

### **God the Holy Spirit: The Gift that Keeps on Giving!**

*Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that 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.*

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.*

*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*

Have you ever heard of friendship bread? Someone gives you a zip lock bag of something that looks like pudding and some directions. It is actually a liquid yeast starter for bread. You could use it to bake a loaf of bread right away. Or, you can add a little flour and sugar and water every couple days for up to ten days. Then you can divide it up into several batches. You can bake one up into bread and give the rest away to friends. Hence the name, "Friendship Bread." It is like a chain letter. It could go on indefinitely and it all comes from one batch of starter.

Today we look at 1 Corinthians 12. From it we see that the Holy Spirit is the gift that keeps on giving. God gave us the Holy Spirit so we may say that Jesus is Lord. But the Spirit also gives us special, spiritual gifts to use for others.

#### *I. The gift of the Holy Spirit.*

We all say that Jesus is Lord. Many of us can't think of a day when we couldn't say it. We grew up in a home where we were taught it, where we heard his name uttered in many prayers, where we saw his picture on the wall. His name was one of the first names we learned to say. Others can remember the day when they didn't say Jesus is Lord. They were plugging along in life until a friend talked about Jesus. Who taught you to say that Jesus is Lord?

Paul tells us that it is God the Holy Spirit who teaches us to say Jesus is Lord. *"Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that 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."* Some members in this Corinthian congregation were formerly Jewish. They were waiting for the Messiah, but didn't know he came or who he was. Their fellow Jews in Jerusalem even cursed his name. Most people in the Corinthian congregation were Gentile adult converts. They all could remember a day when they followed pagan religions. As idol worshipers they were searching for guidance, but the idols were silent. No matter how hard they prayed, there was no answer. For them there was no release from their fears, no light for their darkness.

That was then; now they have seen the light. God the Holy Spirit led the gentiles in Corinth away from their worthless idols. He led the Jews to stop cursing Jesus. Now all of them, Jews and Gentiles, call him Lord. The Apostle Paul told them about Jesus, but it was God the Holy Spirit who gave them faith in Jesus. And that is why you and I are able to say Jesus is Lord. Let's say you go on a camping trip. You gather up some wood and pile it in the fire pit. How long do you have to stand there before it bursts into flames? You need a match to start it. Without God the Holy Spirit, the words of Scripture would be mere words, but the Holy Spirit comes through those words to spark and nourish faith. He is the match that starts the fire.

We love to take credit for things. You and I would love to take credit for faith, too, but really it is the Holy Spirit who gives us that faith. Yes, that humbles us, but it should make us feel relieved! This means that even the most stubborn of people can be won over by the Holy Spirit. This means that those of limited intelligence can believe. That means in Baptism the Spirit is more than capable of working saving faith in that baby. This means that when we speak to people about Jesus, the pressure is off as we simply share the Word and let the Spirit do his work.

I remember a present someone gave one of our kids long ago. It was both a coloring book and a box of crayons. What a nice idea. What good is a coloring book if you have no crayons to color with? God sent his Son Jesus born under law. He came to live a perfect life for us and to die for all our sins. But that by itself would do us no good if we don't believe. So God also gives us the faith to believe and be saved. He does that with the Holy Spirit through the Word and the Sacraments. Now we stop cursing Jesus. Now we say it and mean it that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

#### *II. The spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit.*

But the Holy Spirit is friendship bread. He is the gift that keeps on giving. *"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men."*

Spiritual gifts are abilities God the Holy Spirit gives to believers. The Holy Spirit gave some special gifts to some believers to kickstart the Church on earth. Imagine a new business opens up in town. They advertise it heavily with banners, ads, free donuts, special deals and so on. A year later all of these special things are gone. They did their job. The business is now doing fine on its own. God the Holy Spirit gave some special gifts to some people to do the same for the Church. He spoke directly to some like the prophets and apostles. He gave the ability to perform miracles once in a while. He even gave people the ability to speak in tongues or foreign languages. Now that the church is established, the Spirit doesn't need these gifts. We don't need direct revelation; we have the Bible which God said in Revelation people should not add to it or subtract from it.

So some of these gifts like healing and tongues were used for a short time. But the Holy Spirit still gives special gifts to believers, and not to a few like the prophets, but to all. They include serving, giving, leadership, administration, showing mercy, speaking gifts like knowledge, understanding, able to speak and teach

To help us better understand these gifts, let's look at what they are not. First, spiritual gifts are not essential to being a Christian. ***"Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved."*** Faith in Jesus as your Savior makes you a Christian. It is wrong to say you are not a Christian until you have displayed this spiritual gift or that. Second, spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents. All people, believers and unbelievers, are blessed by God with certain natural talents, but only believers have spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. Third, spiritual gifts are not intended to make you stand out so other people go "oooo" and "aaahhh." They are given to you to help others. ***"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*** Think about our choir. It is composed of basses, tenors, altos and sopranos. It would not sound good if one choir member belted out his or her part loudly. Sure people would know it is him or her, but it would ruin the sound. The choir sings together, each doing his or her part to make beautiful music.

Which tells us why he gave these gifts, so each believer can work for and with fellow believers, and why he gives some gifts to some and other gifts to others. There is an old fable of animals in the forest who organized a school. The curriculum included running, climbing, swimming, and flying, and they determined that each student needed to excel in all of these. The duck passed flying and swimming, but was poor in running. The rabbit was top of the class in running, but nearly drowned in swimming. The eagle took top honors in flying, but could not run. The raccoon climbed well but couldn't fly. Finally, all the animals realized that each had their own unique talents, and the whole forest was better off if each used his own gifts. All of us have been blessed with spiritual gifts. You will not excel in some but you are excellent in others.

But can it happen that the eagle gets jealous of the rabbit's running ability and the rabbit gets jealous of the raccoon's climbing ability and the raccoon gets jealous of the duck's swimming ability? That's what happened in the congregation in Corinth. Many in this congregation were not happy with the gifts the Holy Spirit gave them. But Paul reminds them that their gifts came from the Spirit and each is important. ***"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*** All gifts are important in his eyes and all come from the same Holy Spirit and all have the same purpose, for the common good. So don't be jealous of the gifts you don't have. Praise God for the gifts you do have and use them to the best of your ability.

Some say the days of the sign up sheet are over. It is true, it is hard sometimes to get volunteers for things. Maybe you are asked to do something, but you say, "I can't do it." Or is it, "I don't want to do it." Let the Holy Spirit and his gifts get you involved in one way or another. I always felt that in an ideal congregation each member is involved in one way or another. A congregation is just like an automobile, made up of so many parts, each working together to make the church run. The question isn't, "Do I have any spiritual gifts," but, "Which gifts do I have?"

So, if someone gave you friendship bread, would you use it for yourself or divide it up and give it to others? God has given us the Holy Spirit so we may believe and call Jesus Lord. But this same Holy Spirit gives each of us one or more spiritual gifts. Whatever gifts he has given you, don't hoard them; use them to his glory and for the common good of others because the Holy Spirit is the gift that keeps on giving, to you and through you. Amen.