

“Is Variety the Spice of Life?”—1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Is Variety the Spice of Life?”, is 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 → *There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God Who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

It is hard to imagine a world without variety. Not only do we recognize the need for variety in our daily lives, we also cherish that variety so that we don't have to enjoy the same things as everyone around us. While my favorite vegetable is the mushy spinach from a can I am glad no one forces me to eat something like steak! Now aren't you glad “variety is the spice of life” and you don't have to eat my way? I've heard many people express their opinion that if everyone liked the same things, had the same interests, expressed the same thoughts and even acted the same way, it would be a dull and boring life indeed.

Variety is actually a blessing of God in many respects. Think of the creativity we enjoy because of the variety of foods, technological conveniences, hobbies, conversations and a host of other ascetic

disciplines which enhance our lives in so many ways, which, by the way, we actually take for granted everyday. And yet, because of our sin, variety can also become the springboard for harboring contempt, unforgiveness and hatred for others because they don't think, act, feel or behave like us. Acting out of sinful, selfish, self-righteousness toward others thwarts the blessings which God's various gifts can bring. It may even cause one to ask: "Is variety really the spice of life?"

Our text speaks about the importance of variety when it comes to serving our Lord Jesus Christ as His Church in the world. Paul gives us teaching about the importance of variety in the midst of some specific "constants" in our lives. While we are all unique and different in many ways, the Holy Spirit reveals to us in Scripture that we share absolute consistencies as well.

Romans 3:22-23 says *there is no distinction: for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Thus, we all stand before our holy God helpless to justify our sinful behaviors in His sight. Even though sin (i.e. disobeying God's commands) is sin in His sight no matter what kind of trespass it is, satan accuses you as if you're the worst of all sinners with sins so unique to you that no one understands. Thus, even though the variety of sins you commit produce various consequences, we all share the same guilt before God. There is no difference in God's sight when it comes to our sins.

However, you can be thankful for another absolute constant in life that we share. God is faithful as the great Promise Keeper. Yahweh kept reminding His sinful, rebellious people: *I the LORD do not change; therefore you . . . are not consumed* (cf. Malachi 3:6) . . . by His just anger upon their sins. In keeping His promise to provide for our justification, forgiveness and righteousness before Him, He sent Jesus to live and die on our behalf, taking all our sin upon Himself so we all can have the **same** forgiveness of all our various sins. Thus, Romans 3:24 goes on to say that we are **all** *justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*. This forgiveness is constantly held out to all sinners because *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*. (cf. Hebrews 13:8)

In the midst of our unique personalities, behaviors, different circumstances and spiritual battles, the Holy Spirit gifts Christians to bring the Gospel of Jesus to others. Verse 4 of our text says: *There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit*. While he lists various gifts of the Spirit in this chapter (cf. verses 8-10,28), the focus is not on what gift you possess. It is interesting how people get mis-focused, trying to “discover” their spiritual gift(s). This is self-centered. The focus of our text is on the Triune God’s working His work in the varied lives of people by providing the needed gift(s) to bring Christ to bear upon their life at a given moment. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says that *all these gifts are empowered by*

*one and the same Spirit, Who apportions to each one individually as **He wills***. They are not “discovered,” grasped or created by you somehow. They are **given**.

According to verse 7 of our text, *to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good*. You have received the Holy Spirit so that you can believe in Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:12;12:3) and serve *the common good* of bringing the Person & Work of Jesus to bear on peoples’ varied lives. This seems to be the focus of verse 5 in our text which say: *there are varieties of service, but the same Lord*. “Lord” is usually used in the New Testament as a reference to Jesus in keeping with the Church’s first creed: “Jesus is Lord!” Notice, *varieties of service* are spoken of specifically in connection with Jesus.

What was Jesus’ earthly ministry all about? It was a life of humbling Himself, entering peoples lives as they struggled with sin, serving your needs by His death to buy you back from the power of sin and the devil. It was a life of serving us sinners by serving His Father’s desire for a perfect relationship with us eternally. The Holy Spirit gives His various gifts not so that you can use them but rather **so that He can use them to serve God’s purpose, by serving others through His people bringing Christ to them!** Jesus stated His servant purpose in Mark 10:45 → *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,*

and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Unfortunately, as happens so often amongst sinners, Paul had to rebuke the Corinthian Christians because they became mis-focused in their service in the congregation. Verse 6 of our text says: *There are varieties of activities, but it is the same God Who empowers them all in everyone.* Satan and your own sinful natures strive to cause dissension amongst you to produce contempt, hatred and a host of other sins in an effort to thwart the Spirit's work in your midst. This happens when the focus is taken off of the Giver—*the same God Who empowers them all in everyone*—and places the focus on the gift.

In the Corinthian congregation it led to people negating their own validity as baptized members of the congregation in their own variety of self-righteousness (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:15-20). (i.e. "I guess I really don't belong because I don't have this or that gift . . . or whatever.") On the other hand, it led some people to negate the validity of other members in the congregation by their own variety of self-righteousness (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:21-26). (i.e. "You don't really belong because you don't have this or that gift . . . or whatever.") The service of Christ's people in Christ's Church gets distorted when you make it about yourself. It is about God's power, Jesus' service and the Spirit's gifts to bring the forgiveness of sins in Christ into the varied lives of **all** people.

Thus, in one sense, variety is the spice of life in the Christian Church.

In the midst of the variety of your talents and abilities the Holy Spirit provides His spiritual gifts so you can work together to serve Jesus and His unique forgiveness of sins to others. They are “charismata”—gifts of **grace** (i.e. not given you upon the basis of your working, talents or abilities). They are based on **grace** (i.e. given you as the Spirit determines, not as you determine in some manner). They are given to administer God’s **grace** (i.e. His unconditional love and favor displayed specifically in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) to sinners.

Oh . . . and speaking of spices . . . the various gifts of the Holy Spirit can actually bring the “spice” of life eternal to others. Jesus describe us Christians in Matthew 5:13 as *the salt of the earth*. He tells you to *have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another* (cf. Mark 9:50). Paul tells you to *let your speech always be **gracious**, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*. The Holy Spirit gifts Christians with a variety of gifts so that they can bring the “salt spice” of Life eternal in the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others. But then . . . that’s for another sermon. Amen.

Let’s turn to page 311 in our hymnals and pray together the prayer entitled: “Grace to use our gifts.”

Lord God Almighty, even as You bless Your servants with various and unique gifts of the Holy Spirit, continue to grant

**us grace to use them always to Your honor and glory;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

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