

Week 9: Gifts in the Body - 1 Cor 12

Pre-Work

- One of the beautiful topics covered by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 involves “Gifts of the Spirit”. Understanding these gifts is only possible when we first understand the ministry, role, and character of the Person of the Holy Spirit. Please watch the video below for an introduction to the work of the Holy Spirit in the bible.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/holy-spirit/>

- Please read 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 in the translation of your choice. If you remember, one of Paul’s main purposes for writing this letter to the church at Corinth was to address and correct “divisions” among them. How do you think this chapter serves Paul’s purpose of correcting division?

Class Notes

- This chapter is its own “homily” or devotional sermon, structured as a literary chiasm

A - Previously unaware and led astray v1-3

B - There are many gifts but one Spirit v4-11

C - The Body of Christ v12-13

D - Parable of the human body v14-26

C` - The Body of Christ v27

B` - There are many gifts but one Body v27-31a

A` - Now I will show you a better way v31b

Paul is so immersed in scripture that he actually is inspired to pattern this chiasm of “teaching, parable, teaching” after Isaiah’s use of the structure multiple times in Ch 53. For example, here is Isaiah’s use of this literary design pattern in 53:7-8:

A - He was oppressed “*He was oppressed and afflicted...*”

B - He was silent “*...yet he opened not his mouth;*”

C - Parable of the suffering lamb “*...like a lamb that is led to slaughter...*”

B` - He was silent “*...so he opened not his mouth.*”

A` - He was oppressed “*By oppression and judgment he was taken away.*”

In Isaiah, the image of the Passover lamb mediates the theology of the suffering servant whose sacrifice creates an exodus into new creation life for a rescued humanity.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul uses this same pattern to show the image of the diverse human body mediates the theology of Messiah’s Body whose unity energizes announcing new creation life for a rescued humanity.

This is not a message on “how to be a charismatic church” - it is a message about how the Corinthian believers are one Body, using the gifts as examples.

As we shall see in a couple of weeks, the Corinthians were using spiritual gifts as a way to draw attention to themselves through individual “spiritual flexing”, promoting disunity and disorder.

Chapter 12

1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brothers *and sisters*, I do not want you to be unaware.

- In **1:5-7**, Paul somewhat ironically praised them for their spiritual knowledge. Here he begins to address their massive spiritual misunderstanding.
- “Pneumatikoi” - special Spirit-given things, not natural abilities

2 You know that when you were pagans, *you were* led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. **3** Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

- “When you were pagans” - when their primary identities were in the cultural and faith practices of their “ethnos” and before they entered New Creation, symbolized by baptism.
- “Led astray to mute idols”/ the physical images of the corrupt spiritual powers, now disempowered by Jesus’ enthronement
- “Jesus is accursed” - in the world order of the present age, a crucified person is lower than a slave, cursed. A Spirit-led person doesn’t believe that.
- “Jesus is Lord/Kurios” (as opposed to ‘Caesar is Lord/Kurios’) states that the crucified Jesus is the true Lord of Earth...and heaven.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. **5** And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. **6** There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. **7** But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

- **Paul’s thesis:** varieties of gifts/charismaton exist, but from one true Lord and for one common good, not for personal spiritual status.

8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; **9** to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, **10** and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. **11** But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

- These are examples and by no means comprehensive. Romans 12, later in this chapter, and Ephesians 4 include others, but even combining these lists is not meant to be exclusive.

- This partial list is divided by Paul into two categories: non dramatic gifts and dramatic gifts
 - Non dramatic gifts
 - Wisdom (esp the wisdom of the cruciform life)
 - Knowledge (knowing facts or truths not entirely by natural means)
 - Faith - a pledged steadiness of believing trust
 - Dramatic gifts
 - Gifts (plural) of healing - supernatural healing of an illness given to someone sick
 - Miracles - God acting through and for the one so gifted
 - Prophecy - not just prediction but also “speaking forth”, including preaching
 - Distinguishing of spirits - intuition in the spiritual realm, not just “determining the name of this spiritual being” but whether a malevolent spiritual actor is afoot
 - Tongues - glossalia - an unknown language, not known by the speaker or hearers (as distinct from Acts 2)
 - Interpretation of tongues - if in a public setting, one to explain (not translate) the unknown tongue
- The Spirit distributes these as He wills, not because the Corinthians somehow achieve them through “greater spiritual status”

12 For just as the body is one and *yet* has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. **13** For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

- Paul wants the Corinthians to think of their place in the church in the same way that the “eye” would think of its place in the human body.
- “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” - baptism into New Creation means their primary identity is corporate, with no ethnic or social status distinctions.
- “immersion/baptism” by the Spirit and “made to drink” of the Spirit - two metaphors of water meaning how we enter into the life of Jesus and how the life of Jesus is sustained in us: one Spirit, not many different types of Holy Spirit reflecting our previous identities or social class.

14 For the body is not one part, but many. **15** If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body,” it is not for this reason any less *a part* of the body. **16** And

if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body,” it is not for this reason any less *a part* of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole *body* were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? **18** But now God has arranged the parts, each one of them in the body, just as He desired. **19** If they were all one part, where would the body be? **20** But now there are many parts, but one body. **21** And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again, the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

- **Why would Paul use this metaphor and ask these questions?** The body parts are the individual Corinthians. Some consider certain body parts as not “really” part of the body. Some thought other believers weren’t as necessary, because their gifting or social status was different than theirs.

22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; **23** and those *parts* of the body which we consider less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor, and our less presentable parts become much more presentable, **24** whereas our more presentable parts have no need *of it*. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *part* which lacked,

- Just as humans adorn socially unmentionable body parts with fine clothing, the Corinthians ought to adorn with honor the aged, the infirm, the weak, or those stuck in a lower class.
- Without the “socially unmentionable parts”, just as with the physical body, the Body of Christ will not reproduce...it will become a social club of people who are all alike.

25 so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the parts may have the same care for one another. **26** And if one part *of the body* suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if a part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it.

- They sit at the same table
- Empathy for the hurting
- More difficult: celebrating someone else’s win

27 Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it. **28** And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *and various* kinds of tongues. **29** All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they? **30** All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? **31** But earnestly desire the greater gifts.

- Further examples of gifts: apostles (ones sent to start churches in new cities), prophets/preachers and speakers for God, teachers (expounding the meaning of the scriptures), miracles, healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues...
- The idea is that there is a wide range of activity in the Body of Christ, and not everyone has been given everything!
- What are the greater gifts? There is “faith”, applied here to the life of following Christ in unity with other believers, which is arguably the theme of this letter. There is hope, which Paul will spend an entire chapter on in Ch 15. And then there is something else, something more than a gift...it is a “way”

And yet, *I am going to* show you a far better way.

“...we should note, against those who from time to time make claims about this, that Paul assumes that none of these gifts are given to everybody...it is all summed up in verse 27. These words should be engraved on the mind and heart of all church members. They should especially be taken to heart by those who are called to more high-profile office, or who have been given some special gift that, by thrusting them into the public eye, brings upon them the temptation to arrogance that was afflicting some in Corinth. ‘You are the Messiah’s body; individually, you’re members of it.’ That is the basis of all true understandings of the church, and all humble service within it.”

~N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*

Reflections