

Guidelines on the Gifts

Today we are celebrating the baptism of Erica James and Zachary. Baptism is not an eternal fire insurance policy which we slip in the baby's diaper or a child's pocket when they aren't looking. No, baptism saves you like a life preserver saves you. It's there. Cling to it. As we cling to what it means for each of us to be baptized we will then more fully understand what it means to be part of the church living in the Spirit.

For the next five weeks we will be studying 1 Corinthians 12-14 chapters that spell out for us the implications of our baptism. As we turn to chapter twelve this morning, the main point of the whole chapter is found in verse 7: "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

There are four words I want us to look at.

The first is the phrase "each one." "To each one is given . . ." --that's you, all of you who are Christians and each of you individually. Second, the word "Spirit." "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit . . ." --that's God, the same God that brooded over the waters of Genesis 1:2 and joined in the creation of the universe. Third, the word "manifestation." "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit . . ." --that's the connection between you and God. God is manifested in your life. God, the Spirit, becomes visible through you. You are to show the Spirit. This is why we give out candles at baptism. They are to symbolize the light of the Spirit which is passed on to us so that we in turn can pass His light on to others. Those who are baptized are to live out their lives showing the Spirit. This is the central theme of these three chapters and is the theme at the heart of the Bible and the Christian life. Showing God, making God as seen as an invisible God can be seen.

Fourth, the phrase "common good." "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." That's a result of the manifestation of God the Spirit in the life of the church--good comes to people. It is good for people to see God. It is good for us to see the manifestations of God's Spirit in each other's lives.

Those who are serious about their baptism will live their lives in pursuit of God's glory (the manifestation of God) and in the pursuit of what is good for others. If you want to do good for people, you manifest God to them. If you want to manifest God and make him known, you do good to others, because that is the way he wills to

manifest himself, through you, through me. That is what he is like.

The church is the place where these two things come together. The world often tries to do good for each other. But they leave God out. And so they do some temporary good, but no ultimate, eternal good. And some Christians try to experience God's manifestations alone, but do not do it in the context of an interdependent body, and so they may have some ecstatic experiences, but they don't see God as he really is, because he is the kind of God who manifests himself for the common good, not for individualistic religious raptures.

So this verse (v. 7) is right at the heart of what it means to be Christians individually, and what it means to be the church corporately and therefore articulates clearly what it means to be baptized. So let's take these four words, one at a time, and see what the context tells us about them, and about what we should be at St. Augustine's.

1. "Each one"

Who are the "each ones" who are given the manifestation of the Spirit? For the answer we go back to verses 2 and 3:

2 You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Who then are the "each ones" in verse 7? They are those who once were pagans led away from Christ by idols--idols that have nothing to say. Dumb idols. Idols with no message, no good news. Martin Luther wrote: "Anything that one imagines of God apart from Christ is only useless thinking and vain idolatry." The Corinthians and most Canadians have all sorts of ideas about God that are wrong because they try to understand God apart from Christ. When we do this we are following dumb idols.

But all that changes when we come to know Jesus and the work of the Spirit. The "each ones" of verse 7 are people who have ceased treating Jesus as a curse to be rejected and now follow him as Lord. The key sentence is at the end of verse 3: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." The "each ones" in verse 7 are people who live under the lordship of Jesus--who aim to think the way he says to

think, and who aim to feel the way he says to feel and who aim to do what he says to do. These are the people who each have a manifestation of the Spirit, because they cannot live like this “except by the Holy Spirit.”

The reason I say that LIVING under the lordship of Jesus is the mark of “each one” rather than just saying “Jesus is Lord” is that Scripture and experience teach us that people can indeed say that Jesus is Lord without the special work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. For example in Matthew 7:22-23 Jesus says, “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

So you can see from those words that “practicing the lordship of Jesus” is the issue, not just saying that he is Lord. That’s what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 12:3b, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ (and mean it) except by the Holy Spirit.” So the “each ones” of verse 7 are those who are so being changed by the Holy Spirit that they say it and mean it and live it: Jesus is Lord. He runs my life. I consult with him. I don’t do what he forbids and I do what he commands. And when I fall short, I feel bad and I repent and seek his forgiveness and press on to trust him and obey him more and more fully.

All this comes from the Spirit. Living this way cannot be experienced except by the Spirit of God. The Spirit’s main business in the world is to glorify Jesus and make his lordship real in people’s lives. Jesus said in John 16:14, “When the Spirit of truth comes he will glorify me.” Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” It is the Spirit that changes us from one degree of glory to another in the likeness of Jesus.

That’s who the “each ones” are in verse 7--people who have set their face to be like Jesus and follow him as Lord because the Spirit is at work in them.

2. “The Spirit”

At verse 11 Paul writes: “All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.” This verse emphasizes two things. One is that there is one and the same Spirit behind all the varieties of gifts. “One and

the same Spirit works all these things.” Look at verses 4-6: 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. Then cast your eye down to verses 8 through 10: 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.

Paul clearly wants us to get the message: we are different in our gifts and ministries and effectiveness, yes, no doubt about it; but those differences are not owing to many Spirits, or to bad faith or to poor obedience. They are owing to “one and the same Spirit.” Variety is owing to the unity created by the Spirit when we are under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The other thing verse 11 emphasizes is that the Spirit is the one who decides who will have what gift and ministry and effectiveness. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.” The Spirit who is in us and around us is also over us. He fills us and embraces us and rules us. The Spirit is sovereign. That’s the point of verse 11: he does what he wills. The diversity of gifts, the diversity of ministries, the diversity of effectiveness is his doing. He is God. He is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. They are one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And they build and rule and guide the Church.

3. “Manifestation”

The reason the Spirit gives the gifts and the ministries and the effectiveness that he does is so that he will be manifested in the church. A manifestation is a showing. When you manifest something you bring it to light. You put it forward for people to see.

Now this is a corrective for a truth that we sometimes overstate. We say that the Spirit’s main ministry is to glorify Jesus. That’s implied in verse 3: “No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Spirit.” The “Spirit’s main business is to exalt the lordship of Jesus the Son of God.

But we go too far when we say that the third person of the Trinity is totally self-effacing--as if there were no honor and no glory belonging to the Holy Spirit himself. Verse 7 says that the gifts and ministries of believers in the church are manifestations of the Spirit. They are meant to show the Spirit. They are meant to make the Spirit visible. They are meant to make us admire and love and submit to the Spirit.

But let me stress something else about the Spirit here. What this verse is saying is that the work of the church is a thoroughly supernatural work. One of the greatest curses on a church is when its business is down to such a science that it manifestly runs by human effort alone. In that case the verse should read not: "To each one is given a manifestation of the Spirit," but: "From each one is offered a manifestation of human effort." If that's the main thing in a church, the efficiency of man is glorified, not the sovereignty of the Spirit and the Lordship of Jesus.

4. "The common good."

Finally, the Spirit is manifest for this purpose: the common good. The Spirit does not give gifts and ministries so that we can boast in our spiritual prowess. He gives gifts and ministries for two reasons: to manifest himself and to help us do good to each other in the church. Gifts are for the glory of God and the good of the church.

This is right at the heart of our understanding of Biblical theology: the pursuit of God's glory and the pursuit of what is good for us are not two separate pursuits. If you want to do good for people, you try to manifest God to them. If you want to manifest God and make him known for who he really is, you make it your aim to do good to others.

When we understand that verse seven underscores the guidelines by which the gifts of the Spirit are to be exercised we can then better understand the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the topic we will turn to next week.

As Zachary, James and Erica are now baptized may we hear the language of the baptismal liturgy in light of what Paul writes here so that together we may more fully live in the Holy Spirit and in the Body of Christ for the Common Good.