

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11  
SHOWING THAT JESUS IS LORD

What motivates you? What motivates you to get out of bed in morning? What motivates you to be nice to your neighbours? What motivates you to go to Tynecastle or Easter Road or Murrayfield to watch sport? What motivates you to come to Church? What motivates you to go to work and work hard and maybe work more hours than you're paid to do? What motivates people to move to a new house, to come to live in Juniper Green or Baberton Mains? There are all sorts of answers to questions about motivation. People move to a new house to come here so that they can be inside a school catchment area, or because they grew up here and want to come back, their family is still here; or because it is on a bus route into the city for work. For some people, they are motivated by a sense of duty – “this is what I have to do!” and they turn up to take part in things whether they enjoy it or not.

“Generation Me!” has a different set of motivations. “Generation-me” is seen as a selfish and self-centred generation of people, who do things that suit themselves and who do things to satisfy themselves and they are generally not concerned with other people. They believe in themselves and not only want to be wealthy, they believe that they deserve to be wealthy and deserve to have everything they need for themselves and their children. They want to be seen as individuals, to stand out from the crowd, so they wear unusual clothes and have tattoos and the like. They have a very different set of motives and usually these are centred on themselves, hence the name “generation me!”

Breaking news! “Generation me” was alive and well in the church in Corinth! Paul is writing about building God’s kingdom and about the gifts that God gives to His church and how we use these gifts and the way in which the Spirit works, but the Corinthian Christians had been getting it wrong. There were two ways: first, they were claiming that some gifts were more important than others and so those who had these gifts were more important than those who didn’t. “We’re better than you!” is not a great catchphrase for unity and harmony within the church! Secondly, they were using their gifts for their own sense of importance and to make people look at them. “See what I can do!” and there are records of people doing miracles in the life of the early church and there is great potential there for all the wrong motives, to give Christians the scope to boast and claim to be more special than all the rest! “Generation - me!”

There are three principles that Paul outlines here that are so important for us as we try to build God’s Kingdom and try to grow the Church. God gives gifts; these gifts are for the good of everyone; we are to show that Jesus is Lord.

1. *God gives gifts.* The very name tells us that these are gifts from God. Now there is a list in verses 8-11 of the gifts that God has given to the Christians in Corinth and some of these we recognise and some we don’t. There are other lists in other places that extend the way we look at God’s gifts to include natural talents and aptitudes as well. We need to have as wide an idea of gifts as possible, so that whatever we do, whatever we’re good at, whatever ways in which we can serve, these are God’s gifts to us. Whatever I can do as a preacher is a gift from God; in the same way someone who arranges flowers for our worship has a gift from God; in same way whoever plays music, or delivers flowers, or makes cakes or biscuits for other people, or whoever sees that prayer is important and has an ability to pray – these are all gifts from God. When we see these as gifts from God it changes the way in which we see them! No longer are these abilities of which we can boast about ourselves, but these are abilities which God has given us and we say “thank you” to God for the gift and the ability.

“*There are...*” (1 Corinthians 12:4f) This is perhaps the most obvious thing to say, but it needs to be said, otherwise Paul would not write it. We are all different! We all have different gifts. But the same Spirit of God is at work in all of us and Jesus is same Lord for whose glory we use these gifts. This means that we have no room to boast about someone having “better”

gifts; there is no such thing as “better gifts” or “more important gifts”; we are who we are as God has made us; we have the gifts, talents and aptitudes we have because this is what God has given us. God gives gifts and we are grateful to Him for who we are and what we’re good at!

2. *Gifts are for common good* We come back to motivation. “Now to...” (1 Corinthians 12:7) Why do we use our gifts in the life of the Church or the community or to build God’s kingdom? There is no one answer to that question, either. We see two motivations at work here and this is the first of them; we use our gifts for the common good, for the good of everyone. One of the saddest observations about Parliament in the last few weeks in the Brexit debate is to see MPs motivated by personal ambition, or the desire to do someone else down, or to gain party advantage by taking certain stands. That’s not a party-political comment, because they have all been doing it, seeing an opportunity for selfish advancement rather than the desire for the common good! God has given us gifts for the good of everyone, not for our self-advancement! God has given us gifts to be used for other people’s benefit. We use our gifts for the good of the whole church, the whole community, for the well-being of other people.

3. *We show that Jesus is Lord* This is the other motive, to show the world that Jesus is Lord “No one...” (1 Corinthians 12:3) The Spirit’s whole aim is to glorify Jesus; His only job is to throw the floodlights on Jesus and say to the world “look at Jesus; see what He has done; see how much He is worthy of Your trust.” That’s all that the Spirit wants to do. The Spirit at work in us and in the church wants to show our world that Jesus is Lord and works in us so that we want to do the same, so that we show the world that Jesus is Lord. That’s our deepest and greatest motivation for anything we do, ever. We make tea and serve it in a way that we can show Jesus is Lord; we can decorate the Church building with flowers in way that shows that Jesus is Lord; we can deliver flowers to people in the community in a way that shows that Jesus is Lord. James Denney was a great preacher of the early part of the twentieth century; on the wall of his vestry in his church he had this sign: “No man can bear witness to Christ and himself at same time. No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save.” He saw it every Sunday before he went to preach – show that Jesus is Lord! It has to be our reason for Christian service of any kind, to show the world that Jesus is Lord. We do that by our words when we tell people that Jesus is Lord; we do it by way we go about things, when the very tone of our lives shows that Jesus is Lord.

Or not! It is possible to do things in the life of church for all the wrong reasons! It is possible to be part of our e-mail prayer chain and it seems to all world as if you are committed to pray for people, when your motivation is simply to have gossip to share. It is possible to be involved in the life of the church to massage your own ego. A long time ago, when I was a student training for ministry, I took part in a radio interview about training for ministry and the person asking the questions suggested that ministers/preachers might be seen as frustrated actors playing a part on the stage so that people would applaud them; the notion has to be rejected totally because it suggests that preachers are preachers only in order to be applauded by others, to massage an enormous ego!

Let’s show world that Jesus is Lord. When we’re asked about church and faith and why we do these things, we can talk about serving Jesus because He is Lord. By the tone of our lives, by the way we go about our lives we can show that Jesus is Lord. By our patience, kindness, forgiveness, or trustworthiness, we can show that Jesus is Lord. By our desire for the common good, for the well-being of others, we can show that Jesus is Lord. By our commitment to the life of the Church and the desire to build God’s kingdom we can show that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus went to a wedding. It was a local affair in Galilee. It might have been a family affair because His mother was there and some of His disciples. As the reception went on, the wine was being drunk until there was none left; probably they had not ordered enough! It was a serious social failing for the wine to run out at a wedding. Mary tried to get Jesus to help and

eventually she told the servants just to do what Jesus said. They took six large stone water jars and filled them with water. Then He told one of the servants to draw some water and take it to the steward in charge; when the steward tasted it, he said it was the best wine of the wedding. Not many people knew what had happened; for those who did see, John says this was a sign: *“This, the...”* (John 2:11) A sign of what? That Jesus is Lord. This is not Jesus drawing attention to Himself – humbly, only a handful of people knew. For those who did see, this was a sign to them that Jesus is Lord, someone to be trusted, obeyed, followed.

Jesus is Lord! By recognising our gifts, talents, and aptitudes as gifts from God, we show that Jesus is Lord. By our concern for the common good, using our gifts for the well-being of others, we show that Jesus is Lord! By the words we say we can show that Jesus is Lord and by the very tone of our life, shaped by our faith and by grace, we show that Jesus is Lord. At one and the same time, this is the highest and most profound motivation for Christian service, to show that Jesus is Lord! Be rid of all lesser motivations; keep it pure, keep it simple; we do this to show that Jesus is Lord of our lives and Lord of our church.