

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 15, 2024
1 CORINTHIANS 12 - PART 1

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WHY SPIRITUAL GIFTS MATTER TO YOU AND THE CHURCH



Today we continue in Paul's letter to the Corinthians where Paul is addressing problems and divisions in the Corinthian Church related to things that happen during their regular gatherings. The first two topics in this section in **Chapter 11** were:

1. **11:2-16** Divisions regarding Head Coverings
2. **11:17-33** Divisions at the Lord's Supper.

The topic we begin today in chapters 12-14 is: Divisions regarding the Public Expression of Spiritual Gifts. In which Paul addresses the "intended use, misuse and abuse" of these gifts.



So far we have seen that all the things that Paul has addressed in his letter he offers a pathway to getting back on the right track simply by teaching how to "Apply the gospel, apply love". This becomes even more clear when you see that the central chapter of this three chapter section on Spiritual gifts is **Chapter 13**... what is known as the Love Chapter.



As a reminder the Corinthian “church” is who this letter is written to. The word “church” Paul uses is from the secular word “ecclesia” that simply means an “assembly” of citizens called to gather publicly for a common reason. So the Corinthian Christians are “called” to come together, literally, as followers of Christ, to gather together and be “God’s gathering”. This gathering is “God’s church”. And God supernaturally equips His church to accomplish His purposes. We have learned in Gospel of John that God gives gifts of supernatural love and peace to those who abide or remain in him, now we see in **1 Corinthians 12** that God also gives specific Spiritual gifts to believers that are intended to build up the whole church, so that the church, again, can accomplish God’s purpose. Paul’s purpose is to address things in the church that stand in the way of God’s purpose, specifically in **chapter 12-14**, misunderstandings of what the Spiritual gifts listed in this passage are and what they are intended for, misunderstanding that lead to misuses and abuses of these gifts and cause divisions.

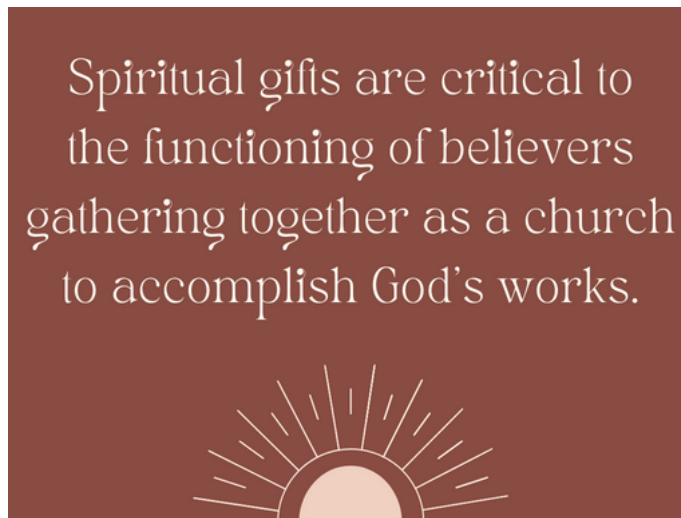
Today and next week the teaching will be formatted slightly different - I’m going to teach one pass through **chapter 12** looking at what we can learn about all the gifts, and then, next week Pastor Miles will take another pass through **chapter 12** teaching about the specific gifts and their specific applications in the body of Christ. This approach will then give us perspective for understanding the need for love in **chapter 13** and will give us insight into the more challenging **chapter 14** dealing with the Spiritual gifts of “tongues and prophecy”.

1 Cor 12:1-7

As a missionary kid growing up in Brazil I have a very clear memory of my Father teaching this passage on Spiritual gifts. Why this memory stuck and many others have faded I don’t know, perhaps for such a time as this. My father was and is a faithful bible teacher, and he taught this passage many times. Our main church service in Brazil was Sunday evenings, Sunday mornings was just Sunday school, “escola dominical”. The Sunday evening service in Brazilian culture was more formal and better attended, and I remember my dad in a white short sleeve dress shirt and a tie standing to teach at a pulpit he built himself. It was a hot evening in our outdoor church, essentially a pavilion with walls around it in a crowded lower class neighborhood. The lighting was just naked light bulbs hanging from the rafters that mosquitoes and other tropical bugs frequented regularly. Watching the flying bugs provided some entertainment for me especially when they landed on an unsuspecting worshipper. I remember my dad’s booming voice announcing the topic of that night’s sermon in Portuguese “Dom’s Espirituais”, or in English “Spiritual gifts”... and that’s about when I checked out and don’t remember anything else. That’s not a reflection of my father’s teachings, that’s a reflection of my amazing ability to check out or fall asleep when someone started preaching. I was known for that as a kid, I think I had some of my best sleep on church pews.

Now if checking out is likewise your internal response when you hear the topic of “Spiritual gifts”, please know that you are in good company. In my attempt to counter that common response to this topic I titled today’s message: “Why Spiritual Gifts matter to you and the Church”, and Paul has many things to say about that – so let’s look at his writings in **1 Corinthians 12**.

In **verse 1** we learn several important things about Spiritual gifts. Note the words “questions” and “misunderstandings”. There is an inherent quality related to “Spiritual gifts” in that the topic of Spiritual gifts generates lots of questions. To have questions about Spiritual gifts is normal. It was clearly true of the Corinthians, they had “questions” about Spiritual gifts. We know that from verse one, and kudos to them for having the humility to ask Paul. Likewise if you have questions please ask (not now during the service because that would be awkward, thank you, but later would be welcome). Paul takes their questions very seriously because Spiritual gifts are critical to the functioning of believers gathering together as a church to accomplish God’s works. So Paul responds to their questions and offers correction to their “misunderstandings” about Spiritual gifts in these next three chapters. We do not know what their questions were but we have his responses.

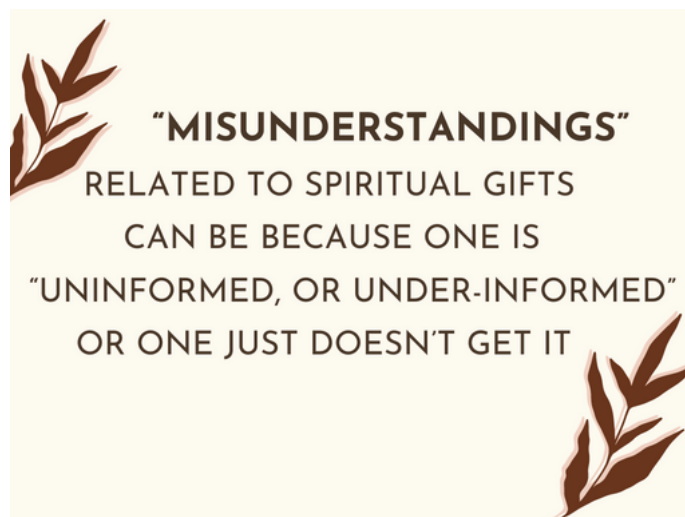


1 Corinthians 12-14 is the first of two writings Paul wrote on Spiritual gifts where he informs about Spiritual gifts, thus also correcting “misunderstandings”. Paul’s 2nd writing happened about 3-5 years after he wrote 1 Corinthians when Paul wrote the letter to the Romans that includes **chapter 12:6-8** where Paul continues his discussion on the church being one body, and where he lists other Spiritual gifts not mentioned in **1 Corinthians 12**. Miles will speak more to that next week. Paul also wrote briefly about the gifts in **Ephesians 4:11** and Peter also wrote briefly about spiritual gifts in **1 Peter 4:10-11**.

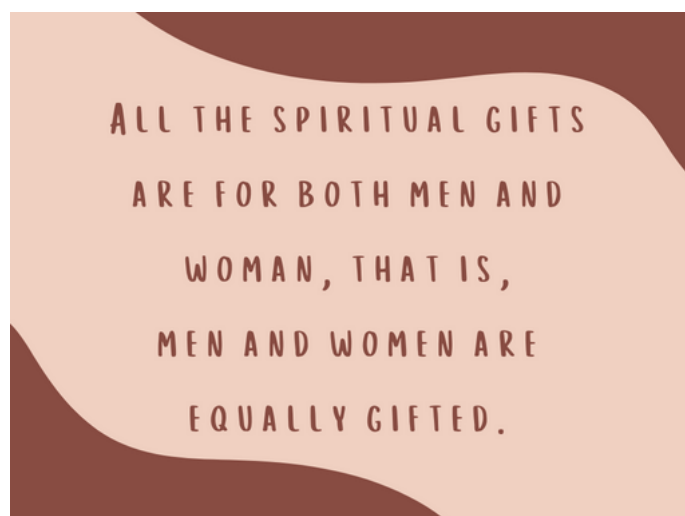


Now in my experience we the church today can also can relate to “misunderstandings pertaining to Spiritual gifts as mentioned in **verse 1**. From my experience as a pastors kids and having been in many different types of churches, including my grandparents Appalachian Pentecostal services, I can attest that “misunderstandings” about Spiritual gifts abound”. I have witnessed many eye opening “misunderstandings about Spiritual gifts” in practice that have given me pause and created questions. Those incidents are not isolated to my experiences, I believe that has been true in the history of the Church for the past 2000 years.

“Misunderstandings” can be because one is “uninformed, or under-informed” or one just doesn’t get it. And where there are misunderstandings about Spiritual gifts there are misuses and abuses. So Paul’s communication to the Corinthians, is to correct “misunderstandings”. And because Paul’s letter is inspired by God, it deals with our “misunderstandings” as well. Our job as pastors over the next three chapters is to teach and model what we believe the Spiritual gifts mean and don’t mean in hopes that this will in turn decrease divisions surrounding spiritual gifts. And as spiritual gifts are increasingly recognized and correctly used, it is our hope that will also increase the effectiveness of the church as a whole in accomplishing God’s purposes.



Also in **verse 1**, we see that Paul is addressing “brothers and sisters” in Christ – so all of what Paul teaches re: Spiritual gifts in this section applies to both men and women. All the spiritual gifts are for both men and woman, that is, men and women are equally gifted. The context of use of spiritual gifts may differ as in Paul prohibiting women to teach men in **1 Timothy**, but that is not to be confused with men and women being equally gifted by God’s Spirit.



What else is of interest in **verse 1** is that the word “gift” does not appear in the Greek until **verse 4**. The Greek word used in **verse 1** is “pneumatikos”. This is where we get our word “pneumatic” as in a “pneumatic pump” – “air” pump. “Air, wind and breath” are biblical words and concepts used for God’s Spirit, thus here **verse 1** simply means that which comes from the Spirit, “pneumatikos”. These special abilities of the Spirit are given in contrast to all the “carnal things”, things generated by the flesh, that Paul has been addressing in previous chapters like sexual immorality, selfishness, pride etc.

pneumatikos

The greek word for “Gifts is “pneumatikos”

1. This is where we get our word “pneumatic” as in a “pneumatic pump” – “air” pump.
2. “Air, wind and breath” are biblical words/imagery used to describe God’s Spirit.
3. NLT translates this as “the special abilities the Spirit gives”.

The NLT translation gives us the wording of “special abilities the Spirit gives”. Again, emphasis on these “special abilities” or “Spiritual gifts” coming from the Spirit.

Regarding what “special abilities” come from the Spirit, we in modern days need to differentiate between what we think of in terms of someone being “gifted” and what Paul means by “Spiritual gifts”. This is foundational to understanding Spiritual gifts. In today’s culture we often use phrases like “gifted academically”, or “gifted athletically”, “gifted musically” that is a reference to a “talent” that a person is born with. Paul here is not referencing that sense of “giftings” or “talent”. Paul is speaking here of Spiritual “gifts” that have a different source, Spiritual gifts that do not come from “natural man” they come from the Spirit. The Spiritual gifts Paul speaks of are not of native intelligence, skill, or education. The gifts Paul teaches are specifically Spiritual gifts from the Spirit of God living in a believer – “given” – hence the word “gift”. Spiritual gifts are “given” to followers of Jesus for use in the Kingdom, primarily for serving other believers, for equipping the local and global church. Thus these are “supernatural gifts from the Spirit for use in God’s kingdom. Since the Spiritual gifts can only come from God’s Spirit that means that they cannot be acquired any other way – they only come from God’s Spirit. Where do Spiritual gifts come from? God’s Spirit!

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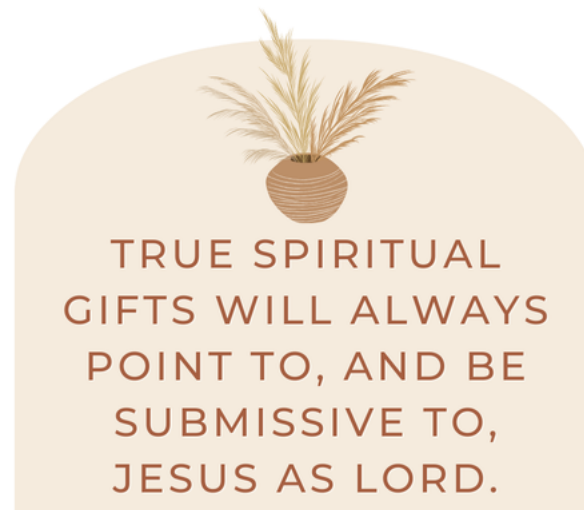


In **verses 2-3** Paul gives us an example that may initially appear to have nothing at all to do with Spiritual gifts. However Paul's main point thus far is that the Spiritual "gifts" are from the Spirit.. so I believe this analogy in **verse 2-3** is given to further distinguish religious activity that is from the flesh vs true Godly works that come from the "Spirit".

Paul's use of the word "Pagans" in **verse 2** is the word he chooses for anyone who does not have God's Spirit in them - yet are highly religious... i.e. "worshipping speechless idols". The emphasis of that word is on a non believers inherent religious quality - everyone worships something. In today's culture you could substitute out anything in place of the words "speechless idols" from **verse 2** that are worshipped, such as, worshipping others perception of yourself, worshipping power, worshipping the ability to influence, money etc... as well as other world religion (g)ods... like Buddha, Allah. This speaks of man's inherent need for spiritually. Humans are always trying to fill a gap that only the Spirit of God can fill. What differentiates between a "pagan" and a believer in Jesus is that because Jesus paid for sin, removed the sin, God's spirit lives in a believer of Jesus. In relation to this verse, a "pagan", Paul's term, does not have God's spirit, thus they cannot say "Jesus is Lord", while a believer that does have God's Spirit in them can say "Jesus is Lord" - which is the opposite of "cursing him".

Let me explain the word "Lord". The word "Lord" in **verse 3** is also significant related to Spiritual gifts. "Lord" means "master" as in one who owns you and has the power of decision over your life. By trusting in Jesus death as payment for your sins Jesus bought you, you surrendered your life to him in that act of trusting him. Thus he is "Lord". And when he is "Lord" - which is his rightful place and designation in every believers life - then his Spirit within us can accomplish thru us what God wants - via the spiritual gifting he gave us. Why? Because he is "Lord" and we are surrendered to him. Jesus being "Lord" matters related to Spiritual gifts.

Jesus being Lord is also helpful in discerning spirits. Discerning in someone what are true Spiritual "gifts" is challenging. It is sometimes challenging to discern what is from natural man, what is from God, and what is from the enemy intended for deception. Discerning that is hard. But this understanding of "Jesus as Lord" is helpful in discerning "gifts" because true Spiritual gifts will always point to, and be submissive to, Jesus as Lord.



Submitting to "Jesus as Lord" related to spiritual gifts is also very important in how we receive the spiritual gifts given to us. What is implied in Paul's teaching is that spiritual gifts come from God's Spirit and that God's spirit chooses what gift each person should have. God's spirit is both the "source" of the spiritual gift and the one who chooses which gift or gifts you should have.

If you go into an restaurant and choose from the menu what meal you want, the restaurant is "source" of the meal you get, but you the customer choose the meal. Spiritual gifts tho are not like that.

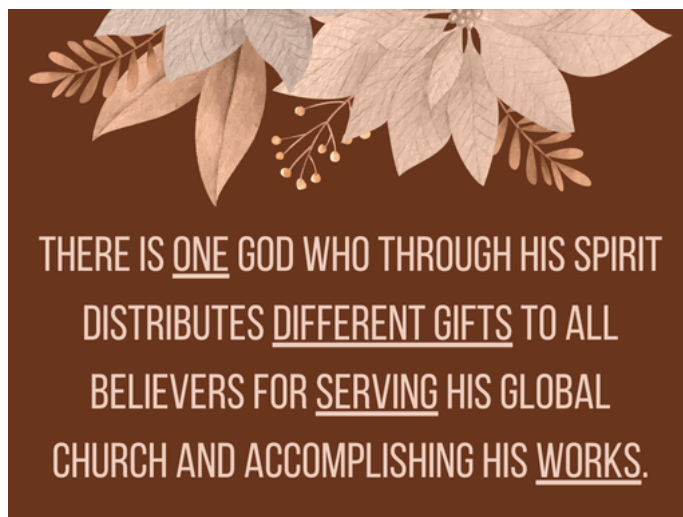
Spiritual gifts are like going into a restaurant and sitting down and the chef decides what meal is best... you get what he chooses. All the different meals available for every customer all come from the same chef and but the chef decides which to give each customer. That's Spiritual gifts. So part of understanding and using your Spiritual gifts for God's church is submitting to God's sovereignty and accepting whatever Spiritual gifts He has chosen for you. A heart of submission, one who recognizes Jesus as Lord, ends up blessing you and others - otherwise there may be jealousy of other's spiritual gifts, and/or resentment of your own.

Let's move on. In **verses 4-6**, there are three pairings of words that help us to see what Paul's main point. Notice the words "different" and "same" - paired three times each. When you hear the word "different", think "variety of".

Notice also in **verses 4-6**, that what follows the words "same" in those three verses are the titles "Spirit, Lord, God" - all a reference to the triune God - One God, one source.

And in each of those three verses what follows the words "different" are the words "gifts, service, works". Note the pattern?

So let's pull that all together. What is the "same" is that the "gifts, service and works" comes from One God - "Spirit, Lord, God". That's from one source. What is different is that for the believers there are different - a variety of - Spiritual "gifts" that are given to each. Now pay attention to the sequence of "gifts, service, works." These "gifts" are then used to "serve" God's church and others in different ways. And that is how God "works" thru us. So let me summarize that. There is "One" God who through His Spirit distributes "different" "gifts" to all believers for "serving" His global church and accomplishing His "works".



What God accomplishes for His church and His kingdom through believers using their Spiritual gifts are defined by Paul as "God's" works. What man accomplishes through his flesh are "man's" works. Far too many "works of man" are mistaken for "works of God" especially be people in ministry running ahead of the Spirit.

Verse 7 reiterates God's intended purpose for all Spiritual gifts. "Each of us" are given Spiritual gifts - if you are a believer, meaning you have trusted Jesus to remove your sins, then you have God's Spirit in you.

Picture yourself lying "Spiritually lifeless", then God Spirit comes in, gives you "breath" - gives you "Spiritual life". By his Spirit entering you, you become Spiritually alive. That picture is true of every believer. Then God's Spirit "gives" you one or more Spiritual gifts intended to help each other. No exceptions, every believer, "each of us" are given Spiritual gifts. Reiterating, the two main points from **verse 7**. Every believer has been given Spiritual gifts intended to "help each other". Peter echoes this in his letter **1 Peter 4:10**.

Every believer has been given
spiritual gifts intended to
“help each other”



Back in **1 Corinthians 12:8-10** Paul then lists what some of these gifts are. Ability to “give wise advice”, “A message of special knowledge”, “great faith”, “gift of healing”, “the power to perform miracles”, “ability to prophesy”, “discerning the Spirits”, “ability to speak in unknown languages”, “ability to interpret”. These are known as the “manifestational gifts”.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10

- GIVE WISE ADVICE
- A MESSAGE OF SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE
- GREAT FAITH
- GIFT OF HEALING
- THE POWER TO PERFORM MIRACLES
- ABILITY TO PROPHECY
- DISCERNING THE SPIRITS
- ABILITY TO SPEAK IN UNKNOWN LANGUAGES
- ABILITY TO INTERPRET



Now this week we are not going to focus on the individual spiritual gifts, what they are/ defining them - how they are to be used, (Miles will do that next week) rather we are going to continue to focus on what is true of all gifts.

In **verses 7-11** there continues to be a lot of repetition of words that are significant - so we will look at a few of them. In both **verse 7** and **verse 11**, note the word “each” appears in both verses. In the Greek it’s the same word in both verses - and having that phrase at the beginning and end of this verse section serves to emphasize that “each” believer receives Spiritual gifts from the same Spirit. If this is sounding repetitive by Paul it is intentionally so....so that we get it drilled in our heads.

And that is exactly what we continue to see then in **verses 8-10**. With more repeating of the previous words, “same” and “one” . And note that all the different gifts that are listed in these verses all come from the “same Spirit, they all come from one Spirit.”. This is clearly a theme through this chapter so far, and continues to be. The importance of all the gifts coming from one source, the Holy Spirit, is important for the body of Christ for unity on what the church’s purpose is, which is God’s purpose, not our own.

What else is a repeating word theme is that there is a variety of gifts given to “each person” and the gifts differ. Note all the ways in **verses 8-10** that Paul indicate “each person”. The emphasis being that there is a variety of gifts given to a variety of people, each believer, each person.

In chapter 12, where unity and oneness is the focus, there is no special emphasis on priority of the gifts or importance of a gifts over others - all are the same. special emphasis on the priority of a gift or importance of a gift over others - all are the same.

But what is also obvious in the writing is that there is no special emphasis on the priority of a gift or importance of a gift over others - all are the same. This is an area where “gifts” get out of balance, we will see that more in the coming chapters.

And no surprise then that the repeating pattern of words “one” and “same” like we saw in **verses 4-11** continues in **verses 12-13**. In this next section of verses Paul begins to define the seamless functioning of the spiritual gifts in all the individual believers using the metaphor of the human body. This “body” is a metaphor to describe how all the individual spiritual giftings work together in the church. And of course the emphasis is that they are all part of one body as it says in the end of **verse 13**. If you jump down to **verse 27** you’ll see whose body this is.

If you want to hear more about what the various Spiritual gifts are and how they all work together in the body of Christ, you just have to come back next week.

So let’s stop there for now, take a step back and look at the big picture. So the Corinthian gathering of believers had some questions and misunderstandings concerning Spiritual gifts - and this is what Paul wanted to emphasize in this chapter, and we can be assured that this is for us today as well.

1. ONE SPIRIT IS THE SOURCE OF ALL THE DIFFERENT / VARIETY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS INTENDED FOR UNITY OF THE BODY AND PURPOSE
2. EVERY BELIEVER IS GIVEN SPIRITUAL GIFTS, THO NOT THE SAME SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR EACH PERSON.
3. IT IS THE SPIRIT WHO DECIDES WHO IS GIVEN WHAT SPIRITUAL GIFT.
4. SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE CRITICAL TO THE FUNCTIONING OF BELIEVERS GATHERING TOGETHER AS A CHURCH TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORKS.
5. ALL THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMAN, THAT IS, MEN AND WOMEN ARE EQUALLY GIFTED

6. SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE “GIVEN” TO FOLLOWERS OF JESUS FOR USE IN THE KINGDOM, PRIMARILY FOR SERVING OTHER BELIEVERS, AND FOR EQUIPPING THE LOCAL AND GLOBAL CHURCH.
7. TRUE SPIRITUAL GIFTS WILL ALWAYS POINT TO, AND BE SUBMISSIVE TO, JESUS AS LORD.
8. THERE IS “ONE” GOD WHO THROUGH HIS SPIRIT DISTRIBUTES “DIFFERENT” “GIFTS” TO ALL BELIEVERS FOR “SERVING” HIS GLOBAL CHURCH AND ACCOMPLISHING HIS “WORKS”.
9. EVERY BELIEVER HAS BEEN GIVEN SPIRITUAL GIFTS INTENDED TO “HELP EACH OTHER”.
10. IN CHAPTER 12, WHERE UNITY AND ONENESS IS THE FOCUS, THERE IS NO SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON PRIORITY OF THE GIFTS OR IMPORTANCE OF A GIFTS OVER OTHERS – ALL ARE THE SAME.

So why are Spiritual gifts important to you? Because as a believer your Spiritual gifts were chosen for you to be helpful to other believers and the church. Utilizing your Spiritual gifts is where meaning and purpose in the body of Christ lies.