



1 CORINTHIANS

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31

INTRODUCTION

The Corinthians found no shortage of things to be divided over. There was Team Paul vs. Team Apollos (1:12), weak Christians vs. strong Christian (chs. 8-10), and wealthy Corinthians vs. poor Corinthians (11:17-34). In chapters 12-14 we're introduced to yet another point of division: spiritual gifts. Instead of appreciating the many ways God gifted his people, many in the church were over-emphasizing some gifts in particular and looking down on those who did not have them.

MAIN POINT

Each Christian has been gifted by the Holy Spirit to build up the church.

REFLECT

The Corinthians had grown up in a culture which assumed that the more spiritual a person was, the more unusually they would behave at times. So when it came to gifts of the Holy Spirit, many in the church became fixated on the more "unusual" gifts like speaking in tongues. It was assumed that someone who spoke in tongues was more in touch with God than someone who didn't. They likely even made this gift the test of whether or not someone had the Holy Spirit. Naturally, this led to further rifts in the church. Those with more "impressive" gifts saw themselves as more spiritual and significant than those without, who in turn probably felt worthless and unnecessary.

Paul begins his response to this scenario by reminding the church that the true test of the Holy Spirit's presence in a person's life isn't whether or not they have certain gifts, but whether or not they have turned from their former way of living and confessed Jesus as Lord (vv. 2-3). This is itself a miracle that can only be explained by the Spirit.

He then reminds them that there's nothing we can do *for* God that has not first been empowered *by* God (vv. 4-6). Since all gifts come from one source, they all have one purpose, which is to build up the church (v. 7). In other words, God didn't give us gifts to inflate our ego but to serve others. The list of spiritual gifts in verses 8-10, while not exhaustive, is meant to teach the Corinthians that from one source, the Spirit (note how often he's mentioned in the list), comes *numerous* gifts, not just or even primarily tongues, which Paul intentionally lists last.

Some of the Corinthians could have acknowledged half-heartedly that there are lots of gifts while inwardly continuing to exaggerate their own importance. And so Paul proceeds to illustrate the necessity of each member of the church with the metaphor of a body. One body has many members, he says (v. 12), and so each church is comprised of many people whose gifts are crucial to the health of the whole. No body part is merely "useful" but necessary.

The body metaphor gave great comfort to those in Corinth who felt like they weren't really needed in the life of the church (vv. 14-20), and we should be mindful of it today in moments where we might similarly feel unimportant. The metaphor also provided a much-needed rebuke to those who saw their gifts as more necessary and important than others' (vv. 21-26). In fact, those with so-called "lesser" gifts deserve greater honor (v. 23)!

God has created the church to be a magnificent picture of unity in diversity. There are numerous ways he has gifted his people, and each person with their gift is absolutely necessary to the health of the church. Four times (vv. 11, 18, 24, 28) Paul stresses God's sovereign intentionality in giving each believer the gift that they have, which means that there's no such thing as an unimportant member. Great care and purpose has gone into the gifts we have all received.

- Are there ways in which you see yourself as less vital to your church than others? How does this chapter speak to you?
- According to verse 7, for what purpose does God give us gifts?
- Do you know the way(s) that God has gifted you? Are you currently using those gifts "for the common good"? If not, how can you start?

MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 12:7 – *"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*