

1 Corinthians 12:1–3

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Date: 06 July 2025

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[0 : 0 0] This is 1 Corinthians 12, 1-3, and you can find that on page 1061 of the Pew Bibles. Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to mute idols however you were led.

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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well, good morning. Welcome to Christ Church Chicago. If you're visiting this morning, I thank you for choosing to spend the morning with us. I am aware that there have arrived a group of pastors who will be here for the next few weeks doing the preaching intensive with the Charles Simeon Trust.

Thank you for worshiping with us as well. Morning, you. I don't need a pastor. You can just be a parishioner. I need a pastor because I need to preach. But let me pray for us this morning.

As the deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. May that be the earnest desire of our hearts this morning.

[1 : 3 5] May we long the Lord. And may we not be satisfied till we hear and receive from him. Help us to that end, we pray.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The letter was dated August 2nd, 1939.

It was addressed to F.D. Roosevelt, President of the United States White House, Washington, D.C. And it read, Sir, some recent work by Enrico Fermi and Lee Zillard, which has been communicated to me in manuscript, leads me to expect that the element uranium may be turned into a new and important source of energy in the immediate future.

Certain aspects of the situation which have arisen seem to call for watchfulness and, if necessary, quick action on the part of your administration.

I believe, therefore, it is my duty to bring to your attention the following facts and recommendations. In the third paragraph, it contains these prophetic words, and I quote from this writer, It is conceivable, though much less certain, that extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed.

[3 : 2 0] You'll want to be aware that secret German research was underway. The letter concluded, yours very truly, A. Einstein.

The letter turns out to be arguably one of the most important in the history of the West. And I share it, given the context of the University of Chicago.

I share it because in it, one of the leading scientists in the world at the University of Chicago informs the sitting U.S. president of one of the leading scientific advancements of the time.

It is critical, President Roosevelt, that you do not remain uninformed. If you remain in the dark or unaware of these matters, the implications will be dire.

Literally, the fate of nations, even the world is at stake. And if you know history, you know very well that Roosevelt began to fund the research in this direction.

[4 : 29] And I open this way because this is the same cautionary sounding and concern of our passage this morning. Paul writes to inform the church, even warn her for her fate and well-being were at stake.

It is as if Paul were saying, it is my duty to bring to your attention the following facts and recommendations. I do not want you to be uninformed.

The fate of the church in Corinth is at stake. Paul had spent 18 months in Corinth establishing this church, according to Acts 18.

The church was certainly dear to Paul. His two recorded letters to the Corinthians make up more of his writings than any of his other letters that he had composed.

They were a very capable congregation, well-resourced. They lacked no gift, according to chapter 1, verse 7. And despite their giftedness and their resources, they were an immensely troubled congregation.

[5 : 40] Strife, quarrels, divisions plagued them. Wayward teaching found its way into the congregation. Immorality pervaded.

Lawsuits directed at other church members. Disorderly worship and conduct were just some of their issues. It's so bad that Paul writes to them in chapter 11 that when they come together, it's not for the better.

It's actually for the worse. When you gather as a church, it's awful. It's an imperfect church. It's an imperfect church. Even a troubled church.

But we'll find this morning it's not a hopeless church. Rather, we'll find that God's grace was not done with them, for his spirit was upon them.

This morning we begin a new series in the book of 1 Corinthians. That will take us through the month of August. We are titling it, The Spirit-Filled Church.

[6 : 40] We'll focus on chapters 12 to 14 specifically. We are, in a sense, reading somebody else's mail. Not only reading someone's mail, but we are jumping in mid-correspondence.

So I want to help us get our bearings as we begin this series. This section, verses chapters 12 to 14, highlights the work of the Holy Spirit in the church.

What he does in bringing about its maturity, her maturity, her edification and strengthening. And one of the ways the Holy Spirit does this is the impartation or the giving of spiritual gifts.

These gifts are like spiritual superpowers of sorts. They are intended to build up the church. What is a spiritual gift? Literally translated, it's a grace.

It's a demonstration of God's grace given to believers. They are spiritual tools, skills, meant to be shared. And in the language of the text, chapter 12, verse 7, intended for the common good.

[7 : 46] Biblically speaking, they serve two primary functions. One is they actually attest to the unbeliever. But secondly, more importantly, they are for the building up of the people of God.

They are to build up those in this room. However, in Corinth, something went sideways. The exercise of spiritual gifts meant for building up others became means of self-promotion, self-adulation.

A look at me, self-importance. The gifts intended to serve others were now self-serving. The gifts meant to edify mutually now became divisive.

The Corinthians had an issue with spiritual pride, spiritual superiority. They were spiritual show-offs, puffing themselves up at the expense of others in the congregation.

Let me see if I can illustrate this. Imagine children bragging and arguing about the significance of their Christmas gifts with one another. The older sibling runs to the younger sibling and says, Hey, what I received from mom or dad is better than what you got.

[9 : 10] The younger sibling says, Well, my gift is worth more and more valuable than what you got. One child positions themselves in a superior position while the other child feels inferior.

See, the gifts that mom and dad gave to these children were intended to bring happiness to the child and joy to the entire home have now somehow created contention.

It's a foolish argument. Yet with such thinking and behavior, the Corinthians had divided their congregation. The faith community was torn and now needed to be mended.

So you begin to understand Corinth at the start of chapter 12. And it is in response to this that Paul writes this section. This morning, I tag our time, true spirituality.

True spirituality. My hope is that it becomes clear in our time together that we see true Christian spirituality stems from two things.

[10 : 20] Being delivered from our lostness and declaring Jesus as Lord. True spirituality is deliverance from our sin and declaring Jesus as Lord.

Paul writes to inform them, even to remind them of these two things. He reminds the Corinthians, firstly, of their common deliverance, verses 1 and 2.

And then their shared common declaration in verse 3. A common deliverance followed by a common declaration. The Spirit-filled church will share a common deliverance and a common declaration.

Firstly, a common deliverance. As I mentioned, we are inserting ourselves into this ongoing exchange between Paul and the Corinthians. According to chapter 5, verse 9, this is a follow-up letter, 1 Corinthians.

It appears that Paul has already written to the Corinthians. They have already written back to him. And they have posed some questions or matters they're confused about.

[11 : 29] A quick glance, since your Bibles are open, if you just look at the opening lines of chapter 7, you'll see this phrase, now concerning about the matters which you wrote.

You see it again in chapter 8, now concerning food offered to idols. And now you see it again in chapter 12, now concerning spiritual things or gifts.

Paul is addressing matters they had previously written about. Chapter 12 is no different. He's responding to an inquiry about spirituality, about spiritual life, about spiritual vigor.

What does it mean to be a spiritual person? We'll see in subsequent weeks there's contention about these spiritual manifestations, these special gifts to, in particular, prophecy and speaking in tongues.

There appears to be a debate going on in the congregation to which spiritual gift is better or best. What's superior?

[12 : 35] What will set me apart from the rest? It has caused the rift in this congregation. Some are snobbish. Some feel snubbed because of the gifts that they had.

Now commentators, historians try to reconstruct what's actually happening. We don't know the exact situation and we're not privy to it. Some have even proposed this.

That in this congregation, there were those who looked down on some who could not speak in tongues. There are traditions today that that occurs.

There are traditions that you might feel lesser because someone is unable to speak in this angelic language. And whether that be the specific situation, we can't say for certain. But whatever is going on, there are those who are looking down at others in the congregation.

Rather, it is like what the specific situation is, is not the most important thing. Rather, the most valuable thing is to see what Paul does to hold together an unraveling congregation.

[13 : 44] He calls them to recall what they once were. You see it. Do you remember? You were pagans. You were led astray by mute idols.

You were unbelievers. You were far from God. You were idolaters, misled into worshipping what was false. Moreover, in a twist of irony, you were drawn to mute idols.

You guys are so obsessed with speaking in angelic ways that you were following a God who could not speak. The idols were not only speechless, but they were lifeless.

The psalmist tells us, the idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of just human hands. They have mouths but do not speak.

Eyes but cannot see. Ears but don't hear. There is no breath in any of their mouths. Those who make them become like them. So do all who trust in him.

[14 : 43] And the psalmist is saying, you are becoming what you worship, mute, blind, deaf, and dead. And that is what the Corinthians were.

Think about what you came from, Paul said. Do you not remember that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived. But such were some.

And that was some of you. But you were washed, sanctified, justified in the Lord Jesus. And at the outset, Paul strategically starts at the most basic and fundamental level.

If the congregation, because the congregation is unraveling, before we talk about all these spiritual things and these spiritual gifts, let's rewind to the place when you were spiritually dead.

You worship the speechless and lifeless. You yourselves had no spiritual speech. You yourselves had no spiritual gifts.

[15 : 46] You yourselves had no spiritual life. So Paul brings them to the foot of the cross where no party, no individual, no ethnicity, no nation has any advantage or privilege.

Let's start right there, Corinthians. You need to be reminded of who you were before you came to Christ.

But something transformed. They're called pagans in verse 2, but they're addressed as brothers. The pagans transformed to brothers and sisters because of the sheer grace and the gift of God.

And Paul understood this, that in order to bring divided parties together, he had to show them that their greatest commonality, what would bring them together, was their deliverance from their old way of life into a life in Christ.

This will always be the most powerful unifying force for Christian fellowship and unity. In Corinth, their division, whether it be Jew or Gentile, socioeconomic status, marital status, married or single, spiritual capabilities or capacity, they would all be overcome if they came together because of their common deliverance and shared salvation.

[17 : 13] And this is the mark of this community as well. Here at Christ Church Chicago, there are so many differences in this room. One of my former pastors said, you know, we are an assembly of peculiar people.

You guys are weird. And you're looking at me, well, you're weird too. And if it were not for the grace of God, we would not be here. So many differences, some visible and evident, others hidden and concealed.

Some may feel that they are unqualified to be in these seats or that you may not belong. The text rises up and establishes the foundation of all Christian spirituality.

It is this to be delivered from the wages of our sin. Because you might walk in this room and you look at this seat next to you and you might say, that person is a seasoned Christian.

Do I have any place here? Or you might look behind you and you say, well, that person is a spiritual giant. Do I even belong here?

[18 : 27] Or you might look up here at the platform and say, how could I become like that? But that's not where Paul starts.

He starts by saying, the person behind, the person besides, the person up front, yes, even up here on the platform, was at one time wayward, lost, rebellious, and chasing idols.

We start there. So when you come in, the worst thought you can have is, these people are too good, too kind.

The last, I hope this person is not here. Someone left us a Google review describing us as a people. If you want peaceful people, you come in here. And yes, we are peaceful, but behind all of that, there's turmoil, restlessness.

Why? Because of our sin and our suffering. And yet that's the grounds whereby Paul draws, the gospel draws all of us together. It was from that position I was rescued.

[19 : 36] And it was from that same position that you were rescued. From that humble position, we're reminded of our common deliverance. So, Father, forgive me if I have ever thought that somehow I deserve to be here more than you.

Forgive me if I ever feel that I'm more valuable or bring more to the table. Forgive me if I act in ways that demean those for whom Christ has died.

Let us not be uninformed. We are brought together because of a common deliverance. Nobody is better than another.

However, the common deliverance is followed by a common declaration. Therefore, I want you to understand, verse 3, that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus is accursed.

No one can say, Jesus is Lord except in the Spirit. Much ink, so much ink has been spilled on verse 3. What does it mean? I can tell you the back half what it means.

[20 : 42] It simply means the Spirit of God empowers the people of God to say, Jesus is Lord. It is an individual's acknowledgment that the crucified Christ is also the reigning king.

It is the earliest, as far as we know, the earliest Christian creed. Jesus is Lord. It is the rejection of all other rivals, all other authorities, all other allegiances.

And here is the mark of true spirituality. Do you want to know what it means in terms for the Bible to be a spiritual person? Now, I know there's people out there who say, well, bang, I'm spiritual but not religious.

I'm spiritual but I'm not Christian. That would be a foreign thought to Paul. In the Bible, true spirituality means this. It means the most powerful thing that the Spirit can do in a person is to bring an individual to acknowledge that Christ is king.

That is the most spiritual thing that can be done in your life. It is greater than any gift. It is greater than any spiritual endowment or manifestation. The greatest work that can be done in your life by the Spirit of God is to work in your heart so that you profess Jesus is Lord.

[22 : 09] Paul is stating before we get to the tongues, before we get to the healing, before we get to the miracles, before you get to the prophecy, let us be clear. The foundational work of the Spirit is to bring you and to bring me and to bring us under the rule of Christ.

He's Lord. So the Spirit takes hold of one's heart and the mouth erupts in joyful confession and declaration that Jesus is Lord. And this is the central ministry of the Holy Spirit.

He bears witness to Christ, who he is and what he does. This is what happens when a person becomes a Christian. The Holy Spirit awakens a dead and dormant heart to the identity of Jesus and the heart's need of him.

And as a result, the individual embraces him by faith and identifies him as Lord. Now, what do we make of the first half of verse 3? Paul refers to some people making a declaration that Jesus is accursed.

He's anathema. Historians have tried to piece this together. What is this? How could people say that Jesus is accursed?

[23 : 29] There are some places in the Bible that might relate. Perhaps it's an allusion to Deuteronomy chapter 21 where the writer records that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed of God.

Possibly. The word is not the same. But it appears to be as early in the second century that it is a Jewish accusation attested against Jesus in particular.

The writings in the second century that would record that that was a way to slander Jesus. He's accursed, the Jews would say.

In our text, Jesus is accursed, is held in contrast to Jesus is Lord. Whether some were saying it when they were pagans or if it were a Jewish accusation, the reality is it's something that Christians under the Spirit of God would never say.

Because the Spirit of God, for clarity's sake, the Spirit of God and the Son of God are never in opposition. The Spirit of God and the Son of God are never in contention.

[24 : 37] At this point, it's worthwhile to say, well, what does the Holy Spirit actually do? What is it? Is it, we call it in Old English, it's a Holy Ghost. Is it a force?

Is it a power? Is it a wind? Do I feel him? Does he move about all the time? Well, we don't have time to convey a full doctrine of the Holy Spirit. But from the text, we need to acknowledge that the Spirit is the presence of God in the people of God.

He's personal. He's relational. He's a supporter, helper, advisor, strengthener, ally, and advocate. He was immensely active in the days of the early church.

What would be very helpful is what did Jesus say about the Spirit? This is taken from John 16, verses 13 to 14.

He says, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won't speak on his own authority. But whatever he hears, he will speak. And he will declare you the things that are to come.

[25 : 40] Verse 14, he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. So one of the primary works of the Holy Spirit is to make much of Jesus.

He glorifies Jesus because he takes Jesus' words and brings them to the believer. Therefore, the Spirit, it is important, the Spirit never acts contrary to Christ.

He never opposes Christ. He would never go in disagreement to Jesus or his words. The Spirit brings people to declare Jesus is Lord.

He would not and could not bring people to declare that Jesus is accursed. And for our sake, if you ever make a decision and you say, oh, the Spirit led me in this way.

The Spirit made it clear to me in this way. The Spirit told me in this way. And you read your Bible and Jesus says something entirely different.

[26 : 52] That was not the Spirit. That was either lunch or dinner or milk or ice cream or pizza. And it's, the Spirit will not lead you in a way that belittles Christ, let alone declare that he's accursed.

Paul is making clear that for those in Corinth, the Spirit had transformed their lives in such a way that Christ, once an enemy, was now a friend.

Christ, who was once associated with shame and foolishness and accursedness, is now declared and established as the pinnacle of glory, wisdom, and truth.

And it's the same with us today. You and I, at times, may long for deeper spirituality. Well, I want to speak in tongues. What in the world does that sound like?

Visions? Dreams? Supernatural manifestations? But these opening lines correct and tame our spiritual ambitions.

[28 : 05] Do you want to know what spiritual death looks like? It's a life lived in obedience and submission to Jesus as Lord.

The most mature, the tallest standing, the grandest of all Christians is not the one who sees things while they sleep or says things that no one understands, but follows God regardless of the cost.

The most mature Christian is the obedient Christian. And this is the lifelong task of the Spirit, to bring us into obedience and submission.

Jesus is Lord. How do we apply that? What does that look like? It's easy to do this on a Sunday morning, yet not I, but Christ.

But how does he work on Monday morning? In the office. He's Lord not only in this auditorium when we're gathered, but he's Lord in your office, in your classroom, in your laboratory or storefront.

[29 : 21] He pervades every relationship. This Lordship pervades every relationship, particularly those that are difficult. He influences your behaviors and actions.

He's Lord in your home, in your solitude, among your siblings, with your spouse. It is the Spirit who makes you aware of your wayward and mean-spirited words that are spoken in haste and insensitivity.

He tames your tongue, restrains your anger. He softens your heart to apologize when you've wounded those whom you love. What does his Lordship look like? He's Lord over your heart, your affections, your desires, your ambitions, your longings.

The Spirit will contend with your pride. Point out your greed. Make you aware of your lust and your laziness, your self-loathing and your groaning and your complaining.

He resides within us to transform us into the image of Jesus. That is what the Lord does.

[30 : 28] When Jesus is Lord, he dethrones all your idols. All your idols. Silver, gold, money, stocks, portfolios, security, health, well-being, status, achievement, institutional powers, degrees, regimes, political administrations, and all other misplaced hopes.

He will displace. Because he is Lord. The Spirit will loosen your grip on all little G-gods in your life.

Because you have a new Lord, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. And you're wondering, well, what's my little G-god? I think Pat, the late Tim Keller put it, well, it's what you daydream about.

What you think about. Perhaps you need to loosen your grip on that. See, his Lordship takes over every area of your life.

He is, as the Bible tells us, enters into the heart and cleans house. Right? He cleans house. And as I close, the Spirit-filled church is one that shares a common deliverance.

[31 : 49] Has a common declaration. And this is where true spirituality, in terms of the Bible, is found. These two strands bind us together as a congregation.

We have been delivered, really, in order to declare that Jesus is Lord. And I close with this. This just happened an hour ago. I had the privilege of sitting down with an individual before the service for a membership interview.

In our membership interviews, we ask questions. Tell us about your life. How did you meet Jesus? How did he become Savior and Lord? How did he become Savior? And as this individual shared, my heart was stirred.

And it was simultaneously tethered to hers. Why? Because we have a common deliverance. We did not come to faith in the same way.

So radically different. Our upbringings were totally different. This person grew up in Chicago. I grew up in the suburbs of California. Our paths we tread are very different, quite divergent.

[32 : 54] But now, somehow by the Spirit of God, we are joined together in this facet of life to walk together. Common deliverance.

Our professional ambitions are so different. But her spiritual goal is like mine. To look like Jesus. The sins and the suffering this person endured are dissimilar from mine.

But their quest to know Christ is the same. To grow in the knowledge of him, experiencing his boundless love, bearing witness to the world of his great power.

This person's life stage is radically different from mine. But our end stage will be the same. Glory forevermore. And if we as a congregation learn to do this in increasing ways, to say, tell me, how did Jesus deliver you?

Tell me, how did Jesus change you? Tell me, what does it look like for Jesus to be Lord of your life? Tell me how he's changed your family.

[34 : 09] If we do those in increasing ways. If we do those in increasing ways, we will be strengthened in unity, spared from division. And we will be a Spirit-filled congregation.

Oh, Father, we come to you this morning. And we glimpse at an imperfect church.

And yet, an imperfect church. And your imperfect bride is never left without hope. Because your Spirit is with her and in her.

Redeeming her. Transforming her. And bringing her under your rule and your reign. And so, Father, I pray for Christ Church Chicago.

That we would never be a congregation that's divided because we think some are up here and some are down here. Some look this way and some dress that way.

[35 : 16] Some are this and some are that. Regardless of all those things, we could say for certain that Christ gave us a common deliverance.

And we have a common declaration that Christ is Lord. And may those two strands bind us together. For your purpose as we pray.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake.