

Growing up in the 70's and 80's, in a small, rural Queensland church, even as a pre-teen and a teenager, I could sometimes catch a sense of an undercurrent of disconnect, or distrust, or maybe even fear, amongst its members... It was something which (most of the time) was kept hidden away pretty well, but sometimes, even for me (a kid), I could see, that the people of this church – well, they weren't on the same page...

*In a nut-shell, "Group A" saw themselves as being "Spiritual and open to the Spirit", and they saw "Group B" as being "**un**spiritual, and opposed to the Spirit".*

*At the same time, "Group B" saw **themselves** as being "discerning and faithful", and they saw "Group A" as "being deceived, and having an arrogance of a feeling of Spiritual superiority"*

What was going on? Well, I now know, that this was the story of a local, denominational church, grappling with how it would respond, to what has become known as "the charismatic renewal movement" ...

*It's a story, which I've **since** learned, wasn't unique to the church I grew up in. In fact, in every town I've lived in since then, I've heard a similar story being told, of how in the 70's and 80's, there was a very real angst, felt by these churches – not because of the movement of the Holy Spirit, Himself, but how their church behaved, through "the charismatic renewal movement"*

And even that very word – "charismatic", probably puts a shudder down some people's spine... Oh, he's one of those happy-clappy sorts of preachers... (We'd better put in some

low ceiling fans, quick, so these charismatics don't put their hands up)...

The word “charismatic” comes from the Greek word χάρισμα (charisma), which simply means “gift”. So, do I believe that God gives gifts to His church? Well I surely do. The “distaste” that some people are left with, with the word “charismatic”, is the way the Spiritual gifts have been used by **some** people in the church, without love... And we've been seeing how the misuse of Spiritual gifts, was tearing the church in Corinth apart ... As the misuse of Spiritual gifts, tears the church apart today.

Anyway, back to my story:

*For those who **didn't** live through the 70's and 80's (many of you are too young), today's going to be a bit of a lesson on “modern history” – It's the experience of many local churches, in the not so distant past... For a number of our older folk, they'll remember this time, as a time of excitement and renewal, but others, will remember it as a time of angst and pain...*

And as we study this Letter to the Corinthian church, I cannot help but see some very real similarities between the mistakes of the Corinthian church, and the mistakes that were being made in many of **our** local churches, and even here in this town...

By the way, I've given today's message the title:

The Temporary, but Critical Nature of Spiritual Gifts.

So, let me set the scene:

In Acts 2, we have the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And it's pretty obvious, through the letters of the New Testament, and particularly in the letter that we're studying at the moment (1st Corinthians), that the experience of the **early** church, very much included the practice of a vast range of Spiritual Gifts....

And it's also interesting, that the Book of the Bible, that has the most teaching on Spiritual Gifts, is actually a letter written to a church, who were **misusing** the spiritual gifts...

.... Something which was given for the **up**-building of the church, was tearing the church apart... Some in that Corinthian Church, had become self-centred, and arrogant, and they were not loving. And the gifts had become all about them, and not about the church.

So, the **Early** church seemed to have a vast range of Spiritual gifts – of all sorts.

Some of the gifts were quite noticeable, and somewhat spectacular, such as the gifts of :

- Healing
- Miracles
- Prophecy
- Knowledge
- Speaking in other languages
- Interpretation of other languages

Some of the gifts though, were still very important, but they **weren't** so noticeable, or so spectacular:

- Mercy

- Wisdom
- Discernment
- Faith
- Evangelism
- Pastoring
- Apostleship
- Teaching
- Helping / serving
- Administration
- Exhortation (encouragement / urging on)
- Giving

There was a vast range of spiritual gifts. Some spectacular. Others not so spectacular... But all absolutely essential, for the building up of the church...

I said a couple of weeks ago:

*The Lord is not looking for talented individuals to work for Him. – He's looking for willing vessels, for **Him** to work through. And that's the purpose of Spiritual gifts – God does His amazing work through us, as we do, what in our own strength, we could never, ever possibly achieve...*

But somewhere, through the years of history, the Spiritual giftedness of the church, seemed to become ... “not so apparent”...

I don't think there would be too many who would deny that Spiritual gifts of:

- Teaching
- Mercy

- Wisdom
- Serving
- Exhortation
- Giving....

And the like.... have continued on throughout the centuries.... To a greater or lesser extent, but still continuing...

But some people identify **some** of the gifts as what they call "Sign Gifts". Gifts such as:

- Tongues
- Prophecy
- Miracles
- Healing

And the like.... And it's **these** gifts, that over the years, seem to have become,,,,, "less apparent"...

Such that, in the church that **I** grew up in, in the decades before I was born, they still prayed for a miracle (Praying for rain) ; and they still prayed for a healing, but it wasn't seen as a Spiritual gift. And the gifts of tongues and prophecy certainly weren't expected to turn up...

Why is that?

- Had they fallen into dis-use, and so God took them away?
- Were they no longer needed?
- Or were they still there, but nobody was game to use these gifts, because it wasn't the 'done' thing????

I don't know why they weren't noticeably active in the church, but I have my suspicions...

In Chapter 14, Paul says: **14 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.**

And the thing is, in many churches, that wasn't being taught...
We **weren't** being taught to earnestly desire spiritual gifts...
And we certainly weren't being taught to desire the gifts of prophecy; or miracles; or healing; or speaking in other languages...

We **didn't** eagerly desire them, and so **is** it a surprise, that they didn't turn up????

Who knows, what spiritual gifts **were** or **weren't** active within that church...

- Was teaching an act of human training and effort?, or was it an expression of the Spiritual gift of teaching?
- Was pastoral care carried out as a 'must do' task? Or was it done through the Spiritual gifts of Pastoring and mercy?
- Was the person who mowed the lawn, and set up the chairs for worship, and cleaned the toilets, doing this because he was a good bloke? Or did he have the spiritual gift of 'service'?

I don't know...

Let's go to today's reading:

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they **will** pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, **it** will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part

and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

Spiritual gifts are temporary, but love never ends. How are Spiritual Gifts temporary? They pass away. They cease.... **When** will they cease? When perfection comes.... When completion comes...

Even if we have the gift of knowledge, we don't know everything... God only reveals to His servants, what He **wants** them to know... If somebody has a gift of Knowledge:

- **that** doesn't mean that they know everything;
- **That** doesn't mean they have all the answers;
- **That** doesn't mean they know every intimate detail of your life and mine...

We only know in part.

Those with the gift of **prophecy**, only **prophecy** in part... God gives them a specific word, for a specific person, or a specific group of people, for a specific time...

I'm always **very wary**, when a church advertises "We've got a prophet coming", and almost invariably, sometime during the service, that person will be expected (for the want of a better word), to perform... (I don't mean "put on an act"...)
We expect them to "perform" (come up with the goods). They are usually expected to have a prophecy, for each individual person, who comes forward...

And wouldn't we be disappointed if he said to 9/10 people up the front, "Sorry, God hasn't given me anything for you today."....

A true prophet won't have a word for every individual... – and we shouldn't expect them to. We're told here, we only prophecy in part. **We** shouldn't expect a prophet to have a word for every person (or a word at all [for that matter]) on a given day. The Lord, reveals His word, when He desires...

But let's leave that now. We're going to talk about the gift of prophecy a bit more next week, ...

Alright, so the spiritual gifts – (at least the ones mentioned here), will pass away (they will end), when the perfect comes... When's that???

Clearly, he's talking about "When Jesus returns". He's talking about when we will be in glory, with him.

And to explain it, he compares the "now", with "then".

¹² For **now** we see in a mirror dimly, but **then** face to face.

For 13 years, I've been sitting on this photo, waiting to use it... When I was in Adelaide in 2005, I had a bit of time to kill, and I found myself at a museum. And it just so happened, that the museum had an exhibit from ancient Egypt. Among the items, was this bronze mirror... A highly polished piece of bronze, was quite a prized possession for the vanity of the ancients...

But compared to our modern mirrors, it was hopeless. To get this next photo, I contorted myself, to get a reflection of my hand in the mirror... It's not a very clear image, is it???

But having that photo, helps to explain V12 ¹² **For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.**

Our knowledge of God, is **so** imperfect... We know Him a bit... but one day, we will see Him face to face. Imagine that... - to be able to gaze upon the very face of God, and not die... Wow... That's what glory is all about. How will we be glorified? Because we will be in the very presence of God...

He says: **Now** I know in part; **then** I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Do we know everything about God? Of course not. How could we possibly. We don't even know a tiny snippet, about this earth He created – nether lone the universe...

I **don't** know... But when Jesus returns, I **will** know... And, for those of us with inquisitive minds, **WOW** – what a bonanza!!! But of course, others of us don't care – we don't need to know... But how's this??? **God** knows... And God knows you. He knows you better than you know yourself.

- God knows our every thought
- Our every emotion
- Our every hurt
- Our every joy
- He knows our every betrayal
- Our every failure; and
- Our every victory....

He knows us, fully. He understands us, completely....

Alright, so we won't need these spiritual gifts when Jesus returns... They pass away...

- We won't need the gift of knowledge, because we will know
- We won't need preachers or teachers, because what are we going to teach? Who are we going to teach? My ministry will be redundant (praise God).
- We won't need the gift of speaking in other languages (or the gift of interpretation). We'll be communing with God, face to face...

Now, to me, that is the most natural and straight-forward way to understand this... But not **everyone**, holds this view.

There is another view, called “the cessationist view”. These people believe that at least **some** of the Spiritual gifts, (the gifts that are known as the ‘sign gifts’), have already passed away, and they’ve been gone a long time...

Some believe that they passed away with the end of the Apostolic age – alright, so when the last of the Apostles (the Apostle John) died, the sign gifts stopped...

Others, believe it was with the formation of “the Canon”, that they stopped... When the writings of the Apostles were all gathered together into what we now have as the New Testament, some of the gifts vanished.

A good friend of mine, has been taught this, ever since he was a little boy, and he explained it to me like this:

- *Before the New Testament was written, we only knew in part. But now, in the Bible, we have everything we need to know.*
- *Prophecies could only tell us a bit about God's will for us, but now in the Bible, God reveals His will to us completely.*
- *Before the New Testament was written, we had an **imperfect** picture of God, but now in the Scriptures, we have a complete picture of God.*
- *The Bible is perfect. Now that that which is perfect has come, we don't need those imperfect Spiritual gifts....*

He shared this with me. That's what he'd been taught, and I was dumbfounded... To believe that the perfect has already come...

To me, it's just so obvious to me, that this is talking about the return of **Jesus**. **That's** when we'll be perfected.... I don't know about you, but I am so looking forward to meeting Jesus face to face – not just reading about him in a book...

Don't get me wrong. I love the Scriptures. It's the best we've currently got. It's how God most commonly reveals Himself. It's presently, that by which all other revelations of God must be tried and tested....

But the writing of the Bible, is not the perfection for which we long...

I love the Bible so much, that I believe what it says – The Spiritual gifts **will** pass away, but that will be when perfection comes. ... Until then, we're told to eagerly desire the Spiritual gifts...

Let's come back to my story of local churches in the 70's and 80's...

For years, most denominational churches had given so little teaching on Spiritual gifts. Some actively taught that at least some of the Spiritual gifts had passed away with the coming of the New Testament...

And yet, from the early 1900's, Pentecostal churches, were being born... People were earnestly desiring Spiritual gifts, and guess what??? They came... That doesn't mean "It was **all** good"... Actually, there was probably a fair bit of falseness associated with it (at times). And we are to expect this. Jesus told us to watch out for false prophets and false teachers... We are to discern the difference between the false ones and the true ones...

But anyway, Spiritual gifts, were once again "noticeable", and even the more 'out there' '**supernatural**' gifts, that hadn't been noticed for years, were evident...

And when the Charismatic renewal movement, began to touch more traditional churches, all of a sudden, people who had never had good teaching on Spiritual gifts, were eagerly desiring Spiritual gifts, and receiving Spiritual gifts... And many people felt that, for so long, they had been kept 'in the

dark', but now their eyes had been opened, and now they were spiritually aware...

God was doing a new thing in those churches, but unfortunately, neither side, learned the lesson that Corinth had to learn... The purpose of the Spiritual gifts, is to build up the body – not to tear it apart...

The spiritual gifts, are given by God, and are to be used in love. Spiritual gifts aren't the most important thing. Spiritual gifts will pass away. When Jesus returns, they're finished.... But love endures forever...

Even after many decades, Spiritual gifts arriving in a church, have left a bad taste, in people's mouths.... , because they lived through the hurts. They lived through the splits...

*I was told once (by a Pentecostal pastor), that one of my predecessors (at a church I used to be a minister in), was the reason that **his** church existed... To use his words, My predecessor "introduced the church to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit; The church couldn't handle it; and eventually the church split, and his Pentecostal church was formed..."*

A Spiritual church – a **TRULY** Spiritual church, doesn't rush off with spiritual arrogance, and look down on others as being 'less spiritual'. A truly Spiritual church, is characterised by Faith; Hope; and **absolutely**, love...

Paul says:

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

- The words of an immature Christian, will very quickly cut down another, and break the bond of love.
- The thought bubbles of an immature Christian, will often be centred on self, instead of on the body. And
- The reasoning of an immature Christian, might very well, be the sort of reasoning, that destroys a church.

Generally, children don't function with a sense of 'order' or unity – they have to be taught that (“Play nicely!” – hey, how often do we have to say that to our kids)... An adult, understands the importance of order; unity; and love.

I think we've gone far enough for today.

The Spiritual gifts, are temporary. They **will** pass away.

When Jesus returns, we won't need them anymore. We will see Him (face to face). We will know Him, as He knows us.

But until then, Spiritual Gifts are absolutely essential.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.

But the greatest of these is love.