

## For The Common Good 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Paul's day, there was a problem in Corinth. They were arguing about which was the better gift, the more important gift of the Holy Spirit. Actually, they were arguing about which person was better and more important, based upon which "gift" they had. Of course, their argument was not really about the gifts, and more importantly, it was not about the Giver of the gifts. Instead, their discussion about these gifts was about the individuals themselves, it was all about prestige and who was greater and more important. It was a, "My dad's bigger than your dad," game they were playing.

As there were problems then, so it is also true today. I am sure that you have heard people discuss, or may even have you ever been asked about, the gifts of the Holy Spirit? We all have each been given peculiar gifts from God.

But there are some who will say that there are specific gifts of the Spirit that all Christians should have. Usually it will be said that all Christians must be able to speak in tongues – and if you cannot, you are not a true Christian. But what does our text say?

*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed... Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. And our text goes on to list a few of the gifts of the Spirit, ending with these words. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. It is the Holy Spirit who is the focus, not the gifts themselves, nor even those who have them. It is the Holy Spirit who gives out his gifts to each individual as He wills for a purpose.*

Take a moment to look around you at the other people sitting in church today – yes, it means Which one of you here looks identical to another? Except for identical twins, it does not happen – and even with identical twins, there is usually something that sets them apart. And even identical twins are different in so many ways, ask any teen-aged twin and they will tell you how different they are from one another.

So, do you have the Holy Spirit? You are not sure?

OK, let me ask it this way. Were you baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? If so, you have the Holy Spirit. *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.*

Everybody who is a Christian, everybody who has faith in Christ, must have the Holy Spirit, for it is He who works saving faith. And if you have faith, then you have some form of gift that has been given to you by the Holy Spirit for service. And whatever your gift may be, that gift is to be used for the common good.

Do you remember the story Pentecost? The disciples were speaking in tongues, and the people were amazed because, as they said, "We hear them telling in our own *tongues* the mighty works of God." (Acts 2:11) Each was hearing in their own language, the mighty works of God. What were those mighty works of God?

Peter's Pentecost sermon follows, and in it we learn about the mighty works God. It is all about Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament, that He was God, that He had been crucified, died, and rose on the third day. The common good was for others to hear the message of salvation in Christ Jesus – the great love of God to purchase forgiveness, to do the work salvation for all mankind.

Many Christians today speak about their supposed spiritual gifts, “Look how I speak in tongues,” or, “I have the gift of healing.” People brag about the incredible gifts, the miraculous appearing gifts - AND - what *they* can do. They may indeed have those particular gifts of the Spirit, it is true. But when you listen to them speak about their gifts, to whom are they directing your attention? To themselves? Or to God? It is easy to see that they are more focused upon getting the glory from others for *their* doing of them than they are upon giving glory to the giver of the gifts – God.

Interestingly, Paul spends the next couple chapters in First Corinthians talking about such outwardly incredible gifts, but ultimately he points out that the greatest gift is faith, the gift to trust Christ Jesus for forgiveness and life. And in our text, he points out that, *to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

First, we need to know that the greatest gift we are given is the Holy Spirit, and it is He who works in us the manifestation of His presence, the gift of faith. Along with faith, God's gift of the Holy Spirit gives to each of us talents, abilities, or varieties of service – all these gifts for the purpose of using them for the common good.

When you hear people talk about these other gifts, usually the focus is put upon discerning what your gift is. They will come up with a list of gifts, but usually the most impressive and outwardly visible gifts. Tongues is mentioned, but you rarely hear about the interpretation of tongues. Healing is another one mentioned often. I once had someone tell me, “If you prayed for someone, and they got better, you probably have the gift of healing.” Really? What does it mean then, if I prayed for someone to get better, and they died? What gift of the Spirit is that?

Does this mean Paul had no faith? Paul lived his whole life with some sort of ailment, a thorn in the flesh that God would not remove from him, God would not heal him. And yet, he was God's instrument to bring the Gospel to many places. Paul was a witness to countless people – his faith served the common good.

So, besides saving faith, what gift has the Holy Spirit given to you? Maybe you look at this list in our text and cannot precisely label what gift or gifts the Lord has entrusted to you. Know this, this is not a complete list of the gifts God gives by His Spirit. Be sure of this, He has given you certain skills and talents for the common good, He has equipped you to serve those around you. How?

Where you have opportunity, help those around you with the talents and abilities you do have.

How? Maybe you speak a word of comfort to someone hurting, pray for them and let them know you are doing it. If you are handy, help fix things for those who are not able to do the same. If you can cook, provide food for those who are in need, maybe for those who are sick, or those stricken with grief. Each of you is exactly who God made you to be, and given you to serve the common good. Use the gifts He has given you, your talents and abilities, for the benefit of your neighbor. That is true even if your unique gifts are not a part of the list in our text.

You my dear friends are the beloved of God. He has called you by name and bestowed upon you His

Spirit. You want proof? It is simple, you are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You take your comfort in the promise of the Word, not in your gifts, and not in your faith. Faith trusts the promise of God in His Word.

Maybe you cannot precisely state how many, or even which gifts God gave you. But, it is plainly evident which gifts are the most important. Can you distinguish between a word of wisdom and a word of knowledge? Maybe you cannot, but you know that Jesus Christ Himself is ***The Truth***, the very Word of God, given unto death to forgive you for those times you saw a need your God-given gift could fulfill for the common good, but you turned and walked away.

The greatest gift is Jesus, who in faith entrusted Himself to the Father, “into Your hands I commit my Spirit.” Jesus went the way of the cross to give Himself up unto death for the common good – for the good of His church – for your good and mine. It was on the cross that He took upon Himself our sins, the disease which brought us death, and purchased the miracle healing of forgiveness for all mankind.

You have been called by the Gospel, and yet English was not even a tongue spoken when Christ first took upon Himself human flesh. In the proclamation of the Gospel, you have been given the Holy Spirit who has bestowed and strengthened faith within you to trust not in yourself, but in the work of Christ.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to see the gift of incredible, miraculous healing? How about hearing someone speaking in tongues?

I proclaim and reveal to you, at Christ's command, a miracle of healing. Take and eat, the very body of Christ. Take and drink the very blood of Christ, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This is a miracle of epic proportions, it is the flesh and blood of God given to you to heal you of your sin-sickness and to strengthen your faith.

Here is a miracle of speaking in tongues – in your own language, in your native tongue, hear the mighty deeds of God, done for you in Christ Jesus. He gave His life that you might have life, and have it to the full, now and forevermore. Hear and believe. That is the gift of the Spirit for the common good, for the salvation of all who believe – for your good – for your salvation. In the name of Jesus! Amen.