

*The decorations come out. The tinsel goes up. These days houses get lit up with a multitude of tiny, twinkling coloured lights. Wives start dropping hints to their husbands about how beautiful certain catalogue items are... Of course if they used the word “useful”, we blokes would be more likely to buy them.... Some children write letters to Santa Clause, and others tell their parents what they want.....*

*What do you ask for at Christmas?*

*One year, when I was a kid, my friend asked his parents for an Atari 2600 computer game with all the bells and whistles, and a few of games to go with it – Pong and Space Invaders and Pac Man, which were the latest and greatest games of the day..... I asked for a pig knife.*

*Guess what... We both got exactly what we asked for.*

*Now for the younger folk, I want to put this into perspective. When I was a kid, an Atari was the equivalent of the very best, most expensive computer game, that you could buy, to plug into your TV (in reality, it’s probably got as much computing power as one of those birthday cards that, when you open it up, it plays “Happy Birthday” to you. It had 4kB of memory (which is enough memory for 1/10 of a second of music that you would have on your phone), and 128 bytes of RAM) . Now, I know this sounds ridiculous, but back then, this was cutting edge technology, and very expensive...*

*So it would be like the very best and latest PlayStation or X Box, or whatever’s the very best you could think of at the moment.*

*My friend asked for one of them, and that's what he got. I asked for a pig knife. And I got that. Did I ask for a pig knife because I didn't want an Atari? No – I would have **loved** to of had an Atari... The thing is, back then, my pig knife cost about \$8.50 (today it would be equivalent to about \$50). And an Atari cost about \$200 (today, its equivalent would be about \$1200)...*

*I thought I had a pretty good chance of getting a pig-knife, and no chance at all, of getting an Atari, so I asked for what I thought I might get.*

Now, when it comes to Spiritual Gifts, what do you ask God for? Do you ask for the Spiritual Gifts you really want? Or do you ask for the gifts you think you might get?.... Or do we not ask God for Spiritual Gifts at all?

Today's reading, tells us to eagerly desire the **greater** spiritual gifts. What does that mean?

Today is Pentecost Sunday. And Pentecost is the day that we celebrate the Holy Spirit, coming upon the church. Jesus told us that He had to ascend to the Father so that He could send to us, His Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit is the One who gave Jesus power in His ministry.
- It's by the Holy Spirit that the prophets prophesied,
- by the Holy Spirit the dead were raised,
- the blind were given sight; and
- the lame were made to walk.

The Holy Spirit – God living inside of us:

- gives us comfort when we mourn
- He gives us strength when we are weak;
- He helps us to understand what God is saying to us in the Bible;
- The Holy Spirit leads us into God's will
- He reminds us that we are God's Children; and
- He always ultimately points us towards Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, and as our refuge and strength.

The Holy Spirit does all of this, and even more. He gives us the ability to be able to do what **we** cannot do, and to achieve, what we, in our **own** strength and skills and talents, cannot achieve..... And He does this through what the Bible calls "Spiritual Gifts".

Even in this one passage, there's a heap of gifts listed here. I **don't** believe it's a complete list – it's a list of examples of different **types** of Spiritual gifts:

- There is the **utterance of wisdom**. (Sometimes, we're faced with a difficult predicament, and we don't know the right thing to do... And in these times, God will speak through a person, who has a gift of wisdom, so that we can know the right way forward, and the problem is solved).
- There's an **utterance of knowledge** (that's where you just know something about somebody or about a situation, and nobody's told you about it – you just know it.) e.g. When Jesus met with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus was given a word of knowledge about this woman. He **knew** that she had been through 5 husbands, and that she was now shackled-up with a 6<sup>th</sup>, that she wasn't even married

to... And Jesus used this knowledge, to help direct the conversation to God's purposes.

- Another gift, is a gift of **Faith** . This is where you have a complete trust in God:
  - A trust that He will provide
  - A trust that He will do
  - A trust that He will keep His promises
  - A trust that He will save
- Then there's gifts of **Healing** (That's being able to heal somebody, not medically, but by the power of God)
- There's Gifts of **miracles**, or **Workings** or **deeds of power** (that's where God can work through us to do something that there's no way that we could do ourselves) e.g. The feeding of the 5000; the crossing of the Red sea...
- There's also the gift of **Prophecy** (Prophecy, is speaking out to individuals or to groups of people, giving them a message from God, and laying down a choice of how they can respond to God in obedience. Prophecy isn't usually telling the future, but it can be.
- The **ability to distinguish between spirits** is another Spiritual Gift. Satan does his worst, to try and take people away from God. He uses false teaching; He uses counterfeit miracles; And by demonic powers, he performs signs and wonders...

Sometimes, somebody will rise up in a church, and a lot of people will think that they're the best thing since sliced bread... But there will be a few who are deeply

concerned, because God has given them a sense of ‘unease’ – “Hey, this person is not from God”... That’s the Holy Spirit warning them, through a gift of discernment...

And these people will usually be proved right. And when children of the Devil, masquerading as servants of God are eventually exposed and the poison of their ministry comes to light, and their evil deeds are exposed, some people will say, “Oh, we never saw that coming”... But that’s only because they didn’t listen to those who have the gift of discernment.

- Then there’s Speaking in different **languages** (often known as the gift of tongues)
- And **interpreting other languages** (the gift of tongues isn’t a lot of use, without an interpreter)
- There’s **Apostleship**
- The gift of **Teaching** (being able to open up God’s word to help others to understand what God is saying)
- Being able to **help** others (helper)
- **Administration** (leader or guide)

Now, these are just some of the gifts that are listed here. But when Paul tells us to “eagerly desire the **greater gifts**”, which ones are they? Out of all of these gifts, which ones are the greater ones? And which **are** the gifts that God wants us to desire?

I'll tell you which ones they are: they're the gifts that build up the church.

They're not the gifts that might seem to be the most spectacular. They're not the ones that draw the most attention to ourselves. They're not the ones that make us feel good about ourselves... The gifts that are the most highly valued, and should be the most sought after are those that build the church up.

And the tragedy is, we humans, in our sinful human nature, often seek after the gifts that build **ourselves** up. But the **greater** gifts, are those gifts that build up **the church** ...

You know, this letter to the Corinthians, was written because they **weren't** using their gifts to build each other up. They were placing a higher value on the **spectacular** gifts than what they were, on the building up gifts.

And they determined their own value, by what gifts they had::: "I'm more important than what you are, because I've got these spectacular gifts, and your gifts – they're so lame...". And the whole place was a mess.

And the one gift that they were using to draw attention to themselves more than any other was the gift of speaking in other languages. "If you can't speak in tongues, you're not spiritual".... It's an attitude that persists today (in some quarters)... And Paul just utterly demolishes that position....

I **don't** have the gift of speaking in other languages. I believe it exists, but I don't have it. But I'm pretty sure, that if I started delivering the message in another language this morning, you'd notice it, wouldn't you? It wouldn't do any of us any good (unless it was Afrikaans) But it **would** be spectacular. (Hey, Michael's got the Spirit). And everybody would notice...

But the purpose of gifts, isn't for us to be noticed – it's for the building up of the body.

If I got up here today, to teach like I am now, how do you know, whether it's my natural ability to speak, or if it's the spiritual gift of teaching, given by the Lord for this purpose? How would you ever know?....

Well, you probably wouldn't – at least not straight away.... But if you went to school with me, you would remember Michael the shy boy who “ummed” and “ahhed” his way through his lecturettes, and you'd think, “Wow, what's happened to Michael, that he can speak in front of people.” You see, **I know** I don't have the natural ability to do public speaking. It's only by the grace of God that He gives me a gift, to do what I'm doing today – to teach about spiritual gifts, and to hopefully develop our understanding so that we will eagerly desire the spiritual gifts that build others up. That's a gift that God has given me...

So which are they? Which gifts, are the greater gifts?....

Well, Paul starts listing them off. And he begins with the obvious ones (sort of like a bit of a hierarchy). The first one you and I don't have to worry about, because it's being an

apostle – they were the special ‘sent ones’ who first went out into the world, and began churches. They were the ones who had a special authority because they had experienced **first-hand**, the teaching of Christ, and they had been eye-witnesses, to the resurrection of Jesus. And so be very wary of anybody who claims to be an apostle today. They are claiming an authority for themselves, that they have not been given.

The second gift he lists is prophecy. When God has a message for a church, it would be a good thing for the church to hear it, don’t you think? Therefore, when God speaks, He does it, to build us up. And He does this, through those who have a gift of prophecy.

The third gift he lists is teaching. The three most important ingredients for spiritual growth are the practice of a prayerful presence with God, a hunger to learn, and a gifted teacher. We need all three of these, (in that order), to grow spiritually – a prayerful presence with God; a hunger to learn; and a gifted teacher. A church may grow in number and regularity of attendance, when they have a very pastoral minister. But rarely will there be significant and lasting spiritual growth within themselves, unless there’s people in that congregation with a spiritual gift of teaching (It doesn’t have to be the pastor, by the way).

These, my friends, are the obvious gifts for building the church up – Prophecy and teaching..... The age of the Apostles has gone, but we still have their testimony in the Bible. And we as a church, should eagerly desire to see

these gifts (of prophecy and teaching) present and practiced within this church (and not just by the pastor). We should be praying, “Lord, please develop the gifts of prophecy and teaching, in people in this church”....

But obviously not all of us are going to have the gift of prophecy or teaching. But that’s OK, because there’s other gifts that are used for building up others as well:

- The gift of works of power (or miracles)
- The gift of healing
- The gift of helping
- The gift of leading
- And then right at the bottom, he puts the gift of speaking in other languages – right at the very bottom. (Isn’t that interesting, when Corinth seemed to be making it the main thing)... But here’s the thing: Even **this** gift **can** be used for the building up of other Christians. And that’s what it **should** be used for.

So, what gifts are you willing to ask for?

I wonder, how many of us already have gifts, that we’re not using?

**God** gives gifts as **God** determines. Eagerly desire the greater gifts – those gifts that will build the people of this church up. Forget about whether it’s spectacular or not. God isn’t looking for showmen – He’s looking for a people of pure heart. He’s looking for a people who love their brothers and sisters in Christ, and want to see them grow. He’s looking for a people with so much love that they’re willing to receive from God whatever gift He has

determined is the right gift for them to have in order to build others up.

The Lord is not looking for talented individuals to work for Him. – He’s looking for willing vessels, for Him to work through.

Let me say that again:

The Lord is not looking for talented individuals to work for Him. – He’s looking for willing vessels, for Him to work through.

Do you remember how I started out this message? I asked, “With spiritual gifts, Do you ask for what you really want? Or do you ask for what you think you might get?” ...

I wonder, how many of us, have never even asked God for a spiritual gift?

Maybe we don’t feel we’re good enough. Maybe we don’t see ourselves as spiritual enough...

Remember last week? We talked about the body – about how the church is made up of many parts, but we form one body... And no one member, is more important than any other member...

**God** gives gifts, as God determines. He gives gifts to each one of us. Why??? For the common good.

We will have **different** gifts to each other – we won't all have the **same** gifts... Some of the gifts will be more spectacular, but they're not the ones we are to seek...

The greater gifts, are those that build the church up.

My prayer for today, is that you and I, would receive the gifts that God has determined for us to have. I guess the question is, “Are we **willing** for this to happen?” “Are we **eager** for it to happen?”

Are we willing to pray, “Lord, I desire the greater spiritual gifts.”? Are we willing to pray, “Lord, Give to **me** whatever gift you have determined for me to have, so that I may exercise this gift, and in so doing, build these people up, to Your glory.”?

Are you willing to pray that with me now???

If so, would you kneel with me? Let's kneel and pray.

Heavenly Father,  
We thank you for the gift of Your Holy Spirit.  
Without your Holy Spirit, we would have never been moved to faith.  
People gifted by Your Spirit, have shared Your word;  
They've encouraged us; they've prayed for us;  
Some of us have received healing;  
And witnessed miracles...

Some have spoken words of wisdom, and others words of knowledge.

Some have used your discernment, to keep us on the straight and narrow...

Lord, we give you thanks for the way that gifts in others, have brought us to where we are today, in the faith...

And Lord today, we are willing, to receive whatever Spiritual gift, You have determined for us to have, for the building up of Your body...

Lord, we're more than willing. We're eager.

Lord please, fill us with Your Holy Spirit...

We eagerly desire Your gifts, to be poured out on us individually, and as Your church....

Increase our faith, Lord.

We place ourselves at Your disposal, for the building up of these, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord, we pray for the greater gifts:

- Lord, bring to this church, the gift of Prophecy
- And give us gifts of Teaching

But not only these – whatever gift that will build Your church up, and glorify Your Holy Name...

- The gift of works of power (or miracles)
- The gift of healing
- The gift of helping
- The gift of leading
- The gift of Faith
- Even the gift of speaking in other languages.
- And interpreting;
- And administrating...

Lord Jesus Christ, come.

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Empower Your church, through Your Holy Spirit.  
In Jesus' name,  
Amen.