

117 "He didn't give me any gifts!"

"Spiritual gifts" can tend to cause confusion for the Lord's people. Some folk assume they have a list of these gifts as long as their arm - and therefore expect a status among us of supreme importance! Others though coyly announce that they have no such gifts at all. Perhaps these latter brethren feel that, being the special ones with absolutely no spiritual gifts at all, they have permission to sit on the sidelines of church life twiddling their thumbs!

The newly-converted members of the church in Corinth were making the same mistakes. We gather there was an unpleasant jostle going on between them over who possessed which gift, and which gifts were "the best", and therefore which gift-holders deserved to be regarded as the most special among the group. This is the situation that the Holy Spirit, through Paul, is writing into in I Corinthians 12 - words which are of course as timely for us today as when they were first given.

The whole point of these spiritual gifts is that they be used, by the possessor, for the "edifying", the building-up, of the church, so they have nothing at all to do with "Who is the greatest round here?"! They are given by the Holy Spirit entirely as He chooses (I Corinthians 12.11), and to whom He chooses.

In Romans 12.6-8 we read - "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us ...", followed by these examples: the gifts of prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, and showing mercy". In I Corinthians 12.8-11, we are told of the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. In verse 28 we read of particular ministries based on these gifts - apostles, prophets, teachers, work of power, gifts of healings, helps, governings and diversities of tongues. We can see that there is wide variety amongst these examples, and that some of these gifts are obviously "supernatural" when they are being exercised, while others, equally God-given, we may hardly notice at all. But they all matter!

In Hebrews 2.4 we read of how the very message of salvation, by faith in Christ, "God bore witness to... by both signs and wonders, and by various works of power, even by distribution of the Holy Spirit, according to His will".

So from these references we are reminded that the gifts are of central importance, for they affect the health, the growth and the outreach of the church. When the gifts are being used properly by the various members of the local

church, the "body of Christ" (I Corinthians 12. 12-31), then that body is functioning effectively on all fronts: its members are being built up, and its work and witness are going forward. Clearly the local church needs to recognise the Spirit-given gifts possessed by its members, and bring them into effective use as much as possible.

At individual level comes the question, "How do I know which gifts I have been entrusted with?" - for no Christian can opt out as that "special one" with no gifts! Often it can help for other people to speak of our gifts, as long as this is done sensitively and honestly - pride can so easily creep in unnoticed. Many gifts, perhaps less "churchy" at first sight, yet just as spiritual in their way as the New Testament examples, are recognisable simply by what we realise we are "good" at and enjoy doing - such as cooking, smiling, plumbing, welcoming, singing, friendliness, humour, IT, poetry, a cheery word, playing the bongo drums, praying, electrics, persevering, and anything else you can think of!

We know we are on track in the use of these gifts when we are making a positive difference in the midst of God's people, serving as round pegs in round holes. The wonder is that we all have a special, important and unique part to play, and if and when we are not playing that part, the local "body of Christ" falls short from what it should be and can be.

You might consider, honestly, what are the gifts the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you? And to those around you? Are you, and they, using these gifts as the Lord intends? If "Yes", then we give thanks and stick at it - being not "weary in well-doing" (Galatians 6.9); and if "No, not really", then we know what needs to be done!