

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11.

Now, concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that when ye were Gentiles ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led. Wherefore I make known unto you, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema [accursed], and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal. For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit: to another faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discernings of spirits: to another divers kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will.

SPIRITUAL COUNSEL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

1. This epistle selection treats of spiritual things, things which chiefly pertain to the office of the ministry and concern the Church authorities. Paul instructs how those in office should employ their gifts for the benefit of one another and thus further the unity and advancement of the Churches. Inharmony is a deplorable offense in the case of Christians, putting them in the worst possible light, and making it impossible for them to steer clear of factions. Divisions are an offense to the world's wisest and best, who cry out, "If the Christians' doctrine were true, they would preserve unity among themselves, but as it is they envy and slander and devour one another." For, though the world carries its own great beam in its eye, it cannot refrain from judging us for our mote, and thus exalting itself as if it were pure and beautiful.

PERFECT HARMONY NOT TO BE EXPECTED

2. Well, we cannot altogether prevent inharmony in the Church. Paul says (1 Corinthians 11:19), "For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you." Wherever the Word of God has a foothold, there the devil will

be. By the agency of his factions he will always build his taverns and kitchens beside God's house. So he did at first, in Paradise. In the family of Adam he entrenched himself, establishing there his church. And such has been his practice ever since, and doubtless will ever be. He who takes offense at differences in the Church, who when he sees any inharmony at once concludes there is no Church there, will in the end miss both the Church and Christ. You will never find any congregation of such purity that all its members are unanimous on every point of belief and teaching and all live in perfect harmony.

3. Paul had experience in this matter in the case of the beautiful and famed Church at Corinth in Achaia, which he himself planted and where he taught two years. Soon after his departure they began to disagree about their preachers and to attach themselves to certain ones – some to Paul, some to Peter, some to Apollos. Though these had all taught correctly, though they had been unanimous in their doctrine, yet men would cleave to a certain one because he was more or differently gifted than the others, could speak better, or was more attractive in personal appearance. And among the ministers of the Church, if one had a special gift or office, he thought he ought to be a little better and a little greater than the others. Necessarily, from such division and inharmony, grew hatred, strife and jealousy, resulting in great injury and disorder to the Church.

4. We must, then, so far as possible, guard against this fatal evil, though we cannot altogether keep it out of the Church. Were we to offer no resistance at all, the devil would seize all authority and bring every element into discord. But when we resist Satan, God will continue to extend his grace and favor, and some fruit and improvement will follow. Even were it not possible for us to accomplish anything, yet as faithful ministers we must not keep silent if we would not be regarded indolent hirelings who flee when the wolf comes. See John 10:12.

5. Such is the tenor of this text from Paul. He begins by preaching on spiritual gifts and admonishing the Corinthians how to conduct themselves in respect to them. In proportion to the greatness and excellence of the gifts are flesh and blood inclined to discord and to coveting personal honor. Let one have a good understanding of the Scriptures and be able to explain them, or let him have the power to work miracles, and he will soon begin to have an extravagantly good opinion of himself, deeming himself worthy the honor of all men, desiring the multitude to follow only him, and positively refusing to regard anyone his equal. He will seek to create something new in doctrine, to change the old order, as if he could introduce something better than others, who must be infinitely below him or at least his inferiors.

6. The same thing has taken place in our day – and will continue to take place – with respect to the Gospel. But through the grace of God that Gospel is brought to light again, and rightly instructs and harmonizes the people. The devil, unable to rest, had to rouse his factious rabble, his selfish souls, who desired the name of being superior and inspired people, a people who could preach, write and explain the Scriptures better than others; for they had learned a little from us. They conceded that the Gospel had indeed made a beginning, had somewhat purified ecclesiastical doctrine, but claimed it had not gone far enough; it was

necessary that greater improvement be made – Church doctrine must be brought to far greater perfection. But as Paul says (1 Corinthians 3:11), they could, with their doctrine, lay no other foundation, could preach no other Christ, than the Christ of the Gospel. Nevertheless, they pretended to teach something better and higher. They hindered and perverted the true doctrine. Their work could not be called building up the faith, but was rather breaking up and destroying its foundation and leading the people back into error and blindness. So Paul begins his admonition in these words: *“Ye know that when ye were Gentiles ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led.”*

7. Paul reminds the Corinthians of their manner of life before they became Christians, for he would have them pause to think that their gifts, past and present, are not of their own procuring, nor are any gifts bestowed upon them because of merit on their part. It is his intent to restrain them from pride in their gifts and from disputations concerning them; to keep them from divisions and from pretending to teach and introduce into the Church something new and better. But at the same time he deals a blow to those who take offense at inharmony among Christians.

8. *“Recall, all of you,”* Paul would say, *“your manner of life before you came to Christ. What were you? Mere darkened heathen, having no knowledge of God but suffering yourselves blindly to be led by anyone who should say aught to you of God. All your devotion was but a discordant worship. Each one – even the child in the cradle, the infant at the mother’s breast – must find his own idol wherever he might turn.”* St. Augustine tells us that the city of Rome alone had more than four hundred gods, and that it erected a church for all the gods in the world, which building still stands – the Pantheon. *“These superstitions,”* Paul’s word imply, *“In return for your devotion you obtained only the privilege of being a blind, wretched, divided, miserable people, unable to fortify yourselves against any error, and allowing yourselves to be distracted by the advocate of any doctrine. You were like a flock of helpless sheep scattered by wolves.”*

9. *“But now you have been turned from that manifold idolatry to the one true worship and have been enlightened by God’s Word. More than that, in Christ have been bestowed upon you great and glorious gifts – discerning of the Scriptures, diversities of tongues, power to work miracles – things impossible to the world. It is unmistakably evident that you embrace the true God, who does not, like dumb idols, leave you to wander in the error of your own speculations, uncounseled by the Word; a living God, who speaks to you that you may know what to expect from him, and works among you publicly and visibly. “Therefore, it is not for you to make divisions among yourselves after the manner of the heathen as you see in the great Babel confusion and divisions of the world, where no one agrees with another, where one runs to this his idol and another to that, each claiming superiority for his own. Knowing that you all embrace the one true God and his Word, you are to hold together in one faith and one mind, not disagreeing among yourselves as if you had a variety of gods, of faiths, of baptisms, spirits and salvations.”*

CAVILERS THEMSELVES LED ASTRAY

10. Paul speaks with particular plainness to the faultfinding and insolent cavilers against Christians and to other factious leaders when he says, “Ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led.” This class peremptorily judge and criticise the life and doctrine of the Church because they see therein a measure of defects, and even some divisions and disagreements; notwithstanding the fact is plainly evident to them that the Church possesses the Word of God in purity, a knowledge of Christ, an illumined understanding of God’s will and his grace, and true comfort for all distress of conscience, and that, in addition to all these, the Holy Spirit manifestly operates with them. At the same time, these same uncalled-for and self-constituted critics would never have been able to say anything about the Christian religion had they not witnessed that religion in the little company of Christians who have the Word of God and the Spirit’s gifts.

11. These fault-finders were individuals who, undoubtedly to a greater extent than others, suffered themselves to be blindly led in whatever way was pointed out, and who gave credence to what was taught and preached to them concerning the way to serve God, yet who all the time were but worshipers of dumb idols, possessing not the Word of God and having no witness to the truth of their faith and their works. Each believed and followed the devices of his own imagination or the popular choice. No man was able to teach anything certain and steadfast, anything to give the heart satisfaction and perfect security. They continually changed from one thing to another, accepting every new thing presented as real worship and true doctrine.

12. And the world, ever from the beginning, has had naught but dumb idols in the countless forms of worship offered to the numerous gods – gods which never existed, but of which images were made and to which divine honors were shown. Worship has been rendered to the mere names of misfortune, disaster and disease, of all sorts; yes, to insects, and to garlic and onions even. Yet, in the practice of all this idolatry, supposed to be evidence of great holiness, each one sacrificing to the idol of his choice – in it all no one could have the assurance of being heard and answered by his god. Men had no word or sign of the divine will or work; they possessed naught but a vain dream and delusion of the human imagination; man devised and made his own idols.

13. And what did we under the papacy but walk blindly? We suffered ourselves to be led just as we were directed by the names of God and the saints. I was myself a pious monk and priest, holding mass daily, wherein I worshipped St. Barbara, St. Anna, St. Christopher and others – more saints than the calendar mentions, some of whom no one knew anything about. I had no knowledge of Christ, I knew not why I should find comfort in him nor what I should expect of him. I was as much afraid of him as of the devil himself, regarding him more a stern Judge than a Savior. How many shameful pilgrimages were made to dead idols of wood and stone, images of Mary and of the saints! How many were the pilgrimages to the graves of the dead, and to bones called “holy relics”! These relics were mere open deception,

devised by shameless impostors; yet such worship was established by popes and bishops, and indulgences granted therefor.

14. How many new saints, new brotherhoods, new psalms to Mary, and new rosaries and crowns did the monks daily invent! In fact, everything each individual monk might dream of had to be a special form of worship, and no one inquired whether or not it was at all authorized by God's Word. When we had done all, we were uncertain that we had pleased God. What was this sort of worship but a worship of dumb idols in the place of the living God – idols which could not talk with us and could not give any definite information or comfort, but left the people fettered and ruined with eternal doubts?

FAITH IN THE ONE CHRIST PRODUCTIVE OF UNITY

15. But Christians, as Paul says, have not a dead and dumb god, for which the Lord be praised! Nor will we countenance such idols. We have a living, speaking God, who gives us his infallible Word. We know how he is disposed toward us and what we may expect from him; namely: through faith in Christ we have forgiveness of sins and are his beloved children; and as evidence of acceptance with God, we have baptism and the Holy Supper, the office and gifts of the Holy Spirit, by which he works in our hearts. We know that in the faith of Christ our works and lives are pleasing to God, and that he will hear and help when in our distress and weakness we cry unto him.

16. Where this confidence obtains, where hearts enjoy such faith, there will be unity in the Church; for verily no one then will allow himself to be led into the manifold doctrines of insensible idols. But dissensions, sects and divisions are sure signs that the true doctrine is either ignored or misunderstood, men thus being left in a condition to be “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,” as Paul says (Eph 4, 14); which is indisputably the case with these same schismatics who condemn the Church and her doctrines because of some discordant ones. The schismatics show by their very instability that they do not embrace the true, uniform and established doctrine, nor can exhibit any substitute for it. They refuse to see that in cases where the Christian doctrine does not obtain, there is only blindness, distraction and confusion, and warring factions and sects, none agreeing with another, each claiming to be better than the other. Numerous have been the sects of monks, and of saints of the Pope and his god the devil, no two of which agreed. Each class regarded its own whims and speculations, and claimed to be holier than the others. The Pope, however, gave validity to them all, granting great indulgence to these factious fraternities. And I am not saying anything of other discords in the papacy – among the monasteries and in the parishes, and between these and the cloisters everywhere, perpetual quarreling, rioting and bitter contention. Such is inevitably the case when righteousness and divine worship are made to consist in external selfdevised works and forms, for then each individual, pleased with his own ideas, thinks his way right; under such circumstances, there can never be unanimity of opinion as to what is right and the best.

17. *“From these numerous sources of disunion and idolatry,”* Paul would say to the Corinthians, “you are now delivered. You know you embrace the real Word of God, the true

faith. You worship one God, one Lord, and enjoy the same grace, the same Spirit, the same salvation. You need not seek other forms and ceremonies as essential to salvation – wearing a white or a gray cowl, refraining from this or that food, forbearing to touch certain things. No diversity of external service, of persons, offices and conditions, destroys the unity in Christ. “But take heed to continue in unity, to hold fast to it. Unquestionably, you should be made wiser by the experience you have had with error; in the future you ought to be prudent, and watchful against being allured from the unity of this settled mind and true faith into your former blindness again. But so it will certainly befall you if you forget such grace and seek your own honor and praise more than the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and his gifts, and come to despise one another and to conduct yourselves as if you had many and not the same God, the same Christ, the same Spirit. God’s gifts cannot be different from, but must be one with his nature, and hence he cannot give to one a better Gospel or a different baptism from that given another.” In short, Paul teaches there must be unity in Christ, otherwise we have no Christ, no God and Holy Spirit, no grace nor salvation; as the next verse emphasizes.

“Wherefore I make known unto you that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema [calleth Jesus accursed]; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit.”

18. *“Why make divisions and differences,” Paul inquires, “in the doctrine and faith of the Church, which rests wholly upon the one Christ? In him you are to be one if you are Christians at all; you must harmoniously praise him, according to your individual gifts. No one can possibly possess the Holy Spirit if he does not regard Christ as the Lord, much less if he call him accursed. Destroy the foundation and you destroy all; there will be no God, no Spirit, and all your claims, teaching and works are naught. You must recognize and be governed by the fact that either Christ must be received and believed in as the one true Lord, and praised and glorified as such, or else he will be cursed; between these alternatives is no medium.”*

THE SPIRIT, THE TEST OF THE TRUE TEACHER.

It is easy, then, to judge the doctrine of every official teacher of the Christian Church. No one need resort to faction, no one need gaze hither and thither in uncertainty and hesitate as to which gift or which person is most to be regarded. We are to make the doctrine of this verse the standard and authority as to what and how we preach concerning Christ. He who speaks by inspiration of the Holy Spirit certainly will not curse Christ; he will glorify and praise him. So doing, he surely will not teach error, or give occasion for divisions. If his teaching is not to the glory of God, you may safely conclude that he is not true, not inspired by the Holy Spirit.

19. Thus Paul rejects the glorying and boasting of the sects over their offices and gifts – they who pretend to be filled with the Spirit and to teach the people correctly, and who make out that Paul and other teachers are of no consequence. Themselves the chief of apostles, the people must hear them and accept their baptism. More than that, they demand a higher attainment in the Spirit for Gospel ministers, deeming faith, the Sacrament and the outward

office not sufficient. But Paul says: “Boast as you will about the great measure of the Spirit you possess, it is certain that the Spirit-inspired teacher will not curse Christ.” In other words, such boasting of the Spirit will not answer the purpose. What you believe and teach concerning Christ must receive attention. You are either reproaching and cursing Jesus, or praising him and owning him your Lord. If your preaching and teaching fail to point to Christ, something else being offered, and you nevertheless boast of the Spirit, you are already judged: the spirit you boast is not the Holy Spirit, not the true Spirit, but a false one. To it we are not to listen. Rather we are to condemn it to the abyss of hell, as Paul declares (Galatians 1:8), saying: *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.”*

20. When Paul here speaks of calling Jesus accursed, he does not only have reference to openly blaspheming or cursing Christ’s name or person after the manner of heathen and of ungodly Jews; with them Paul has nothing to do here, nor are the Corinthians supposed to be of that character. Paul refers rather to the Christian who, though boasting of the Holy Spirit, does not preach Christ as the ground of our salvation as he should, but, neglecting this truth, points the soul away to something else, pretending that this substitute is of the Holy Spirit and is something better and more essential than the common doctrine of the Gospel. All such teachers are in reality simply guilty of condemning, reproaching and cursing Christ, though themselves bearing and boasting that name. To slight Christ’s Word and ministry, and exalt in their stead other things as mediums for obtaining the Holy Spirit and eternal life, or at least as being equally efficacious and essential – what is this but scorning Christ and making him of no consequence? Indeed, according to Hebrews 6:6 and 10:29, it is crucifying the Son of God afresh, and treading under foot his blood.

21. Christ himself explains the office and ministry of the Holy Spirit – what he is to teach in the Church – saying (John 15:26), “He shall bear witness of me.” Again (John 16:14): “He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.” The tongue of a minister of Christ – the language he employs – must be of that simplicity which preaches naught but Christ. If he is to testify of the Savior and glorify him, he cannot present other things whereby Christ would be ignored and robbed of his glory. He who does so, certainly is not inspired by the Holy Spirit, even though he possess great gifts and be called a teacher, a bishop, a pope, a council, an apostle even – yes, an angel from heaven. There were among the Corinthians some who thus neglected to preach only Christ, and presented instead the apostles, making choice of them – one Cephas, another Apollos and a third Paul. And just so our monks have done. They have in a way highly extolled Jesus, have in words honored and worshiped his name and used it to clothe all their lying nonsense and idolatry. For instance, they exalt Mary as the mother of Jesus and Anna as his grandmother. But they have thus torn men’s hearts away from Christ, turning over to Mary and the saints the honor due him alone, and teaching the people to invoke these as mediators and intercessors having power to protect us in the hour of death. This is substituting dumb idols for Christ. No saint has ever taught such things; still less does the Word of God enjoin them. Thus the monks really curse and insult Christ.

22. The Pope, throughout his whole administration, has been guilty of such insult to Christ, notwithstanding his boast that his kingdom represents the Christian Church, that he truly possesses the Holy Spirit and that his decrees and ordinances must be respected. Nothing can dissuade the Papists from their practice. They ever boast of being led by the Spirit, yet their vaunting is mere malediction, not only of Christ in person, but of his Word and his sacraments. For they openly condemn, and denounce as heresy, the doctrine of the Gospel, which Gospel assures us that to Christ alone we owe the unmerited forgiveness of our sins; they condemn also the use of the sacraments according to Christ's command and institution. And they destroy the people who thus offend them. The fact is, the Pope has in our doctrine nothing to curse but Jesus Christ, its foundation and principle, expressed by his Word and sacraments. The same is true of other factions – the Anabaptists and similar sects. What else do they but slander baptism and the Lord's Supper when they pretend that the external Word and outward sacraments do not benefit the soul, that the Spirit alone can do that? But in these matters you have Paul's sure word of judgment to strengthen your faith. You may be assured that the factions of the Pope and other sects are not, as they boast, the Church of Christ, but accursed schisms of the devil. The true Church, the righteous bride of Christ, certainly will not curse him nor persecute his Word. Let no one be moved by hearing men loudly boast about Christ after the manner of the false apostles who called themselves disciples of the true apostles of Jesus, and claimed that certain of their number had even seen Christ in person. The Savior himself warns us against this class when he says (Matthew 25:5,24), *"Many shall come in my name.. and shall show wonders"*; and (Matthew 7:21), *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."*

HOLY SPIRIT ALONE GIVES ASSURANCE

23. Paul has the same thought here when he says, *"No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit."* To call Jesus "Lord" is to confess one's self his servant and to seek his honor alone; to act as his messenger or the bearer of his Word and command. Paul's reference here is chiefly to the office representative of Christ and bearing his Word. Where the office answers these conditions and points to Christ as the Lord, it is truly the message of the Holy Spirit, even though the occupant of the office does not in his own person possess the Spirit; the office itself is essentially the Holy Spirit. Hypocrisy and invention have no place here. One must proceed in sincerity if he would be certain he is Christ's minister, or apostle, and really handles his Word. Only the inspiration of the Holy Spirit can give one this assurance.

24. All Christians – each in his own work or sphere – equally may call Christ "Lord." One may be assured he serves Christ if he can call him "Lord," for only by the Holy Spirit is he enabled to do that. Let him try for a single day – from morning until evening – whether or no he can truly say at all times that he is the servant of God and of Christ in what he does. When delivering a sermon or listening to one, when baptizing a child or bringing a child to baptism, when pursuing your daily home duties, ask yourself if the act is attended by such faith that you can, without misgiving and not hypocritically nor mechanically, boast – and if necessary die by your word – that you serve and please Christ therein. This is calling Christ "Lord." Unquestionably you will often feel your heart doubting and trembling over the matter.

25. In the papacy we were altogether hindered from feeling thus confident – yes, frightened from it by accursed scepticism. No one could – no one dared – say, “I know I am a servant, a bondsman, of Christ, and that my conduct pleases him.” Flesh and blood are too weak to obtain this glorious confidence; the Holy Spirit is essential. Reason and our own hearts cry out in protest: *“Alas, I am far too evil and unworthy! How could I be proud and presumptuous enough to boast myself the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ? I might if I were as holy as St. Peter, St. Paul and others.”*

26. I used often to wonder that St. Ambrose was so bold as, in his letters, to call himself a servant of Jesus Christ. I supposed we all ought to be terrified at thoughts of this kind, and that none but the apostles might boast of such honor. But the fact is, we must all say to Christ: “Thou art my Lord and I am thy servant; for I believe on thee and aspire to be with thee and all the faithful and to possess thy Word and Sacrament.” Otherwise Christ will not acknowledge us.

CHRISTIANS TO GIVE ALL GLORY TO GOD

It is written (Matthew 4:10) – indeed, it is the first commandment – “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” There Christ requires of us, under the penalty of forfeiting eternal life, to honor him as our Lord and so to regulate our lives that we shall know we serve him. Peter also teaches (1 Peter 4:11) that all the Christian’s words and deeds should be regarded not as his own, but as God’s. The word and the act are to be of the ability which God gives, that in it all God may be glorified. Of necessity this condition can obtain only through the Holy Spirit.

27. In this point – the glorification of Christ – do the true Christians distinguish themselves from false Christians, hypocrites and factious spirits, who likewise triumphantly boast of the Spirit and of their divine office. But the vanity of their boasting is evident from the fact that they do not hold to the doctrine that glorifies Christ, but preach that which leads to other evils and deceives; yes, which condemns and persecutes the right doctrine and the true faith of Christ. Further evidence of the emptiness of their boasting is apparent in the fact that they have no conscious testimony that they serve Christ, nor can their followers give assurance on the same point. You have here the clear sentence of Paul declaring this class devoid of the Holy Spirit and thus separated from the true Church and from Christians. He exhorts us to be on our guard against them, and would bring Christians together in one faith and under one Lord and Spirit. Now he teaches how to employ rightly the manifold gifts of a united Church for the general benefit of its members.

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.”

28. “In former time, when you were heathen, you followed many kinds of idolatrous worship, many doctrines and spirits; but it was only a divided religion, and representative of blindness and error. Now, however, you possess various beautiful divine gifts and offices. These are mutually related and all emanate, not from man’s reason or faculties, but from the one true God. They are his work – the expression of his power. Notwithstanding the dissimilarity of gifts, offices and works, of a certain order in one and otherwise in another,

many and few, great and small, weak and strong – notwithstanding all, we are not to divide the Spirit, God and faith; we are not to create factions, exalting this individual or that one solely because of his gifts, and despising others. All gifts are direct from one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and to serve the same purpose – to bring men to the knowledge of the one God and to build up the Church in the unity of faith. Therefore, you are united in the one doctrine, your object being to serve God and the Church in a harmonious way.” This verse is briefly the substance of all that follows in the text.

THE TRINITY

29. Paul presents three different points: “Diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit;” “diversities of administrations, and the same Lord;” “diversities of workings, but the same God.” Unquestionably, Paul touches the article of faith concerning the Trinity, or three persons in the Divine Essence, and shows that both Christ and the Holy Spirit are true God and yet different in person from the Father and from each other. He teaches the same elsewhere (1 Corinthians 8:5-6), saying: “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him.”

30. In the text before us, the apostle likewise distinguishes the three – one God, one Lord, one Spirit. He assigns to each the particular operation whereby he manifests himself. One is God the Father, and from him as the origin and first person emanates all power. Another is the Lord, Christ the Son of God, who as the head of the Church appoints all offices. The third is the Spirit, who produces and dispenses all gifts in the Church. Yet all three are of one divine, almighty and eternal essence. They are of the same name, and are truly one since God must be an indivisible essence. To each individual is attributed only the characteristics of the Divine Majesty. As he who is the source of all operative power in the Church and in the entire creation is true God; so also must the Lord who appoints all offices, and the Spirit who confers all gifts, be true God. No creature is able to impart spiritual offices and gifts; that is impossible to any but God. These three – God, Lord and Spirit – are not Gods of unlike nature, but one in divine essence. The Lord is no other God than God the Father; and the Spirit is none other than God and the Lord. But more on this topic elsewhere.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS SPECIFIED

31. The names and nature of the spiritual gifts, the apostle here specifies. He names wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, power to discern spirits, capacity to speak with tongues and to interpret, extraordinary gifts of faith, and power to work miracles. “The word of wisdom” is the doctrine which teaches a knowledge of God, revealing his will, counsel and design. It embraces every article of belief and justification. The world knows nothing of this loftiest, most exalted gift of the Spirit.

THE WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

The “word of knowledge” also teaches of the outward life and interests of the Christian: how we are to conduct ourselves toward all others, making a profitable use of the Gospel doctrine

according as necessity of time and person demands; it teaches us the wisest course toward the weak and the strong, the timid and the obstinate.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

The gift of prophecy is the ability to rightly interpret and explain the Scriptures, and powerfully to reveal therefrom the doctrine of faith and the overthrow of false doctrine. The gift of prophecy includes, further, the ability to employ the Scriptures for admonition and reproof, for imparting strength and comfort, by pointing out, on the one hand, the certainty of future indignation, vengeance and punishment for the unbelieving and disobedient, and on the other hand presenting divine aid and reward to godly believers. Thus did the prophets with the Word of God, both the Law and the promises.

THE GIFT OF FAITH

32. Paul is making mention of gifts not common to all. Only to certain ones are they given, and the gifts in themselves are unlike. "To another faith," he says, "to another workings of miracles, and to another prophecy." In "faith" here the reference is not to ordinary faith in Christ which brings justification before God and forgiveness of sin; such faith is essentially the property of every Christian, even if they do not possess the particular gifts here enumerated. Paul is speaking of a particular virtue or power of the Spirit operating in the Church, whereby certain ones can effect great and glorious things by reason of their remarkable and confident courage; as instanced in Paul's words later on (1 Corinthians 13:2), "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains." To work such wonders, a very strong and sure faith is certainly necessary. An unwavering, vigorous, courageous faith may accomplish a special work in the name and power of Christ although the worker may not himself be truly repentant nor possess the right kind of faith to secure forgiveness of sins and grace in Christ. He may be a hypocrite, a false saint. Christ says (Matthew 7:22), "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works?" It is true that such gifts are exercised, such works performed, in the name of Christ, and that the gifts are granted to none but individuals in the Church of Christ, and yet the possessor may not be altogether righteous, may even be a false Christian. For the effects wrought do not emanate from the individual but from the office he represents, being the operation of the Spirit given in behalf of the Church. Thus, as occupants of the office and by virtue of the Church, these persons perform many and great works, benefiting not themselves but others.

33. Paul says of all these, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit," by way of admonishing us against creating sects. The Spirit is equally effective through him whose gifts are few and less significant and through him of remarkable gifts. And as with gifts, so it is with workings and ministrations.

MEANING OF "WORKINGS"

34. The term "workings," or operations, has reference to remarkable works of God wrought through certain individuals in an exceptional way. For instance, he grants to Paul a ministerial office of unusual influence: Paul is permitted to convert more souls than other

apostles, to perform more wonders and accomplish more. He says himself (1 Corinthians 15:10) that by the grace of God he labored more abundantly than all.

MEANING OF “ADMINISTRATIONS”

35. The meaning of “administrations” is easily apparent. Office is an ordained and essential feature of every government. It represents various duties imposed and commanded by sovereign authority. It may have reference to the duties enjoined upon a society collectively, in the service of others. There are various offices in the Church; for instance, one individual is an apostle, another an evangelist, another a teacher, as Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:11. And as he says in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and also hints in this text, the office of one is to read the Scriptures in different languages, of another to interpret and explain. So it was ordained in the Church at that time, and similarly today are ordained certain offices – of pastors, preachers, deacons or priests, their duties being to hear confessions, to administer the Sacrament, and so on.

36. Not every Christian is obliged, nor is able, to execute such duties; only upon certain ones are they enjoined. “Administrations” differ from what Paul terms “workings” and gifts. There have ever been many Christians who, though possessing the Holy Spirit, were not “administrators;” for instance, virgins and wives – Agnes Anastasia and others – and martyrs, many of whom wrought miracles and had other gifts. True, both gifts and workings are imparted chiefly for the execution of Christian duties. It is essential here, especially in the superior office of preaching, that the occupant be peculiarly qualified for the place. The preacher must be able to understand and explain the Scriptures and be familiar with the languages. It is necessary to the effectiveness of his labors that he be accompanied by God’s operative power. Thus the three – gifts, workings, administrations are harmonious features of one divine government in the Church; Christ is the Lord, who regulates and maintains the offices, while God works and the Holy Spirit bestows his gifts.

DIVERSITY OF GIFTS NO REASON FOR SECTS

37. As we said, offices are many and varied, even as one gift is greater than another, an apostle, for instance, is superior to a teacher or expounder, while the office of a baptizer is inferior to that of a preacher. Yet notwithstanding, we are to remember, Paul says, that all are ordained of the same Lord, and the occupant of a superior office is not to consider himself any better by reason of his position and to despise others. He must bear in mind that all serve the same Lord, the least as well as the greatest, and consequently the holder of the inferior office is not necessarily inferior with his Lord, nor the executor of the higher office greater with him. Christ is ever Lord of all; one belongs as much to his realm as another. Therefore he will have no divisions and sects over this point; rather he wills that such diversity of gifts and offices be promotive of unity.

38. When I preach and you listen, we are not exercising the same gift and office, yet you as truly serve Christ by listening as I by preaching. If you preach, explain the Scriptures, baptize, comfort or aught else, through you works the same Christ who works through another. All is wrought in obedience to the order of him who commands me to hear his

Word as well as to preach to you, and to exercise the same faith and Spirit with you. Thus all alike praise the one Lord. You say, “The Word I hear is the true Word of God,” and I as a preacher prove and declare the very same thing. When I baptize, administer the Sacrament or absolve, and you accept my administrations, we are both engaged in the service of the same Lord and harmoniously execute his command. You and I, however, so far as office and gifts are considered, may be of different capacities.

39. A peculiarity of the Christian profession, and the chief point of distinction between Christians and the heathen, is their recognition of the fact that workings, offices and gifts are of God, Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. The world does not perceive this truth, though it, too, enjoys the gifts of God. For God remembers all his creatures, though, like swine that enter the trough on all fours with no thought but of eating and rooting therein, not even lifting their eyes, they cannot raise their thoughts to the source of all their good and have not a thought as to whom they should thank for it. He who is not a Christian comes before God in an insensible and beastly attitude. The world is but a pen of animals indifferent to the kingdom of God and with no idea of gratitude for his rich beneficence, his gifts for body and soul. The worldly seek only their husks and their troughs. To these they cleave like fattening swine intended for slaughter. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 12:3) says concerning the ungodly, who with great satisfaction persecute the righteous: *“Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.”*

40. God gives the ungodly mighty kingdoms, riches, lands and houses, making them to enjoy greatness and abundance. But when the swine are fed and fat, the question of bacon and sausage introduces a struggle. A slaughterer – a sausage-maker – appears, perchance, to slaughter the swine in their sty; one comes desolating the country, overthrowing the kingdom, destroying people and all; for, desiring to be but swine, the people must be destroyed like swine. Even though the world have personal knowledge of such punishment, it continues its course so long as possible – until the slaughterer comes. Swine remain swine; they are capable of standing ever unmoved by their trough, one perfectly indifferent if another be struck dead before its eyes. Christians Recognize the Divine Source of Their Gifts.

41. Christians, however, though obliged to live among swine and to be at times trampled under foot and rooted about, have nevertheless surpassing glory; for they can look up and intelligently behold their Lord and his gifts. They are not of the pen of swine intended only for slaughter; they know themselves children of God, adorned by him with gifts and graces not merely temporal. They are conscious that, having given them body and life – for these they realize are not of their own obtaining – he will also supply their further needs, providing for them forever.

42. Christians are able to recognize even God’s least blessing as most precious, as truly excellent; not only because it comes from him, but because of its inherent value. No one who recognizes even temporal blessings would give an eye, or a less important member of the body, to redeem the riches of the entire world. How much loftier and more precious to the Christian are the spiritual gifts concerning which Paul here speaks – gifts bestowed as

means unto salvation! The baptizing of a child or the absolution of a penitent makes no great show, but were the office viewed in the true light, the bestowed treasure rightly appreciated, all the officers, authority and riches of kings and emperors would be nothing at all in comparison.

43. Regarding the baptizer – who may be a woman even – and the baptized, we certainly can see nothing wonderful. The humanity in the case does not effect any great work; the work is wrought by him who is God, Lord and Spirit. It is he who gives to the office power and greatness above that of all emperors, kings and lords, however inferior the instrumentality – the occupants of the sacred offices. By these ministrations souls are won from the devil, snatched out of hell and transformed into saints blessed forever. Person and office may be apparently inferior, but the office is of God and God is no inferior being. His greatness cannot be equaled by a hundred thousand worlds. He accomplishes things incomprehensible to the world and impossible to angels. The combined efforts of all creation could not produce baptism. Were the world to unite in baptizing an infant, the infant would receive no good therefrom unless God the Lord commanded the deed. Let the Sultan be many thousands of times more powerful than at present and he could not, with all his riches, his dominion and peoples, free himself or any other from the power of the least sin. He could not effectively pronounce the absolution, “God has forgiven you your sins.” For the Sultan has neither gift, office nor work; indeed, he knows nothing about them. They belong to God alone, though human mouths and hands are instrumental therein.

44. Note why Paul boasts of the fact that God bestows such great blessings. It is that Christians may discern them and thank him; and that such discernment may lead them to serve one another in humility, with mutual faith and love, each one learning to praise God fervently wherever he beholds God’s gifts and offices operative in the Church, and to esteem them as he would esteem God himself. For, unquestionably, none would possess office and gifts had not God ordained and bestowed them.

45. How we have exalted our own nonsense – pilgrimages, cloisters, cords, cowls, running to the dead in the wilderness and so on! But to what purpose? What benefit have we derived therefrom, notwithstanding we walked until our feet were bleeding, and watched and fasted and tormented ourselves to death? Such a life, it is true, may be called holy, divine, yet it is not at all the gift, the work, the office, of God. No God, no Lord, no Spirit, is in that practice. God has nowhere commanded such a life. We have devised it and may reward and help ourselves for so doing. We cannot boast his authority for it nor find divine comfort therein. But the discerning Christian can with satisfaction boast on this wise: *“My baptism or my absolution is not of my own devising or ordaining, nor of another man’s. It is of Christ my Lord. For here is his command ordaining the office: ‘Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’ Matthew 28:19. Upon authority of the office, work and gift here presented, I can boast and be strong in faith against the devil and all the gates of hell; otherwise I cannot withstand Satan for one moment. He would not be afraid of me and my works though I should be able to boast of having lived seventy years as a member of a holy order, serving God every day and hour, praying, fasting, and so on.”*

46. The devil hurls both person and work, as he finds them, into the abyss of hell. If he ask you where God has commanded such works as yours, you have no answer. But let him hear you boast in the confident faith God's command inspires: "I have received from Christ my Lord baptism and absolution; of this I am certain, and what I do is done at his command and by his power" – let him hear that and he is forced immediately to leave you. He must flee, not from your person or works, but from Christ's office and gifts found with you.

47. Paul presents these thoughts to teach us what we Christians have from God in the three forms, blessings superior to those enjoyed by all others in the world. The apostle would have us be grateful for these things and make use of them in a spirit of Christian love. He desires that the possessor of gifts devote them to the service of others. He teaches we are to honor God in the gifts another possesses; that we are highly to esteem them, remembering they are not of man's production, not wrought of man's ability or skill, but are the offices, gifts and works of God. They are not the inferior and trivial things they seem to the world because making no show and noise. God does not give unredeemable coin or empty shells and mere husks. His gifts and works in his Church must effect inexpressible results, taking souls from the jaws of the devil and translating them into eternal life and glory.

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