



Life In The Spirit: Jesus, Church and Everyone Else

Date: Sunday 5th May, 2019

Speakers: Becky Stamps and Michael Munson

Key Verses: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Talk Summary:

We introduced our new series in 1 Corinthians by looking at the first bit of 1 Corinthians 12. Here, Paul lays the foundation for his answer to the Corinthians' question about how they can tell who is really 'spiritual' or 'gifted', and which gifts and people are most important.

Firstly, in verses 1-3, Paul answers their question by refocusing them on the giver rather than the gifts. He begins with helping them distinguish between Christian and non-Christian experiences and teaching by reminding them that it's only the Holy Spirit that empowers someone to give their lives to Jesus, to follow him as their 'Lord'. This is reassuring for everyone who's a follower of Jesus - the Spirit isn't something you need as an added extra, he already lives in you and empowers you - your faith in Jesus shows that. However, it could also be a challenge - do we find it easy to accept other people who love Jesus when they can be very different to us in lots of other ways (looks, background, opinions etc)? And do we actually live like we're full of the Spirit, or do we just 'do spiritual things' sometimes, like it's an additional, occasional bonus and not our core identity?

Secondly, Paul uses verses 4-6 to expand the Corinthians' vision. His point is that we are a unified people, with one God saving, serving and empowering us, but we have a wide diversity of gifts. He illustrates this as he writes with the very person of God himself - one God in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit, who are a diverse group of distinct and different individuals who are nevertheless one perfectly unified whole. Paul's point is this: we only reflect God we'll when we are a team, a group of people each with their own passions and gifts, trained and utilised to their full, as part of a unified whole, committed to working together and loving one another under the lordship and authority of Jesus.

Thirdly, Paul then proceeds to list some of the gifts in verses 7-11. We will deal more fully with this list next week - for now it's worth noting that Paul isn't trying to be too specific or prescriptive about how different people may function. Instead, he's demonstrating again the wide diversity of people and gifts you should find in a church and repeating over and over the central truth that there are all gifts of the same Holy Spirit, the same God working through everyone. He's also reminding the Corinthians of why they have been given any gifts or power in the first place - not to make themselves feel more important or to get themselves recognition or a platform in the community (it will become clear in the following chapters that this is a problem for them), but "for the common good", to help other people. There is a challenge here for all of us - do we know people who could do with more wisdom, knowledge, healing, power etc? Do we press into knowing God more and seeking him for breakthrough in their lives? Are we willing to be used by him in powerful ways for their sake, even if it makes us vulnerable or we look silly, or strange, or 'too religious'?

We hope this series will help to answer some of our questions about how the Spirit works and help us as we seek to pursue Jesus and his power more so that we can see those around us blessed and better off in every way because of what he has done.

Group Discussion Questions:

- Print out the passage (1 Cor 12:1-11) for each member of your group, or have enough Bibles that everyone can see the text. The nice thing about a printed copy is that people can write all over it, highlight bits, etc and that helps them interact with the text.
 - You could do a Bible study of the text, getting people into groups to look at the context of the passage, the connections between it and other bits of the Bible (patterns, principles, direct quotes), and then at the characters: who is God, the Spirit, the church, etc in this passage? What does Paul say about them? Encourage them to write notes and scribble on their sheets, individually or in groups, depending on the people you have.
 - Then, ask them how we should respond. You could ask some questions to help draw them out, e.g.:
 - if God is relational and a unified one, what does that mean for us if we want to live like him?
 - What mindsets do you think Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to change from reading this passage?
 - How does Paul encourage and affirm everyone's unique value while also challenging everyone to seek more of God's power and presence in their lives?
 - What might this look like for you?
- If you like, you could ask people to write a short letter to God, as a way to work out what he might be saying to them and to let his prepare their hearts for what he might want to do this series. God wants us to experience his love and grace, to grow in our gifts and use them in ways that glorify him, and to be part of a loving, encouraging community, submitted to Christ. He has a plan to bless and change the world through us working with Him to see miraculous breakthrough in the lives of our friends and neighbours.
 - Their letter could therefore be: tell God about the needs of some of your friends and ask him, how does he feel about them? What is his heart for them? If you have difficulties with the Spirit, or with God, including doubts, frustrations and anger, you can express these to him, along with your desire to see change even when you don't know how to go about that. Encourage people to spend 10 minutes or so writing this, and then share it with someone else in the group and leave time for them to pray for each other.