

1st Corinthians 12:4-11

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

I am not particularly fond of my voice. It is not powerful or authoritative. I can't sing and I have a nasal country twang. Many times I have questioned my own abilities and have doubted my value. At the Monument Terrace for the Veterans Day service the man who sang the national anthem had a powerful voice that was polished and professional. It was the kind of voice you would see on TV. I could never sing like that. When it comes to speaking, it seem like some people seem to know exactly what to say. Whereas, I stumble for words and cannot recite scripture. It's like the filing cabinet gets stuck whenever I want to use it. Sometimes it seems like I don't have any significant talent but then I come across today's Scripture. The reality is that the Holy Spirit has blessed me with many gifts.

As pastor we are often asked to be used as a reference. I once gave a job reference for someone and later on came across a mutual colleague. We were talking and getting caught up on contacts. As we were discussing who is where, and what happened to so and so, his name came up. I said "oh, I gave a job reference for him." As we were talking he said that he had a lot of trouble with this person and asked if the reference was positive. I said "yes, he has the top characteristic that any employee could hope for. He has honesty and integrity." What we need most in any organization are people that we can trust, people with honesty and integrity.

In the apostle Paul's 1st letter to the church in Corinth he addresses the audience as brothers and sisters. This is important for us to understand because people often misunderstand the apostle Paul. He establishes common ground with all believers as children of God. Paul's understanding is that we are all equal. Male and female are equal. Jews and Gentiles are equal. We are all children of God. The apostle Paul appeals to the people to speak with one voice, one mind, and one purpose. How do you do that? With so many variables, opinions, and emotions, how do you speak with one voice, one mind, and one purpose? I think the answer is to stay true to the text; stay true to the gospel. Read and study the Bible and make it your guide for daily living. Paul writes the letter due to divisiveness. His appeal is unity in Christ. Paul's attitude is that divisiveness does not belong and is unacceptable. We belong to Christ. We answer to God. Our allegiance is to God. Religion is not just a Sunday morning thing. Our faith is a matter of living a life that is centered on Christ. The foremost and dominant thought should always be the word, prayer, and the manifestation of the Spirit.

Take a look at Jesus. What did Jesus do? During the great temptation his response was the written word. When he was preparing to face the cross his response was prayer. As Christians, we are to live our lives centered on Christ. Live challenges you, it will always tempt you and stress you out. When it does, rely on word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. The theme that

dominates Paul's letters is the theme that dominates the ministry of Jesus. It is the theme that dominates the Bible. The theme is Love. Paul's doctrine is we are one, we are equal, we center our lives on Christ, and love.

There is a lot to unpack in today's Scripture. Chapter 12 is full of spiritual gifts. The information is based on the previous chapters and lessons. The apostle Paul values distinctiveness of believers and appreciates differences we might have. However, he does not tolerate divisiveness. Unity of believers is established in God's grace, Christ's love, and the reception of the Holy Spirit. That is the basic premise that Paul founds his letters upon. Believers are united in the one body of Christ. We are united together in a common good, a common purpose, to obey the teachings of Christ. To be united in the body of Christ you have to know the Lord. Not just say it but take ownership of the idea that you have surrendered your life to Christ. It starts with repentance, a promise to change, a public confession of faith, and baptism. Paul's counsel is based on love. Love is the foundation. Love has the power to refocus the Corinthians from competing against each other to building up each other.

The Scripture applies to us today as we are all members of the body of Christ. We all have equal standing. We all use gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit to care for the common good of all. We are given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Jesus is Lord. So, Jesus is to be the Lord over your life. This means you do not live a life that is divided between sacred and secular. This means that you do not have two competing value systems. I was in a seminary class and I mentioned an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. A classmate questioned it. She stated that she had never heard a Disciple preacher mention an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I said "well, it is in the Bible." Today's Scripture is one of those places.

People with honesty and integrity are people that live by the word of God as best they can within the realm of contemporary society. You have talent. You are to use your talent, whatever it is, for the common good of all. You have been given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. You have been given life from the creator of the heavens and the earth. You have been given salvation from the grace of God. In turn, show your appreciation, by using your God given gifts for the glory of the Lord here on earth.