

1 Corinthians 12:1-7 (read v. 4, 7) **“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit...Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”**

Brothers and Sisters in the Faith:

Have you used your Christmas gifts yet? If you got a new set of golf clubs, you may have to wait a while to use them unless you travel south. But if you got a nice warm pair of socks, you might be using them right now!

In 1 Cor. 12, Paul is encouraging us to use our gifts -- not Christmas gifts, but Christ's gifts -- given us via the Holy Spirit. God doesn't give us gifts so we can put them in a corner of the closet and collect dust. He wants us to use them frequently and wisely!

In verse 7, God through Paul instructs us to ***Use Our Gifts for the Common Good*** (1) ***God graciously supplies us with useful gifts***, and (2) ***He wants us to use them to benefit all***.

1

The Christians to whom Paul wrote his letter in Corinth were young-in-the-faith Christians. Many of them had until recently been idol worshipers. ***“You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.”*** They put their trust in hunks of wood, bars of steel, and columns of stone fashioned by artisans to look like gods who supposedly lived on Mt. Olympus.

They had lived in fear of those fickle gods and the death that they thought awaited them in the shadowy, horrifying underworld. Death hung over them like a shroud. But now that blanket of darkness had been lifted! The light of Christ shone brilliantly in their hearts giving them bright eternal futures!

Paul says, ***“No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”*** The man they had once rejected and cursed as foolishness now became their Rescuer and the love of their lives. The Holy Spirit, through the preaching of Paul and others, began to live and rule in their hearts...the very same thing that has happened to all of us. We are not people of God because of intellect or wealth or family connections, but purely by the Holy Spirit's power and gracious gift. He alone convinced us that Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death brought us complete forgiveness so we never have to fear God's wrath again.

God gave the Corinthians and us Jesus, and he gave them and us even more: gifts! ***“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.”*** These gifts, he says, are ***“a manifestation of the Spirit.”*** In other words, while our gifts are all different they are all from God given to us according to his choosing.

And what is more, each gift we use displays something about God: ***“a manifestation of the Spirit.”*** Are you an **encouraging** person? Your gift is a reflection of the encouragement God gives us. Are you an **organizer**? Your gift is a reflection of God's orderliness. Do you love to **teach**? Your gift reflects God's ability to teach us in his Word. Are you **generous**? Your gift reflects God's generosity in all things. Simply put, when you use the gifts the Spirit has given you, you are helping the world see God.

That's one reason why God doesn't want us to neglect our gifts. No putting them in the closet to rot. He wants us using them today to glorify him and to be a blessing to others.

2

He also wants us to use our gifts together and for each other's benefit. ***“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”*** I am not an island. I am my brother's keeper. I am responsible to my fellow Christians and, in truth, to all fellow humans, to use my God-given, Spirit manifesting gifts to help and love them.

These words were an excellent reminder to the cliquish, separatistic Corinthians. They were jealous of each others' gifts or bragged about their celebrity connections: ***"I follow Paul. I follow Peter. I follow Apollos!"*** It's like, *"See how much more important I am than you are?"*

Our gifts are not for prestige or for comparing ourselves to others. They are to be used to benefit others and bring glory to God. They're *all* important. What's more important in archery: the bow, the string, or the arrow? I'd like to see you win an archery tournament without any one of those three things! The bow, string, and arrow are all important! All the parts, all the "gifts" are needed.

God-willing, this week the 2018 Annual Report will be distributed to members. In that report you will see how many different ways people are using their gifts and talents to serve the kingdom. The names and positions aren't there for bragging rights. God forbid! No, they are there so we can see how blessed we are by God to have his gifts being used through so many ordinary people in so many ways. And because of it?: a thriving congregation! Are we perfect? Name one perfect congregation on earth! No, we aren't perfect, but we are working and marching forward together and we are, by God's grace, getting things accomplished and bringing the gospel to more people, more often.

The truth is, we complement and compensate for one another. I read about two students who graduated from Chicago-Kent College of Law. The highest ranking student was a man who was blind. When he received his honor, he insisted that the credit should also go to his friend, who was born with no arms. They began a friendship of mutual interdependence as the man who couldn't see carried the books of the man who had no arms, which the armless man would read aloud to the blind man as they studied together. After graduation, their intent was to practice law together.

We Christians need each others' gifts, too. In fact, if ever we needed each other, it's now! The spiritual and moral conditions of our day in many ways mirror those of Paul's day in Corinth. We are so often driven by selfish motives, lack of love, rudeness, and a rejection of God's Word and moral standards. So many desperately need the message of Christ. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, ***"From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work"*** (Eph 4:16).

Fellow believers in Jesus, we are connected to each other for time and eternity. This is both a gift and an obligation. It's a gift to know we can support each other now and will enjoy each other in heaven forever. It is an obligation (of love) because God has "gifted us" and calls on us to use his gifts to serve and benefit one another each day to the best of our abilities -- for the common good. In light of how Jesus used his gifts to serve our common good, it is an honor for us to do so!

Amen.