

1 CORINTHIANS 12:3-7

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DIFFERENT KINDS OF GIFTS...FOR THE COMMON GOOD

³ Therefore I want you to know that 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. ⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

When, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in power and gave to them spectacular gifts of speaking in different languages, the purpose was for the spread of the Gospel. The purpose was the common good of the Christian Church. When we think about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we need to take a view of things like a hovering dove up in the sky and ask: How does this or that gift help the mission of the Church and the spread of the Gospel? Well, this is the point that the Apostle Paul wants us to consider at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 12.

The first word of our text is “Therefore” and this either explains or draws a conclusion from what was said before. This is important to notice because Paul is answering a question that they had asked him, a question we don’t have, but which we can make a very good guess about based on what Paul says. He began by reminding them that before they became Christians, they had been pagans, people who worshiped idols, the Greek and Roman gods. Since this had been the case, since they had been so misled in their beliefs, what did that mean regarding their spiritual gifts?

Well, as far as things to worry about regarding our salvation, spiritual gifts aren’t even on the list. So Paul wants his readers and you and I to be informed these gifts. **What is their purpose? How do they come to us? And, just so we’re all on the same page about it, what are they?**

Let’s start with their purpose, and that will clear up a few misconceptions about these gifts. And a few examples would be: Speaking in tongues (whatever that may mean), interpreting something spoken in a tongue, prophecy, healing, certain other miraculous powers, and some abilities we might consider more ordinary, such as administration and teaching. Paul tells us that the reason such gifts are given to us is “**for the common good.**”

By that, he means just what we said earlier, that these are given to help the spread of the Gospel and to encourage believers. So if I had the gift of speaking in tongues, for example, it would have nothing to do with me, personally, or my faith, but it would be all about the Lord’s plans for

^a There is long tradition that Pentecost was the birthday of King David, 3,059 year ago.

the spread of the Gospel when or where I happen to be. If I have the gift of healing, it would likewise be for the purpose of the spread of the Gospel or for the encouragement of God's people at this place and at this moment.

I suppose that this is where many people become confused about these gifts from the Holy Spirit. Many of these gifts are incredible, splashy, miraculous, and would make a person famous. And there are people who probably desire them for these reasons. They want to be a big, splashy part of God's plan. Or, they want God to let them set the direction of the work of the church for the time being. And maybe that's why they don't have those gifts. God wants us to carry out his plans, not our own.

And that brings us to the question of **how these gifts come to us?** Well, the question that Paul seems to be answering is the negative of this, in other words: **Do these gifts get withheld from some Christians because of certain sins?** And the answer is, No. The example Paul gives is idolatry. Before the Corinthians became Christians, they were all guilty of various forms of idolatry. Might this sin be sticking to them still, might the stigma of having worshiped Zeus or Venus be something that God just can't get past, now that they have become Christians? Well, Paul says: Only the Holy Spirit keeps you from saying "Jesus be cursed," and only the Holy Spirit lets you say, "Jesus is Lord." Every aspect of your faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you, in your spirit but also in your flesh—in you—and he, the Holy Spirit, is the one who makes you the part of the Body of Christ that you are today.

If you imagine that some sin in your past, or even in your present, is keeping you from speaking in tongues or from working miracles, then you misunderstand both sides of this doctrine of spiritual gifts. **First of all, if you are seeking** out a special, particular spiritual gift, and you have even been praying about it, please understand that your desire may have nothing to do with the Spirit's choice about giving it or withholding it. The gifts he gives are given for his purposes, not ours. So examine your desire, and pray that your desires would walk in step with God's will, and not that God would change his will to walk in step with your desire.

Second of all, if there is a sin in your past or in your present that bothers you, take it to the cross of Jesus where it belongs. Confess it. Pray about it. Let go of it. Turn away from it. Turn your will and your desires toward God's will and God's desires, and leave your sinful habits and urges in the past along with the Corinthian idolatry that Paul was talking about with such comforting words.

Remember: No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," which is the same as saying, "Jesus is God," apart from faith in Jesus. And where there is faith, there is also forgiveness. Trust in the promise of forgiveness. Get yourself centered on the cross of Jesus, on the atoning sacrifice through which

God set your sins, all of your sins, out of reach, off the record, forever. Isaiah said: “In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction, you have put all of my sins behind your back.” Isa 38:17

As you thank God for that forgiveness, let it lead you to understand that having faith is having one of the spiritual gifts we’ve been talking about. There are lists of spiritual gifts in different places in the New Testament. There’s a list later in 1 Corinthians 12, another one in Romans 12, and in chapters 13-14 of 1 Corinthians, as well as partial lists or additions here are there. But let’s consider these gifts, which include **teaching, preaching, having faith, giving to the poor, helping people, administration**—all of those gifts are still around today. **In the early days of the church, there were other gifts we no longer see: miraculous healing and other miraculous powers, prophecy, something described as “distinguishing between spirits,” and then speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues.** Although I can’t rule out their appearance from time to time, perhaps in the case of certain areas of missionary activity, these splashier and more spectacular gifts no longer seem to be required.

Remember that all gifts are given for the common good. And Paul emphasizes that every gift is from the same Holy Spirit, from the same Lord Jesus, from the same Lord God. Our Triune God is one, always working for the proclamation of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

You have faith already. You can’t have it apart from the working of the Holy Spirit, and he has already given you this gift. Now: How can you put that gift to work in the service of God’s Kingdom, either spreading the Gospel or encouraging God’s people?

You have the ability to give to the Church, to give to the poor, to help people—and maybe, maybe, you also have a gift like administrations. How can you use all of the gifts God has given to you in the service of the Kingdom?

Pray about this. Ask God, not to give you a specific gift you don’t already have, but to guide how best to use the gifts you do have. Consider the parable of the talents. Use what you have today, use it well, and the day may come when God says: Give that person more, because they help my kingdom to grow.

Until that day comes, thank God for what you have, and give him glory with everything you do. Amen.