

Series: On Purpose

January 15, 2017

Title: Rose Window

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Text: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Cathedral Glass:

Sunlight:

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It starts its journey 93,000,000 miles from Earth in the nuclear furnace we call the Sun. 8 minutes later it streams through the 35' diameter rose window on the south side of an ancient cathedral. Instantly, the warm, yellow light of the Sun is turned into a kaleidoscope of brilliant blues, reds, yellows and greens, all precisely arranged to tell a story: the story of God and His world.

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Each piece of stained glass in the great rose windows of the Chartres Cathedral began as a handful of sand. Workmen mixed the sand with other minerals, then laced the mixture with trace elements. Once melted, the sand would become stained glass. Copper made the glass green. Cobalt made it a brilliant blue. Gold made it wine red or violet. When the glass had cooled, it was cut into a desired shape and joined to the thousands of other pieces of glass that would make the rose window.

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For 800 years church-goers and other visitors have marveled at the beauty of the stained glass. But the story in the stained glass could never happen without the light of the Sun. The colors depicted by the bits of glass in the massive window came ready-made from the Sun. Visible sunlight, after all, is not one color, but all the colors of the rainbow. All the bits of colored glass do is separate the sunlight so that it can tell a story.

Who is the best?

How easy it is, however, to take the sunlight for granted and focus instead on those pretty pieces of stained glass. If those pieces of glass could talk, I wonder if they would argue over which one is the most important, or which one is the most beautiful? The rich blue glass could boast that it alone captured the deep blue of the heavens. The wine-dark red glass could argue that blue is boring, but red always gets your attention. The yellow glass could say that *it* was more like the Sun than the others.

Something like this was happening in the church that Paul was writing to in the city of Corinth. The Christians in that church were evidently comparing themselves to each other, bragging about the gifts that God's Spirit had given to them. They had established a spiritual pecking order, insisting that because they spoke in tongues or uttered prophecies, they were obviously more important than the others in the church.

Each of them was vying to be a stained glass window made of but one piece of glass.

Commented [r1]:

Diversity/Unity:

Paul attacks this problem head on. He writes:

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1 Corinthians 12:4-6 NIV

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Different kinds of gifts: God's Spirit distributes to each of us a special shape and color that will become part of a vastly larger work – one that will project Jesus Himself into His world.

Different kinds of service: A funny thing happens when you put two different colors next to each other. They both become more intense. A rich deep blue makes red or yellow pop right out at you. The two seemingly opposing colors actually *serve each other*.

Likewise, the Lord Jesus arranges us – places us where we need to be – so that the picture of Himself can come to life in our time and our world. Each one of us *serves* each other and *serves* Him, so that we can become an *act of service* to a dark and confused world.

Different kinds of working: Of course, the best way to truly appreciate a 35' diameter stained glass window is from a distance – far enough away that you no longer see the individual pieces of glass at all, but only the image that they together make. Every bit of glass *works together with all the rest* according to the design of the artist. In the same way, God puts us all together – as different as we are – to make one picture in the world. And then *He* shines His light through the window He designed and created.

In other words, human beings who are truly reflecting God's presence and image into His world are different in how they are gifted, how they serve and what they accomplish. But the *same Spirit, Lord and God* make it all happen.

We are His cathedral glass, made to glow with His light alone.

The Common Good

The Holy Spirit:

Paul's goal is to help these Christians – and you and me – understand that the Holy Spirit is gifting us and fitting us together to be part of something vastly more important and glorious than anything we could ever be all by ourselves. He writes:

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1 Corinthians 12:7 NIV

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Think of it: you and I are given the privilege of manifesting, or making known, God's presence in the world through His Holy Spirit. It is sort of like the stained glass that reveals or manifests a specific wavelength of sunlight as a brilliant color. That color would otherwise remain mixed with all the other hues of visible light.

But even more important is the big picture that is revealed when all of the pieces of glass are fit together. Only then can it be said that they all work together for the "common good."

The many manifestations of the Spirit:

Paul gives examples of the many manifestations of the Spirit, examples that were familiar to the Christians in Corinth. You can think of these various giftings or manifestations as being like the beautiful colors that make the rose window tell its story.

First, there are gifts of wisdom and knowing through the power of the Holy Spirit:

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1 Corinthians 12:8 NIV

To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,

Then there are gifts of miracles and healing:

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1 Corinthians 12:9-10a NIV

To another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers...

Next come gifts of speaking God's truth:

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1 Corinthians 12:10b NIV

To another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits...

And finally there are the gifts of praying in a heavenly language:

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1 Corinthians 12:10c NIV

To another speaking in tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

The different gifts are like different colors of stained glass: the deep blues of God-given knowledge and wisdom, the bright reds of miracles, the flaming yellows of tongues. Each is part of what it means to have the Holy Spirit living inside you. Each is a little bit of Heaven showing up here on Earth. All are from the same Source: the Holy Spirit.

The common good:

The Christians in Corinth needed to know that their own spiritual gifting was no more or less important than that of the other Christians in their church family. They needed each other. Each one needed to submit his or her gifting to “the common good.”

In our day and in our culture, we may have the opposite problem of the Corinthian Christians. If they valued their spiritual gift *too much*, I wonder if we sometimes value spiritual gifts *too little*? Perhaps we think that such gifts are only for a select few. Perhaps they are frightening or unfamiliar to us. Perhaps we feel the need to stay in control.

The good news is that we can trust the Holy Spirit to get it right when it comes to giving us His gifts and when it comes to following His lead in using those gifts. He gives them for the “common good!”

Rose Window

Master Designer:

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Like all medieval cathedrals, Chartres is built in the form of a cross. The arms of the cross are called transepts, and at the end of each of them is a massive rose window.

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In the very center of the South Transept Rose Window is Jesus, His arm raised in blessing. Around Him is a circle of 12 angels. And around the angels are the 24 Elders from the throne room in the Book of Revelation. It is a glimpse of Heaven here on Earth.

Every piece of colored glass has been artfully positioned to make this composite picture of the King of kings and the Lord of lords – the work of a master designer.

The work of the one and same Spirit:

The same is true of you and me. The Holy Spirit is the Master Designer who gives gifts to us and links us together so that we together make God known to this world.

Paul writes:

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1 Corinthians 12:11 NIV

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

We together form a picture of the God of Heaven right in the middle of this spiritually darkened Earth. That is our God-given work: to bear His image in the world. We are the bits of colored glass; the Spirit is the Designer and Artist Who makes it all happen.

Rose Window:

God's work is to make the window. Our work is to let God shine through us. That's what it means to be the "light of the world."

And what does it mean for God's light to shine through us?

- First of all, it means that *we must become transparent*. Our story can no longer be "all about us." We are part of something bigger than ourselves. Our little story is a part of His great Story.
- Second, it means allowing God to use us. It means daring to get to know the Holy Spirit and His power. It means learning to hear God's voice when He speaks to us. It means stepping out in faith with the gifts that God has given us.
- Third, it means always remembering that the goal is for people to see God in us. You can't fit all of the Sun in a piece of stained glass, but even the tiniest piece of stained glass can glow with its light.

And when you put us all together, we form a picture that brings Heaven itself right down to Earth.

We're God's Rose Window.

LIFE Group Lesson for “Rose Window”

Ice Breaker:

- Can you remember the first person in your life who introduced you to Jesus?
- What did they do or say that made it possible for you to begin to know Jesus for yourself?

Picturing God:

- Let me – Pastor Roland – share a personal experience that helps show how important each one of us is to making God real to others:
 - I bought a digital camera for my son for a Christmas present, and when he started taking pictures it turned out that in every single picture there was a tiny bright white dot, always in the same place.
 - It turns out that *one pixel* in the image sensor didn’t work. It just showed up white every time you took a picture.
 - Can you imagine how aggravating it was to see pictures that were otherwise perfectly fine – but all with that pesky white dot.
 - It seemed that no matter what the picture, all we could see was that one place where the picture didn’t happen!
- The same thing happens in the glorious stained glass windows of a cathedral: every little piece of stained glass is like a pixel in the overall picture. Imagine what the stained glass window would look like if even a single piece of colored glass was missing!
- Well, you and I are the pixels in the image God is projecting into our world. Every single one of us is essential for the picture to be perfect.
- We are the pieces of colored glass in God’s Rose Window.
- This is our calling; this is what it means to be made in the image of God.

Two things to keep in focus:

- To fulfill our calling we must first of all understand that God designed the Big Picture. He is revealing nothing less than Himself through us.
- Second, we must understand that the picture only “works” if His light and presence shine through the stained glass.
 - Did you ever see a stained glass window from the outside? Nothing to see there. Just grey, lifeless glass. But when you go

inside and see the sunshine streaming through the glass, you see the stained glass in all its glory.

- When Jesus says, "Let your light so shine before people that they see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven," He is saying that God's light and presence are meant to shine through us.
- Third, for light to shine through glass, the glass has to be clean! No dust, dirt, cobwebs, pollution masking the surface.
 - The same is true in our lives. Anything that blocks the light of God shining through us – anger, pride, desires, fear, etc. – needs to be cleaned off.
- Fourth, letting God shine through us means letting Him alone be Lord. We must relinquish our control and let His Spirit run the show!

Share and Pray:

- Take a few moments and share with a friend what it would mean for God to shine through you in your present situation. What would be the biggest challenge? What would be your biggest reservation or fear?
- Invite the Holy Spirit to come and help you clean off the stained glass of your spirit. Pray for each other that God's glory can shine through you.