

Many Gifts One Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Most people at some time or other in their life ask life questions, “Why am I here?”

“What is my purpose?”

“How do I fit into the grand scheme of life in this world?”

If you have been trained in the Catechism, you would quickly answer, “To glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

But, equally important, yet less asked are the questions, “What is my purpose in the Church?”

“How do I fit into God’s purpose for the Church?”

“What is my role?”

“Am I using the gifts that God has given me to serve faithfully in the body of Christ?”

In most churches, the pattern is for 20% of the people to do 80% of the work.

Many don’t have any desire to serve the Church.

Some want to serve but don’t know how they might serve.

Some wonder if they have anything to offer the Church at all.

These are all problems that will never be fully fixed. But there is another problem that can arise. It is one that affects those who are the most active in a Church.

It is the pride of thinking that your particular service makes you more important, more valuable, than other members of the church.

My son, Michael, when he was maybe 6 years old, thought that we sat in the front row of the Church because we were the most important family in the Church.

Sort of funny when it comes from the mouth of a six year old. Far more insidious when it lurks in the heart of an adult.

The truth is that God has designed the Church such that every member has a role to play. Each role is significant, because each role helps the Church function as a body. And, in order for each member to fulfill their role, God has gifted them through the Holy Spirit, with one or more gifts.

Chapters 12-14 are one large section dealing with the question of spiritual gifts. We are only going to look at the first 11 verses of chapter 12.

Read I Corinthians 12:1-11.

Now concerning¹ spiritual gifts,² brothers,³ I do not want you to be uninformed.

“spiritual gifts” is a good translation even though the Greek simply has “the spiritual”.

tw/n pneumatikw/n Of spiritual things – or of spiritual ones

But when you see the context, it is best translated “spiritual gifts”.

Paul is dealing with the issue of spiritual gifts because the Corinthians had asked him questions concerning spiritual gifts.

The way that the members of the church functioned mattered greatly to Paul. It matters greatly to God.

It takes conscious effort to look at the congregation from God's perspective, to see her as the product of his sovereign and particular mercy.

Paul is going to lay out for us a pattern for how God wants his church to function. On the one hand, there are various universal principles that must be in place. On the other hand, each congregation will have its own unique personality.

The same is true within each congregation. There are certain principles that must govern every member of the congregation if she is to function properly. But given these principles, the individual members will each have their own particular place and role within the congregation.

Healthy individuals and healthy congregations, will not all look alike. But they will all hold certain principles in common. Understanding this will go a long way in helping us to appreciate other believers when they are not exactly like ourselves. We will also be able to appreciate other congregations that look differently than our own.

What is the highest and most "essential" principle that must drive every true Christian and every true congregation?

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.

I find it helpful in understanding Paul's intent here to compare it with Jesus' warning in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:22-23 ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

When Paul says that it is impossible to "say" "Jesus is Lord" except in/by the Holy Spirit, he cannot mean the mere articulation of the words verbally. Jesus' words make very clear that on the day of Judgment there will be those who verbally confessed "Lord, Lord" of Jesus, but who will cast away from his kingdom and merciful presence.

Entirely applicable to our own context in Corinthians, Jesus states that these same individuals were exercising spiritual gifts: prophesying, casting out demons, doing mighty or miraculous works.

One would think that the ability to perform “spiritual works” was a sure indication that you, yourself, were in a right relationship with Jesus Christ, especially if you also openly confessed Jesus as Lord. But sadly, this is not the case. A person can openly profess Jesus as Lord, and perform all sorts of “spiritual works” and still not be in a right relationship with Jesus Christ.

So then, how do we rightly understand Paul’s words? What is it that he is actually communicating to the Corinthians, and to us?

Paul is laying out, in a very stark manner, that there are only two possible “end games” in life. One end game is the absolute surrender of heart and life to Jesus as Lord. The other end game is to magnify your own self as lord of your life. And to lift yourself up, to be the master of your own ship, is necessarily to deny Jesus his rightful place as Lord. Whether you actually voice the words or not, you are declaring by your life, “Jesus is accursed.”

Picture parallel train tracks. One set of tracks runs in one direction. The other set of tracks runs in the other direction. The destination of the one is absolute and all-encompassing life of submission to Jesus as Lord. The destination of the other is the eternal attempt to deny Jesus his rightful place as Lord over your life.

There is no third track. There is no track that allows you to simply wander about somewhere in the middle. It may look like there is. And as we travel in life, it may be difficult to discern which track an individual or a church is really on. But make no mistake, they are either on the one or the other.

Individuals and congregations must regularly examine their intentions. What is it that they are actually seeking? What is the goal of their life? What is it that they are actually pursuing?

And there can only be one answer: I am seeking for my life, and my congregation, to experience the Lordship of Jesus Christ in a fuller and more complete way. If an individual, or a congregation, does not have this as their set purpose, they are on the wrong track, and are in for a rude awakening on the Day of Judgment.

Paul is saying that if the Holy Spirit truly indwells a person, the Holy Spirit will put them on the track to making Jesus Lord of their life. Only in the grace of the Holy Spirit, will anyone truly submit to Jesus as Lord. That is what the Holy Spirit does. He submits to Jesus as Lord. And only as He is ruling in a person’s heart will they submit to Jesus as Lord.

And as a person is filled with the Spirit, they will not oppose the Lordship of Jesus. They will not say, by their words or life, that Jesus is accursed.

So, the universal principle that every true believer and every good congregation must embrace is that the goal of their existence is to submit to Jesus as Lord.

Understanding this one principle has helped me get along with people who sometimes think very differently from me.

I do not spend a lot of time trying to forge relationships with other pastors in our area. But over the years I have gotten to know a fair number.

David Doster of Gateway Church, formerly Burke Community Bible Church.

Eddie Bunton of Burkemont Baptist Church.

George Logan of New Day Christian Church.

Pastor Gamble of Mount Home Baptist.

Pastor Javier at First Advent Christian Church.

Pastor Tommy of the Marshallese Church.

Just to name a few.

On many points of theology or philosophy of ministry I may disagree with these men.

But I am satisfied that they are sincerely committed to helping people to know Jesus and to submit to his Lordship.

That does not mean that our differences do not matter. Truth always matters. It is never a good idea to sacrifice truth for the sake of unity. But, submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is the main thing. And if a church or an individual has that as their goal, I can work with them. That main goal is what unites us together.

Having this understanding also helps me to remind myself, what is my purpose in my ministry. If I am not encouraging people know Jesus as Lord, then I am not doing my job. I am fine with other pastor's making jokes about me being Presbyterian and baptizing children. But what I don't want them to say about me is that Pastor Mike does not really care about true holiness. Or, the members of Faith Church are not really zealous to obey Christ.

The zeal of every Christian sometimes wavers. But our set purpose is to grow in our understanding and practice of Jesus as Lord.

Are you keeping this purpose in front of you?

Do you remind yourself often that this is the reason why we exist?

In one way or another, every member of this congregation is called to play a role in helping others of the body to know, to love, and to submit to Jesus as Lord.

The Church is formed by God to lead people away from idols and to a true worship of Jesus Christ as Lord.

The problem in the Corinthian Church was that the Church was more about the exercise of spiritual gifts than it was about the pursuit of holiness.

God has given spiritual gifts to the church, but when the exercise of those spiritual gifts becomes more important than submission to Jesus as Lord, the gifts actually become a hindrance to God's purposes.

We will explore this more in the weeks to come, but a helpful way to think about this is to say: God cares far more about the Fruit of the Spirit than he does about the Gifts of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Satan can and does mimic the gifts of the Spirit, but he will never mimic the fruit of the Spirit.

But while the end game is universal, the specific functions within the Church are as varied as there are people.

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.

Notice the repetition of what is the same and what are varieties in these verses.

First, the same.

If you look at vv. 4, 5, and 6 together, you can see the unity of the Trinity.

The Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit.

Lord refers to Jesus.

God refers to the Father.

Paul wants his readers to see that there is not any true division between the members of the Trinity.

They are one with each other. You cannot pit one member of the Trinity against another member.

But notice the repetition of the word “varieties”.

diai, resij - what is apportioned out *division, allotment, distribution*

The meaning of this word includes two aspects that are difficult to capture in any one English word.

The first is that of variation. There are many variations in how the God works through his people. The translators of the ESV felt like this was the most important point to make.

But the second aspect of the Greek word is that of apportionment. The various gifts do not randomly exist. They have been apportioned, or distributed, according to the wisdom of God. God is sovereign over the apportionment. If you do not like your gifts, you have to take it up with God.

But what is it that God has apportioned?

He has apportioned:

- gifts
- ministries
- activities

All of these words are related. But they also bring out different nuances that are important to us.

Gifts = charismata

This is the word from which we derive charismatic.

Gift is a good translation. It is that which is freely given, freely bestowed.

A person does not have an ability because they are better than another person.

That ability has been given to them out of God’s free grace.

Now, in this context, ability probably does not go far enough. It is also coupled with the word we saw in verse 1: pneumatikon.

So, we are dealing with freely given gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. They are “spiritual” gifts because they are bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

This is important for many reasons, but one reason is that every member of the Church has some apportionment of the Spirit for service in the body of Christ. Every Christian has been endowed by the Spirit with one, or more, spiritual gifts.

No Christian is entirely giftless.
Some Christians are endowed with more gifts than others.
But no Christian is entirely devoid of any gift from the Holy Spirit.

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

If you are a member of the Church, God intends for you to in some way be active promoting the “common good.” That means to be in some way helping others to know Jesus as Lord.

As long as we understand that gifts are bestowed by the Holy Spirit, I do not have a problem with also speaking of gifts as abilities.

A person’s gifts and abilities are in many ways connected with their personality and talents. We should not look for them to be disconnected. And we should also expect them to develop over time.

God has certainly made me an extrovert. But more than that, he has given me a fascination with people. People have such depth. Getting to know someone is fun for me. For someone else it is like pulling teeth. So, certainly, God has used my personality, and my innate love of people, to gift me in my ministry as a pastor. I do not know exactly how to distinguish the personality and the natural ability from the spiritual gift. But I am certain that it is the Spirit who has made me who I am for the benefit of his people.

It really does not matter what your personality and talents are, God will combine them with his spiritual gifting to help you serve in some way to enable his people become who he has bled to make them.

Gifts are related to ministries. Variations in gifts means variations in ministry (service.)

diakoniw/n

This is the word that is sometimes used for the office of deacon.

But it is used here much more broadly.

I believe that it is used in the broad way that we think of a ministry.

There are various ministries within the Church.

We have a prayer ministry for the next generation.

We have a ministry that is beginning to help men with sexual purity.

We have a youth ministry.

We have a women's ministry.

We have a Sunday School ministry.

We have small group ministries.

But we don't have a ministry to abused women. We could.

We don't have a ministry to athletes. But Tim Smith is working with a ministry called Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

I am thankful for the Pregnancy Care Center. It is a ministry that serves many churches within our area. They do it well. It is not necessary for every congregation to have their own ministry to women in crisis pregnancy.

I am thankful for the ministry that James and Margaret Hester have to men and women recovering from chemical addiction. We do not have to reinvent our own ministry. We could. If we had the laborers. But we can also direct our members to support that ministry in one way or another.

There are some ministries that every church must be active in. The ministry of the Word for one. But every church does not have to have every ministry.

And just because a church has had a ministry, does not mean it must always have the ministry.

And churches certainly can add new ministries.

The ministries of a church can vary over time, according to the make up of the members of the congregation.

Gifts are related to ministries.

And ministries require laborers – people who are willing to put in the work to make the ministry happen.

varieties of activities

evnerghma,twn

This is the word from which we get energy.

Think of the statement, “So and so is very active in the Church.”

A person may not be leading any specific “ministry.” But they may be active in various ministries within the Church.

To be active takes energy. Without divine energy you will not be active. And certainly, due to all sorts of personal life issues and due to various stages in a person’s life, one’s energy will certainly be more or less. Fine.

But every Christian is given some amount of divine energy to in some way help another believer in the Church to grow in godliness.

And they will do so as Christ apportions to them giftedness, as he bestows upon them a desire to serve, and as he gives them energy to do the work.

God has not designed or gifted every individual to be a part of every ministry within the Church.

Discovering your particular gifts and knowing how best to use them in the Church may take time and may be frustrating.

One person may have vision for some new ministry within the Church. What so often happens is that they become frustrated because others within the church don’t jump on board. This can be frustrating.

Patience is required. Prayer is necessary; asking for God to give others a similar passion. Asking God for laborers to come alongside of you.

Others have a different frustration. They may feel like they are not really gifted at all. Or at least they do not know yet what their gifts are. They can feel frustrated because they do not understand how they fit into the body. They do not yet see their particular purpose.

Some churches love to have their members take a spiritual gift survey to help their members.

to another
the utterance of knowledge
according to the same Spirit,

The utterance of wisdom is the ability to take truth and make it practical to life situations.

The utterance of knowledge is the ability to impart sound theology in digestible ways.

Both are necessary in the Church.

⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit,

Paul does not mean the universal gift of faith that every believer must have in Jesus Christ to be saved.

Instead, he is speaking of one's stronger ability to trust God in the various challenges of life.

Sometimes this sort of faith can be confused with optimism, but it is more than mere optimism. It is the faith that God can and will do some new work in building his church.

I believe that "church planters" probably have to have this gift.

Every member is to live their entire life by faith. But not every member is given the same measure of faith for life.

Jesus obviously thinks that the church needs some people who are particularly gifted in the area of faith.

Understanding this should not lead to pride. I trust God more than others. But it should give courage to the one given such faith to lead in these new initiatives. We should believe, "God has designed me for this purpose."

The rest of the gifts that Paul lists can be categorized as sign gifts.

They are gifts that accompanied the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost.

They are gifts that were prophesied in the OT book of Joel to accompany the pouring out of the Spirit and the rule of the Messiah.

They are gifts that were present in Jesus' earthly ministry and certainly in the age of the apostles.

Whether or not these particular gifts are continuing to be given to God's people today is a matter of debate in the larger church.

As Presbyterians, we believe that they have ceased to be given. The argument, broadly speaking is that with the dying out of the apostles and the completion of the Bible as the rule of our lives, these sign gifts have ceased.

10 to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
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.

This is not to say that God has ceased healing people or has ceased working of miracles altogether. It is simply that God does not apportion to an individual these particular gifts since the ending of the Apostolic age and the completion of the written Word of God.

You could touch the hem of Peter's garment and you would be healed. That sort of gift of healing I do not see exercised in anyone today. Instead, if someone is sick, we are encouraged to have the elderly to come and pray. We are told that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. But the NT does not encourage believers to search out one with gift of healing.

If you would like to talk with me further on this, feel free to talk with me.

The same is true of someone have the gift of miracles. While I have spoken with many a believer who would acknowledge God's miraculous work in their lives, I do not see anyone in the Church today who has a permanent gift of miracles.

The gift of prophecy involves one of two aspects. Either being able to foresee the future or receiving some new revelation from God for the welfare of the Church.

It is a gift that has ceased in the Church.

Ephesians 2:19-20 ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,¹ but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

The ministry of the prophets was foundational to the Church. Now that the foundation has been laid, this gift has ceased.

The ability to distinguish between spirits is sometimes called the gift of discernment. It is very much connected to the gift of prophecy. Traveling prophets would come into the various churches and speak God's authoritative word to the people.

But along with these good prophets, there arose all sorts of false prophets as well. And often it would be some time before believers could see the truth about these false prophets.

God provided his church with those gifted in discerning whether a prophet was true or false.

Lastly, Paul speaks of the gift of tongues and the gift of the interpretation of tongues.

Be patient, I will speak on both tongues and prophecy when we get to chapter 14. For now, just know that it is my view, and the view of our Confession of Faith, that these gifts have also ceased in the Church.

That being said, each one of these gifts were very much active in the Church at Corinth in that first generation.

And in some way, the ability to exercise one or more of these gifts led to spiritual pride. And pride does not lead to godliness. Pride does not build others up.

It was ironic that individuals could be exercising such amazing gifts while not actually promoting the universal goal of the Church.

If you focus more on the gift, or the ministry, than the purpose, you will go astray.

¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

A person should not conclude when another person has a different gift that they do not have the same Spirit.

Giftedness, ministries, and activities are varied.

What is universal is the commitment to love Jesus as Lord and to help others in the church love Jesus as Lord.

The same Spirit that works in a pastor to preach and teach, also works in the faithful member who...

Organizes and plans events, Leads in prayer meetings, Shows Hospitality, Welcomes visitors, Prays alone faithfully for the church , Prays with another believer privately Encourages others in simple notes, Leads well, Shepherds, Disciples, Decorates, Works the Sound system, Leads in Music, Teaches kids, Hosts small groups, Paints new Vision Simply is willing to do the grunt work to make things go.

Cleans the church building, Volunteers in the Nursery, Fixes things that break, Thinks of Security, Thinks through logistics and details, Cooks, Gift of fun and games, Website, Computers and technology

Application:

If you belong to Christ, he wants you to be active in the congregation. He has gifted you to serve. He will give you energy to serve.

But you do not have to serve in the same ways, or in the same ministries, as the person next to you. Feel the freedom to serve according to who God is making you.

No ministry is insignificant, as long as it keeps the end game of making Jesus Lord in focus.

And when you serve, resist the temptation to think that your particular type of service makes you more important than those who are not called to serve as you are serving. And please be in constant prayer that we would soon return to a place where every member can have the freedom to be active in using their gifts in the life of the Church.

Amen.