

## How Christians are made 1 Corinthians 12:1-3

Have you ever been on the receiving end of discrimination?

Discrimination is when you are treated wrongly and badly because of something about you.

- It could be the colour of your skin. We call this **racism**.
- It could be because of how old you are. We call this **ageism**.
- It could be because you are a man or a woman. We call this **sexism**.

Did you know there is even something called **gingerism**? Which is when you treat someone badly because they have ginger hair.

One of the big ways to deal with all kinds of discrimination is to try and convince people that despite the external differences, we are the same on the inside.

**Christians of all people should be leading the charge when it comes to eliminating discrimination in all its forms.** This is because Christians believe that everybody, regardless of the colour of their skin or their age or their sex, has been made in the image of God, and we believe that salvation is for anyone who puts their faith in Jesus.

However, did you know that there is a form of discrimination that can **only** be practised by Christians?

It's when Christians in a church rate each other depending on how much of the Holy Spirit they think other Christians have. This normally happens on the basis of which spiritual gifts people are said to have. The result is that Christians see themselves on different levels, almost like a first and second division.

This form of spiritual discrimination doesn't have an official name but let me tell you **it is the cause of much needless pain**.

The section of the Bible we are looking at this morning from **1 Corinthians 12** is designed to blow away so much of the dangerous and destructive nonsense that is spoken about the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians.

As we prepare to dive into these verses let me promise you that if we take these truths to heart we will be very encouraged.

Let me show you what I mean. Have a look at verse 1. **Read verse 1.**

One of the things I want to stress from what I've just read is how important it is to the apostle Paul that this church is not **uninformed** about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We all know that a lot of damage can be done when we are misinformed about the way things should be. This can result when either we told something that is wrong or when nobody tells us anything at all.

**I have an American friend who once visited the UK a couple of years ago in business.** When he was here he almost got a speeding fine. The reason is that he was driving on a motorway that had a sign saying Variable Speed Limits. No one had told him what this meant so he assumed it meant he could decide on what speed he thought was best!

Friends, it is really important that we are not misinformed about the way things should be.

This is true when it comes to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Think about questions like these.

- How do we know who has the Holy Spirit?
- How are we to understand his gifts?
  - What are they?
  - How do we get them?
  - And are they equally important?

**Friends, I do not want you to be uninformed.**

Paul has lots to say about the person and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in **1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14**. However, what I want to show us this morning is what he says **first**.

Listen to verse 2. **Read verses 2 and 3**.

The Corinthian church was a deeply divided church.

One of the big issues that was causing the tension was how they viewed spiritual gifts.

They were some in the church who believed that either the true sign that the Holy Spirit was present in your life or the sign that he was present in a special way was that you spoke in a heavenly language, what Christians today call speaking in tongues.

You can imagine the consequence of this way of thinking. Some became puffed up because they thought they were the special ones. Many others felt dismayed because they thought they were either not really Christians at all. Or at best they were inferior, lower division type Christians.

Paul is going to speak directly about the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues later in this section of 1 Corinthians. We'll see him do this in chapter 14. However, please notice that this is not where he starts.

No, **his big focus at the very beginning is on Jesus**.

**Verse 3**, no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Or if I can put it like this, **the real evidence that the Holy Spirit is within a person is seen by what they think about Jesus**.

Initially we might conclude this is very easy test to pass. Come on, how difficult is it to say that Jesus is Lord? Surely anyone can utter these words?

But here's the point. We're not just talking about saying three special words in a sentence, like some sort of magical Harry Potter spell.

No, we're talking about the attitude of our hearts to the **rule** and **reign** of King Jesus. We're talking about our willing submission to **his lordship** over our lives. Quite frankly this is impossible to do without the presence of the Holy Spirit. For **anyone** to properly confess that Jesus is Lord involves the mighty miracle working power of the divine Holy Spirit active in their hearts.

Let me ask you a strange question. **Would you prefer to watch a rocket launch or someone switching on a light?** Suppose you could pick your TV channel and the choice was between 'Rocket launching' and 'Light Switching', what would you choose? Unless you have a particular attachment to light switches I suspect we'd all be watching rockets launching into the atmosphere. It's easy to see why. One seems dramatic and powerful and the other seems easy and unimpressive. However, what we forget is that it takes tremendous power to turn on a light and that hidden from our view is a whole series of cables that are carrying huge amounts of power to do something that seems pretty easy.

**Do you see my point?** It's tempting to think that the real demonstration of the Spirit's power is when someone is healed or when someone is raised from the dead but not when someone becomes a Christian. However, here's the true for anyone to become a Christian the Holy Spirit must give them spiritual sight, spiritual hearing and spiritual life. Deciding to following Jesus is not easy. It requires the miracle working power of the Holy Spirit.

**In these strange covid days we're all aware of how important a testing programme is**. And we all know that it's vital that the test itself provides an accurate result.

How much more when it comes to the presence of the Holy Spirit! We need an accurate way of knowing who has the Spirit of God.

**What's the test?** It's not about whether we have a particular spiritual gift. It's not about whether we speak **a heavenly language**. It's about whether we serve a heavenly Lord. It's all about whether we love Jesus as our King. Or let me put it in the form of a question, **is it your heart's desire and your practical aim, day by day, to please Jesus?** If the answer is yes then the Holy Spirit dwells in your life. The reason is because **only the Spirit** can make such an attitude possible.

## What does all this mean?

### If you are not yet a Christian...

You may be saying, 'I'd like to believe, but I don't, yet. What has this slightly odd-sounding topic got to do with me?' Well, what verse 3 says is that you'll never believe, you'll never recognise Jesus for who he really is, and want to turn to him - unless God, by his Spirit, does something in you. You need to hear about Jesus from the Bible. However, at the same time, you need God, by his Spirit, to overcome your natural resistance to him and distrust of him. So here's what you can do as you come and listen and read and think and investigate. Ask God to change you by his Spirit. It's a prayer he loves to answer. Ask him to enable you believe and turn to Jesus. And keep asking until he does.

### If you are a Christian...

Two things.

First, **don't give up on sharing the gospel.** Be encouraged. Anyone can become a Christian by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, **don't feel inadequate and don't feel uncertain.** There are not levels of Christians where some have more of the Spirit than others. No, the true test of whether you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in your life is about whether you truly love Jesus as your Lord. And if you do, well, praise God, because the Spirit is the only one who can enable this to happen.

**Let's pray.**