

The Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Introduction

New Section: Spiritual gifts (12-14). Keep all of it in mind, because the “problem” in Corinth will really show up in ch. 14. It’s a long section because it’s important and sensitive.

- A lot of the themes of Corinthians will show up it (e.g., division, knowledge, self-importance) and we will be dealing with the way people act in gathered worship.

What Do We Value: “Honor *people* such as these” (Phil 2:29; i.e., Epaphroditus, Timothy). We are so enamored by the spectacle that we often overlook character flaws. We look for prominence and pageantry over faithfulness and sincerity.

- “We imitate what we celebrate.” The truth about our obsession with celebrities is that it reveals **we want to be them** (and usually only for the wealth, status, and approval not because of some great virtue they display). That’s the danger in overlooking flaws in **leaders** just because they are powerful or get us what we want.
- In Corinth (*spoiler alert*) there was an inordinate emphasis on showy displays of spirituality (especially speaking in tongues). It seemed that some were disrupting and dominating the church’s gathering. It was a “look at me” show rather than a “look to Christ” gathering.
 - People will sometimes use spirituality (and even the church) to get the validation and acceptance that they should get from Christ (it’s possible to be doing the right thing, at the right place, but for the wrong reasons; **unhealthy relationship to faith**).
- We believe the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and our church. We welcome and long for his leadership here. We pray for him to convict us of sin, empower us toward righteousness, and lead us in obedience... but we measure the work of the HS less by spectacular dramatics and more by ordinary discipleship.
 - **Bumper Cars vs. Train Tracks (sparks, screaming, and circles vs. actual progress)**.
- The truth is, the Spirit *is* at work in every believer in our church and **we want to celebrate his work and receive his gifts with gratitude and joy**.¹

¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. ¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I

1. The Test of True Spirituality: Jesus is Lord (vv. 1-3)

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Corinthian Spirituality: Corinthians are very aware of the spiritual. Even in their pagan (**Gentile**; ἔθνη) lives (pre-Christ) they were very “spiritual.”

- Don't confuse “spiritual” for Christian (or for right). Lots of people are “spiritual.”
- The Corinthians had been “led astray” or “carried away” in their spiritual ecstasy to mute idols (cf. “dumb gods”; τὰ εἰδωλα τὰ ἄφωνα).
 - In antiquity, some had apparent divine experiences, full of frenzied and unpredictable activity. That's why Paul warns the Galatians that “even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8).
 - Jesus tells us that some will prophesy and cast out demons in his name but they never knew him (Matt 7:21-23).
- Spiritual fervor isn't the same thing as a god-driven movement. Devout passion is not the same thing as Spirit-directed activity. Christians today and from the earliest days of the church (see Corinth) sometimes mistake *unusual* works of the Spirit of God for the *only* works of the Spirit of God.
 - The HS is just as present in the stillness as the thunder. He's just as active in the preparation of the sermon as in the delivery. He guides the calendar as much as the conference. He's working in our evangelistic conversation with the Uber driver as much as the revival meeting.

Clarify: He doesn't want them to live uninformed (ignorant or agnostic, ἀγνοεῖν). *This would at least be ironic (**if not insulting**) to Corinthians who pride themselves on their knowledge (what does some backwater Jew have to teach us progressive and cosmopolitan Corinthians?).

am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ 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 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Lordship: There's a relatively simple way to see if the spiritual fervor that one is witnessing is of God or not. Do the words and actions confessed and demonstrated confess and display the Lordship of Jesus.

- Those inspired by the HS will speak and act in ways that glorify and surrender to Christ."
 - They will not be glorifying themselves. A lot of people say they are speaking in the Spirit but the content is self-exaltation. If your experience of the HS does not magnify Christ in your life, behavior, and action, then you are showing off for yourself, not him.
- They will not speak in contradiction to the commands of Christ already revealed. A lot of people say they are speaking in the Spirit but they are saying something contrary to what he has already inspired.

Spiritual vs. Natural: We are talking about "spiritual" gifts today.

- Spiritual vs natural. We have a tendency to baptize natural talents and human skill with spiritual meaning. *God has called you to use all of your natural talent and hard-earned skill* for his glory. Both your natural abilities and spiritual gifts should be used to worship God and serve others. However, natural ability comes genetically or through training but spiritual gifts only come from the power of the HS. Anyone can have an ability, only a Christian can have a spiritual gift. Talents can be used for godly or worldly purposes, spiritual gifts can only be used for God-glorifying tasks.

2. The Aim of True Spirituality: Common Good (vv. 4-11)

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Spiritual Person vs. Spiritual Gift: The topic at hand is spiritual gifts (sort of). Paul also calls them "services" (cf. deacon), and "activities." The word in v. 1, though was not "gifts" (v. 4) but "spiritual something" (τῶν πνευματικῶν, *neuter*) could be spiritual *things* (i.e., gifts) or spiritual *persons* (the spiritual ones).

- Paul changes "spiritual" to "gifts" (χαρισμάτων; cf. "charismatic"), because these are not achievements of the spiritual superior but gracious gifts by God. My spiritual gifts are not hard-earned or well-deserved, but freely given by God. He owns them, I don't.
 - *Which means*, I can't get mad at God for not giving me what I want. The response to a gift is simply "thank you," not, "this isn't what I wanted." It's a gift! You didn't have to get anything (teaching kids at Christmas).

Terminology: Spiritual activity summarized in three ways. There's a beautiful triune shape to this whole thing that displays the variety of God's work but all under the same God. The unity and diversity of the triune God is evidenced in the unity and diversity of the gifts he gives his church.

- There are a variety of **gifts** (χαρισμάτων, "charismatic"), the same **Spirit** (πνεῦμα).
- There are a variety of **types of service** or **ministries** (διακονιών, "deacon"), the same **Lord** (κύριος).
- There are a variety of **activities** (ἐνεργημάτων; in + work; "energy").

Variety: Change is hard. We like familiarity and predictability. Too many options is a stress we don't need (e.g., wardrobe like Steve Jobs; what's for dinner). We sometimes bring this mindset to our faith: we want people to look, think, act, and behave like us because it is easy, it doesn't stretch us, it validates our preferences. In the process we miss out on a huge array of God's spiritual arsenal. We limit ourselves (ordering something new at a restaurant, shrimp at hibachi; dino nuggets and ketchup limit the joy of variety).

Everyone: To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit

- To each (everyone is given spiritual gift). No one is left out.
 - HS doesn't come on a few but on all.

Purpose: Because all spiritual gifts from a common source (e.g., ⁴⁻⁶same Spirit, same Lord, same God... ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit), they are given for a common goal (i.e., the common good). God gives us gifts not for our own amusement or personal happiness but for the benefit of those around us in his church.

- Your gifts are not for you but for the church.
- ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Eph 4:15-16).
 - Giver or taker; Builder or consumer; Encourager or critic.
 - How can I get what I want vs. how can I help others?

Examples: vv. 8-10 contain a sample list of "manifestations of the Spirit" (i.e., spiritual gifts).

*This is not a comprehensive list (cf. Rom 12:6-8, Eph 4:11-13). The point is not necessarily the specifics of each gift but the diversity of God's provision for his church. Some of these are hard to map onto our modern understandings.

- **Three groups** grammatically separated (doesn't show up in English; i.e., ἐτέρω vs. ἄλλω; another of a different kind vs. another of the same kind).
- 2 + 5 + 2; First two apply to Corinthians, last two apply to Corinthians; middle five are more random, representative.
- **Group 1:** (1) word of wisdom (λόγος σοφίας); (2) word of knowledge (λόγος γνώσεως)
 - Not exactly sure if our distinction between wisdom and knowledge is the same.
 - This would stand out to the Corinthians who prided their knowledge. This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor 8:1b).

- **Group 2:** (1) faith (πίστις); (2) healing (χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων); (3) miracles (ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων); (4) prophecy (προφητεία); (5) judging spirits (διακρίσεις πνευμάτων).
 - This is sort of a random assortment (first two and last two have more direct application to Corinthian church).
 - All have **faith**, but what is this special kind? Faith is a gift for all of us. Just cause you don't have the "gift" (e.g., faith, helping, evangelism) doesn't mean you are exempt from the command (e.g., just because you're 'bad with money' doesn't mean you don't have to pay your bills).
 - Only gift listed in all NT gift lists is **prophecy**.
 - Inspired speech. **Predicting future: foretelling** (sometimes; if predicted is a mark of a true or false prophet). **Explaining the present: forthtelling** (conveying the message of God to hearers; 1 Jn 4:1; Moses).
- **Group 3:** (1) different kinds of tongues (γένη γλωσσῶν); (2) ἄλλω interpretation of tongues (ἑρμηνεῖα γλωσσῶν).
 - A particular problem in Corinth (see ch 14).
 - What kinds of languages? Human languages? Angelic languages? Not understood (need divine interpreter).

Will of God: ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually **as he wills**. God gives "as *he* wills," according to *his* purpose. Your spiritual ambition will not get you more or "better" gifts. Your job is simply to receive the gifts of God and to glorify him.

- "The wind (i.e., spirit) blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8).
- Both in ancient and modern revival movements (e.g., Jesus movement, Asbury, etc.), all throughout Scripture and history, God chooses particularly questionable people through whom to work. They don't have the education or the pedigree, they have some gnarly skeletons in their closet. It is not our job to gatekeep the work of the Spirit but to receive it (we do test and discern the Spirit).
- God surprises us: (Calvin and Hobbes). The Boss catches Calvin sitting at his desk staring out the window and asks, "Why aren't you working?" Calvin responds: "Because I didn't see you coming."
 - Don't limit God to only what you can imagine or expect. He'll surprise you with the people and circumstances he uses to get your attention and bring him glory.

3. The Perfect Analogy: The Body (vv. 12-26)

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make

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Perfect Metaphor: There's little use explaining this metaphor (it's basically perfect). I'll make a few comments, but let the sermonizing of Paul speak for itself. This metaphor is the illustration to his point. Church, not democracy but body (not do what I want, but work together, needy and needed)

Every Member Matters: All parts matter.

- Just cause you don't want to be part of the body. You're either a healthy and contributing part or an unhealthy and damaging part.
- Every member is needy and needed. We need all the different parts of the body. We need thumbs, and noses, and ears, and eyes, and big toes (every hurt your big toe). If you were one big nose, that wouldn't be great.
 - Each of us has a gift, it might not be prominent or flashy, but it's essential.
 - Diversity is not accidental but essential. A healthy body has all its parts, not just the visible ones.
 - Don't envy or mimic another's gift.
- The weaker members are especially elevated (you can live without an eye, nose, ear, etc.), but not a liver (yet we spend most of our time worried about our face).
- He reminds us that the least visible are often the most important (e.g., private parts in boxing or MMA fight).
 - The person you never see on stage, but is fervently praying in secret is more important than the most visible preacher or musician.

Baptized: When we are saved, we receive the Spirit of God (we are baptized by the HS) and become a member of God's church.

- Water baptism in a local church is a physical picture of the spiritual reality of salvation. It's also the moment you join a *local* expression of the *body of Christ*.
 - We don't baptize people that we don't plan to disciple and who don't take seriously their role in this local body.
- Spirit brings us together as one. We are now the body of Christ (e.g., no longer eggs, flour, sugar, but cake; we need all the parts but can't be separated).
 - The old markers of identity no longer hold (e.g., Jew, Greek, slave, free).

4. The Unmistakeable Point: You Are the Body of Christ (vv. 27-31)

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

A More Excellent Way: This section is a bit of a summary and a transition to next week (one of the most famous passages of Scripture).

- **God has given these gifts.** No one chooses to be an apostle, prophet, teacher, etc.
 - “The moment I’ve developed any sense of entitlement in ministry is the moment I’ve departed from the way of Jesus. To be a believer at all is a gift. To be in ministry at all is an occasion for gratitude” (Barber).
- This doesn’t mean that God’s gifts should be ignored. He *has* given us apostles, prophets, teachers (evangelists, shepherds, etc.).
- But not all of us are these things (“are all” demands a rhetorical “no”).
 - We need to stop taking one gift and making it everything!
 - That’s probably why he puts “tongues” last (that is there problem, ch 14).
 - There is a greater gift than tongues (e.g., prophecy, v. 14).
 - But, in the end, all the tongues in the world mean nothing devoid of the love of Christ (ch. 13).
- There is a **more excellent way** than ecstatic experience, it’s the way of love, where our gifts build others up rather than building ourselves up.
 - There is something better than healings and miracles, it’s the way of love.
 - The presence of the Spirit is seen by the fruit of the Spirit (fruit, cf. Gal 5): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
 - Don’t be enamored by someone with more “anointing than character” because such combo is arecipe for disaster. It’s power tools in the hands of a toddler (Tyson).
 - “Here’s your biggest contribution to God’s new world. Just be a man of growing integrity. Who you are deep in your heart empowers what you do out in the public eye” (Ray Ortlund).

Conclusion:

Be the Body: ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1. Love Each Other

- Each of us is part of the whole but none of us is the whole thing. We belong to each other. My well-being matters to you and yours to me.

- I would say this starts with committing to each other. Personally and internally commit to loving each other but also publicly and officially committing to a local church.
 - Feel each others hurts, celebrate each others wins.
 - “Walk in love” (deliberate choice to seek the good of another). “Falling in love is an accident, walking in love is a choice” (Eph 2).

2. Find Your Role

- We need each other.
- You can't opt out from the body.
- Whether your “gift” is highly visible or behind the scenes, or seemingly impressive or unimpressive, it is essential to the health, effectiveness, and mission of the church.
- When you opt out of the body of Christ, you hurt others and you hurt yourself! You weaken the body and you isolate yourself (isolation is deadly). No one should suffer or celebrate in isolation.
- When you neglect your role in the body you rob yourself and others of the good gifts of God.
- We need each other. This is the body God gave you.