

1 Corinthians Chapter 12

NKJV Notes by Pastor Bob Caldwell

Spiritual Gifts: Unity in Diversity

v. 1 Concerning - Paul used the this expression in 1 Corinthians to refer to several topics the believers in Corinth had written him about (1 Cor. 7:1; 7:25; 8:1, 4). It can be compared to our “subject line” in an e-mail or “Re:” in a memo. He now wants to address their questions regarding spiritual gifts.

Spiritual Gifts - Literally: “that of the Spirit,” i.e., the blessings and gifts the Holy Spirit gives to believers.

Ignorant - This means to be unaware and uninformed about something.

v. 2 You were Gentiles - Most of the Corinthian believers had been pagans and not part of the Jewish people.

Carried Away - Paul uses this idea of being led astray by force. When someone chooses darkness, Satan and his powers can force him into deeper evil and error.

Dumb Idols - “Dumb” is not used here in the sense of stupid, but rather it means mute and unspeaking. The Old Testament prophets mocked idols as deaf and dumb, unable to respond to those who worshipped them (Is. 41:21-24).

However you were Led - People are led into error and darkness in many different ways

v. 3 No one Speaking by the Spirit of God Calls Jesus Accursed- This would seem obvious, but Paul is saying that there is a clear dividing line between speaking inspired by God’s Spirit and that which is empowered by spiritual darkness. The test is what one has to say about Jesus. To say “Anathema Jesus!” (“Jesus be cursed!”) never originates from God. Some Bible scholars suspect that there was a group in Corinth who were saying this to emphasize that Jesus’ life and story were unimportant; it was the spiritual “Christ” that counted. Paul makes it clear that without the earthly Jesus you can’t have the heavenly “Christ.”

Except by the Holy Spirit - To say “Kurios Jesus” (“Jesus is Lord!”) in Roman society, where everyone was saying “Caesar is Lord!”, sometimes meant putting your life on the line. To truly do this requires the work of God’s Holy Spirit.

v. 4-6 Diversities of Gifts...Differences of Ministries...Diversities of Activities - The way different believers serve God is determined by their spiritual gifts, but everything that is accomplished is due to God acting in them. Also note the structural form Paul uses in these verses. Theologians clearly see a Trinitarian form in how he uses “Spirit... Lord... God”, which indicates the entire Godhead is involved with His people.

v. 6 God Who Works All in All - In the face of the diversity and variety of Christian activities, Paul emphasizes that it is still the same God who is at work among all His people in every genuine spiritual manifestation.

v. 7 Given to Each One - Paul emphasizes the fact that God’s Spirit is at work in each and every believer. None are left out.

For the Profit of All - Profit means a benefit; common good. The activity of the Holy Spirit in each believer works for the good of all those who belong to Christ.

v. 8 Word of Wisdom - A divine “word of wisdom” applies God’s principles of proper living to practical situations or questions we face in life. In 1 Corinthians 2:4 Paul contrasted persuasive “human wisdom” with wisdom that comes from the “power of God.” This “wisdom of God” connects our daily life to His eternal plan in Jesus to redeem the world (1 Cor. 1:21-24). This gift helps us effectively deal with the challenging issues that face us in the world by seeing them from God’s perspective.

Word of Knowledge - A “word of knowledge” does not just give information, but also the ability to connect the dots and understand what that information means. It may involve supernatural awareness of things we would not otherwise know.

Compare this with Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of individuals and circumstances (John 2:23-25, 4:18). Knowledge that comes from God’s Spirit will always be in harmony with the scriptures. The Bible must be the standard for evaluating all teaching, correction, and training (2 Tim. 3:16). Paul says that the key danger for those who have knowledge is that it can result in arrogance or pride (1 Cor. 8:1).

v. 9 Faith - This gift, according to 13:2, generates the kind of faith that can move mountains, but it must be used with love. True faith, according to Hebrews 11, involves understanding, courage and action - all based upon recognizing God’s dependability and His promise to act for His people. This gift cannot be exercised apart from God’s will and His promises in the scriptures. It is given so that we can accomplish His purposes in the world.

Gifts of Healing - This verse is the only occurrence of the plural form of “gifts.” This may imply that a person with this manifestation of the Spirit does not simply have the power to heal everyone, but rather in each situation God reserves the right to decide whether or not to give healing.

By the same Spirit - Literally, “by the one Spirit.” The contrast in these verses is unmistakable—there are different believers with differing manifestations, but only one Holy Spirit who is at work.

v. 10 Working of Miracles - This manifestation of the Spirit involves God overruling the normal course of nature and His natural laws. These laws are the general pattern He has ordained for the world, but He can give power that suspends them to accomplish His purposes.

Prophecy - This gift is an enabling by the Holy Spirit to provide light upon past, present, or future issues facing God’s people. Prophetic utterances do not have the same status as the prophecy of scripture. They must be judged according to their harmony with the Word of God and are susceptible to the influence of the person the Spirit of God is using (1 Cor. 14:29-32).

Discerning of Spirits - This is the ability to distinguish between spiritual manifestations that are from God and those that are from human or demonic sources.

Different Kinds of Tongues - In scripture, tongues are a gift of the Spirit that enables a believer to worship or prophesy in a language that is unknown to him or her. Tongues can be used by the Holy Spirit to build up the personal spiritual life of a believer. In chapter 14, Paul gives more information on this gift and also provides guidelines for the use of it in public gatherings.

Interpretation of Tongues - As we will see in 1 Corinthians 14, tongues are not to be used for speaking in public gatherings without interpretation. The gift of interpretation is given so that the meaning of the utterance can be given in a language the people listening to it can understand.

v. 11 Distributing to Each one Individually as He Wills - Paul particularly emphasized that the different spiritual gifts are manifestations of one and the same Spirit. He also made clear that they are distributed to each and every man or woman who knows Christ. No one is without a gift. He distributes the gifts as He wishes, not as we would.

Unity and Diversity in One Body

v. 12 The Body is One - Beginning with verse 12, Paul introduces the most prominent image of the church in all of scripture: the Body of Christ. Paul emphasizes the point he wants to make by reversing the same phrase twice in the opening verse of this section.

v. 13 By One Spirit we were all Baptized into One Body - This refers to all who belong to Christ. Each of the four Gospels records the promise that Jesus would baptize God’s people in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Baptism in His Spirit is what Jesus does to make each believer part of His body, the church.

Jews or Greeks, Slaves or Free - The huge social divisions of Roman society no longer counted in the body of Christ; all partake of His Spirit. The same applies today—the body of Christ is not subject to arbitrary distinctions of culture or nationality. And have all Been Made to Drink into One Spirit - Jesus gives the Holy Spirit. In John 7:37-39 He invites “all who are thirsty” to come to Him. He promises to give them to drink of the Spirit, which will become as an artesian well within them, overflowing and fresh.

v. 14 But One - Paul again restates his original point. This type of repetition is not just a mark of his excitement, but rather an intentional use of language to drive home how important this point is.

v. 15 Is it Therefore not Part of the Body? - In verses **15-17**, Paul provides four back-to-back illustrations emphasizing the fact that each and every part of the body is vital. There is no room for self-pity at having a less prominent gift, ministry, or position; each and every part of the body is vital for the working of the whole.

v. 18 Just as He Pleased - God has arranged the members of the body of Christ (each individual with his or her gifts) according to His will. Consequently, no one should boast, nor should they feel ashamed or unimportant.

v. 20 Yet One Body - Paul again restates his thesis.

v. 21 Cannot Say - Verses 14-17 focused on peoples’ tendencies to feel unimportant, but Paul now turns his attention to the sense of superiority some people would be tempted to feel over others. While the eye and head may seem like more important parts of a body, they cannot function without the support of hands and feet.

v. 22 Are Necessary - Paul leaves no room for misinterpretation here—every part of the body matters!

v. 23 Bestow Greater Honor - This is a reference to clothing. While the face of a body may seem nobler, we do not take care to adorn and decorate it with special clothing. The idea here is that we should not disregard members of the body who are in seemingly less important positions. Rather, we must see them as necessary (v. 22), and, as this verse suggests, consciously honor them.

v. 24 God composed the body - God Himself arranged the members of the body together. For a part of the body to complain against its position is to complain against the One who positioned it. Furthermore, it is foolish for a part of the body to boast about its position, because it was placed by God, not by its own strength. Having Given Greater Honor to that Part Which Lacks it - Prominence in public does not equal honor before God; He values the faithful service of the smallest of us.

v. 25 No Schism - He purposely combined believers into the body of Christ in such a way that there should be no division between them. The Same Care for one Another - Believers in the body of Christ should have equal concern for each other, regardless of what gift or place of visibility each has.

v. 26 One Member... All the Members - Whether in suffering or honor, believers are connected to each other

v. 27 Now, you are the Body of Christ - Paul uses the plural form of “you” here, indicating he is speaking to the entirety of the Corinthian church. And Members Individually - Each believer is personally integrated by God into the body of Christ.

v. 28-31 - Having shown the importance of each believer and his or her gifts for the total body, Paul goes on in these verses to present how the gifted members are structured and have an ordered position in the church so that they may work together in harmony.

v. 28 God has Appointed These - Appointed literally means to “set in.” In verse 18 Paul, says God has “set” the members in the body with their various gifts. In this verse he makes clear that God has also “set” people in different positions of responsibility for the church.

Apostles - Apostle literally means, “a person sent on a mission”. After the coming of the Holy Spirit, apostles were sent out with the special task of proclaiming the Gospel and establishing churches. According to Ephesians 2:20, the church is built upon the ministry of the apostles and prophets.

Prophets - The primary responsibility of New Testament prophets was not predicting the future, but rather presenting God’s message to their contemporaries. Ephesians 3:2-5 also explains how prophets provide guidance for the church.

Teachers - Teachers are those who explain and apply the written word of God.

Miracles - See notes on verse 10.

Healings - See notes on verse 9.

Helps - This refers to people who have the gift of aiding others in various ways.

Administrations - This literally means, “leadership or managerial skill”, and is the same word used for someone who steers a ship. A person with this gift can help the church safely navigate difficult times and crises.

v. 29 Are All - In verses **29 and 30**, Paul poses seven questions in a way that a negative answer is expected. Like his previous repetitions of key themes, Paul is not simply showing off his rhetorical style; he is asking concrete questions to help demonstrate his point that diversity and unity in the body is absolutely essential for them to understand.

v. 31 Earnestly Desire the Best Gifts - Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to diligently pursue spiritual gifts that will be “for the profit of all” (v. 7).

A More Excellent Way - Paul is preparing to discuss the greatest gift of all—love.