



“Let’s Live in the Spirit’s Power”

I Corinthians 12:1-11

July 11, 2021

Will you join me please in I Corinthians Chapter 12 for a message that I have titled *Let’s Live in the Spirit’s Power*. Let’s live in the Spirit’s power. Let’s serve in the Spirit’s power. Let’s have fellowship in the power that He provides.

It was a Wednesday night in the month of November about ten years ago. I wonder if any of you happen to remember this. Some of you might have been here that night. AWANA ministry was happening, so there were children all over the campus. The workers were all here. This place was hopping with activity. The Worship Band was settling in to their practice and preparation for Sunday morning. There were all kinds of things happening here that night. Then, lights out! Then, power off! Then, the place went dark.

It was the great power outage back about ten years ago. We had people that were kind of wandering around the property with the lights out. It did not take long before the lights came back on and I think that most of the kids thought it was a really cool experience.

With that being something I remember, I want to let you know this: I am thankful for electricity. I am thankful for light switches. I am thankful for power plugs. I am thankful for amplification of voices that comes through electricity and some of the inventions that God has helped us with.

That being said, the Edison Electric Company is not the power source of the church. Long before there were light switches or amplifiers, the church of God was filled with power to advance the Kingdom of God so that it spread all across the globe.

This morning I come with the encouragement in the reminder that it is the Spirit of the Living God who is empowering all of the ministry of the local church. It is the Spirit of God! The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the Lord. He has personality. He has volition. He has authority.

And He has a design and He has power to bring His perfect plan to life among the people that He has brought to a living faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God, is the source of power for anything that we do with eternal effect as a local body of believers at Bethel Grace.

It begins as the Holy Spirit reveals the grace and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ to each one of God’s elect, drawing them from the darkness of the world into the light of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, bringing them to living faith.

It continues as the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within each one of the followers of Jesus Christ, stirring and prompting worship in their hearts so that they praise the name of King Jesus Christ. It continues as the Spirit dwells within each one of the children of God, empowering them with abilities and gifts to build up the body of Christ and to encourage others in their faith.

Then the Holy Spirit gathers the people of God into communities and in those communities, there are others who are gifted in comparable yet different ways. All empowered by the Holy Spirit in ways that are going to build up the church as a whole.

The Holy Spirit is activating this whole array of ministries among all of the people that belong to the Lord and He is the One who is calling us and pushing us to move in that direction and to follow the lead that He is providing. The Spirit of the Living God is the One who empowers it all.

I want for us to see this as we enter into a very rich portion of the New Testament Doctrine of the Church that is recorded for us in I Corinthians Chapter 12. This was the Word of the Lord to the believers in Corinth. This is also the Word of the Lord to the believers in Bellflower today. Let's see what is here for us in I Corinthians Chapter 12 and Verses 1 through 11:

¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore 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.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

So here in this portion of Scripture we have revealed to us the sovereignty and the authority of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Living God.

The Holy Spirit is active in the church, kind of like the general manager in sports, making sure that the right mix of gifts and abilities are going to be present in the church so that church can be used of the Lord to carry out the purposes that the Lord has for us.

As we dig into to what is here, we first need to understand that what we have before us is a corrective portion of teaching from the Spirit. The Corinthians, they were a church richly endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but it seems that the people of the church were becoming enthralled and fixated on one of those gifts in particular. This gift was the speaking in tongues.

In other words, the ability that was being given to some of them by the Spirit to speak forth prayer and praise to God in other languages that were unknown to them and unlearned by them, even as they were speaking them. The Spirit was empowering something that was supernatural.

However, the problem was coming in that the ones who were speaking in tongues, they were becoming the limelight of the church. Some were viewing this gift as superior and other gifts as kind of second-rate, and they were starting to judge people's spirituality and maturity based on whether this gift was in operation in their life.

This was becoming a messy, messy situation. So the Apostle Paul in this text said, Brothers and sisters, we need an education about spiritual gifts in the local church of Corinth. We need to start at square one about the diversity of what the Holy Spirit is doing.

I am not bringing this portion of Scripture before us because I have had indication that there is a problem with speaking in tongues among the body of Christ here at Bethel Grace. Instead, I am bringing this to help us to see that in each and every one of us, the Spirit of the Living God is active and working through us as the members of the church in a whole, diverse array of ways.

That includes each one of us in Christ, born anew, living in the Lord Jesus Christ. Somehow you are gifted by the Spirit of Jesus for the good of the people that are here around you. There is this supernatural interface where Almighty God is present in you and wills to move through you. And we don't want to be those who are putting out the Spirit's flame.

Rather, we want to be those carried the Holy Spirit, discerning how He is at work in us for the good of the people that are with us in Bethel Grace, that the body of Christ might build itself up in love. So this morning we dig into this portion of Scripture and search this out.

As we see what is here, we are going to talk about how the Holy Spirit empowers a church. First we are going to see that the Holy Spirit empowers us by giving us a common foundation upon which we all stand.

From there we see how the Holy Spirit is at work in this whole variety of ways so that there is a well balanced body of believers; some serving in this way and some serving in another way but all for the health of the local church.

It begins with the common foundation, then it goes into the diversity of operations; what the Spirit is doing and desires to do through us together. We will get into the details of the third point next week as we define the gifts that are provided for us in the teaching of the New Testament.

This morning as we think about how the Spirit is empowering the local church, I want for us to first see how He is empowering a common confession in the church. Then we will see how He is empowering a variety of ministries, ministries being acts of service that are outward oriented toward others. Then next week we will see in detail how the Spirit is empowering an array of abilities. It is interesting and exciting to think about the ways that He works.

So let's see how it starts with how the Spirit of God is placing us upon that one Rock. How does the Holy Spirit empower the church? First, we see that:

1. He empowers a common confession (12:2-3)

What is the common confession that is spoken of here in this text? It is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is the common confession. What does it say in Verse 3?

³...no one can say "Jesus is Lord" *except in the Holy Spirit.*

The Spirit empowers that confession from the heart. But do you notice here in these verses the kind of strange way that Paul arrived at that statement? It is important to take that to heart because we see even the difficult contexts from which the Spirit of God will activate this belief from deep within the confession that Christ is King!

²You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore 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.*

This is interesting because Paul first spoke of these Corinthian Gentiles previous involvement in paganism. Then he went on to give this terrible saying that would have been much more common in the Jewish Synagogue in the presence of the Roman civil authority, where it says, Jesus is anathema or Jesus is cursed or Jesus is false. I don't even like saying that even though I am reading it from the Bible.

It may have been the case that that utterance was heard in some of the pagan shrines as they were doing their ecstatic oracles and speaking forth. Maybe in the pagan shrines, that saying was heard. But we know for sure that it would have definitely been stated on a regular basis in the Jewish synagogue.

The Jewish synagogues included prayers that regularly condemned those that they declared heretics or blasphemers. The Jewish authorities declared their own Messiah such, so, yes, it would have been stated as a warning to the people in those congregations—Jesus is anathema and so is anybody who worships Him. There was a synagogue in close proximity to where the church was meeting in the city of Corinth.

Additionally, it was already setting in when the New Testament letters were written—this persecution that broke out against the church. The persecution became furious under Nero and Christians were being compelled by Roman overlords either to curse Christ and pay homage to Caesar or die.

So in such a context, this statement, Jesus is anathema, would have been the passport back into the good graces of the society at large. They could remove themselves from the pressure of the world by agreeing with them about what they said about Jesus.

Meanwhile, in this environment the Holy Spirit produced the first common confession of the church. And the first common creed that rose up from the hearts of all of those born again is the exact opposite of Jesus is accursed. It is no! Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Master. Jesus is King. Jesus is Lord Most High.

This is what the Holy Spirit would prompt from hearts, even in the most seemingly impossible of situations. So as these believers were proclaiming that Jesus is Lord in the ears of the Jews, they would be hearing these Jews say that Jesus is Yahweh, the Living God of the Old Testament, the Lord. In the ears of the Roman overlords they would be hearing the believers say, Christ is the King of kings. Christ is the Lord of lords.

Paul's point here is even if it is in a context of persecution or if it is in a time of peace, there is nobody who from the heart with a clear and accurate vision of Jesus as God Most High, is going to be able to declare Him as such apart from the revealing work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, giving them a clear picture of the One who created everything, who entered into the world as Savior; to the One who died on the cross and rose from the grave and who has ascended to the right hand of His Father within the Triune Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit.

Paul was saying that the Holy Spirit is going to be the One triggering this. And, praise God, He was triggering this and, praise God, He is triggering this today. This is the common confession that we stand upon. The Holy Spirit wants to make a big deal about Jesus Christ.

Wherever people are filled with the Spirit of God, they are going to make a big deal about Jesus Christ. They are going to say, We proclaim Christ, crucified, risen, and coming again. This was happening and is the first work of the Spirit applied to the people of God. He unites them in this common confession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Many brothers and sisters here at Bethel Grace can identify with some of the pressures and the struggles that many of the people in Corinth were feeling themselves under. We are living in "post-Christian America." Well, there is no post Christian anything because Christ will encompass all things. However, there is the sense in which the tide of popular opinion seems to have shifted and many of you are feeling the pressure of that.

Man is created in God's image and there is a splendor to that, but anyone who will declare that there is rampant and perverse depravity about every human being, that is going to rub against the grain of the humanitarianism of the world; the humanism of the world—that we are essentially good, while the Word of God says that the human heart is desperately wicked and in need of cleansing and total transformation.

If you are one who will declare that faith in Jesus is the one solution to that heart problem, you are now going against the grain of popular society. If you proclaim what the standard of God is for sexuality, for marriage, you are going to stick out like a sore thumb.

Praise God for His cleansing grace. Praise God for the way that He transforms. Praise God for the way that He brings new life. But many of you know the difficulty of standing for Christ and being salt and light in a world that has now repudiated the biblical teaching on sexuality.

Praise God for the presence of the Spirit. You are not alone. The Spirit of the Living God was the One who was with you, prompting you to ever say Jesus is Lord in the first place; giving you eyes to see the glory and the goodness of His Great Name. The Spirit of the Living God is the One who continues to abide with you, empowering you to see the Lordship of Christ the King and to honor Him as such.

And someday when this life is over, and you pass into the glory of the Kingdom of the Living God, it is going to be with saturation of the Holy Spirit to the very core of your being. Then you are going to be glorying in the Lordship of Jesus Christ who you will see before your very eyes. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not something that we can conjure up.

This is the first work of the Holy Spirit in the church of God. Christ is King. Christ is Savior. Christ is Lord. Christ is good. We will follow Christ in the power of the Spirit of God. We see that this is the first work because no one can do this apart from the Spirit, and the Spirit is the One who is empowering people to do this.

As we come to the second aspect of this passage of Scripture on the enablement of the Spirit, not only does He enable us to believe and declare the Lordship of Christ, but He also empowers us to contribute to the cause of Christ.

He also equips us and gifts us to be building up the local church which is to be a place of ministry and refuge; a place where the Kingdom of God has its outpost here on earth, where God is advancing and working in the midst of His people. So the Spirit is going to help us in diverse ways to build up the body of Christ.

How does the Spirit empower the church? He gives us a common confession and continuing, we see that:

2. He empowers a variety of ministries (12:4-7)

A whole variety of them. Let's see what it says in Verses 4 through 6:

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

With that final statement we have the essence of what ministry is. Ministry is something that God does through a person for the good of the people around them. It is service oriented. It is outward looking. It is others oriented.

I have heard it put like this, and this is helpful for me. Your gift is not about you. Your gift is about me. My gift is not about me. My gift is about you. This is so important for us to take to heart because the lingering presence of sin in us can so easily confuse things.

The things that the Lord does through us for the good of others, it gets turned inward then it becomes all about us. Us being recognized. Us being heralded. Would you believe that there is possibly a spirit of narcissism even among Christians? This all can get turned into my glory. This can happen.

The Holy Spirit desires to bear fruit through us, and sometimes we want to eat our own fruit. And the Holy Spirit is making it so that others are to be edified and built up through what we are doing. In our struggle with sin, we often want to build kingdoms for ourselves; to make names for ourselves.

Yes, there is great joy that comes in serving the Lord and, yes, we want to know that we are doing people good but when it becomes self-absorbed and the attention is focused on us rather than the people around us, then the Holy Spirit's gifts are being turned around.

So we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will fill us up in such a way that says, I'm there for their good. You can come to the church in one of two mindsets. You can come saying, Here I am or you can come saying, there you are. How are you doing? Then there is this mutuality to it, it becomes so energizing. That is what the Spirit desires.

I need to backtrack once again. The first thing that we say when we come to church is: Here He is! The Lord. The Lord! And there you are. How does joy work? Jesus, others, and yourself. With this in view we see some definition here in what we have read just about the nature of the Spiritual gifts and how the Holy Spirit wants to make us so that we are benefitting others.

We see that there is this great diversity of gifts. We will see this as we move through this passage and get into it again next week. These things are all prompted and provided and provoked and stirred up by the One Triune God, but then we see that a different word for the gifts is used in Verse 4, then in Verse 5, and again in Verse 6.

First in Verse 4, it says there is a variety of *gifts* but the same Spirit. That is the Greek word Charismata. It takes the Greek word for grace, which is Charis, then it turns it into a noun form. It is then like a manifestation of grace. It is something that God gives to the church through us as a gift of His grace.

None of us has deserved or earned a spiritual gift anymore than we have deserved or earned the gift of salvation. It is a gift that the goodness of God gives to His church through the individuals that comprise it. It is a gift!

Second, in Verse 5 we see that it says that there are a varieties of *service*, but the same Lord. Service is the from the same word that we get deacon and deaconess from—*diakonai*. It talks about humble service. It is the type of service that you do wearing the strings of an apron. We think about how Jesus was washing feet, blessing others by meeting their needs. It is service oriented.

Thirdly, in Verse 6 it says that there are a variety of *activities*, but the same God who empowers them all in everyone. That word activities in the Greek is *energemata*. It is the language of energy, of working, of effect that the Spirit of God brings for the Kingdom through His people.

With all of these things in view, I think that John Stott provides a very good definition of what the Spiritual gifts are:

“A spiritual gift is a special ability bestowed as a gracious gift to be used in humble serve with power supplied by God for the common good.”

That captures all of the language that we just read in this passage. Finally, let us go into the third point that we have, bringing this as a foretaste of what we are going dig into in greater detail next week.

How does the Spirit empower the church? Third,

3. He empowers an array of abilities (12:8-11)

All kinds of different aptitudes that come with the supernatural effect of His Kingdom actually working through people. It is amazing to think about. Here is what Paul had to say about it in just one portion, one paragraph, among several in the New Testament that provide a sampling of the array of gifts that the Spirit gives.

⁸For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

The sovereignty of the Spirit. Here again in the context of spiritual gifts we see God applying His right to choose. I didn't choose what gifts I got. You don't choose what gifts you got. The Spirit distributes gifts according to His will.

In this text we see the beginning of the whole diversity of gifts listed. The Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts is focused in on in four different places in the New Testament. I remember it by remembering 12 – 12; 4 – 4. Romans Chapter 12. I Corinthians Chapter 12. Ephesians Chapter 4. I Peter Chapter 4.

In these chapters you have lists where different abilities are specified. When you count up all of the gifts that are there and some overlaps, so there are between twenty and twenty-four gifts. That being the case, I think that what we find listed in those passages are a sampling.

We must be careful not to create things in our minds that are outside of the nature of the Kingdom of God, but it seems that there are other things that the Lord is doing through people not kept in one of those lists.

To me it is so interesting and fascinating to go through and seek to define the difference gifts. When I do that, different faces begin popping into my head. When I go through the gifts teaching or discernment or mercy or administration, I say not me! Thank God, for the faces in my brain. Thank God for them. Thank God for them.

I think that is the point of the diversly gifted body of Christ that are all contributing to a common effort for the upbuilding of the church in love. So next week we are going to dig into those gifts. I hope there is a sense of anticipation as we think about what is to come.

This is point important and I will close with it because of the season that we are in right now. I think of where were are as Bethel Grace. And here is my quick assessment of things. There are many who are a part of Bethel Grace who are active. You are going to town, and serving and you are serving sacrificially. Many of you are serving not only in one area, but in multiple areas that get stacked up. Praise God for that activity.

There is some dormancy at Bethel Grace also. Not everybody who is part of the church has been active. We have gone through this very, very weird season called Covid and even in the society around us, you find that there are companies that are struggling to get people to come and be employed. There may be the sense in some people in the church in which they are still holding back and they need to get active in the calling that the Spirit places upon their lives.

So there are many active. There are some that are dormant. Here is another wonderful reality of this present moment at our church. Many of you are new. Welcome! Over the past year a number of people have been discerning God moving in their lives and they weighing up where the Lord would have them as far as their local church goes.

We want to be an active church. We want everybody serving, so understand that coming in. We are very interested in how you might be discerning yourself to be gifted; where you are interested in serving as we get to know you and you get to know the church. As we see people serving in the areas that God has activated them to serve, the church is built up.

Okay who can remember? 12 – 12 and 4 – 4. Read through these listings of gifts and we are going to talk about this more next week. This being the case, we want people to be doing the lion share of their ministry in their area of giftedness. That is vital.

Yes, sometimes there are initiatives that don't last for a year or more. Rather, they last for a week, like VBS! We just need people to jump in! Even if you don't have the full endowment of the gift of helps, which is a wonderful gift that will define next week, we need people who will just help because the need is there. If you look at what is left on the VBS list, you will notice two of the main areas just says help.

So if the Spirit is tugging, resist not the Holy Spirit. Let's join in this effort together because we are looking at a great month of July. Student ministry is taking place this week and it is going to be awesome; attributes of God being proclaimed; people coming to know more and more about who the Living God is. Then VBS, kids being introduced to Jesus. Very important and a blessing. So rally and follow His lead.

Will you join me in a word of prayer?