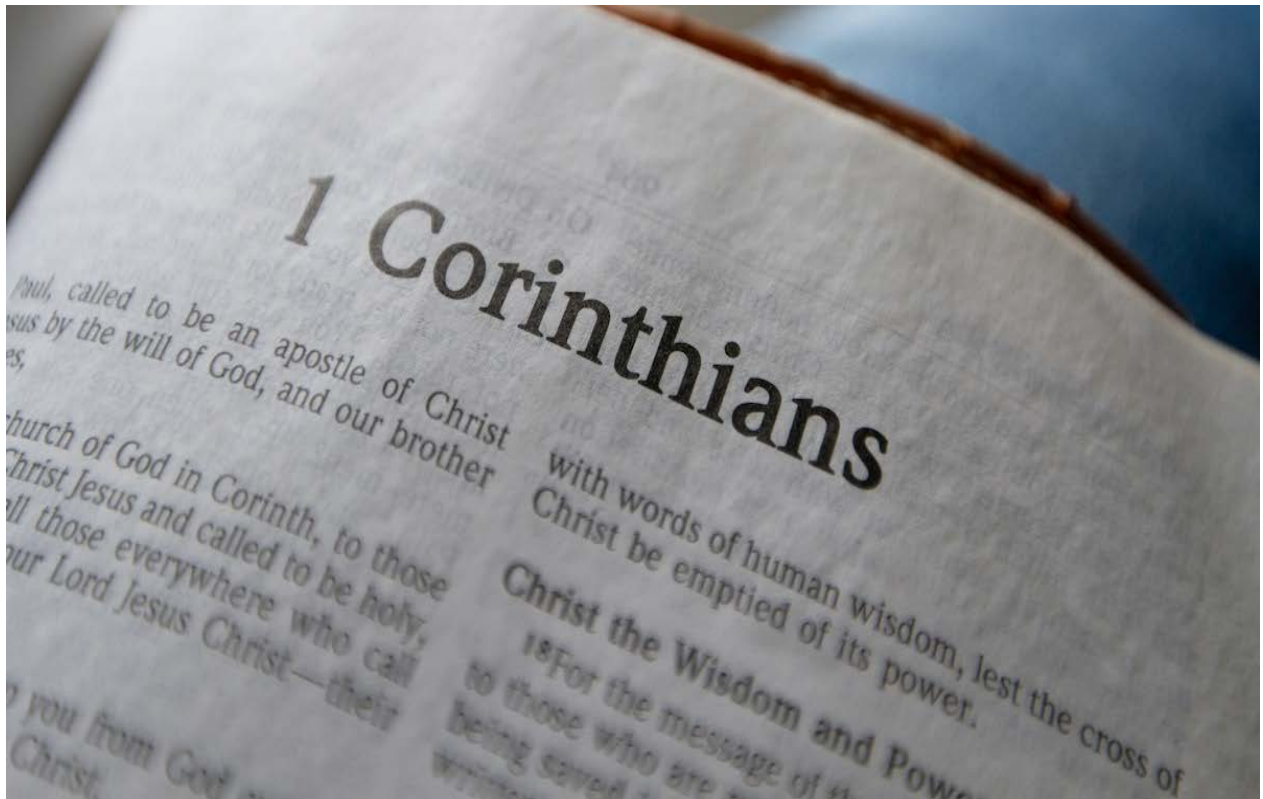


Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 13



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 13
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Introduction to *1 Corinthians 12*

In the church, the reality of the Holy Spirit is made manifest by the gifts He gives to every member and their faithful use of those gifts.

The effects of putting those gifts to work are that church members grow to become more like Christ and the church does, too. If we fail or refuse to identify and use our gifts, we quench the Spirit's power to grow our church in unity and maturity in the Lord (1 Thess. 5.19).

If our churches are not growing, there's a simple explanation: We are quenching the Spirit Who alone builds a church into a holy temple unto the Lord (Eph. 2.19-22).

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 No Guesswork

Pray Psalm 25.4, 5.

Show me Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You *are* the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.

Sing Psalm 25.4, 5.

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

Make me to know Your ways, teach me Your paths, O LORD!
My Savior, all day long I wait and seek You in Your Word.

Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 12.1-3.

Preparation

1. Who confesses Christ as Lord? Who does not?
2. How did Paul describe the idols of the Gentiles?

Meditation

These three verses are a curious way to introduce the subject of spiritual gifts, which will dominate the rest of this chapter. What was Paul thinking?

Note his motive: He was getting ready to explain to the Corinthians about spiritual gifts—what they are, where they come from, how they operate in the church, in short, why they matter so much. He, speaking for the Lord, would explain the dynamics of God’s Spirit, how He works in and through each one of them to realize the fellowship of Jesus together.

Idols can’t do that. Idols don’t teach people about caring for one another and building up the community of faith to be more like the idols. Idols are “dumb”—they have nothing to say about anything! We must not act as if our God has nothing to say. Rather, by the power of the Spirit acknowledging Jesus as Lord, we eagerly hear and submit to whatever He says. Because Jesus is not silent. And we will hear Him as Lord if, indeed, we have the Spirit of God—Who, it turns out, not only enables us to acknowledge and submit to the Lordship of Jesus, but also gifts us in unique and wonderful ways so that we might do so!

Probably none of the Corinthians would have said aloud, “Jesus be cursed!” But would they not be doing the same, and thus showing that they did not really possess the Spirit, if they refused to hear what Jesus was speaking to them and to do what He says? Paul to the Corinthians: Don’t curse Jesus by failing to hear what I’m about to tell you from Him.

Thus Paul indirectly set the stage for his teaching on spiritual gifts: If you have the Spirit and know Jesus as Lord, then you will hear what the Spirit says through Paul and use the gifts He gives you for building others up in love.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

“But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.
Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands.
They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
They have ears, but they do not hear;

Noses they have, but they do not smell;
They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk;
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them” (Pss. 115.3-8; 135.15-18).

Paul did not want the Corinthians, nor us, to be ignorant. And we are thankful for that.
I like the way he parsed his thoughts out:
No one speaking by the Spirit of God can call Jesus accursed.
No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.
To both of those thoughts we can agree wholeheartedly, thus we know, we are filled with the Holy Spirit.
And being filled with the Holy Spirit, we anticipate eagerly the gifts waiting for those thus filled.

We don’t need to guess about our status in the Kingdom. We are assured of salvation because we “know whom [we] have believed and [are] persuaded that He is able to keep what [we] have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim. 1.12). And we are “persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8.38, 39). And we are “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...” (Rom. 1.16). No guesswork needed.

Thank you, Paul. We know through the power of the Holy Spirit that we will never say nor think that Jesus is accursed. That is a settled fact. And we know that Jesus is Lord through the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are ready to accept the gifts needed to be useful vessels in the Kingdom of God, ready “for building others up in love”.

Dumb idols are incapable of any activity at all—merely hunks of mass lacking attributes or gifts. But our God is in heaven, majestic in power, seeing us, hearing us, and speaking words of love and encouragement to us. Ready to gift us with His Spirit, to minister in our Personal Mission Field.

Ready we are—of this, we are sure.

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.
(Fanny J. Crosby, 1873)*

For reflection

1. How do you experience the assurance of knowing that you belong to Jesus and the Father?
2. How would you explain this assurance to a friend who doesn’t know the Lord?
3. Whom will you encourage today to rejoice in the assurance of knowing the Lord?

*Those who confess Jesus Christ to be Lord and God must necessarily possess these gifts. Those who blaspheme Christ Jesus and subject him to cursing do not possess these gifts. This is what those deceived people were doing who were following blind and mute idols. And this is what the Corinthians would now do if the grace of the Holy Spirit did not shine on them. Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (1460-1536), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12.1**

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12

Pray Psalm 25.8-13.

As you pray, reflect on your daily reading of God's Word. What specific guidance, instruction, or commands has He spoken to You? Call on Him to make clear how you must follow Him this day.

Sing Psalm 25.8-13.

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

Upright and good are You, You lead us in Your way.

The humble You instruct in truth and guide him day by day.

The paths of God are all of love and faithfulness.

All they who keep His covenant the LORD will surely bless.

For Your sake, LORD, forgive. All they who fear You, LORD,
shall know Your blessings day by day and follow in Your Word.

2 Unity in Diversity

Pray Psalm 103.1-6.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
The LORD executes righteousness
And justice for all who are oppressed.

Sing Psalm 103.1-6.

(Old 100th: *All Creatures that on Earth Do Dwell*)

O my soul, bless the LORD's great Name! His many benefits proclaim:
He pardons sins and heals disease, and from the pit grants us release.

With mercy rich and steadfast love He satisfies us from above,
revives our youth, works righteousness, and justice serves for the oppressed.

Read 1 Corinthians 12.1-10; meditate on verses 4-10.

Preparation

1. What does God give His people?
2. Why does He give these?

Meditation

The Corinthians failed to understand how God works within His Church. They were vaunting themselves over their brethren rather than loving and edifying them. They were not practicing the fellowship of Jesus but were dividing the Body of Christ by attaching more to men than to the Lord. Paul's burden was to refocus their priorities so that they could realize God's purpose for His Church.

He turned now to address the matter of spiritual gifts, endowments of grace which God intends to be used "for the profit *of all*" (v. 7). The Spirit gives these gifts (v. 4); that is, He both instructs us in them and empowers their use. The Lord Jesus oversees the use of gifts (v. 5), to ensure that they are contributing to His agenda, which is to build His Church and advance His Kingdom. And all the use of gifts are to be unto the glory of God, Who works in us all (v. 6).

Everyone has gifts, since everyone who believes has the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts are the ways the Spirit makes Himself known (v. 7). There are many gifts, because the Body of Christ requires all its members to labor in ministry together and for one another to build up the Church in Jesus (Eph. 4.1-16).

Paul's introductory list of gifts is merely suggestive (vv. 8-10; he'll add to this list later). The Corinthians would have been perhaps most familiar with these first ones mentioned, so that their response would have been, "Oh, OK, now I know what you're talking about." He'll have more to say about these gifts before, in chapter 13, qualifying how all spiritual gifts must be used.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

“The Holy Spirit displays God’s power through each of us as a means of helping the entire church” (1 Cor. 12.7 TLB).

Jesus comforted His disciples with the knowledge that the Holy Spirit would be sent to each of them, and to all believers, to fill the coming void when He would ascend back into heaven. “But now I go away to Him Who sent Me, and...sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you...When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come; He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (Jn. 16.5, 6, 7, 13, 14). And He will give you gifts!

All good and perfect gifts are from God (Jms. 1.17) and are meant to be used for the edification of others. As Paul wrote: There are diversities of gifts, differences of ministries, and diversities of activities, but all emanate from the same God Who works all in all (1 Cor. 12.4-6). Gifts to cover all the needs of the church.

And these gifts are to be enjoyed, appreciated, and honored among believers. We are to be happy with the things we have been given and thrilled with the things given to others. “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13.5, 6).

We needn’t fear how others either accept or reject us or our gifts, because everything we have is from God, to be used for His honor and glory and within His Kingdom. Our job is to faithfully do what we have been called to do. And if we are doing that, we know His pleasure and His delight. And in that we can rejoice. “I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices...You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16.8, 9, 11).

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2.12). Manifestation for edification.

*All for Jesus! All for Jesus! All my being’s ransomed powers;
All my thoughts and words and doings, all my days and all my hours.*

*Let my hands perform His bidding, let my feet run in His ways;
Let my eyes see Jesus only, let my lips speak forth His praise.
(Mary D. James, 1889)*

For reflection

1. What spiritual gifts do you think the Spirit of God has given to you?
2. Are you making good use of those gifts? In what ways?
3. How can you see that spiritual gifts can help bring unity and edification to a local church?

*There are various gifts, and various offices to perform, but all proceed from one God, one Lord, one Spirit; that is, from the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the origin of all spiritual blessings. No man has them merely for himself. The more he profits others, the more will they turn to his own account. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on the 1 Corinthians 12.1-11**

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12

Pray Psalm 103.17-22.

Thank and praise the Lord for His abundant mercy and for the gifts He has given you for serving Him. Call on Him for grace to help you in serving others today.

Sing Psalm 103.17-22.

(Old 100th: *All Creatures that on Earth Do Dwell*)

But evermore to those who fear the LORD brings lovingkindness near;
His righteousness to them extends and to their children without end.

He rules upon His throne in heav'n; His sovereign rule o'er all is giv'n.
You angels, bless the LORD, rejoice, who live in strength to heed His voice.

All you who serve Him, bless the LORD, all you who heed His righteous Word!
Let all throughout the cosmos whole unite to praise Him, with my soul!

3 Working in All

Pray Psalm 68.19, 20.

Blessed be the Lord,
Who daily loads us *with benefits*,
The God of our salvation!

Selah

Our God *is* the God of salvation;
And to GOD the Lord *belong* escapes from death.

Sing Psalm 68.19, 20, 32, 33.

(O Store Gud: *How Great Thou Art*)

Blessed be the LORD, our burden daily bearing,
O God, our God, our Savior and our King!
With us salvation and deliv'rance sharing,
He life from death His people daily brings.

Refrain vv. 32, 33

Sing to the LORD, O kingdoms of the earth!
Ancient of Days—praise Him on high!
Behold He speaks; His Word is going forth;
Ancient of Days—praise Him on high!

Read 1 Corinthians 12.1-11; meditate on verse 11.

Preparation

1. What does the Spirit work?
2. What guides Him in distributing gifts?

Meditation

It seems to me that David composed Psalm 68 at the time he was preparing to build the temple. Perhaps he sent this all around the nation, calling the people to give whatever gifts they could to God on high for use in constructing His dwelling place:

You have ascended on high,
You have led captivity captive;
You have received gifts among men... (Ps. 68.18; cf. vv. 29-35).

The people all had something to give, and they gave lavishly for the project which Solomon would bring to completion.

Paul picked up on this idea of gifts for building the Church, but he turned it to reflect the great significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit: “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says:

When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.” (Eph. 4.7, 8)

Paul depicts Jesus as the One Who gives gifts. He daily loads us with benefits from on high, in and by the Person of the Holy Spirit (as symbolized in Acts 2.4). He gives all the gifts to the Church, distributing them as He will, that the people of God might work together with the gifts of God to build the Church for the glory of God.

If we were but as faithful in our work as the children of Israel were in the days of David and Solomon, our churches would be growing in unity and maturity, rejoicing in the work of the Lord and abounding in grace for their communities.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“What did you get for Christmas?” That was the penetrating question upon return to elementary school after the holidays. Were we waiting to hear that the class bully got charcoal and rocks in his stocking? After all, wasn’t the prerequisite for good gifts the naughty or nice litmus test?

But here’s the deal. God gave us the Holy Spirit when we were just on the cusp of naughty. Just saved and new to living for Jesus, and boom! We get the greatest gift of all—after of course, the gift of our underserved salvation—the Holy Spirit and His accompanying gift bags.

Wouldn’t it be a fun exercise to ask our fellow-believers: “What did you get from the Holy Spirit?” Or maybe just as fun, to observe these same people, and ask the Lord what gift they have, and how I can best encourage them to use it to the full?

David, in the throes of having been found out in one of his darkest sins, prayed: “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51.11). This was what he feared the most, knowing full well that without Him, he could do nothing. And without God, his life would have no meaning or purpose. None. Ditto for us. So we pleadingly pray the same.

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Rom. 14.17-19).

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One...” (1 Jn. 2.20). And so do I. We are gifted by the Holy Spirit, Who has distributed to each one of us—individually—as He wills (1 Cor. 12.11).

“What did we get from God for Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and Kingdom Calling?”

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
Who satisfies your mouth with good things...” (Ps. 103.2-5).
Who fills you with His Holy Spirit (Acts 1.8; Jn. 16.7).
Who gives you gifts to regift for others (1 Cor. 12.11).

Working in all for all.

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou are the Potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting yielded and still.*

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Hold o’er my being absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see*

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12

Christ only, always, living in me!
Adelaide A. Pollard, (1902)

For reflection

1. When did you first begin to discover the gifts God's Spirit has given you?
2. How have other people used their spiritual gifts to bless you?
3. What can you do to encourage others to discover and use their spiritual gifts?

He again calls the Corinthians to unity, by reminding them that all have derived from one fountain whatever they possess, while he instructs them, at the same time, that no one has so much as to have enough within himself, so as not to require help from others. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12.11*

Pray Psalm 68.26-35.

Pray that God, by His Holy Spirit working within us, will revive His churches and renew us in our mission to make disciples, build His Church, and advance His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Sing Psalm 68.26-35.

(O Store Gud: How Great Thou Art)

Bless God in all His holy congregations,
even the LORD, the Fountainhead of grace;
He calls His people forth from all the nations
and gathers them before His glorious face.

Refrain v. 32, 33

Sing to the LORD, O kingdoms of the earth!
Ancient of Days—praise Him on high!
Behold He speaks; His Word is going forth;
Ancient of Days—praise Him on high!

To You, O God, are strength and exaltation;
You fill the skies and dwell in holy awe!
To us You give strength, pow'r, and full salvation.
Blessed be Your Name, our strong, majestic God!

Refrain

4 Many Members, One Body

Pray Psalm 102.12-14.

But You, O LORD, shall endure forever,
And the remembrance of Your name to all generations.
You will arise *and* have mercy on Zion;
For the time to favor her,
Yes, the set time, has come.
For Your servants take pleasure in her stones,
And show favor to her dust.

Sing Psalm 102.12-14.

(Leominster: *Not What My Hands Have Done*)
But You, O LORD, abide forever in Your place.
Arise and stand on Zion's side and lavish us with grace!
Revive Your Church, O LORD! Let all her dust and stones
be strengthened by Your mighty Word, and compact be as one.

Read 1 Corinthians 12.1-19; meditate on verses 12-19.

Preparation

1. How is the church like a body?
2. How many of its members does the body need?

Meditation.

All for one and one for all. That's how a human body works. Many members, one body. Every member and component of the body works to benefit the whole body, and the whole body, healthy and strong, supports and strengthens each member. So God intends it to be in His churches.

All who believe in Jesus share in His fellowship by virtue of the Spirit dwelling within us. The Spirit distributes gifts for the members to use in building-up the church into Christlikeness (Eph. 4.11-16). As the church grows and becomes healthy, it provides strength and direction for each member to use their gifts to maximum benefit. All for one and one for all.

It takes all the gifts of God, from the most visible to the least visible, to contribute to making a healthy, growing church (vv. 15-18), so we dare not overlook or despise any of the gifts of the Spirit. We must identify them, nurture and develop them, and encourage those who have them to put them to use, by God's Spirit and Word, in edifying and loving others.

This is so simple and so beautiful. Imagine if our churches worked this way, what a powerful impact for the Lord we would have on one another and our local communities. And we can get to this. But first we'll have to admit that we are but babes in Christ and more prone to divisiveness than to unity. Then we can take up "doing church" the way the Lord intends. All for one and one for all. Many members, one body.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Church work is not a means to an end, like a Betty Crocker Bake-Off, or a religiously themed episode of *This Old House*.

It is not to show off our personal good works skills.

So then, why do we do good works within the church network?

Is it merely to show that we know how to nail shingles on a roof, clean a house, bake a dinner, or drive

another to an appointment?

Those things are all nice, no doubt, but the goal is to be like Jesus and to help others become the same: “The Spirit distributes gifts for the members to use in building-up the church into Christlikeness.” If that is not the ultimate goal of our good works then we are aiming at the wrong target.

“The equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” is done so that we all “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” to “grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ...” (Eph. 4.12, 13, 15). That is the end all and be all, for the all for one and one for all.

The many members of the one body serve as a catalyst for Christlikeness; but they also provide encouragement, shelter, safety, and strength in the long slog that is our lives. Solomon wrote that “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4.9-12).

All the parts of the physical body are necessary.

All the various parts of the body of Christ—the church—are necessary as well.

It cannot survive without each intricate part.

God made the world with an ecologically sound format; each part playing a significant role in the planet’s survival. The Church runs in much the same way.

Why would God have one survive differently from the other?

Each is His creation; each runs according to His fully wise plan.

“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth and it abides.

They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants” (Ps. 119.89-91).

All for one and one for all are His servants. The heavens, the earth, the people, and the Church. And all the purpose of all the things? To “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3.18).

For reflection

1. In what ways have you been growing in Christlikeness lately?
2. How does your church show Jesus to its community?
3. Whom will you encourage today to use their gifts in ministry?

The unity of the body consists in the fact that its many members supply the things which the other parts lack. Ambrosiaster (fl. 366-384), Commentary on Paul’s Epistles

Pray Psalm 102.22-28.

Pray that God will revive His churches throughout the world, that greater unity will come into the Body of Christ throughout your community, and that your own church will realize the promise of blessings from the Lord.

Sing Psalm 102.22-28.

(Leominster: *Not What My Hands Have Done*)

Yet let us tell God’s Name and praise His glorious grace;

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12

let all as one His love proclaim together in this place.
Though now our strength is low; though shortened grow our days,
our God will not forsake us so, but keep us in His ways!

Of old You made the earth and heavens by Your hand.
Though they shall perish You endure; forever shall You stand.
They change, yet You remain the same, without an end.
Our children shall Your favor gain, and theirs shall be Your friend.

5 Mutual Care, not Division

Pray Psalm 143.1, 2.

Hear my prayer, O LORD,
Give ear to my supplications!
In Your faithfulness answer me,
And in Your righteousness.
Do not enter into judgment with Your servant,
For in Your sight no one living is righteous.

Sing Psalm 143.1, 2.

(Divinum Mysterium: *Of the Father's Love Begotten*)

Hear my earnest prayer, O LORD! Give ear to my pleas for grace!
In Your faithfulness and righteousness, look upon me with Your face!
Enter not to judgment with Your servant, LORD,
with Your loving servant, LORD:
None can stand before Your Word.

Read 1 Corinthians 12.1-26; meditate on verses 20-26.

Preparation

1. How should we regard the other members of Christ's Body?
2. What does God want for His Church?

Meditation

All the members of the Body of Christ matter. Whether their gifts are few or many, great or small, visible or invisible, all matter and all contribute to the building-up of the Body of Christ in unity and maturity in the Lord (Eph. 4.11-16).

Imagine if your body were as wracked with division as the churches in Corinth. Your hand would tell your mouth to get its own food. Your eyes wouldn't care if you stubbed your toe; sorry, they were just too busy taking in all the view. With the members of your body warring against one another, vaunting themselves over the others, refusing to cooperate, and turning a blind eye to questionable practices, you'd just be better off staying in bed.

But God intends His Church to be sign of the Kingdom's having arrived and an outpost from which it advances throughout the world. So we need each other. We must refuse to let anything divide us as we cling to Jesus and delight in His fellowship. As we care for one another, suffer and weep with one another, rejoice and give thanks together, and make the most of every opportunity to build one another up in Jesus, we will become true temples of the Lord, and the people in our world will take note.

Division doesn't always take the form of hostility or competition. Sometimes the most common form of division is indifference: We just don't care to discover and use our gifts; it doesn't matter to us whether our church is growing in Christlikeness. But God calls His churches—He has so composed them (v. 24)—that they should be beautiful in unity and mutual care. And we all have something to contribute to that.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul used the picture of a healthy, functioning body to describe the Church that puts a smile on God's face.

A diseased Church is diametrically opposed to one that functions properly, for disease is defined as a disordered or abnormal condition of the body, or any harmful condition of society. (And we can safely

include here, the ailing Church).

All of us have been sick with something or other, and we know that it lays us low. We can empathize with Paul's analogy. We get it. And on a personal level, Paul experienced this kind of physical discordance, yet was comforted by the Lord Jesus that His grace would be sufficient to see him through his trial because, as it turns out, Jesus' "strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12.9). Personal or corporate weakness.

The Church must apply this same remedy. It does not need to despair, even though it may look at its body and see a huge gaping schism, oozing sin at every level. Repentance brings remission. "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mk. 1.4). Peter added a bonus, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2.38).

Do we truly want to be a healthy, vibrant, active, living, Christ-like Church?

If the answer is "yes", God's life-giving regime is the one to follow:

"If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God
and do what is right in His sight,
give ear to His commandments
and keep all His statutes,
I will put none of the diseases on you
which I have brought on the Egyptians.
For I AM the LORD who heals you" (Ex. 15.26).

Healthy and free to follow His Plan for mutual care and love within the Body of Christ.

For reflection

1. How can we tell when our church is not healthy, when it is not living up to God's desire?
2. What is your responsibility in helping your church to mutual care and love?
3. Pray daily for your church, that it might be more like what God intends. And pray for yourself, that you might be a faithful "member" of Christ's Body. What will that look like today?

If there were not great diversity among you, you could not be a body. If you were not a body, you could not be unified. If you were not one, you would not be equal in honor. It is because you are not all endowed with the same gift that you are a body. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 30.5

Pray Psalm 143.5-12.

Pray for your church, that the Lord would bring out all the gifts He has bestowed on your fellow believers and grow your church in greater unity and maturity in the Lord.

Sing Psalm 143.5-12.

(Divinum Mysterium: [Of the Father's Love Begotten](#))

I recall the days of old; on Your works I meditate—
all the wonders of Your mighty hand, works both small, O LORD, and great.
LORD, my thirsty soul cries out for help to You!
To You, LORD, I reach my hand
in a dry and weary land.

Answer quickly, O my LORD! Do not hide from me Your face!
For my spirit fails and I am like those who do not know Your grace.
In the morning let me hear Your steadfast love;

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12

LORD I trust You, show my way!
I lift up my soul and pray!

Rescue me from all my enemies! LORD, I refuge seek in You.
Let me know Your will, O LORD my God; make me know what I must do.
Let Your Spirit lead me on to level ground;
save my life! Preserve my soul!
Rescue, LORD, and make me whole!

6 Desiring Gifts

Pray Psalm 84.1-4.

How lovely *is* Your tabernacle,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, even faints
For the courts of the LORD;
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
Even the sparrow has found a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young—
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,
My King and my God.
Blessed *are* those who dwell in Your house;
They will still be praising You.
Selah

Sing Psalm 84.1-4.

(Holy Manna: *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

LORD of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling; how my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling of Your grace forevermore.
Like a bird upon the altar, let my life to You belong.
Blessed are they who never falter as they praise Your grace with song!

Read 1 Corinthians 12.1-31; meditate on verses 27-31.

Prepare

1. Does everyone in the church have the same gifts?
2. Which gifts should we earnestly desire?

Meditation

I saw a commercial on TV in which a man is trying to decide which pastry to buy from a case full of many and varied sweets. He keeps pointing at this one, no, that one, no the chocolate one in the back, no over there, that one. Meanwhile the exasperated baker is trying to keep up with his flitting choices. Finally, the man just says, “Give me all of them!”

That should be our attitude toward spiritual gifts. Not for ourselves, but for our church.

Remember, we don’t select the gifts we are to receive and use. The Spirit distributes them as He will because He alone knows what our church needs to keep growing in unity and maturity. There are greater gifts and lesser gifts, as Paul explains here (“first”, “second”, “third”, “after that”) but all the gifts are needed. Those who have the greater gifts must not despise those with lesser gifts; and those with lesser gifts should be diligent and content in fully exercising them.

At the same time, we can desire to have more gifts, gifts greater even than we already have (v. 31). If it pleases God to grant them, then we will rejoice to put them to use. If not, then we will rejoice in the good gifts we already possess.

I want to say to the Lord, “Just give me all the gifts, Lord!”, but that is a request we should make for our church, that all the gifts, properly distributed and employed, would be spread around and work together for the building-up of the Body of Christ.

And yet one more gift—one we all must have and use—is yet to be revealed. And it is more excellent than them all.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

God said to His disobedient children that “just as I was determined to punish you”

now “I am determined to do good...Do not fear.”

But then He told them what He expected from them:

“These are the things you shall do:

Speak each man the truth to his neighbor;

Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace;

Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor;

And do not love a false oath” (Zech. 8.14-17).

“Depart from evil, and do good;

And dwell forevermore” (Ps. 37.27).

Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15.5); but He also said: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (Jn. 14.12-14).

The gifts that we have received, and will continue to receive, as needed, should all be used to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and to beautify and grow His Church. This is Plan A and there is no Plan B.

When we prayerfully consider the local church we should attend, perhaps it would be wise to see what gifts are lacking there and ask the Lord if we are meant to fill in the gap. We so often choose a church because it has things that we like—a Bible oriented pastor, pleasing music, friendly people, a good children’s program, fun things for the teens to do, a burgeoning singles group, mission trips to interesting destinations, a thriving seniors’ group, or good snacks at half-time—but maybe there is another way to contemplate this question. Just wondering.

It is interesting to observe in the book of Acts and in the epistles, the gifts that were given at different times to meet different needs. Peter and Paul were both used by God to heal people, but they were not primarily known as healers. We can be used in the very same way, as Jesus promised, maybe just once. God wants to grow His Church and we are the available vessels He chooses to use for His purposes. How very exciting our calling is!

We dare not become wed to one gift and think that is as good as it gets. We need to, as Carole King sang, get up every morning, with a smile on our face, and show the world, all the love in our hearts. And ask the Lord Jesus to do great things in and through us, so the Father will be glorified in the Son, in and by our gifted good works, planned beforehand that we should do (Eph. 2.10).

“Lord, use me, give me the gifts needed for today’s work in my Personal Mission Field, in my church, and wherever else You choose to lead me. In Jesus’ precious name I pray. Amen.”

For reflection

1. What should you do in desiring greater gifts to use in serving the Lord? How would you go about obtaining those gifts from the Holy Spirit?

2. What gifts has God given you to use in the world for the purpose of building-up the church?

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12

3. How can believers encourage one another in this matter of spiritual gifts?

The Spirit distributes to every one as he will. We must be content though we are lower and less than others. We must not despise others, if we have greater gifts. How blessed the Christian church, if all the members did their duty! Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12.27-31*

Pray Psalm 84.5-12.

Thank the Lord for the gifts He has given you to carry you through your journey to eternal life. And thank Him for the gifts He has given your fellow travelers. Pray that you all might use your gifts faithfully and fruitfully, and that God would grant you even more gifts than what you already possess.

Sing Psalm 84.5-12.

(Holy Manna: *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Blessed are they whose strength is founded in Your strength, O LORD above.
All whose hearts in You are grounded journey in Your strength and love.
Though they weep with tears of sadness, grace shall all their way sustain.
In Your Presence, filled with gladness, they shall conquer all their pain.

LORD of hosts, my prayer receiving, hear me, help me by Your grace!
In Your courts I stand believing; turn to me Your glorious face!
LORD, our sun, our shield, our glory, no good thing will You deny
to those who proclaim Your story, and who on Your grace rely.

7 The Spirit in the Church

Pray Psalm 104.24-30.

O LORD, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all.
The earth is full of Your possessions—
This great and wide sea,
In which are innumerable teeming things,
Living things both small and great.
There the ships sail about;
There is that Leviathan
Which You have made to play there.
These all wait for You,
That You may give *them* their food in due season.
What You give them they gather in;
You open Your hand, they are filled with good.
You hide Your face, they are troubled;
You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the earth.

Sing Psalm 104.24-30.

(Creation: *The Spacious Firmament Above*)

How many are Your works, O LORD, which You have created by Your Word!
The earth and sea with creatures teem—they look to You to care and feed.
You give to them, they gather all; You hide Your face, they fail and fall.
You take their breath, they gasp and die; You send Your Spirit, they revive.

Review 1 Corinthians 12.1-31; meditate on verse 7.

Preparation

1. What do spiritual gifts manifest?
2. What do they accomplish?

Meditation

Some things you can only see by their effects. Like the wind. We can't see the wind, but we know it is present as we see the trees swaying or feel the breeze on our back. Jesus said that's the way it is with the Spirit as well. We can't see Him, but we can see His effects (Jn. 3.8).

In the church, the reality of the Holy Spirit is made manifest by the gifts He gives to every member and their faithful use of those gifts. The effects of putting those gifts to work are that church members grow to become more like Christ and the church does, too. If we fail or refuse to identify and use our gifts, we quench the Spirit's power to grow our church in unity and maturity in the Lord (1 Thess. 5.19). If our churches are not growing, there's a simple explanation: We are quenching the Spirit Who alone builds a church into a holy temple unto the Lord (Eph. 2.19-22).

Sadly, as we look at the state of many of our churches today, we would have to conclude—by the lack of Holy Spirit effects—that the Spirit is being quenched, most likely because the folks have made their faith into a spectator sport rather than a building project. Thus it is possible that the decrepitude of our churches will continue. But let us resolve to have no part in that decline. Let us make the commitment Solzhenitsyn made in the face of encroaching Marxist oppression: "Let that come, if it must come, only not by me."

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Little children let no one deceive you.
He who practices righteousness is righteous,
just as He is righteous.
He who sins is of the devil,
for the devil has sinned from the beginning.
For this purpose the Son of God was manifested,
that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn. 3.18).

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and make a way for us to be righteous before God. The Holy Spirit came bearing gifts making this way of life possible. We have received the gifts to glorify God and to benefit others. “The effects of putting those gifts to work are that church members grow to become more like Christ and the church does, too.”

Paul used the physical body and its members as a word picture for the operations of the church. Sin, I suppose, would be a euphemism for elimination, neither being a subject pleasant to discuss. But since we are, it would be appropriate to hear God’s words for how to keep our camps clean, and to keep our churches clean and functioning in righteousness—you know, mind how you go and watch where you step: “For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you” (Deut. 23.14; cf. 1 Cor. 5).

As the bumper sticker proclaims, this stuff happens. But to paraphrase Solzhenitsyn, “Not in our camp!”

Give the Holy Spirit full reign/rein in your life and use His gifts positively flagrantly for others.
“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4.30-32).

The Spirit of the Church loves to roam through a place free from the detritus of sin, observing those who practice righteousness; then gifting, and guiding them for the purpose of fruitful living (Gal. 5.22, 23).

*Refresh Thy people on their toilsome way; Lead us from night to never-ending day;
Fill all our lives with love and grace divine; And glory, laud, and praise be ever Thine.*
(Daniel C. Roberts, 1876)

For reflection

1. Why is the body metaphor such a good way to look at the church?
2. How has God gifted you to contribute to the overall health of your church?
3. What effects of the Holy Spirit would you like to see more of in your life?

Since no one has the capacity to receive all spiritual gifts, but the grace of the Spirit is given proportionately to the faith of each, when one is living in community with others, the grace privately bestowed on each individual becomes the common possession of the others.... One who receives any of these gifts does not possess it for his own sake but rather for the sake of others. Basil of Caesarea (330-379), *The Long Rules* 7

Pray Psalm 104.1-5, 31-35.

Give praise and thanks to God for the many gifts He has bestowed on you and your church. Pray that His Spirit may be powerfully manifest in the love you bear for one another.

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12

Sing Psalm 104.1-5, 31-35.

(Creation: *The Spacious Firmament Above*)

Bless God, my soul! How great are You, LORD, with majesty and splendor adorned.
The heav'ns He stretches like a tent, and lays His chambers in the firmament.
He rides the wings of winds on high and makes His messengers flaming fly.
The earth on its foundation stands, established forever by His hands.

LORD, let Your glory long endure! Rejoice! His works are ever sure!
He looks on earth, it quails and quakes, as we our songs of praises make.
LORD, let our meditation rise and bring great pleasure in Your eyes.
Consumed shall sinners ever be; O, bless and praise the LORD with me!

Spiritual Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What are spiritual gifts and what are they for?
2. How do believers acquire spiritual gifts?
3. Are some gifts more important than others in the church? But are those gifts any less significant? Explain.
4. What are your spiritual gifts and how are you using them at present?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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