

Who's in charge here?

Do you know sometimes I forget? I get to thinking that you are. What you want, what you hope for, what you need I try to deliver. Then I serve you.

Sometimes I think you forget too. Sometimes i get the impression you think I am in charge here. What I want, what I need, what I hope for you try to do.

One thing I am sure of, the Bishop is not in charge here. None of you have ever suggested I call him to find out what we should do.

Sometimes it may seem the past is in charge here. You come to me with an idea, or I to you, and memories of what has been tried before are given authority over the present suggestion as if yesterday had veto power over today. But most of the time we don't get too focused on the past or the future.

Sometimes fear is in charge here. Fear of what people will think, or fear of failure, or fear of risk.

Sometimes it may seem that no one is in charge here. Whatever anyone wants to do they do it, every woman or man for herself, himself.

Who is in charge here? That is the question Paul addressed for the Corinthians. For in that Corinthian congregation it must have seemed no one was in charge. Everyone had something to say, a prophecy, speaking in tongues, the utterance of wisdom. And their worship was chaos. Everyone was being ruled by how it made them feel.

Imagine a gathering where each was singing her own hymn, one tune being pounded out on the piano, another being played by a flute, the organ booming at full volume on still another. And in the choir loft and in the pews every favorite hymn being sung at full volume, each hearing and

enjoying his own voice, her own sound. Imagine that and I think you have some idea of how it was at Corinth, everyone leading, thinking their gift and contribution needed the place of emanence. So it is in this letter that Paul suggests that women should remain silent in worship, as it appears some of the women may have been especially enthusiastic. And it is in this letter that Paul suggests that speaking in tongues should be done at home, in private, unless there was someone to interpret the message. And it is in this letter that they are even told to eat at home as even the meal of the community had become everyone for herself, some stuffing themselves and getting drunk while others were still hungry. But before he went into any of those subjects he laid the groundwork with today's second lesson concerning spiritual gifts.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak."

Paul starts with a little history lesson there in this congregation where the highest form of truth is how it makes me feel. Remember - you were led and enticed by idols - the same you that thinks your feelings are such a great guide. Those feelings were enticed and led astray by idols.

Paul continues "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."

Right away Paul sets some boundaries albeit some very wide boundaries. Jesus be cursed could not come from one ruled by God's spirit. There are limits that are not based on feeling.

Paul continues Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is give the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Paul says it is all coming from God - the words he uses in Greek here suggest everything from

the prophecy and speaking in tongues in worship to the waiting of tables at meals. All are gifts and services that come from God and are to be used for the common good.

This is one of the two big points here - gifts are given and to be used for the common good. If God has given you the gift of listening it is not given so that you can make a real name for yourself. The gift is given you by God for service in the community.

IF God has given me the gift of preaching sermons it is not so that I may make a name for myself, and build up myself, but to be used for the good of the community.

If God has given you the gift of singing or reading in public or teaching children, it is not to be used for your glory and enjoyment but for the community.

For the common good.

Paul's Gifts
To one is given the utterance of wisdom, to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same spirit, to another faith by the same spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

The second big point is right there: the gifts are given as the Spirit chooses.

Paul wanted them to honor one another's gifts - for all the gifts were given by the Spirit. And Paul wanted them to use their gifts not for their own joy and happiness but for the good of all.

I remember the Christmas that I decided to give abstract paintings as gifts to all my family members. Now had I chosen paintings from some great or even mediocre artist I suspect my gifts would have been appreciated. But I chose me as the artist. And I received not a single thank you.

Now were I to decide that I am going to paint a mural on the back wall of the church, no matter how moved I was by the thought of my doing so, you would all do well to say no. Loud and clear, no. For my work would not be for the common good.

One more point Paul was making - each has been given a gift.

The church of Jesus Christ is built up when those gifts are used for the common good. When no talents are buried in the ground or hidden under a blanket of modesty or insecurity. You are given a gift for this body of Christ a gift to be used as the Spirit chooses.

So ask yourself right now - what gift has the Spirit of God given me and how can I use the gift to build up the community.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. That means you.

Amen.

Who's in charge here? The Holy Spirit is in charge here!