

The Spirit’s Bounty

Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, and Sanctus Spiritus

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and our Helper, the Holy Spirit. Today’s sermon is titled “The Spirit’s Bounty.”

Today we celebrate “Whitsunday,” or as it better known as, the Holy Day of Pentecost. It is the day when, as the Greek name implies, 50 days after the first Easter, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and disciples of Christ. This event was the inauguration of the Church Age, the christening of the body of believers. Though He is, unfortunately and to our great shame, the least talked about person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is as important as God the Father and God the Son. That may confuse a non-Christian who would naturally assume that the person for whom the entire religion is named would be the “most important” but careful and proper exegesis on the doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are, as the Athanasian Creed (one of the three “Ecumenical Creeds” found in the Lutheran Book of Concord) says, “all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.” And so, let’s talk about the Holy Spirit and what He does for us.

The first, and I would argue the most important, thing that the Holy Spirit does for us is that He gives to us our faith in Christ. Now, I don’t mean to start off this sermon with fanning the flames of a debate that has lasted hundreds of years, if not, in some respect, thousands; nor do I intend to arrogantly suppose and propose that I alone have the correct answer in that debate. There are God-fearing and faithful Christians on the full spectrum of the Calvinism vs. Arminianism argument (not to imply, of course, that those two systems may be the only proposals worth considering). That is, of course, the debate on what agency we have in our salvation. I will spare you all from turning this ideally edifying sermon into a diatribe for either position and rather consider this passage in Scripture: [Ephesians 2:8](#), “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” Regardless of what position you hold, this quote states it plainly that faith is, somehow, a gift of God. If we couple this with the opening line of our Epistle Reading today, [1](#)

[Corinthians 12:3](#), “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit,” then we come to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is intricate in our salvific faith. The mechanics of and to what degree, I'll leave for Theologians to debate and parse out. But let it suffice today/tonight that the Holy Spirit works faith inside every believer. And without Him we would still be dead in our trespasses.

Speaking of which our trespasses, as I mentioned before in previous sermons, the Holy Spirit is uniquely responsible for our sanctification, or helping us in our attempts at holy living. Paul tells us in [2 Thessalonians 2:13](#) that we are to be saved “through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in truth.” And then in [Galatians 5:22-23](#), “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” As the Holy Spirit works inside of us, we produce these “fruit of the Spirit.” After years of walking in the Spirit, you should find yourself more abundantly with these virtues. You will, of course, still be lacking in some of them, or even many of them, but you ought to be much better off than when you started your walk. You can't judge yourself according to another believer in Christ, you can only compare yourself now from before you were saved. You can't look at a dear friend of yours and compare himself to yourself, thinking things like “Well so-and-so has only been a Christian for only half as long as me, and yet look at them, so much more mature in the faith than I.” C.S Lewis had a lot to say on this matter in his book *Mere Christianity*. First, he says that you never know the true starting materials. Before this person become a Christian, what was their temperament and how much did nature and nurture play what roles in that temperament? And then he says that the Christian claim is the following: any Christian will be “nicer” (showing more fruit of the Spirit) than if he wasn't a Christian; and any man who becomes a Christian will be nicer than he was before he became one. Which is to say, you will never be able to accurately judge yourself against someone else (or someone else to yet a third person). Your information is far too limited to truly understand how much work the Holy Spirit has done inside of someone. Perhaps that person you know as a saint was already, before their conversion, a very kind and gentle soul, and maybe that cantankerous person was, before their conversion, so much coarser in speech as to make even the Devil blush.

Now, in addition to the fruit of the Spirit, we are told about the gifts of the Spirit. These are called Spiritual Gifts and they are given out to every believer in Christ. Before going over some of the gifts Paul enumerated for us in our reading, let’s explore what he had to say about why we’re given gifts. The first hint of a ‘why’ is in [1 Corinthians 12:5](#), “and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;” Paul links the idea of gifts with service to the Lord. These gifts aren’t meant to be idle decoration, but rather they’re meant to be pressed into daily service and used for the Lord who gave them to you. Then Paul says in [1 Corinthians 12:7](#), “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” This is a direct answer to our question of ‘why?’ God gives us gifts “for the common good.” Your spiritual gift isn’t for your benefit or enrichment, but it is for the good of all believers—to do God’s will. If you only use your gift for your advantage, that’s as bad as, or perhaps even worse than, never using it. And lastly from our reading, Paul says in [1 Corinthians 12:12](#), “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” But Paul doesn’t end his train of thought there, he continues and spends the bulk of chapter 12 discussing what it means to be a member in Christ. I want to highlight his words in [1 Corinthians 12:17-19](#), “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?” God gives us gifts so that we can complement other believers and their gifts. This idea goes hand in hand with gifts being for the “common good.” Where one person is lacking, another will be given by the Spirit to supply.

With that being said, let’s look at some of the possible gifts that the Spirit gives to the members of the body of Christ. I want to preface this by saying the list Paul gives in our reading today is not, by any means, exhaustive. It would be presumptive and folly to pigeonhole the ability of the Holy Spirit to generate and give gifts as is needed for his church throughout the changing and varied years. First Paul mentions the gifts of the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge. They are related, though technically distinct. The latter is, well, a Spirit given ability to know and remember Scripture (or other items). It also includes an understanding of the things known. The former is a Spirit given ability to apply the Scripture to certain and individual circumstances, or even

Godly counsel in a more general sense. It makes sense to have a knowledge of the Scriptures before you give advice based on it. Next Paul mentions the spiritual gift of faith. As I mentioned before, every believer, by definition, has this gift to some degree or another—faith in Christ wouldn't be possible without it. However, there are some who have an extraordinary amount of faith in God and His promises. To people with this gift, times of doubt are few and far between and they can often see the forest for the trees in times of trials. It is important that those with this gift share their faith and that we listen gladly to them. We all, at times, need help to remember what we're hoping in and who we're hoping in. Then Paul mentions the gifts, plural, of healing. This includes both the God given talent of practicing medicine, be it a surgeon, general practitioner, nurse, or even a veterinarian, and the gift of supernatural miraculous healing. While I know of many more of the former, I affirm, commend, and pray for God to increase the number of, those with the latter. It goes without saying but continue to pray earnestly for those in the church universal who are sick and need healing. Even if you don't think you have the gift of healing, it doesn't hurt to try, and God loves and listens to our prayers regardless.

The next gift is a very large group of gifts, stated simply as "miracles." Miracles are acts that could only have been done by the power and workings of God. Our Bible is filled with God's elect performing miracles in His name. Now, I wouldn't consider myself in any way a Cessationist, but I will admit that, as I have seen it, this is quite the rare and withheld gift. The Holy Spirit is reserved in its allocation of those gifted with the power to work miracles. The miracles I have seen and know of almost entirely fall neatly under the definition of one of the other spiritual gifts described to us. But just because I haven't seen it in my mere four years as a Christian, doesn't mean the gift isn't out there, especially when you consider the chance that I have seen it but failed to recognize it. It should suffice to take the testimony of our brothers and sisters in Christ and believe that if God says He will give this gift to some, that some have, indeed, received it, and that it will be made manifest at the proper time for the common good.

Paul then talks about the gift of prophecy. In Scripture we see two types of prophecy. On one hand we have individuals like the prophets who would boldly declare what God had told them to say. On the other hand, we have people like

in the last narrative of Genesis, Pharaoh, or even Joseph himself, who are given prophetic dreams and those who can interpret them. Of these two types, the latter is more common in our age than the direct prophets of old. Paul mentions just two chapters later that prophesying ought to “build up the church.” Now, I warn a stern caution to anyone who thinks they have the gift of direct prophecy. It is a very serious and grave thing to claim to speak for God. You, like all teachers, will be held to a much stricter standard come Judgment Day. And, to those who encounter someone who claims to be a direct prophet, be like those Jews in Berea who examined the Scriptures daily to “see if these things were so.” Test their words against Scripture, God will never contradict God. Next, he talks about the gift of distinguishing between spirits. I mentioned this gift last week and noted that I was most certainly lacking in this gift. This is the ability of a Christian to sense, or discern, the spiritual world around us. We are surrounded by angels and demons vying for our souls and this world. There is a metaphysical Good and Evil, and God has given to some a distinct ability to sense which is which. This includes things like recognizing an angelic being (as [Hebrews 13:2](#) warns us we may even entertain angels without knowing it), recognizing a masquerading demon, demonic possession, or demonic oppression, or even simply knowing if someone is speaking and act out of a spirit of God or not. There is also an aspect of discerning truth about God and His word, though that also falls under the gifts of wisdom and knowledge.

Lastly, Paul mentions one of the most hotly debated gifts in our age, the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of interpreting tongues. This is more hotly debated than even the Calvinism vs. Arminianism debate. In our reading from the book of Acts, we saw that on Pentecost the people who were flooded by the Spirit spoke in many foreign tongues, yet all heard and understood in their mother tongue. This is, seemingly, quite different than what Paul refers to as “speaking in tongues” and it is very clearly different than what is known as today as “speaking in tongues.” Now unfortunately, my lack of experience in Christ limits my ability to talk about this gift. I haven’t seen anyone speak in tongues, I haven’t seen anyone interpret said tongues, nor do I know anyone who claims to have this gift or claims knows someone who has this gift. It is entirely foreign to me. So again, I will turn to Scripture for explanation. Paul seems to have some apprehension about this gift. He affirms its existence and use but hedges it by saying that he wants the church to prophesy more than

they speak in tongues because speaking in tongues “builds himself up” rather than compared to prophesying which, as already quoted, builds up the church. Paul mentions that when speaking in tongues “my spirit prays but”, he says, “my mind is unfruitful” if he is unable to interpret or be interpreted. He couches his praise of this gift strictly in the context of having it be understood by someone else. In fact, he says he would rather speak five words “with his mind” that instruct others than “ten thousand words” in tongue. He even warns that speaking in tongues is a sign for Christians only and that it could turn away outsiders and make the unbelievers think that everyone is, and I quote, “out of their minds.” There’s more than could be said on this gift, a lot has been said, considered, debated, and argue inside the church universal, but this sermon is already long enough.

I want to close with this thought. No single believer is more important or valuable because of their gifts. Someone who can demonstrate that they have every gift listed here is not, in any definition, better than a believer whose only gift is that of faith. The gifts which are, as the name implies, given freely, do not impart any value. All of our value as human beings come from the fact we are made in the image of our God and that He took on our form and died on the cross to purchase us at a price we could never merit nor pay back. So please, do not envy your brothers’ and sisters’ gifts, do not boast of your own gifts, nor despair your, apparent, lack of gifts. Even the most humble member works powerfully to do their Father’s will and they will be filled with glory beyond comprehension come the Parousia like every other fellow worker. And so, remember this verse from our reading today, [1 Corinthians 12:13](#), “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

Let us pray for our spiritual gifts and the wisdom, courage, and place to use them in service of the God who gave them to us and for the common good of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Amen, and amen.