

“A Charismatic People”

1 Corinthians 12 | August 19, 2012

Ecclesia

by Steven Norris

Charismatic. It can be such a misunderstood word. Typically, we associate it with one of two categories of meaning. First, we may think of charismatic as referring to a type of Christianity - one associated with churches or individuals that speak in tongues, faith healers, high-energy worship, raised hands, dancing, shouting, clapping, “Amen’s!” and “Hallelujahs!” Or we think of charismatic as referring to a specific character trait that may include: being articulate, one who inspires great enthusiasm and devotion, a people-person, someone who seems to give off an energy that is contagious, someone people are just drawn to, confidence, a “born leader,” etc.

Now, while there may be some element of truth to these descriptions, these are not really the biblical definition. In fact, properly understood, I would submit to you that it is God’s plan for Ecclesia that we be a “charismatic people.” More than that, I would suggest that it is God’s plan for all churches to be a “charismatic people.”

Let me remind you that we have been talking about the Holy Spirit this month. We began with the teaching of Jesus, where he taught that it was better that he went away because the Spirit (Paraclete) would come. He told the disciples that the Spirit would become their teacher. But more importantly, the Spirit would point to, and bring glory to, Jesus.

Then, last week, we said that this teaching from Jesus came true at Pentecost. After Jesus had ascended back to heaven, the disciples were gathered in a 10-day-long prayer meeting in the upper room. The Spirit came upon them in a mighty, uncontrollable, terrifying wind that turns the community on its head. This Spirit redefines what it means to be a part of the people of God and empowers the community to do great and awesome things, sharing the message of Jesus with the world.

The Spirit does this by giving these followers certain manifestations of the Spirit’s presence. We might read this as “signs and wonders.” Examples include boldness in preaching, miraculous healing, prophecy, and other signs. Now, in hindsight, we might look at these and call them “Spiritual Gifts.”

So, what does this have to do with being a charismatic? I’m glad you asked. Charismatic is an English word that comes from the Greek word *charis*. It is the word translated as “grace.” Biblically speaking, grace is unmerited favor. It is “God’s free action for the benefit of his people.” Grace refers to something that is not earned or deserved - it is pure gift. In our passage today, the word translated “gift” (vs. 4) is the Greek word *charisma*. We might literally translate it as “gift of grace” or “a free gift.” Maybe we would translate it this way: a *charisma* is a “concrete manifestation of God’s grace.” Or we might say it this way: a spiritual gift is “God’s grace with skin on.”

In this sense of the term, we are called to be a “charismatic community” - a community that has received God’s gift to us in Jesus, a community of those who have received the gift of new life, who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, who have received the gifts of the Spirit to live this new life. Which all lead to the first point I want to make about Spiritual Gifts:

1. Spiritual Gifts are *Gifts*

The Bible doesn’t talk about “Spiritual Wages.” You don’t deserve them. You didn’t earn them. You don’t get to choose them. They are gifts. We don’t serve a stingy God, sitting up in heaven, withholding good things from us. No, we are God’s children. We serve a God that loves to bless us. that loves to give us good gifts, that pours out grace upon grace upon grace upon us day after day

after day. In fact, the book of James tells us that “Every good and every perfect gift comes down from the Father above” (James 1:17).

But there is purpose for these gifts. These “gifts” are also referred to in terms of “functions” - as in Function of the Body.

2. Spiritual Gift = Function of the Body

When the Bible talks about the Church, it is not talking about four brick walls, a metal roof, some Sunday School classes, a stage, a cross on the wall, and a video projector. When the Bible talks about the Church, it talks about a living organism, a community of people gathered together, or the “body of Christ.”

Remember what we said last week: the coming of the Spirit redefined what it means to be a part of the people of God. Those that have received the Spirit, regardless of their background, have been adopted into the family. Since Jesus is no longer present in flesh in and blood, the gathered community of Christ-followers, who have the Spirit living inside of them, now make up the body of Jesus in the world. We are the body of Christ.

Just like our bodies need each and every organ to function properly, the Body of Christ needs all members to function (i.e. use their gifts) for it to function properly. This leads me to my third point:

3. There are a variety of gifts.

Each organ in the body does something different. Each one has a job. The heart pumps blood. The lungs breathe air. The stomach digests food. The brain sends and interprets signals. The skin keeps it all in. The ear hears. The eye sees. The nose smells. The mouth speaks.

It is vital that each organ does its part because the other parts of the body depend on it to function properly so that they can function properly. It does no good for the heart to pump blood if the lungs aren't bringing oxygen for the blood to carry to the rest of the body. It does no good for the heart to pump blood if the stomach is not digesting food to bring nutrients to the rest of the body. It does no good for the brain to send signals to mouth to speak if the tongue is paralyzed, the vocal chords don't work, or the jaw doesn't move.

In the same way, the church does not work unless all parts are using their gifts. That is - unless the body is functioning “charismatically.” The main point is this: There may be a variety of different gifts, but there is one Spirit. It is the same Spirit who gives the different gifts. It is the Spirit who chooses the gifts - we don't choose for ourself. It is the Spirit who calls us to a specific community to use those gifts. All of those various gifts work together - they are individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle - a puzzle that is incomplete if even one of them is missing.

4. Spiritual Gifts are interdependent.

When you take a closer look at many of the gifts that Paul mentions, you find that they are listed together in dependent groups:

- Tongues / Interpretation of tongues
- Prophecy / Discernment (of spirits)
- Faith / Healing and Miracles

The point is this - you cannot be a lone ranger is this. You do not practice your spiritual gifts in isolation. Gifts are given for the good of the community. As we said, there is one body and one Spirit. Therefore, our gifts are intended to work in harmony with one another.

Have you ever been to a symphony concert? There are all different kinds of instruments: strings (violins, violas, celli, basses), woodwinds (flutes, clarinets, oboes, bassoons), brass (trumpets, horns, trombones, tuba), percussion (snare, bass, tympani, cymbals, xylophone, marimba, glockenspiel, and a whole host of others). What would happen if everyone just decided that they were going to play

what they wanted, when they wanted without any care for the others in the orchestra? It would be mass chaos - and sound terrible.

The symphony works because all the players work together - they listen to one another and seek to compliment one another. They each play their own part, but it is in harmony with all the other parts in the orchestra.

This is what Paul is trying to point out. Although we each have our own part to play, we are to play it in concert with all the others God has called and gifted in this place. One commentator sums it up this way:

In short, even the listings of the charisms in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 underlined the character of the charismatic community as one of mutual independence: a tongues-speaker without and interpreter was of little use to the congregation; a prophecy untested by the community could result in all sorts of misconception and error; healings and miracles attempted or claimed which did not express and promise trust in God were likely to mislead.

James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, p.557

5. This is the beginning, not the end of the list

If you look over the list of gifts, it seems that many of them overlap. Others seem pretty vague and not well-defined. Sometimes, we fight the temptation to solidify these listed as though this were a fixed list of all that the Spirit was and is doing. Instead, I think of this as an attempt to catch the wind. The Spirit was moving and Paul was trying to describe the reality that was playing out right before his eyes. I believe that these are vague because the early church was trying to figure out exactly what all this meant.

These lists weren't intended to be complete. The Spirit continues to move and inspire in ways that are appropriate to our context. While gift inventories and assessments are helpful in getting us started, it is the role of the community to help identify the work and movement of the Holy Spirit. We are to point out where we see the Spirit at work among us and in us. This is why I ask our congregation on a regular basis, "Where have you seen God at work?" How can we affirm the work of the Spirit if we don't train ourselves to be aware of it?

6. Spiritual Gifts are something you use/do, not something you have

Too often, in our discussions about Spiritual Gifts, we use language of possession - I have this gift, you have that gift. What is interesting is that when we look at the way in which Paul discusses these gifts, they almost always have what James D.G. Dunn calls an "event" character.

We aren't given gifts for our own personal enjoyment or edification. We are given gifts to be used in the church. All parts of the body are expected to function properly. This is their reason for being - to contribute. In this sense, Paul does not even have a notion of a member who is nonfunctioning.

You see, we look at things a little differently. We say, if you have accepted Jesus and expressed a desire to be a member of this church, you are a member. This is why we have a number of "inactive" members - people whose names are on the roles, but don't contribute to the life of the community.

Paul cannot even imagine this. If you are a part of the community, you use your gifts in the ministry of the church. In this sense, ministry is not left for those special few - it is something we all join in together. This is why Paul paints this comedic picture of a whole body who is an eye or a whole body who is an ear. Hear Dunn once again:

"When ministry is limited to the few the result is a grotesque parody of the body, a body eighty or ninety percent paralyzed, with only the few organs functioning, and functioning to little effect, since the effectiveness of the body depends on its diversity functioning in unity."

James, D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, p. 560

Take a look around this morning. Could that explain some of what is going on here at Ecclesia? A body that is partially paralyzed because certain organs of the body are having to things they were not created for because other organs aren't functioning at all. I would dare say it is. But look, I don't say that to guilt you into service. I say it as a plea. We need you. Every single one of you has important gifts. This body won't function properly without you.

So, what can you do? Let me suggest four things:

1. Discover your gifts - You can begin with the assessment tool that Jerry put together, but remember, this is not the final word, but the beginning.
2. Learn - Join us in a couple of weeks as Jerry leads us to dig a little deeper in understanding the specific gifts mentioned in scripture and what those might look like in today's context.
3. Get Busy - Use those gifts that you discover or didn't know you had. If you need help finding a place to plug in, come see me.
4. Pray - Our church leadership is meeting tonight to begin asking questions about where we are going and where the Spirit is leading us as a church. There may be new ways to plug in your gifts very soon.

The Holy Spirit has brought us all here and formed us into one body. You are a valued and important member of that body. You have gifts that no one else has. We want you here and we need you. Will you join us?

Amen.