

Every week we talk about how God has provided everything we need for this life unto the next. We understand the promises of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. However, I think it's easy to overlook just how rich our lives are in Christ now, today. This morning and for the next two weeks I want to take a look at the "spiritual gifts" God has blessed us with. Today, we'll concentrate on the purpose of these gifts for our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

1st CORINTHIANS 12:1-11: Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except in the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.

To understand this passage it's helpful to know a little about the background of the church to whom the letter, 1st Corinthians, was written. Corinth was a Roman colony in Greece, a city rebuilt by Julius Caesar about 100 years before St. Paul showed up. It grew into a major port town with lots of business activity and thousands of foreign merchants, and like any cosmopolitan city, Corinth, was a montage of many different cultural and religious traditions.

So St. Paul didn't speak to the church in Corinth as though the people lived in a vacuum. He knew they came from a variety of backgrounds with different experiences and beliefs. A big part of what St. Paul did with this letter then was get everyone on the same page, that they might start thinking as one body about their faith in Jesus.

With this in mind let's consider what St. Paul said to the church about spiritual gifts. We'll examine this passage in 3-sections, learning 3-things about spiritual gifts as we go. St. Paul wrote, **1st Corinthians 12:1-3**, "**Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except in the Holy Spirit.**"

Spiritual gifts were obviously an issue for the church. Paul brought up the subject as though it was already on the table, as though spiritual gifts had somehow been a part of the life of the people even before they became Christians.

Consider his words: "**You know that when you were pagans you were led astray by mute idols.**" It's a redundancy to call an idol "**mute**" for an idol is nothing but the representation of something that does not exist! But I think Paul called them "**mute**" because he wanted the reader to understand that his God speaks and his God acts, that his God is a God of substance.

Something must've been going on with the Corinthians because Paul gave the people a formula to use to sort out spiritual gifts. He said, "**no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except in the Holy Spirit.**"

There's evidence the people mingled magic and occult practices with true spiritual gifts. In addition, they had created a hierarchy of the gifts, which began to infect the organization and structure of the church.

So when Paul said, "**no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except in the Holy Spirit,**" I think he was talking about the entire attitude and heart of the church and its members.

In other words, Paul was saying if my thoughts, words, and deeds are not devoted to God, then it's the same as if I said, "**Jesus is accursed!**" On the other hand, if what I'm doing—if what WE are doing—is devoted to the work of Christ, then we confess, "**Jesus is Lord!**" This is how we know whether or not a spiritual gift is from God: Does it draw us closer to Christ?

Brothers and sister, "**Jesus is Lord**" because He is our Savior. He died for us on the Cross, washing away all our sins, and He rose from the grave on the third day, gifting us with eternal life. "**Jesus is Lord!**": Please say it with me....

Paul's second teaching is in the next few verses. He wrote, **1st Corinthians 12:4-7**, "**Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."**

Paul is helping us to understand how the spiritual gifts should work in the church. Again, he wrote that there are "**varieties of gifts**," "**varieties of service**," and "**varieties of activities**." "**Varieties of gifts**" are the things given by God for us to use to glorify the name of Jesus, things like teaching, evangelism, and giving. "**Varieties of service**," on the other hand, are the different kinds of ministries which the church creates in order to put the spiritual gifts to work, ministries like LWML and Sunday school and youth ministry. And the "**varieties of activities**" is everything we do to connect the gifts God has given us with the ministries or acts of "**service**," things like management, fundraising, and promotional campaigns.

We read, "**To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good**."

A recurring theme in 1st Corinthians is how the church is one body knit together in the name of Jesus. I remember a church I attended as a layman. It had two big, powerful committees. One was the music committee. It had a paid music director from a local music school, who had put together a fabulous choir and organized and promoted community music events brilliantly. There was also the building committee. The church building was an historic landmark, which required a huge amount of money for repairs and maintenance.

I remember one year during a congregational meeting how there was a huge argument about which committee should cut back its budget because of a shortfall in donations. The church voted, and the building committee was forced to take a huge financial hit. What happened then horrified me. The music people got out of their seats and started high-fiving and congratulating each other as the building people got up and slunk away, bristling with anger with a lot of muttering.

St. Paul has taught us that there are a variety of gifts, services, and activities in the church, but there is only one God, one God who oversees and directs all, one God to whom we are all committed. Again, he said, **“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”**

The **“common good”** of the Christian church is salvation, for Jesus said, **“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16).**

The **“common good”** of the Christian church is our mutual affection for and service one to another. Jesus said, **“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).**

The **“common good”** of the Christian church is our service to the world outside these four walls. Jesus said, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20).**

This is the **“common good”** of the Christian church, that the name of Jesus be glorified.

Jesus is Lord!

The following verses reveal Paul’s third teaching. He wrote, **1st Corinthians 12:8-11, For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to**

distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.

There are two other lists of spiritual gifts. One is later on in 1st Corinthians and the other is in Romans. The lists are like this list, but here are some additional gifts noted. Some of the gifts are identified two or three times, while others are mentioned only once.

Why is there just one list of spiritual gifts, you know maybe 7 gifts or a multiple of 7 gifts? Maybe 14 or 21? There is not just one list because God's grace is without limit. God has provided and he continues to provide everything we need to fulfill his call on our lives in this world in which we live. God provides whatever is needed in a particular circumstance among the people whom he has brought together in his communion.

The key idea in this passage is in the last verse. St. Paul wrote, **“All these [spiritual gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.”**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God has distributed gifts to His children, to you and me, according to His perfect will.

In a small church it's easy to begin to feel like we don't have enough, as in we don't have enough money, we don't have enough people. But that is not what I'm reading here. What I'm reading is that God's people have been given what they need by God himself to glorify the name of Jesus.

Each one of us gathered here today was called by God purposely. What you have, what you are, what you do on behalf of Faith Lutheran Church is God's gift to your brothers and sisters with whom you worship. But that's not all. What this congregation does as a community in the name of Christ is God's gift to Whittier, California!

Friends in Christ, the Lord has gifted us with everything we need to do the work he's called us to do. Our calling is to glorify the name of Jesus, to proclaim that he

is our Savior, that he is our Good Shepherd, that he is the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

This is our “**common good**,” this is the will of God, that our lives be united in this name, the name of Jesus.

This week, my friends, let us reflect on how the Lord has gifted us, how he has provided Faith Lutheran Church with everything it needs to do the work he has called it to do.

This week let us give thanks to the Lord for his gifts, and then let us pray to him, asking how can we use these gifts to glorify the name of Jesus.

And this week let us share this Good News of God’s generosity with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.