

A9 BIBLE STUDY: I CORINTHIANS #12

Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 12: 1~31

In previous chapters Apostle Paul warned the Christians in Corinth to avoid idolatry and not take part in the foods offered to idols. As Gentiles some of these Christians had been carried along by custom and traditions of the idol-worshipping society [v. 2]. Paul characterizes these idols as 'dumb idols.' They cannot talk, hear, think or give anything to their worshippers. People worship them in vain hope of material/physical blessings but meet only disappointments. You do not get any life-giving benefits from idols. Only God can give true life and vitality because He is the Creator of the universe.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. [Genesis 2: 7]

Having given life to the human, God continues to give vitality and nourishment through His Son, Jesus, as Jesus claimed while He was on earth:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. [John 14: 6]

While the human body moves along a life's journey towards total death and decay, God's children have the privilege of receiving this true nourishment and life from God that contribute to their 'eternal' life with God.

In Chapter 12 Paul gives a description of various gifts of the Holy Spirit to members of the Christian church, that is, to those who have been born again as God's children. These gifts are provided so that the Church, which is compared as the human body, can function and grow into full maturity of Christ. Just as a human body has various members that perform different functions and complement one another so that the whole body functions in accordance with the intents of the mind/ brain, members of the church receive help of the Spirit of God to function based on the gifts received from God so that the whole church honors and glorifies God and the whole may benefit in growing to the full maturity of Christ:

for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ [Ephesians 4: 12-13]

As a little child grows, the members of the child's body need to function properly and in harmony to get sufficient food, to exercise, to learn and to contribute to the family. All activities of the child's body contribute to the living and growing of the child as a whole. As the members of the child's body continue to function in harmony, the child grows to a fully mature person eventually. Likewise, members of a Christian church need to work in harmony as designed so that the church as a whole may grow to the full stature of Christ. Paul lists the following gifts/ talents that are given to members of a church:

1. Word of wisdom -- gift of wisdom [v. 8]
2. Word of knowledge -- gift of theological and practical knowledge [v. 8]
3. Gift of faith [v. 9]
4. Gifts of healing [v. 9]
5. Working of miracles [v. 10]
6. Gift of prophecy [v. 10]
7. Gift of discerning spirits [v. 10]
8. Gift of speaking in tongues [v. 10]
9. Gift of interpretation of tongues [v. 10]

How do these gifts come to a person? Does God assign these gifts randomly or according to a plan? We know from the life stories of God's people in the Scripture that God gives privileges and gifts to the 'right' persons that best fit

His plan. In the following examples let us see what qualities these people had that moved God to give them the gifts to achieve great works for God and for the kingdom:

1. Noah built the ark to save himself and his family from the great flood by the faith of believing the coming great disaster and preparing for it by building a large vessel together with his sons, a vessel as large as a modern day navy supply ship:

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. [Hebrews 11: 7]

2. Moses had the gift of not only the Egyptian wisdom but also received great wisdom, knowledge and leadership qualities from God to lead the entire nation out of Egypt, receiving God's commandments and laws and delivering them to the people, both orally and in written documents, thus establishing the Jewish OT religious structure:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin [Hebrews 11: 24-25]

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. [Acts 7: 22]

3. Joshua and Caleb had the vision of victory over the inhabitants of the land of Palestine by God's people through God's help. Thus they became the only two people who came out of Egypt to enter the Promised Land. Thus, Joshua became the leader of Israel after Moses and Caleb, in his old age, still had the courage and strength to drive out the giants from the land allotted to his tribe:

Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have wholly followed the Lord. [Numbers 32: 11-12]

"And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the Lord spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said." [Joshua 14: 10-12]

4. David, as a young shepherd boy, could not stand still when he saw how Goliath, the Philistine giant, was ridiculing and despising the army of Israel, and killed him with a sling and smooth stones. The Lord God gave David many more victories and eventually made him the greatest king of Israel:

But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." Moreover David said, "The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." [1 Samuel 17: 34-37]

5. Daniel received the gift of seeing and understanding visions concerning the future of Israel and the world, even unto the end of the times, because he purposed to humble himself before God and to keep true to Him in spite of social and political pressures. He became one of the top rulers of Babylonia and the Persia-Mede Empire. And God revealed him the vision of seventy weeks that foretell the return of Israel from the Babylonian exile, rebuilding of the temple, coming of the Messiah and His death, destruction of the second temple and of Jerusalem, and the end times:

Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. [Daniel 10: 12]

Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God, yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision: [Daniel 9: 20-23]

6. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was chosen by God to bear the baby Jesus and be His human mother. Why was she found to be the suitable young maiden for this privilege? A quality she manifested was obedience to God's will and the faith that God's word would be fulfilled:

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." [Luke 1: 30-33]

Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. [Luke 1: 38]

From these examples we can see that God sees admirable qualities in men and women and uses them to enable fulfillment of His plan. As He did thousands of years ago, He has been doing the same even now in the 21st century. Let us examine what gifts God has bestowed to ourselves and what gifts we desire of God. Not all gifts we ask to God will be given to us. But if we ask in faith and with right preparations of heart and life, God may be pleased to give what you ask for. Then, as Paul exhorted, we would want to use our gifts in harmony with others in the church so that the whole may benefit and grow in Christ.

Discussion topics:

- 1. What gifts have I received of God? How am I using such gifts?*
- 2. Let us discuss ways we can do better to recognize the gifts in others and to encourage their usefulness through such gifts in ways to benefit the whole church.*
- 3. Are the gifts of speaking in 'tongues' apparent in modern days as they were in the first century? Why were these gifts useful then but not now?*