

What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Stewardship and Generosity, Part 1

The Grace Connection: We Give Because We are Gifted

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren...: The word “gifts” here is an addition. Literally, Paul now addresses spiritual “matters”, “things”, or “impacts”, and all this after talking about all the problems the Corinthian church is enduring. These gifts, then, are more than simple mechanisms God grants to an individual to enhance their walk with Him; these are important to spiritual *life*.

...I do not want you to be ignorant: Broadly speaking, Paul identifies in his New Testament epistles three things he wants Christians to be knowledgeable (and not ignorant of!):

- God’s plan of salvation
- Our life together as Christians (including spiritual gifts, the equipping of the saints, and Christian conduct)
- The Second Coming of Jesus, and eternal life

You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols: Paul reminds his readers that spiritual gifts/matter stand in stark contrast to life outside the Kingdom of God, including that which they lived before they were saved through the power of the Gospel. Because these were Gentiles, they had a lot still to learn about the Holy Spirit’s interaction with God’s people.

No one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed: We can discern many things by judging how they relate to Jesus. Does a situation or

phenomenon – including a “spiritual gift” -- glorify Jesus? Does it promote the true Jesus, or a false one?

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not to promote Himself or any man, but to glorify and represent Jesus. We can, therefore, trust that the true ministry of the Holy Spirit will be consistent with, and will glorify, the true nature of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit...: Paul will list about nine of these spiritual gifts in the following verses, and more in other places. Yet there is only one Giver, who works through the diverse gifts. So they all serve a single Master, and have a common goal as well as a common Source.

There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord: By “ministries” Paul is referring to the enumerated “gifted offices” in the church, such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (also described in Ephesians 4). Again, though there are varied offices, it is the same Lord granting those offices to men, and directing the service of each.

And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all: The Greek word for “activities” here is ἐνεργημάτων (“energematōn”), from which English derives words like energy, energetic, and energize. It conveys active, miraculous power. “Diversities” of activities means that God displays, uses, and allocates His power in different ways, but it is always the same God doing the work, so the purpose of each is consistent.

It’s easy for us to focus on our particular gifts, ministries, or activities, and de-emphasize those who have other gifts, ministries, or activities. But this is a package deal; God has a glorious diversity and unity in the way He does things. We should never expect it to be all according to our own emphasis and taste; God uses His church to accomplish His purposes. That means all gifts that He gives to all His people!

I Corinthians 12:7-11

The manifestation of the Spirit is given: The Holy Spirit is always present in and among Christians. Speaking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus said He would “abide with you forever” (John 14:16). However, from our perception, sometimes the Spirit’s presence is more apparent than it is at other times.

We should never think the Holy Spirit is “more” present when He is manifested through the gifts. The Holy Spirit is always present with and in believers.

Given to each one for the profit of all: The purpose of the manifestation of the Spirit, then, is to benefit the entire church, not just the individual.

The word of knowledge: As Paul begins to name different manifestations of the Spirit, he begins with the “word of wisdom”. This is the unique ability to speak forth the wisdom of God, especially in an important situation, as shown in the examples of Stephen (Acts 7), and Paul himself (Acts 23). This gift is exhibited in the ability to declare knowledge that could only be revealed supernaturally, whether by Jesus Himself or through His followers.

The gift of faith: Though faith is an essential part of every Christian’s life, the gift of faith is the unique ability to trust God against all circumstances, as Peter did when he walked out of the boat onto the water (Matthew 14:22-33). There are many examples throughout history of people exhibiting bold faith despite horrific circumstances.

Gifts of healings: This is God’s healing power, either given or received, and has been repeatedly documented in the New Testament and since.

Working of miracles: The Greek δύναμις (“dynamis”) [dynamite!], or “acts of power”, specifically when the Holy Spirit chooses to “override” the laws of nature, working in or through an available person.

The gifts of healing and working of miracles operate only in conjunction with the gift of faith, as in Acts 3:1-8 or Acts 14:8-10. These things are not

done on the whim of the individual, as if the power to heal or work miracles was at their permanent disposal. Instead, they operate as an individual is prompted by God and given the faith to invoke such a work.

Prophecy: The proclaiming of God's message in a particular situation, always in accord with His Word and His work. *Sometimes* this has the character of foretelling the future, as in Acts 21:10-11 and Acts 27:21-26. But it applies to any situation where God communicates His word to His people through His people. While this can be what we formally label as "preaching", it is not limited to preachers or ordained ministers of the Gospel. There is a Greek word for that kind of preaching, but here Paul uses the word for "divinely-inspired" speech, not proclamation in the formal sense. So preaching is a use of the gift of prophecy, but not all use of the gift of prophecy is what we think of as "preaching".

Discerning of spirits: This is the ability to tell the difference between true and false doctrine, and between what is of the Holy Spirit and what isn't (see Acts 8:18-23 and 16:16-18).

Tongues: The practice of praying or speaking in tongues is not in and of itself evidence of being "filled with the Holy Spirit"; this emphasis has led people to seek the gift of tongues (and to counterfeit it) merely to prove to themselves and others that they really are filled with the Holy Spirit. Biblically, this gift is manifested to bless the people of God. Even on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples spoke in tongues, they were not *intending* to preach to the crowd in their native tongues (until verse 14, anyway)! They were praising God for what they had experienced, and God caused the crowd at the feast of Pentecost to hear the disciples excitedly praising Him. They were hearing men, which confused them, but what they were really hearing was God reaching out to them through His disciples!

The gift of the interpretation of tongues: This gift is what *allows* the gift of tongues to be of benefit for those other than the speaker, as they are able to hear and agree with the tongue-speaker's words to God. Speaking in tongues, therefore, is always a team sport!

The tendency towards division among the Corinthian Christians had made them think separately -- or perhaps competitively -- about the gifts. Maybe the “tongues speakers” thought themselves superior to the “prophesiers,” as if the gifts had come from two different gods! Paul emphasizes to them that one and the same Spirit works all these things, so they should reflect that same unity among themselves.

Distributing to each one individually as He wills: Here is another reason for unity, and a reason against any sense of superiority regarding the gifts. They are distributed not according to the will of man, but as the Spirit of God wills – as He wills.

If the Spirit distributes to each one individually as He wills, why would He choose to give a particular gift at a particular moment? The larger reasons may not be apparent, but the goal of the Holy Spirit’s work is always to glorify Jesus and to build His nature and character in us. The Spirit’s goal is never to amaze or confuse, but to build the fruit of the Spirit, and He will use or not use any gift He thinks right towards that end.

We are Gifted, so we are Givers

All Christians are gifted according to God’s pleasure and will. In turn, we serve Him by becoming like Him. He takes care of us, and calls on us to take care of each other, and the world He has created.