

**C.I.A. – Christians In Action...using the gifts.
1 Cor 12:1-13, Acts 9:36-43, 18:24-28**

Well friends, a month ago when we started this series I asked you what you got for Christmas – I bet that seems like a long time ago now doesn't it?

But I hope that as we have been learning about spiritual gifts you've discovered that what God has given you in the gift of his son Jesus Christ – all that grace and mercy and love, is something that continues to give, even though Christmas is over.

And while we might want to rush right away to the part where we figure out which grace gifts we have received, or perhaps we think we know already what we've been given its important that before we get to this part that we take some time to really understand what the bible teaches us about spiritual gifts.

So a quick review of what we've learned so far...

- **Spiritual gifts are** better called “Grace gifts” because they come out of your experience of the grace and mercy of being forgiven by Jesus Christ.
- **Grace Gifts are what** make the church the Body of Christ and keep the church the Body of Christ.
- **Grace Gifts make** us *all* ministers, the Holy Spirit gives us specific gifts to play specific parts in the church – nobody is a volunteer in the Body of Christ.
- **Grace Gifts are** different from natural skills and abilities, different from the Fruit of the Spirit,
- **Its important to** beware of counterfeit gifts the Enemy uses to try destroy the church instead of building it up
- **True Gifts come f**rom the Holy Spirit, and you can determine if the Holy Spirit is working in someone's life by what they confess about Jesus Christ.

So we've covered three weeks of important material that we need to know about. Remember the apostle Paul says "about grace gifts...I don't want you to be ignorant!"

Now if you've missed the past three messages, you can read them online on our website, in fact you can catch up on any Sunday you've missed since the summer – just visit the download messages link on the home page and all the messages are there to download and some for listening.

So you can remedy any ignorance you may have in obedience to the scriptures command to us regarding spiritual gifts.

But, knowledge in and of itself isn't always that which inspires us to action, is it? Just knowing all these facts about grace gifts doesn't necessarily motivate us to go and discover ours and put them to use, right?

We need something a bit more...

Let me give you an example. If I were to go online and look up "fencing" or "Sword fighting" on Wikipedia, I'd get interesting facts, descriptions about different styles of sword

play, find instruction on how to hold your sword, how to care for your sword etc...

but... what really makes me want to learn how to fence is watching movies like Lord of the Rings, or Pirates of the Caribbean. All that great swashbuckling, action and fighting!

Then I'm all pumped up to go out and sign up for a class in sword fighting, I'm motivated to learn and practice!

So... today I hope to inspire you to become "C.I.A." – Christians in action - by sharing with you a couple of stories from the scriptures featuring followers of Jesus using their grace gifts and doing amazing things with incredible results.

Hopefully it will get you all pumped up so you will want to identify which specific gifts you have and develop them further!

So, the first story is about the apostle Peter – and while he is travelling abroad he makes a stop over in Joppa in order to

raise a dead woman, who was a local charity superstar, back to life! What an amazing demonstration of grace-gifts.

Now, if anybody could tell you about experiencing Jesus' grace and forgiveness it was Peter. As a disciple Peter was the keener of the group. He was impetuous, bold and often spoke before he thought.

When Jesus asked who the disciples thought he was Peter blurts out, "You are the Christ the son of the living God!" When Jesus foretells that all his disciples will fail to stand up for him when he is arrested, Peter swears that he will never desert him...and yet as Jesus warned Peter, on that good Friday morning before the rooster crowed Peter had denied Jesus three times.

Peter needed Jesus' grace and forgiveness – not because he was an ignorant outcast who had lived a sinful life because he needed to survive, but because he was one of Jesus' inner-circle who knowingly had betrayed his Lord, deliberately...out of fear for his own life.

It hard to come back after you've done something like that isn't it? But yet after his resurrection Jesus finds Peter on the beach one morning and cooks him breakfast, forgives him, and reinstates him as an apostle!

Peter knows grace and it drives him to use the gifts He has received through having the Holy Spirit poured out on him, and what we read today is just one story among many detailing how Peter used these gifts so that the Body of Christ is built up!

So what gifts are being exercised? Well, Peter is an apostle and he is using this gift by travelling around to various cities to oversee the groups of believers that have started to grow everywhere. So we see apostleship in practice here.

The poor lady who died was also using her grace-gifts! Funneling her natural skills and talents as a seamstress through the grace-gifts of helping and serving to make clothes for the poor and needy!

And finally we see the gift of miracles being used here as Peter prays and then commands Tabitha to get up and she is raised back to life – and the cumulative result of all these grace gifts being used is that many people in Joppa believed in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Christians in action.

Now the next story features some believers who have been the recipients of Christ's grace because other believers have been using their gift of evangelism and teaching. Priscilla and Aquila were Italian Jews who had been evangelized and taught by the apostle Paul in Corinth, and Apollos was an Egyptian Jew who had been evangelized and taught by some unknown follower of Christ.

So Apollos comes to Ephesus and his natural ability as a scholar is funneled through the gift of teaching the faith and he is a powerful force - but when Priscilla and Aquila hear him teach they realize he doesn't have all the information. They use their gift of discernment and also the gift of nurturing

leadership, by inviting Apollos over for coffee one afternoon and teaching him about Christ more fully.

Now Apollos must also use discernment here – he doesn't know these people and they could be using counterfeit gifts from the enemy to introduce false teaching!

But Apollos knows enough about what the prophets say about Christ to discern if what Priscilla and Aquila teach about Christ is coming from the Holy Spirit – and it is! So he is now more fully equipped as a teacher, and so he decides to go off to another city to do more teaching there...

And the combination of his natural gift of scholarship and the grace gift of teaching the faith is a great help to the believers in Ephesus as he publically debates the Jews and proves from the Old Testament that Jesus is the expected Messiah.

And the believers there have their faith strengthened through this - Christians in action!

Now I want you to notice how in both of these stories the grace gifts are being used in love!

Because as the apostle Paul explains in that famous “love” passage in 1 Corinthians 13 you can perform the most amazing feats with your grace gifts – like giving all you have to the poor, making sense of the deepest mysteries, but if you don’t do them out of love – its nothing!

If you don’t exercise your gifts out of that selfless giving love which characterizes the grace and forgiveness that Christ accomplished for us – even the most amazing results will be nothing.

Can you imagine if Peter didn’t exercise his gifts in love? He’d be impatient with the messengers who’d come to ask him to go with them – after all he had more important things to do on his “apostle-tour” than visit a dead woman, she’s dead – and I’ve got a book signing engagement this afternoon. But oh alright, I’ll go and see what I can do. Then he could have chewed them out rather rudely for not having enough faith and

praying and healing her themselves, and said something like it’s a good thing I was close by to come and take care of this... Christians in Action – if it’s not in love...its nothing.

Priscilla and Aquila could have publically jumped all over Apollos’ incomplete teaching and embarrassed him. They could have name-dropped as those who’d spent time with the apostle Paul, and conversely Apollos could have dredged up Paul’s past sins of persecuting and killing Christians and tried to discredit his attackers who dared challenge his impressive intellect.

But... ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

And this is how the gifts were used by the people in our scripture passages

Now we often use this great passage for weddings, for romance, Valentines Day, but it's actually about the way in which Christians are to exercise their grace gifts so that they have maximum impact in building up the body of Christ, and so that the one exercising the gift also benefits from using it as well.

And friends its here to inspire us to use our gifts in love as well!

Can you imagine what sort of results could happen in our church, in the relationships we have with our family, friends and neighbors?

People coming to believe in Christ, people's incredible natural skills and ability being funneled into the Kingdom of God to do amazing things, people serving and helping others, even miracles happening! All to accomplish the mission Christ gave us – make disciples of all nations.

So, friends are you inspired? I hope you are! I hope that you want to discover what gifts Christ has given you, that you are

all pumped to try them out as ministers, and experience the amazing results in your life and in the lives of others.