

SPIRITUAL GIFTS THE POTENTIAL TO ...

Today we are starting a series that will look deeply into the spiritual gifts. Two years ago I preached a mini-series on the gifts of the Spirit.

We looked at the Vocal Gifts, the Service Gifts, and the Leadership Gifts. The gifts of Gab, Grab, and Jab.

But now we are going to tear those groupings apart.

There are 14 distinct gifts God has given through His Spirit.

God wants us to identify and use the gifts He has given to the church.

So it is good to review the spiritual gifts periodically.

God revealed these gifts to Paul.

Paul was convinced the church needed to be aware of these gifts.

So he wrote specifically about these gifts three times.

Three different letters to three different churches include the gifts.

He wrote to the churches in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus.

Paul had one purpose in teaching these churches about the gifts.

The spiritual gifts were given to keep the body of Christ together.

As we understand the gifts of the Spirit we understand God.

They are given to unite the church.

In each case Paul reminds the congregations they are one body.

The Church was created to rely on each other.

Going off on our own was not God's plan for the Church.

We live outside of God's will thinking we can survive without the church.

We cannot survive as a Christian outside of the church.

It is impossible to live up to our potential isolated from the church.

Outside of the church all you will be is a nose or an eye.

Or you will be some other part of the body.

But you will not be a spiritual body.

You are unable to reveal Jesus without the church.

Satan will tempt you to wash your hands of the church.

He will tempt you to think you can be a better Christian without the church.

God never tempts you away from the body of Christ.

That would be a kingdom divided.

Satan alone brings those temptations.

And if we bite into those temptations, we sin.

That is why the spiritual gifts are essential to the church.

Through the gifts we recognize how desperate we are for each other.

We see that being together is a matter of life and death for us.

Rationalize it any way you want we are stuck together.

No matter how gifted or spiritual you are, you are not enough.

The world needs the body of believers to know Jesus.

There will always be skeptics who don't believe this.

Can I prove these claims?

Absolutely!

1 Corinthians 12:7.

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

1 Corinthians 12:12.

"For 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."

1 Corinthians 12:14.

"For the body does not consist of one member but of many."

1 Corinthians 12:21.

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have not need of you.'"

1 Corinthians 12:25-26.

"that there be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

Colossians 3:14-15.

"And above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful."

Ephesians 4:15-16.

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love."

And our text for this morning - Ephesians 4:1-3.

These Scriptures are just a sampling of this fact.

We cannot cut ourselves off from the body and live.

Maybe God in His mercy will pickle us to preserve us until eternity.

That is just speculation on my part.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 in the KJV may sound like God does that.

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

But that was not Paul's message.

"May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 TM)

The gifts of the Spirit are given to keep us fit.

They are given so that we can live up to God's potential.

Living up to potential.

What is your potential?

Are you living up to the potential God envisions for you?

Are you everything you can be in Christ Jesus?

Do you know the joy of uninhibited service to God?

That is the question Paul wants to resolve in the church in Ephesus.

That is what Paul wanted them to experience.

He wanted them to live up to the calling to which they had been called.

That's a pretty bold desire on Paul's part.

Especially when we consider from where he was writing this letter.

Paul was a prisoner cooped up in some dungeon.

He was chained to a wall.

And Paul has the audacity to tell us to live up to our potential.

How can a person in bondage tell us to be all that we can be?

He certainly could not say, "Let me show you how it is done."

Or, could he?

I In verse one this confusion is cleared up.

We are called into bondage to Jesus.

Paul is a prisoner for the Lord and no one else.

We are duped with this thought - that potential requires ideal conditions.

Less than perfect conditions will somehow stifle or limit our potential.

Pressure or resistance will render our plans unattainable.

We are led to believe that potential can only be realized somewhere else.
That I can't be all God created me to be where I am right now.

We think that potential is directly linked to our environment.

Paul dismantles that myth.

Paul was a great myth buster.

He vaporizes the myth that environment is greater than our potential.

No prison has the power to limit our potential.

We do not need to be limited by our circumstances.

God certainly isn't limited by chains or any other circumstance.

They do not need to debilitate us.

Our potential is found in our "call" not in our "cell".

God is extending His call to you.

Christ in you results in an amazing call wherever you are.

Paul realized that it was only in Christ that his potential was realized.

It was not found in missionary success.

It was not contingent on planting growing churches.

His ability to exhort and preach was not a barometer of his potential.

Paul's potential was found in a personal relationship with Jesus.

He knew the joy of sins forgiven.

He knew the freedom of surrendering the throne of his life.

Jesus was not limited to the events that took place around him.

Jesus transcends the superficial, surface areas of life.

Jesus deals with the heart of the matter.

Our heart is a place where outside forces cannot reach.

It is pure joy to not be bound while fettered by this world's chains.

Bondage to Jesus means freedom everywhere else.

That is to what God has called us.

II Verses 2 and 7 give us another call to bondage.

We are called into the bondage of love.

This is the love in which Jesus lived.

It is with lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearing one another in love.

Our potential is experienced in the bond of love.

This love is the evidence of Jesus' influence in our lives.

Love shows that Jesus is being cultivated in our lives.

It shows how deeply Jesus has penetrated.

We begin to deal with others as Jesus dealt with us.

We love one another as Jesus loved us.

Potential bubbles to the surface when we are bond in love.

The bondage of love exudes potential.

God has called the church to that bond of love.

Jesus has shown the freedom of love.

He has done that through lowliness and meekness.

"And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:8)

He has done that through patience.

"The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9).

And He has done it through love.

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." (Jn. 10:14-15)

The gifts of the Spirit are great.

But Paul says the greatest of all is love.

God's love brings excellence to our potential.

III Verse 3 gives us the third bondage that results in potential.

"Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
God calls us to be eager for unity.

The word **eager** is an interesting word in the Greek.

From it we get the name speedo.

What do you think of when you hear or see that word speedo?

Running shoes, athletic wear.

Things designed to enhance our physical abilities.

Paul is telling us that the gifts of the Spirit has the same effect on our lives that speedo sport equipment has on our physical abilities.

That equipment helps an athlete to live up to potential.

That is what the gifts of the Spirit do for you spiritually.

The gifts give eagerness, energy, and earnestness for unity.

God dispatches us with such urgency that we don't dilly dally.

We live for unity.

The experience of unity is our greatest desire, nothing else matters.

It is in unity that we find ourselves living up to potential.

The reason why we need to live up to potential is because the task is enormous.

We are called to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

That is no small task, as we all well know.

More and more, our world is looking for peacemakers.

People are seeking for peace in our own community.

God has gifted His Church to be that place of peace.

What else would the Prince of Peace expect of His citizens?

The peace our world needs is the unity of the Spirit flowing through His body.

This may be difficult to inject into our world on an international level.

But we can do something about it here in our congregation.

And we can do something about it in our homes.

All it takes is for one person to take this passage of Scripture seriously.

It only requires you to lead the life Paul is begging for in these verses.

All it takes is for you to say "YES" to the call of Jesus to be bound to Him, His love, and His peace.

Let me ask you to candidly answer this question in your own heart.

Is there a lack of peace in your life?

Are there war zones in your home, within your family, that go on and on?

Are you at a loss in knowing where to find resolve?

Are there other battle fields in your life, perhaps internal conflicts?

Are you looking for peace?

Do you feel like you are living under a cloud that refuses to lift?

A cloud that paralyzes you and keeps you distant from your potential?

Give yourself to Jesus.

He does not sow discord in your life.

Satan, your adversary does that.

Giving Jesus the freedom to bind us enables us to mushroom with potential.

He captivates us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Let's explore the gifts God gives and discover our potential in Him.

Closing Song - Be Thou My Vision