word uninformed for it means without understanding. The NAS (New American Standard) translates this word uninformed as ignorance which I like better. As Christians we're not ignorant because all the information we know we need to know the reality of God has been given. Our problem is not a lack of information but a lack of understanding or the suppression of the information. Know that Paul is not rebuking them here. It is Paul saying he needs to teach them this and that he should have taught him them this so he is going to correct it in this letter. He is about to inform them of what they need to know and understand about spiritual gifts.

We need to understand that when we become a Christian we are not a blank slate. You have a new record for Jesus took away your sin and gave you His righteousness. You have a new heart for you are born again. You have a new family for you have been adopted into the family of God. You have a new perspective for you have eyes to see and ears to hear. You are on a journey of a new life, the old has passed away behold the new has come. You have a new home where you are headed, for it's the new heavens and the new earth.

What you don't have is a new mind and all of those years apart from Christ with those rebellious life views that we were submerged in, they are still with us. That's why Paul is going to be working with the Corinthians and in I Corinthians 12:2 he starts out 'you know...' so Paul is going to start with what they do know. Discipling always starts with what you know. I Corinthians 12:2 says [2] *You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.*

'When you were pagans...' refers to their old lives and we don't identify with our old lives when we become Christians for that's what we were but now we are in Christ and Christ is in us. All of us, before we were Christians were led to mute idols, we lived a pagan life style and when we become a Christian we still have that stuff all over us. As one man put it, 'you have stinkin' thinkin' everywhere.' It didn't disappear. You wake up in the morning and the default

is the way you have been taught for years and years. Secondly, the Christian life is not lived by intuition for the Christian life is lived by Divine revelation. So, you have stuff you have learned before Christ that you need to unlearn and now you want to be taught by the Word of God. That's what we call discipleship.

Paul is telling the Corinthians that he is going to correct this with discipleship. The preacher in discipleship and evangelism does it at one level that then leads to another level and so on. Did Jesus speak the truth to call people to salvation, to train and disciple people to big multitudes? Yes but then He had 70, then 12, then 3. Discipleship is at every single one of those levels. Paul starts from the pulpit ministry to start informing and discipling them about spiritual gifts, because they are interpreting spiritual gifts from their pagan world and life view and that's why there are so many problems. This should have been done earlier here at Briarwood because it is unbelievable what the misunderstanding about spiritual gifts have done to churches and whole denominations. The reason for this is because most are not teaching from a Biblical standpoint but a pagan view, a false view, a man-centered world and life view.

There would be so many problems that would be handled in the worship wars if we all committed ourselves to a theology of worship and not judged worship by personal preferences and influences from our unbelieving life and how you evaluate such an issue. We have to start with what God's Word says when it comes to this and spiritual gifts and that means we have to undo what we learned before. So now we are to be led by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Let's go to the next verse.

I Corinthians 12:3 says [3] *Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and **no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.***

Paul here is saying that you can't understand spiritual gifts until you are spiritual and you can't be spiritual until the Holy Spirit converts you to Christ for spiritual gifts are for Christians. Only Christians have them and every Christian has one, but most importantly the same Spirit that brought you to Christ is the Spirit who gives the gift and with His Word teaches us where the gifts comes from, why they have been given and how they are to be used.

What is the unpardonable sin? Paul is telling you what it is. What does the Holy Spirit bring you to say? It is 'Jesus is Lord and Savior.' So if you say Jesus is calling you but say 'Jesus is accursed' the Holy Spirit didn't give you that to say, but you rejected what the Spirit is telling you to do and therefore instead of coming to Christ as Lord and Savior, you call Christ accursed – anathema – and when you do that you have rejected the only One who can save you so you have done the unpardonable sin. It's a sin that keeps you from the only One who can pardon us and save us. When you surrender to Christ as Savior you surrender not only as Savior but Lord so enough of this 'come to Christ as Savior and later as Lord.' He doesn't offer Himself on the a la carte menu – He is Lord and Savior. When you have converted to Him as Savior you have bowed to Him as Lord. Now God, go to work on my mind so that we can go to work on my life to know how to live in all of life with Him as Lord and Savior.

When Paul says 'no one can say' he has just told us a great theological truth. We are not sin sick, we are sin dead. You can't receive Jesus as Savior and Lord until you are born again. You can mouth the words. You can be in a service and emotionally respond to an altar call or invitation and come and mouth the words, but not from the heart, until the Holy Spirit who calls you gives you a new heart. When He gives you a new heart and you come to Christ as Savior, you surrender to Him as Lord and now we're setting up Christ as Owner of our gifts and us as stewards of our Lord in the use of our gifts. This is what Paul is putting into place here. Paul is

not demeaning here for he is preaching and teaching to give them the theology of where to start in understanding spiritual gifts so they can get rid of the confusion and divisions that the misuse, abuse or non-use of these gifts were causing in that particular congregation at Corinth.

Before I get to the takeaway I want to ask this question; what are the marks of paganism, especially in the first century? I'm indebted to several people on this but particularly my friend Alistair Begg. Mute idolatry are mute idols where you can talk to them but they can't talk to you. You might be thinking 'I talk to Jesus, does He talk to me?' I would say 'yes' right from His Word – 66 Books – that is available to everyone. You can personally talk to Him but He has given His Word so that we can know His mind to us.

What are the marks of idolatry? It is self-absorption and it is manifested by a fascination with dramatic experiences. We call it today 'FOMO' – fear of missing out. I want the next experiences. There is also an abdication to the gratification of appetites. There is a depraved embrace of sexual immorality. Alistair Begg summed it up this way; we want to be in the know, we want an experience that is powerful and we want it to be all about us. Paganism is the ecstatic, dramatic, the mystic and the self-aggrandizing. That is what comes from idolatry of mute idols.

Some reading this are saying 'yeah that's silly, paganism, thinking that Zeus, Artemis, Aries, Diana and all those other gods are it – how silly can you be?' There is a reason I have continually said we are in an age of neo-paganism, developing a culture of insanity, immorality, lethality and absurdity. You think their gods are silly? Take a look at ours – we think our possessions are going to save us and we worship them. We don't use them but we worship them. We have become **fan**-atics of sports. We build our life, our economy around these things. It is what I possess, who I control, what I have power over, what I experience that are our gods.

That is why Jesus warns us through Paul that in the last days the anti-Christ is going to have a field day because everyone will be suspect to his false signs, wonders and miracles that are done with power and become fascinated with it. We want all these other things and people, instead of God's Word and God's Spirit bringing us to Him. Satan uses our old man and old mind, but the Lord is ready to change us. So, I want to leave you with these three takeaways from what Paul is teaching us from this text.

Number one, Paul is teaching us to discover, develop and deploy our spiritual gifts we have to have conversion clarity. Spiritual gifts are for people who have been converted through the power of the Spirit and brought to Christ as Lord through God's grace. Spiritual gifts are received from God by God and they come to you by Christ through the Holy Spirit. So my call today to you is Christ if you have not come to Him and surrendered to Him as your Savior and Lord who died to save you through His Spirit who brings you to Him. When you receive a spiritual gift from Jesus it is not a gift that is to become idolized or to put on the shelf until it's convenient. It is something you use for Him to whom you will answer for the use of that gift.

The Father designed your gift, Jesus secured your gift and the Holy Spirit delivers your gift. It is the same Father who authored your salvation, the same Son who accomplished your salvation and the same Spirit who applied your salvation. So, until you are saved there won't be a spiritual gift delivered to you for you to use.

Number two, Paul is teaching us that to discover, develop and deploy our spiritual gifts there has to be discipleship necessity. We all show up to Christ with baggage. Discipleship from a pulpit first, to a congregational community next, then to a small group – are all needed to help unpack the old baggage to repack it with the truths of God's Word. We need these kinds of discipleship so that we don't follow the mute idols of this world.

Number three, Paul is ultimately telling us to be a steward of a spiritual gift as we discover, develop and deploy it, we have to have a God-glorifying, self-denying humility. I don't invent, discover, develop or deploy the gifts for the One who gives me the gifts is the One who enables me to discover, develop and deploy them for the Kingdom. It's not from me or about me. It's from Him and it's about Him as I engage with His people to exalt Him.

Here is the amazing thing I've seen so many times in the Bible and in life. What is interesting to me is the status for which people are converted. Moses was a murderer and becomes an emancipator. Peter was a traitor, denier and becomes a leader plus one who is faithful to Christ. Paul when he was Saul was a religious terrorist who killed Christians and destroyed churches and becomes perhaps the greatest evangelist and church planter. I look at my own life. I was violent and now I get to shepherd. I was profane, vulgar and blasphemous with a mouth that spewed rebellion against God and now I get to preach the Word of God.

It's astonishing how great God's grace is. In our rebellion He not only forgives us and transforms us but even our spiritual gifts are a statement of the power of His grace as He takes our rebellion and turns it into His instrument to serve Him. Selfish become the great statement of hospitality. I have seen it time and time again but it only comes to those who are converted, disciplined and to glorify God is to deny and humble themselves – God it is of You, from You and to You. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the privilege to study Your Word together. Would You plant it deeply in our hearts? If you have come seeking a relationship with Christ please do not hesitate to call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would love to talk and pray with you. Those who know Christ, would you join me in this journey of not only framing spiritual gifts but understanding spiritual gifts, not from the world's perspective and philosophies which inundates us, but from His Word, by His Spirit and to His glory? God, help us stay amazed not only at the grace that saves us but the grace of God that gives us to serve our Savior and Lord. Jesus, please do this I pray, Amen.