

Lesson 2

For the Common Good

1 Corinthians 12.1-11

Overview

1 Corinthians 12 begins a major section inside the book. It focuses on spiritual gifts, of which every member of the church has been given. These are the way that God uses us to proclaim His word to the world and minister to others inside and outside the church. Each gift is a tool God has given that we can use to grow, worship, testify, and serve. Spiritual gifts are also a powerful testimony of God's power to bring people together in oneness, harmony, and power. God's gifts have been given to build up the church.

The Bigger Picture

Supernatural spiritual gifts had been given by the Spirit to the Corinthians. They came to regard the possession of these gifts as a matter of pride and were setting believers against each other based on who possessed what gift. The more visible and public the gift, the more important a person was viewed. By doing so, they created division and subverted the purpose for which they were given. The Spirit gave gifts for the common benefit of all and for the unity of the local church. In the local church, there is no A-Team or B-Team ... members are all one. The main idea presented in these verses is that there is great diversity in the gifts that have been received that all originate from a single, unified source.

The Text

NLT:

1 Corinthians 12:1–11 (NLT)

¹ Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don't want you to misunderstand this. ² You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshiping speechless idols. ³ So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. ⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. ⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹ The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

CSB:

1 Corinthians 12:1–11 (CSB)

¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware. ² You know that when you were pagans, you used to be enticed and led astray by mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are different activities, but the same God works all of them in each person. ⁷ A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: ⁸ to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, ⁹ to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills.

Explore the Text

1. What are we saying when we say, “Jesus is Lord”? What does the term “Lord” mean?
2. What are the “gifts” Paul is referring to in 12.4?
3. How is diversity inherent in unity?
4. What is the purpose of receiving spiritual gifts?
5. Who is the source of our spiritual gifts?
6. How many people received spiritual gifts? See 12.6. Why would this be important to consider?

7. What do you think is the meaning of *the common good* in 12.7?

8. How many times in 12.1-11 does Paul mention that gifts are given by the Spirit? Why would he concentrate on this so much?

About the Text

Every member of the church has been given gifts by God which are to be used in ministering to others and sharing the gospel. It appears that the Corinthian Christians were tending to exalt one or a few gifts over the others. Some viewed tongue speaking as great while at the same time denigrating other gifts. Therefore, they were turning these blessings from God into something He never intended: sources of cliques and personal glory. In this chapter Paul will explain the origin and purpose of the gifts they received, as well as how to distinguish between those who made legitimate claims to them and those who did not.

I. 12.1-3 – How to Examine the Authenticity of Spiritual Gifts

- A. *I do not want you to be unaware.*
 - i. Paul wanted to correct them on their understanding of the things of the Spirit.
- B. Paul reminds them of their pagan past. At that time many of them had been influenced by and led to false gods. Like Christians, pagans had spiritual experiences as well, but they were to be rejected because the practices came from idol worship.
- C. Believers who confess Jesus as the Son of God and Lord of their life will speak and act in ways that glorify Jesus. This is the result of the work of the Spirit.
 - i. No true believer is going to claim that “Jesus is cursed.”

II. 12.4-7 – Unity in Diversity

- A. 12.4: The Spirit distributes gifts in many different forms or varieties. They can be speaking gifts or serving gifts (1 Peter 4.11).
 - i. Just as the *one* Spirit, Lord, and God manifest themselves in a variety of ways and ministries, so the Spirit has equipped members of the church to work in a variety of ways and ministries.
 - ii. The unity of God does not imply unity of gifts.
 - iii. Rather, the one and same God is responsible for the variety itself.
- B. 12.5: The gifts are given so they might be used as tools in ministry. They are to be used in service in the name of the Lord.
 - i. These ministries are varied. Some are gifted to teach children. Others are gifted public speakers, while others work closely with people in one-on-one situations. Some are good

at emphasizing doctrine, others are great in giving mercy and comfort, etc. The specialties are endless because the emphasis is on variety.

- ii. The gifts are not given for self-edification or self-service. They are not for us but for others. See 1 Peter 4.10.
- C. 12.6: The gifts we receive are worked out by the power of God.
 - i. “Activities” in this verse means “effect” or “results.”
 - ii. The exercising of our gifts is not for our personal prestige or acclaim. God is the one who empowers us.
- D. 12.7: Gifts have been given to bring us together. The objective is *for the common good*.
 - i. They are intended to help, bring a benefit, or to be advantageous to other believers who God has brought together in His name.
 - ii. By exercising our gifts, we also help others discover and use their own gifts more effectively.

III. 12.8-11 – Varieties of Spiritual Gifts

- A. 12.8-10: These verses illustrate the varieties of gifts mentioned in 12.4.
 - i. Some of the gifts were temporary. Others were permanent.
 - ii. This is not an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts. Other lists are found in 1 Corinthians 12.28; Romans 12.6-8; and 1 Peter 4.11.
- B. 12.11: The common source of the gifts is the Spirit.

Reaction

1. Do you think the “gifts” in view here are supernatural, natural, or both? Explain.
2. Does the Spirit give us gifts today? Who all receives the gifts? (Ephesians 4.7)
3. What is the expectation that comes with the receiving of a gift?
4. Why is it important that we appreciate and value the variety of gifts God has given?
5. What are some examples of the variety of ministries God has given us inside our local church?

6. By whose power are these gifts being employed? Who gets the glory?

7. For what purpose have these things been given (12.7) and who is the source (12.11)?

For the Christian Today

Unity in diversity is a good thing. Your favorite football team would wind up last in the conference each year if all 11 players came out as quarterbacks . . . no matter if they were each the best in the country. In fact, they would probably not even score a single point all year. A successful team will effectively use every part it has to accomplish what is good and achieve victory. As we look inside the body of the local church, we need to value every member. They all have a role on the team and a purpose to fulfill. Different backgrounds, experiences, education, talents, and perspectives are all part of what makes the local body function. Each one needs to appreciate the diversity God has blessed us with. With it, we are able to reach far more people than we would otherwise.

We must use our gift. Everyone has received a gift, Ephesians 4.7. On your last birthday or Christmas, you may have received a gift from someone that you did not use. It may be tucked away in a drawer somewhere. Don't treat the gift you have received from God like that. Your gift is reflection of God's love. What does it say if you disregard it? *Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God,* 1 Peter 4.10. We are stewards of God's gifts. He intends to use those gifts for the benefit of others. It was never in God's vision that we have a professional class inside the church where a few specially talented people carry on the work while everyone else sits back and watches. Everyone has a gift and everyone is expected to use it.

The exercising of your gift encourages others to use their gifts. Here we bring in the Hebrew writer's familiar words: *let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works,* Hebrews 10.24. Our gifts were never intended to be only for us or for our glory. They have been given *for the common good,* 1 Corinthians 12.7. The Christian who ministers to others with his/her gift of service, encourages other believers to serve. For example, one who exercises his/her gift of mercy and compassion helps the other members of the body to be filled with mercy and compassion. If this is true, the so is the opposite. If we fail in the exercising of our gift, we actually become a hindrance to others in the exercising of their gift.

When the church works together exercising its variety of gifts amazing things happen. Every member in the local church will begin to experience the byproduct of their service by being blessed by God and by others. The local church will have a powerful testimony inside its community . . . demonstrating the transforming energy of the gospel before unbelievers. Leaders will also become apparent, which is essential for the local church to function properly. And finally, the congregation will experience great joy in abiding unity, love, and fellowship. This is the *maintaining unity in the bond of*

peace, Ephesians 4.3, that Paul had in mind. This result is not produced by us ... it is a byproduct of the work of the Spirit who dwells inside.

Journal

As you think about the gift God has given you, what are some things you can do to use it more effectively in the kingdom? How will the exercising of it help others? How will it encourage them to use their gift? What are some things you can do this week to put this into practice?

For Further Reading

Read through Romans 12.1-8 and 1 Corinthians 12.28. What are some of the types of gifts listed here? What are some of the attitudes Paul speaks of that we must keep in mind as we use our gifts?