

For the Common Good

2afterEpiphany

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1 Cor. 12:1-11

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

God has always given His Church everything that they need to live. In the Old Testament He provided their daily bread; and in the New Testament He provided their daily bread. When the Israelites were out wandering in the desert, God let them hunger for a bit to show them that “man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from Him.” Yet He did give them the food and water that their bodies needed.

In the New Testament, God gave His Church all that they needed; and they chose to share everything in common, giving to any as they had need. This is not to say that Communism is the way to go. Modern Communism and how God worked for the good of His Church at that time are two different things. Modern Communism is based on a utopian idea for perfection in this lifetime, which will never happen. But both Democracy and Communism, and every other form of government in this world, have been established by God.

So if the title of this sermon is not to say that the United States should become Communist, what is it talking about? How does God do things for the common good? That is precisely what we will explore as we hear from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, the twelfth chapter.

Verse 1

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”

It may not seem that there’s much to say about spiritual gifts in these first couple verses. However, much is said. That’s the thing, what is needed to know is said. It’s spoken. It’s the Word of God. Others go after other doctrines or other religions or no religion at all—and it’s all the same. There’s only silence. They are all “mute idols.” So the first thing we must know about spiritual gifts is that they are given through words, rather than silence.

After all, which of the Old Testament prophets went about proclaiming God’s Word and doing great things without having first been called? There were those who did, but God chastised those false prophets saying that He had not called them to speak. God called His chosen prophets verbally.

When He came among us manifested in His Son, Jesus Christ, Jesus called the apostles with His mouth. Then, after having been called, they received even greater gifts by the baptism of fire, which not all of us have received. Yet it remains the same that all spiritual gifts are received verbally, for first one must be called to the faith through the proclamation of the Word, and then gifts may follow.

Verse 2

“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.”

The beginning of this section is nearly word for word the same. The words that change are “gifts,” “service,” and “activities.” Each of these is connected to the “same Spirit,” the “same Lord,” and the “same

God.” So the next thing to know about spiritual gifts is that they are supplied by God, Father, Son, and Spirit. “(I)t is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

That’s the common good we’re hearing about. Not Communism or Democracy or a form of government. It is the spiritual gifts which are given for the common good. And these spiritual gifts are received through God’s spoken Word.

God’s Word is to be proclaimed. That is why young men enter the seminaries to become pastors and missionaries. They will be called to proclaim the Gospel at congregations throughout the nation and throughout the world. “(F)ait h comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).”

As all pastors and missionaries proclaim God’s Word to the congregations around the world, God’s Word accomplishes His purposes, including bestowing these spiritual gifts as He sees fit. These gifts are bestowed for the good of everyone; first to the congregation who hears it, and then to those to whom the congregation members speak.

Verse 3

“For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, 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. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportion s to each one individually as he will s.”

To expect to have the same gifts as your brother or sister in Christ, or to expect every pastor, missionary, lawyer, teacher, accountant, or any other group of people with the same occupation to have the exact same set of gifts is against this Scripture. It is against the work of God. “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportion s to each one individually as he will s.” The Spirit decides who gets which gifts, and how much of each gift. And the Spirit is the third person of God.

Yet He empowers them each for the good of the Church, who then uses them for the good of everyone. It is through knowledge and wisdom and healing and the working of miracles and all the other gifts that someone might see which would then lead him or her to wonder about this religion thing and hear God’s Word, and from hearing the Word believe.

That is how God does things for the common good: first by giving us His Word, though we do not deserve it. And we don’t deserve it. Rather than trusting God’s Word and how He apportion s things, how often do you desire for this person or that person to have a particular gift? How often do you desire to have a gift that has not been given to you? Or for more of the gift that you have? How often do you go your own way thinking about such things instead of believing and trusting that God works as He has said in this word? So you and I don’t deserve God’s Word, but He gives it anyway on account of His Son, God manifested in human flesh, who paid for those sins, and indeed all sins, by His death on the cross of Calvary. Then, after giving us His Word, God uses His Word to give us spiritual gifts. These gifts bind us together in the one true faith. From that binding flow the good works which all those around us see, and from those good works, the curiosity which can lead those others to God’s Word, and to their hearing and receiving salvation. This Word will continue to go out from all pastors and missionaries to their congregations and this one, and from those congregations to the world, for the common good found in Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

