

Warning Labels – Using the Gifts properly
1 Cor 12:1-31

Friends are you familiar with these symbols? (show slide of warning labels) You've most likely seen them around on products or in different place. They are used to alert people to specific dangers that might be present in a product, or a situation and that caution needs to be exercised, or a product used in a certain way or someone might be harmed.

Now if you didn't know what these symbols meant, or understand them properly you'd be oblivious to the danger they try to warn you about.

You might mix a household cleaner with bleach when you shouldn't, you might play a DVD for your children and get an earful of foul language, you might go swimming in a place where you shouldn't

You might also react wrongly to things. When I was a young boy, my little sister told me that the symbol on the hot water heater downstairs meant that if you touched it, there was a chance it could explode on you – her friends' dad who worked

in construction had told this to her friend – and she told me... so for a few years I lived with a morbid curiosity that wondered what exactly would happen if I touched that hot water heater – I was sure I had touched it before and nothing had happened but now I couldn't be too sure... I was scared of it and apprehensive around it when I didn't need to be.

And friends, spiritual gifts – grace gifts come with warning labels too – and that's what we want to look at this morning.

We need to understand these labels so that we are aware of what spiritual / grace gifts are and what they aren't, and in what capacity they must be used, and we need to make sure that we haven't been scared off from any particular gifts because we've been misinformed about some warnings that accompany them.

And going through this is ok, we're not the first church to need to look at this stuff and learn about it. The apostle Paul had to go through the same thing with the early church in the city of Corinth, and in the scripture passage we read today we find a

number of these warnings and clarifications regarding gifts and how to use them properly.

Now, there is a fair bit of material to cover with this, so stay with me ok. Let's look at the first warning label

Vs. 3 - no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

This is a warning to beware of counterfeit gifts, that's right counterfeit gifts – friends all too often we are naïve and unassuming about the degree to which the enemy, the devil – is working against the mission of the church and trying to destroy it.

One of the ways in which he does this is through deception, by motivating and using people who seem to be doing good things. They may even claim to be acting in God's name but who are in fact subtly destroying and undermining God's work, and sometimes teaching things which are blatantly false. Paul explains this further in his second letter to the church in Corinth

¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.

Friends, beware of counterfeit gifts – they exist. But the good news is that with some education it's pretty easy to spot them. Now, if you've ever worked as a cashier you probably received some basic training on what to look for to make sure a twenty, fifty, or one hundred dollar bill is legit, and Paul gives us some clues on what to look for in this passage as well.

And the basic rule is that the source of the gifts is what makes it legit, and you can determine the source by what the "gifted" person confesses about Christ

Now I'm not just talking about the ability to mouth off a few words – Jesus is Lord. We all know anyone can say something and not truly mean it, or say the right things and not really believe it.

But in Paul's time citizens in Rome were required to take citizenship oaths by going in front of some Roman official, taking a pinch of incense and throwing it in a fire and saying "Caesar is Lord" But the Christians wouldn't do it – instead they would say "Jesus is Lord" and it got them in trouble – it cost them.

Paul says only the presence of the Holy Spirit working in someone's life would enable them to do that, and conversely if someone denied Jesus Christ in that situation by saying "Jesus be cursed" – that's not coming from the Holy Spirit.

So we need to test the spirits behind people's gifts to ensure they are coming out of the correct source, the Spirit of God, listen to what 1 John 4:2-3 says:

² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

So Friends, its all about Jesus isn't it - Jesus who is the grace and mercy and forgiveness of God, come in the flesh to offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sin.

To distinguish between true and counterfeit gifts, listen to how people speak about Jesus, about their relationship with him, who He is for them, and how they need or have experienced his forgiveness.

And observe them - do they bow to Canadian society and offer a pinch of incense saying "All religions lead to God" or do they risk trouble and reputation by saying instead "Jesus is the only way to God!" in their words and actions. Observe for a bit and it's not too hard to see which spirit is at work in people's lives.

Friends, counterfeit gifts may look real, come in a variety of forms, they may produce initial results, but they don't come from the Holy Spirit working God's grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ in someone's life.

In the end they are destructive; they don't build up the body of Christ or lead to faith in Jesus – so we need to be aware and on guard against them.

Now, the next warning label cautions us about over-generalizing with our grace gifts.

In verse 4 Paul writes: *⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.*

What Paul is emphasizing here is that while all of the grace gifts find their source in the Holy Spirit – this doesn't mean they are all the same, they are different and it's important to distinguish between them. For example the Grace-Gifts from the Spirit are Different from the Fruit of the Spirit.

You see Fruit of the Spirit are internal qualities that describe your character as a follower of Christ and are reflective of your spiritual maturity which anticipates the perfection we will receive in the new heavens and new earth when Christ returns.

Additionally all nine fruits are essential – you can't say I'll just show love but no joy or peace. I like patience but forget self-control.

By comparison Grace-gifts are indicators of having received grace, that you've experienced forgiveness, they are outward actions and task oriented, focusing on the work we need to do until Christ returns. And Christians are only given specific gifts, not all of them. So they are different.

And if we do not distinguish between these things, if we over-generalize them, or confuse them with Christian character, we will not know the specifics of the roles and the tasks that God has created for us to play in the Body of Christ, and we won't function in those roles.

For example: If you have been given the grace-gift of Knowledge, but you're not aware that Knowledge is different from the gift of Teaching, or Visionary Leadership you might be trying to be something you're not supposed to be, or function in a role you don't belong in – and feeling really frustrated about it, even though you're very loving and patient.

That's why Paul explains to the Corinthians in vs ¹⁷ *If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?*

It's important to know what you are... and what you aren't.

But sometimes we go the other way and we think that other people ought to function the way we do. If you've been given the grace-gift of Mercy, but you're not aware that Mercy is different from Wisdom, or Discernment you may be tempted to judge other because they don't act like you do.

Friends Paul writes about this too, he says in vs ²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"* ²² *On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,*

It's important to know what others are... and what they aren't.

However, this is not to say that each person sitting in a pew in a church building on a Sunday morning is an indispensable part of the Body of Christ, though I wish it were.

Because friends the sad reality is that many people, even people who attend church, have not discovered their grace-gifts which make them part of the Body of Christ - because they have not come to a point where they understand and believe that they need the forgiveness and grace of Jesus Christ.

Today, many people, especially those in mainline denominations, think that church is simply another charitable organization that does good work and it's a good thing to be involved in, and it helps you to be a better person – by using your own talents and abilities.

Friends, that's another lesson that comes out of the warning label of over generalizing - We must distinguish between grace-gifts and our natural skills, talents and abilities.

God gives all humans natural skills, talents and abilities when they are born, and also the ability to learn new ones as we

grow, but you don't need to have experienced Christ's forgiveness, or even acknowledge your talents are given by God to become a musician, a painter, a scholar, or do whatever you're talented at...you can just do it! This is part of what we call "common grace."

Jesus describes common grace in Mat 5:44 when he says God *"causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."*

But when people realize what they have been given is a gift from God and that our number one offense against God is our ungratefulness for these gifts. When people turn away from using them in place of God, or to do what is evil. When people ask God to forgive them for all this....then we receive special grace!

Listen to how Jesus describes this ⁵ *Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*

So our natural gifts and talents are given to us at our physical birth, but our grace-gifts come when we are reborn spiritually after being forgiven through Jesus Christ, and they are to be used to help others to experience being born again as well.

It's important to know what our natural talents are, and what our grace-gifts are!

So what happens to our natural gifts and talents? Well friends, I believe that they are funneled through our grace-gifts, put to use through our grace gifts, even transformed by our grace-gifts so that what the scriptures say in Colossians 3:17 begins to describe us.

¹⁷ *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

So friends, now you know...

You know we must beware of counterfeit gifts, you know that we must distinguish the work of the Spirit in our life – and you

know it is important that we do this so that as a church we are properly equipped to accomplish the mission Christ gave us...

Go make disciples in Springbank Hill, Signal Hill, Aspen – whichever community you live in.

Amen.