

Gift Oriented Ministry
Pledge Sunday, Stephens Ministers Commissioning
Isaiah 61:1-11, I Corinthians 12:1-13
April 20, 2008

This Spring we are having a sermon series on something called Natural Church Development. There are 8 quality characteristics of growing churches and we are considering each of those each week. We have considered the first quality characteristic, *empowering leadership* and today we consider the second, *gift oriented ministry*.

I want to thank all of you who are supporting our church in the giving faithfully to the program budget and to the building project. Your faithfulness is evident in growth inside and growth outside. One of the words that we use in church that is such a good word is stewardship. If a person or an organization is a steward, that means that she manages assets for another party responsibly, so that the greatest gain can be experienced with those resources. We are to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us. We have assets and the careful, prudent, accountable management of those assets is essential. When we think of assets we immediately think of our financial assets. We want to be good stewards of the monetary gifts God has given us. You can be sure that those responsible for the financial management of this church are extremely competent, judicious, and integrous. How we manage our assets is critical to our life as a church.

Well, in our passage today; we have another area of stewardship, another asset, another kind of resource. We need to be good managers of the assets God has given us; whatever they are. But it is possible in this other area of stewardship, to be less aware of this resource than we may be in financial responsibility. It would be a problem, if we did not know what financial means we had at our disposal, wouldn't it? Imagine not doing some important ministry based on an assumed bare bones budget when someone had placed a couple hundred thousand dollars in our budget and somehow we were never notified of that transaction. We were not doing what God was demanding we do because we thought that we could not afford it, when all along, we could easily afford it given our assets. In today's passage we have the Great Lion of God, the Apostle Paul, revealing an area of ignorance about stewardship of certain of God's gifts. He tells us immediately that he does not want us to be uninformed. This church was functioning but apparently not using what God had supplied for them to have. They were struggling to make a go of it while in fact they possessed the very resources necessary to advance. It would be kind of like a couple of fellows pulling a cart with square wheels carrying a load of round wheels. All that work and effort that could be greatly more effective by simply using what was in the wagon. Are we using what is in the wagon?

Listen to this passage reveal another kind of stewardship, another kind of asset, another kind of blessing that the church is called to use to conduct it's ministry. Could it be that our church is under utilizing the very assets God has bequeathed to us? Some think, these particular benefits are more important than monetary assets. Hear the Word of God. What if we had great assets and could great things for God but did not know we had them?

¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To 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 discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. ¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to of one sprink of one spirit.

Before we get into this other asset, this other benefit of God lavished on his people; let me make some observations about this passage. And then from these observations, I will share certain implications for how we are to do church.

Note that the words Spirit or Holy Spirit occur over and over again. To be exact twelve times in thirteen verses. So it is evident that whatever we are talking about, it has to some significant relationship to the Spirit of God; So this other resource that the church has available is related directly to the Spirit of God.

Notice again, that Paul implies that they were ignorant of these assets even though they were a successful-appearing church. So, it is possible, we see right off the top, to be a successful-appearing church and not act like a church, not behave like a spirit filled and empowered church. Even some of the leaders of that Corinthian church did not understand this and were using a different model. It is possible to do church and do it without the very abilities that God requires a church to use to work. But this would not be good, kind of like running a bank without money, or a school without teachers, or restaurant without food.

Before Pentecost, certain so called charismatic leaders lived very close to God and they could do things that others could not do who were not so close to God and so gifted. The Spirit of God had descended on them and they were given special endowments and great power.

But after Pentecost, at the birth of the church, each Christian was given the Holy Spirit; that is the presence and power God within their bodies. . But they were not only given a gift of the Holy Spirit, they were given the Holy Spirit. You see if Christ is a presence in your life, this is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is this side of God. There is always one member of the trinity on the earth with people in some fashion. Jesus came to earth and left but he sent his spirit into all the people who followed him. We celebrate the fact that the presence of God is not only given to certain people like in the Old Testament times, but since Pentecost, all people have the Spirit of God who entrust their lives to God in Christ.

When you have the Holy Spirit in you, **you also get an ability of the Holy Spirit.** The ability is not yours, it is his, working through you. Paul illustrates this total dependency on the Holy Spirit. He says that just SAYING that *Jesus is Lord*, requires the Spirit of God. You do that because the Spirit does that in you ; you cannot do that alone. If the Spirit of God dwells in you, then your life is not about you. It is about God and his appropriating you for his plan. So one way you can tell if you have the

Spirit of God working inside of you is that you find yourself doing things that you could not and not would not should not do on your own. This means that you ask for help a lot.

I believe this whole concept is counter intuitive. This ability from the spirit of God is called a spiritual gift. But is not to be confused with talent, education, or natural ability. Sometime churches depend on natural gifts without using the gifts of God that are not talents, training, or professional expertise. We think people who lead us need to have a related experience field to operate here, while helpful, that does not mean that our organization will be a church even though called one. Having a banker on our finance committee or a public school educator teaching Sunday School makes all kinds of sense but in no way does that mean that the Spirit of God is leading through such a person, even though we naturally organize that way.

The term spiritual gifts is **not an ideal translation** of what we are talking about here. In fact, we do not even have the literal Greek term in the first verse, spiritual gifts, the word gift is not there. The Greek word is something like spirituals. **The activity is to be identified with the giver not the gifted primarily.** This means that whatever is being done is being done by the Spirit; through the agency of the Holy Spirit. I think a better way to talk about this is **SUPERNATURAL ABILITY**, not spiritual gift. Yes it is something spiritual and it is a gift; but it so much more than that term can carry. Christ has given each of his people supernatural ability when they confess him as Lord and Savior. The activity does not reflect on the person, the gifted one, as much as reveal some other presence and power in the persons life. So when a person is inhabited by the Spirit of God, then that person is given an ability to do something that points not to the person but to the presence and power within the person. **It creates a question, and the question is: What got into you? What makes you tick?**

I believe this is the most counter intuitive subject we have in the Bible. God is the one who is to act in us and through us.

Sometimes I think to myself when considering my role in the church, I cannot do this. But then I have to realize that GOD loves to hear me say that, because it is true for one thing and another thing, if I am to do what God wants done, I cannot do it. That is a good thing, otherwise God is entirely unnecessary.

So as surely as Christ came back from the dead, as surely as Christ gave his spirit to the church and each of its true members, so surely each person inhabited by the Spirit has an ability from God. This is called spiritual gift because it is something that cannot be earned by the recipient but is really a supernatural ability.

Now there are many other points in the text that I would love to point out but we need to take these and consider the **implications of these for how we do church.** The question is not what can I do, but what can God the Spirit do in me and through me.

There are certain signs that a person has the Holy Spirit operating within. In general we are given a new character and a new competence. We become more sensitive to those things we are doing that are offensive to the Holy Spirit. We are then quick to confess our sins to God and others. We are less defensive, slower to defend ourselves and more and more willing to deal with those things in our lives that need to be deleted.

There is a change again in character and our competence. The character would be like the personal attributes that shape how we relate to others. There signs of the spirit are called fruit by Paul. The first fruit of the spirit is love. If God is inside of you, then you are seeking the good of others as a function of

your own life. Paul gives us a list of the character of the Christian in Galatians 5: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. We are to behave differently toward others in how we treat them.

When a church only functions off of rules and procedures, there is order all right but energy and vitality and life can be missing. All plumbing and no water. Something alive changes. Living things grow and growing things change.

This is a call to listen for the Holy Spirit to lead and guide our church. It is also a call to stop the thinking that if it is different, it has to be wrong, or right. Or if it is the same, it may be wrong, if it is different it may be wrong; but if the Holy Spirit is allowed to lead, we will keep some things the same, but some things will be different. Pray for the wisdom to know which is which.

To be a Christian is not to subscribe to a set of propositions or rules or laws, as good as those are. It is to be inhabited by God, by the life of God, by the Spirit of God.

The new tenant in your body comes there as a consequence of trusting in Jesus Christ to be the master of your life. Jesus is the master of your life by his moving in with you and beginning to make you fit for heaven and well for doing his calling in this life. Sometimes we do not cooperate with the rebuilding effort and this is called sin.

Is the Holy Spirit active in you? How would you know? There are several signs that the Holy Spirit is active in your life. The Holy Spirit will convict us of our sin. If the Spirit is active in you, then you are made aware of changes that need to be made in your life, not others lives.

If the Holy Spirit is in your life, you will be changing and this will cause you to suffer. The only person who likes change is a baby with dirty diapers.

You are a tool. If you are a tool in God's hands. You are to be used and if you to be used like a tool; then you may get banged up. A tool is not a trophy; a trophy sits in a cabinet and has to be dusted. Tools are used, get dirty, bent and faded. This is what happens to you who are willing to serve God, you may get into something and you get dirty and banged up. But that is ok because we do not protect tools, God uses them. We are to be less concerned about preservation that participation; more comfortable with the tool shed than the trophy case. Do not use your personality as an excuse for disobedience; get into the game, it it is worth having a dirty uniform especially when we win.

Something less obvious concerning prepositions. We read that the gifts were of the Spirit, by the Spirit, and in the Spirit. This implies that what is normal for God is to be normal for us and what is abnormal for God would be abnormal for us. God deals in the supernatural not the natural alone. So those who allow God the Spirit to use them will be doing things that are supernatural. Not because we are supernatural but because we carry a supernatural being within us. We are to act more like that inboard presence than our old personalities. We are to attempt things we would not do that God would do and is seeking to do within us. This ability of the Holy Spirit is like the Holy Spirit; that is, supernatural. We are not talking about talents, we are not talking about skills, we are not talking about strengths versus weaknesses. Speaking, singing, playing an instrument is not a spiritual gift. You do not need God to do that. You do need God to speak, or sing, or play an instrument in such a way, given who you are, to bless others supernaturally. Your spiritual gift may be expressed at times through some talent, but you do not require than one means to express your gift. A person with great oratorical skills may not be used by God with the gift of

preaching, or a person with no talent for speaking may be used to preach; hopefully, the talent and the gift are working together. **The question is not what can I do but what can God do through me?**

The mutual exercising of the abilities of the Holy Spirit in all of the members is what the church does to be the church. The main activity of the church happens when people in the church mutually minister to one another and build up one another. This kind of meeting celebrates that new life before God.

Therefore, our calling is to help each member realizes that they have been inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God as a result of receiving Christ and that spirit is to reside in them and direct them. The Spirit of God seeks to minister to others given certain abilities placed inside each one of us. The job of the leaders to help each member come to cooperate with the Spirit who is calling all of the members to serve one another by using the supernatural abilities God has given us. IF want to experience, we need to be in a group where each person is encouraged to use their spiritual gift to minister to other relationally. That may have been the most important thing I have said.

This morning we commission Stephens Ministers who are called to ministry one on one. These Stephens ministers are available to help any of us follow Christ in and through the problems we face. They are using the gifts of the Spirit to help us become the persons God calls us to be in and through the trials of our lives.

We have a rich church and we want to be good stewards of the abilities, the gifts, the blessings of the Holy Spirit in each one who has decided to follow Christ. May God call everyone of us to be faithful in our stewardship of the spiritual assets he has given to us that together we may be part of a church that is faithful to our Lord and God in all we are and have. Amen!

THIS SERMON WAS WRITTEN FOR ORAL PRESENTATION AND THEREFORE CONTAINS GRAMMATICAL FORMS THAT ARE UNACCEPTABLE IN WRITTEN ENGLISH