

1 Corinthians

Chapter 12:1-31

June 16, 1996

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- Spiritual gifts are not a measure of spirituality.
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- Spiritual gifts are distributed according to God's purposes.
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- Miraculous gifts were used by God to testify to something.
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- Spiritual gifts are given for the edification of the body of Christ.
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- **1 Corinthians Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Ungodly divisions result from man's wisdom.
- Chapter 2 Carnal man cannot understand our Spiritual God.
- Chapter 3 All Christians will have their labors tried by fire.
- Chapter 4 Boasting in our leaders puffs up and destroys fellowship.
- Chapter 5 Maintain the purity of the Church.
- Chapter 6 Do not dispute before the world and do not partake in sexual immorality.
- Chapter 7 Principles of marriage
- Chapter 8 The responsibility of liberty
- Chapter 9 Those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel
- Chapter 10 You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons.
- Chapter 11 Propriety in corporate worship and communion
- Chapter 12 The body of Christ is unified around a diversity of spiritual gifts

- **1 Corinthians 12:1-31**

- **Introduction & Review**

Last week we considered the four foundational principles which we shall keep in mind when we traffic through the next three chapters. The primary question to consider when evaluating the continuance of the revelatory and miraculous gifts is the sufficiency of the Scriptures.

- **Exposition**

1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:² You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.³ Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

- Earlier in chapter 10:20 Paul says that the sacrifices of the Gentiles are sacrificed to demons. He clearly teaches that the idols are nothing but that there is a spiritual entity being worshipped behind the idol. Paul is basically saying that it wouldn't occur to a thinking man to worship a block of wood but somehow they were led to do so. This leading was most likely done by the spiritual entities which received their worship although they themselves were created beings.
- It may seem curious as to why Paul would need to clarify that only by the Spirit of God can anyone say Jesus is Lord. Surely Paul is not simply referring to the mouthing of the words alone. Paul here is contrasting those spiritual entities which enticed

them to follow dumb idols with those who would be truly of God so that they might be able to distinguish between them.

- This simple test in verse 3 is not intended to be a shibboleth whereby we can quickly determine who Christians are but rather is it intended to distinguish those who are being led by a demonic spiritual entity and those who are being led by the true Spirit of God. Obviously it is not enough to say that our fellowship is based on a spiritual experience because in this case we would be having fellowship with people being led astray.

⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:⁸ for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

- Of first note is the Trinitarian emphasis in verses 4-6 where we see the Spirit, the Lord and God. God in His three persons administers the gifts, ministries and works.
- It is very important that we see the contrast that Paul is building. In the first section we see that there may be for instance, a man with the ability to prophesy yet he is not from the Lord. Sitting next to him may be a Christian who has been given the Spiritual gift of prophecy yet even though they have the same gift they are not unified. Going further, Paul goes on to instruct that even if we are not unified in our gifts, we are still unified as long as they have come from the same Spirit. The basis of unity is not the commonality of our gifts but rather it is the unity of the Holy Spirit.
- Just as in ancient Israel God revealed His mind through the prophets, so too these gifts were the New Testament for the first century Christian church. Until God's revelation was complete this was the means by which the people were instructed in the mind of God.
- Paul goes on to list some of these gifts which are distributed by the Spirit of God for the purpose of edifying the entire body. Wisdom can be defined as applied knowledge; it gives instruction on what to do even if the knowledge is incomplete. The gift of knowledge may have been the ability to comprehend deep, weighty spiritual matters within the counsel of God. It is hard to know what kind of faith is mentioned here. Given that it is in the middle of a list of the revelatory gifts, it must have been a faith that was extraordinarily fruitful. The next gift mentioned refers to those who had been vested with the authority to heal extemporaneously - not just a providential answer to a prayer for healing. Working miracles was the ability to do the "undoable" but not for the sake of a magic show - this was done to edify (not entertain) the body and testify to the authenticity of something or someone. The prophets would have been authenticated by the miraculous works so that the hearers might know they were receiving a true word from God. Those with the gifts of tongues and interpretation (tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy) functioned like those who prophesied so that all in the body would be blessed and edified according to the will and purpose of God.

¹² For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being 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 have all been made to drink into one Spirit.¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many.¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

- There is a common teaching called the Second Work of Grace where at some time after conversion Christians receive the baptism of the Spirit and as a result manifest the miraculous gifts. However, this verse says that we were included in the body by being baptized by the Holy Spirit. If we have not been baptized by the Spirit then we are not in the body and we are not Christians.
- In this and the next section, Paul in great detail demonstrates the proper thinking about the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ. We can see that in this first part, the person speaking is coveting the gifts of another. Here they think that their gift is unimportant and want the gifts of someone else. Doing so, Paul says, destroys the blessing of diversity.

¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be?²⁰ But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."²² No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be

weaker are necessary.²³ And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,²⁴ but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,²⁵ that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

- In this section, we can see a person who thinks that their gift is superior to others. Although the parts of the body are distinguishable does not mean that they are separate. We are a multiplicity of parts but are organically connected to each other. If we all were the same member of the body we wouldn't have a body.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.²⁸ And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?³⁰ Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?³¹ But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. NKJV

- It appears in this list in verse 28, that Paul is giving two lists; the first being apostles, prophets and teachers and all of the rest comprise the second list. It is most likely that the list is in order of importance rather than chronology.
- Of vital importance is the string of rhetorical questions posed by Paul at the end of this paragraph which all have the answer no. Consistent with his teaching, we must not impose certain gifts upon each other, there is no single gift or single set of gifts which is present in all Christians.