

14. JESUS IS LORD

1 Corinthians 12v1-3.

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no-one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no-one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

There was time when my Bible fell open at 1 Corinthians chapter 12 (for me in the late 70's and early 80's). The issue of "spiritual gifts" was a real battle ground. Every Sunday I went to our Baptist church meetings with a knotted stomach. What would happen today? The trouble was that the "charismatics" were often the flaky ones. They set things back, rather than moved them forward, by their contributions.

One of the problems in those early days was that talk of the gifts of the Spirit was often divorced from the Doctrine of God. These are gifts from God Himself. They come through the Holy Spirit, who is, Himself, *The Gift* from whom every other gift is given and received. We discover more about the Giver in His gifts and we also meet the Giver in His gifts.

Gifts *you* give do the same. They say something about you, the giver. This year I will celebrate (if that's the right word) my 60th birthday. I am pretty sure Liz will give me a gift on my birthday! That gift will say something about my wife: the care she takes in choosing it, her knowledge of what I like or what I need, the message inside it and the way it is wrapped.

In fact the gift not only tells me about the giver it speaks of my relationship with the giver. You could even say the giver is *in* the gift because the gift itself has ceased to be an object from a shop; it has become an expression of love and affection. *The giver is now in the gift.* For me to reject the gift or show indifference to the gift is no longer about the gift itself. I would be rejecting the giver. I would be showing my indifference to Liz herself.

So it is with God and His gifts. We meet the Giver in His Gifts. This is the direction I want to come from over the next few weeks in this final part of our current series.

Now to our text; Paul is writing largely in response to a letter from the church at Corinth which we do not now have. The believers have raised issues which Paul responds to. The tone of Paul's reply is largely corrective. The issue in this section of his letter is what it means to be "*spiritual*" (*pneumatikoi*). It seems that for some in the church at Corinth "spirituality" was synonymous with one spiritual gift more than any other - the gift of tongues. "Tongues" was being used in their worship to show off; to let every one else know how "spiritual" they were; to outdo others in their displays of spirituality. So Paul corrects them. He is not against the gift of tongues as such, but in this case it is at the heart of the problem. So he writes about how spiritual gifts are to function in the church and what their purpose is. They are not for showing off! And his teaching is set firmly in the Doctrine of God.

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, (literally, ‘the things of the Spirit’) **I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.** There were plenty of “inspired utterances” in pagan temples. Fascination with spiritual phenomena as an end in itself is most certainly not a mark of spirituality.

Therefore I tell you that no-one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no-one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. What does this mean? Surely no one in the church at Corinth was saying “Jesus be cursed”! What is Paul saying here?

1. He is urging them to use their minds.

Listen to The Message paraphrase. *“God wants us to use our intelligence, to seek to understand as well as we can. For instance, by using your heads, you know perfectly well that the Spirit of God would never prompt anyone to say “Jesus be damned!” Nor would anyone be inclined to say “Jesus is Master!” without the insight of the Holy Spirit.”*

When you “receive the Holy Spirit” this is not to replace your brain. When you start to “live by the Spirit” and be “led by the Spirit” this does not mean that you need to ask the Holy Spirit whether you should get up in the morning or put clothes on or eat food. There are some sad and hilarious stories of fanatics who have lived in that very manner. These things are common sense. Similarly we do not need to ask the Holy Spirit whether we should forgive others or be generous. These things are very clear in Scripture. *We need the Spirit’s help* to forgive and to know how much to give, but the basics are easily understood.

So too, it doesn’t usually take great spiritual discernment to work out what is genuinely Christian and what is not. We can find this out by simple intelligence using the *“Jesus is Lord”* test. i.e. Jesus is God!

In our day we have groups which call themselves Christian which, while they do not go around cursing Jesus, utterly reject any teaching that Jesus is Lord. Those two young Mormons (from *‘The Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints’*) on your doorstep may look clean-cut, but they believe Jesus is the first-born of God’s spirit-children not the unique Son of God. The Jehovah’s Witnesses offering you *‘The Watchtower’* magazine may seem to know their Bible but they do not believe that God was made flesh in Jesus Christ. He is a created being and certainly not equal to God. In fact they believe that Jesus was the Archangel Michael in his pre-existent state and that his brother Lucifer rebelled against God. And if you ever wander into a Christian Science Reading Room (I am not recommending you do so) you will discover that Mary Baker Eddy separated “Jesus” and “Christ” into two separate entities. *“Jesus is the human man and Christ is the divine idea.”* Any teaching that Jesus Christ is Lord is rejected.

In the same way we need to face the issue of what we believe in our multi-cultural society with its different world faiths. Many tell us that the different religions all lead to the same God or that the God of the Christian is the same as Islam’s Allah. But this does not pass the simple *“Jesus is Lord”* test. This is the line neither the true

Christian nor true Muslim can cross. Muslims do not believe that “Jesus is Lord”. One Muslim placard outside Westminster Cathedral last September, during the protest at some remarks of Pope Benedict XVI, read “*Jesus is the Slave of Allah.*”

2. He is emphasising the need for content in worship.

The Corinthians’ preoccupation with tongues seems to have so taken over their meetings that public worship ended up with very little intelligible content. So, Paul says, if they have the majority of their meeting in unknown languages they could even end up with someone cursing Jesus in their ecstatic utterance. That would then be no different from demon filled pagan worship. Everyone needs to be able to understand, weigh and test what is said in public worship to ensure it is from God.

There is no likelihood of us having over fifty percent of our meetings in tongues – but the call for content is a necessary one. It is something we need to be vigilant about.

Churches like ours have been caricatured as “Happy Clappy”. I don’t mind that too much but I do mind the implication that there is no theological content in our worship or teaching. On one occasion Terry Virgo was visiting a group of Reformed Leaders in London, many of whom were very hostile to any emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit. One of the men threw this “Happy Clappy” charge at Terry but before he could answer another man spoke up, pointing out that Terry’s colleague in Brighton, the songwriter Dave Fellingham, had “*practically set Ephesians to music.*” Plenty of theological content there, then.

More than anything we need content that exalts Jesus as Lord. We want Jesus to be glorified in our worship songs and our prayers and our prophetic words and pictures and songs and our interpretation of tongues and our preaching.

3. He is explaining how to recognise the activity of God.

He is laying down the most basic of all principles for recognising the work of God’s Spirit over against counterfeit signs and wonders – in two ways.

On the one hand, no-one who denies, rejects or blasphemes Christ can possibly work signs & wonders by the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit will not cooperate with such a person. Such miracles must come from another source, so stay well clear of these people and things. This is a serious word to anyone tempted to dabble in the occult or with spiritualism or faith healers who by-pass Jesus.

On the other hand, no one confessing Jesus to be Lord can do signs and wonders by some demonic or counterfeit spirit. There is no need to be anxious. I remember the distress I felt some years ago when I talked to one of my fellow elders in a Baptist church about the amazing things happening in Seoul South Korea in Dr. Paul Yongi Cho’s ministry. Thousands were turning to Christ. The church was now the biggest in the world. Miracles were taking place among them on a daily basis. Church leaders and members were spending weeks in prayer and fasting. My elder said he believed that Cho’s ministry was not from God but “*of the devil!*” This elder was on the board of an international missionary organisation and in many other ways

he was godly and wise. But he was also resolutely anti-charismatic and this had blinded him to the genuine work of God. He had forgotten a basic Biblical principle. Demons flee from the name of Jesus. We can be sure that when Jesus is being proclaimed as Lord we will also find the genuine activity of God's Spirit.

Many people went through great heart searching during the early 1990's when Christian meetings all around the world were thrown into disarray by waves of laughter and the most unlikely people began acting in very strange ways. Some called this the "Toronto Blessing" because of where it started, and others referred to it as "The Refreshing". But some had less complimentary names for it! They were not sure it was from God at all. For myself, I believe it was a genuine initiative of the Spirit. In Brighton songs like "*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,*" were often the trigger for this phenomena. The last place demons would have wanted to be was in those meetings. There were, of course, discomforts and dangers. Some may have copied what was happening to others so as not to be left out. Some behaviour may have been "fleshly" immaturity or exhibitionism. But many people's devotion for Jesus was deepened and others became more passionate about sharing their faith. During that time, as always, the great need was to make sure that Jesus was being exalted as Lord. That is the way we can be sure that the Holy Spirit will be at home.

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There is a common theme in all of this; only speech which clearly exalts Jesus Christ as Lord is of value. This is the real sign that the Holy Spirit is inspiring someone's words and works. Every one of the Spirit's gifts will bring glory to Jesus. This is the Spirit's preoccupation – to honour Jesus. It is the genuine mark of the Spirit's presence.

Therefore all contributions in our worship need to be put to this test. Does this exalt Jesus Christ as Lord? Does it honour His teaching or cut across it? Does it highlight His saving work on the cross or emphasise salvation by works? Does it lift our hearts in worship or cause us to feel wretched and condemned? Does it glorify His name or draw attention to someone else - like the one who is speaking?

The spiritual pride of some in the congregation at Corinth was obscuring the Lordship of Jesus. Their preoccupation with displays of spirituality was getting in the way of the glory of Jesus. Today it might be something different from tongues. In my early days as a Christian the preaching was all that really mattered. Everything else was preamble! In our setting it can be different. It might be worship leaders or prophetic ministry or healing evangelists that take centre stage. We need to hear again and again John the Baptist's words "*He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less,*" or "*He must increase; I must decrease.*" (John 3v30)

"Jesus is Lord!" In Ephesians 2v20 Jesus is described as "*the chief cornerstone*" of the church. This was the essential part of the foundation; it aligned the other foundation stones and the whole building. Let's make sure this is the foundation upon which County Church is built. "Jesus is Lord!"

John Wilthew. May 200