

1 Corinthians 12

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[0 : 0 0] We are looking tonight at 1 Corinthians chapter 12, so if you want to keep your Bible open there. The topic is spiritual gifts, and especially how attitudes about spiritual gifts play out in the church. We'll be looking at this topic over a few weeks starting tonight, but through chapter 14 over the next three weeks. Before I get started, let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word.

Let us be joyful recipients of it now. May my voice be yours, that your word would be heard and lived out in the coming days and weeks.

In your Son and through your Spirit we pray this. Amen. Amen. One of my underlying goals as we work through these passages on spiritual gifts is to help us relate sort of contemporary discussions and debates about spiritual gifts to what the Bible actually says here. So in that vein, I thought it would be helpful to introduce this section with a sort of quick taxonomy of contemporary positions on spiritual gifts, so that when we come to the bits of the Bible that actually talk about that here, we know what we're dealing with in the 21st century. Does that make sense? The first camp, there are really two big camps.

The first camp is cessationism, meaning that the miraculous spiritual gifts have ceased. People who hold this position typically do so in reaction to perceived abuses of spiritual giftedness in the other camp.

One extreme of the sort of sensationist camp is... One extreme tends to be, frankly, a little condescending and arrogant in its approach to sort of...

[2 : 1 7] And actually, I think, abuses the Bible sometimes in its approach to sort of denying the present work of the Holy Spirit. The other extreme of the cessationist camp, and this is a hard word to say, cessationist camp are what I would like to call functional cessationists.

Those are, I think, most evangelicals sort of live in this realm of going about their lives quietly, not really paying that much attention to any particular thing the Holy Spirit might be doing, and sort of functionally live as though cessationists.

Exegetically, I think, one problem for cessationists is dealing with lists like this one that we saw in 1 Corinthians 12, but others in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, that don't really distinguish between miraculous gifts, like tongues, miracles, prophecy, healing, and other gifts that I don't think any cessationist would deny, things like faith, encouragement, service.

And so because the lists don't really distinguish those, it's hard to argue, well, all of them are ceased, or just some of them are ceased, etc. Does that make sense? All right. The other major camp is the continuationists, also known as the charismatics.

You know, charismatics. This is the international symbol for charismatics. I think there are sort of three big categories of charismatics that are worth paying attention to.

[3 : 5 8] One is, I'm going to call them biblically restrained charismatics. Those are people who are open to the idea that the spiritual gifts are for today, things like tongues.

But if they're going to be practiced, they need to be practiced in a way that is restrained by biblical precedent and by biblical sort of parameters, things like what we're going to see in chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians.

Second, I'm going to call the hypercharismatics. Those who are not only open to spiritual gifts, but actually treat them as a sort of separate source of interpretation.

I'm sorry, of inspiration. A separate source of inspiration actually parallel to scripture. The goal for the hypercharismatics is usually some kind of emotional high of experience.

So, prophetic utterances and tongues, as well as several things that have no basis in the Bible, like barking and laughing and drunken glory.

[5 : 07] And if you ever want to see some examples of this, they're all over YouTube and quite amusing. These become sort of direct lines of communication from the Holy Spirit that, and this is where it gets kind of dangerous, I think, have equal authority to the Bible.

This, of course, is problematic for a few reasons. One, because it goes against the Bible's understanding of its own soul authority. Two, because it introduces all kinds of false doctrine, false prophets into the church.

And three, it goes hand in hand with legalism. Because the power of God now rests in the utterance of man, rather than in the revealed word of God.

So, legalism tends to be where hypercharismatics really struggle. The third group, I'm going to call them monocharismatics.

You may also know them as Pentecostals. They don't necessarily hold that the spiritual gifts are sort of side-by-side revelation with the Bible.

[6 : 24] But rather, the gift of the Spirit, particularly the gift of tongues, is somehow a sign of God's presence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life.

In other words, one is not really a Christian unless they speak in tongues. These last two groups are the hypercharismatics and the monocharismatics, are important to pay attention to because they are the fastest growing groups of Christians in the world.

Particularly in the developing world. And it's problematic because these perspectives go hand in hand with the prosperity gospel. Which I think makes sense, right?

When what matters is the sign and the experience and the authority rests under the leader, rather than the word of God, greed and misunderstanding of God's promises inevitably follow.

So, that's what I wanted to sort of introduce in this section. These are the sort of modern categories of positions on the spiritual gifts.

[7 : 41] So, now let's look at the actual passage. 1 Corinthians 12. I think the passage works in three sections. Section 1 to 3.

I'm sorry, verses 1 to 3. I'm going to call ignorance and spirituality. Verses 4 to 13. Unity in the spirit. And 14 to 31.

The necessity of a variety of spiritual gifts. So, again, 1 to 3. Ignorance. 4 to 13. Unity. 14 to 31. Necessity.

1 to 3. Ignorance and spirituality. Verse 1. Now, concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You'll notice Paul opens the passage with, now concerning.

You may remember from 7.1, 725, 8.1, this is his phrase for introducing topics that they had asked him about in a letter. So, he's transitioning topics to something that they've written him about.

[8 : 45] If you have the ESV translation of the New Testament, you'll also notice there's a little footnote there behind the phrase spiritual gifts.

This is an important word. It's a word that really means spiritual people. It's from the Greek pneumatikos. Pneuma is the word for spirit.

So, if we look back at 3.1, Paul has already used this word with the connotation of spiritual maturity.

So, 3.1. But I, brothers, could not address you as, and here's our word, spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

It's quick, it's subtle, it's incredibly effective. The idea is, now concerning spiritual people, Corinthians, and I've already said you're not really spiritual people.

[9 : 49] In fact, you're so bad at spirituality, you're basically infants. That's the tone of this introduction. The word here in 12.1 is also in contrast to every other instance of the word gifts in this chapter.

Every other time you see the word gifts, it's not this word. It's a different word from the Greek charisma. It's where we get the word charismatic. Okay? So, it's important to see he's making a distinction here between spiritual people, spiritual maturity, and the expression of charismatic gifts.

He continues, I love this phrase, I do not want you to be uninformed. I don't want you to be ignorant. It's a punch in the gut, is what it is.

It's a word that literally means without knowledge. And it's dripping with irony. The Corinthians think they know everything. Which is kind of funny.

They think they know everything. And so he writes to them saying, Corinthians, I know you know everything, but I just, I want you to not be ignorant. In fact, they have the spiritual gift of knowledge.

[11 : 08] He's already admitted that at the beginning of the book. Remember back in chapter 1, verses 4 to 7. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.

That in every way you were enriched in him. In all speech. And all knowledge. Even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you. So that you are not lacking in any gift.

That's the charisma word. They have all the gifts. They have none of the spiritual maturity. They know everything.

But he wants them to know this too. What is it that they actually need to know? He gives them a test. Verses 2 and 3. It's a little confusing in the wording, but we'll give it a try.

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.

[12 : 16] And no one can say, Jesus is Lord. Except in the Holy Spirit. He's saying, remember, it's not that long ago that you were idol worshipers.

For some of you, it's actually only two chapters ago. But now you have the Holy Spirit. And whatever having the Holy Spirit means, and it means a lot in this chapter, the Spirit positions the believer in relationship to Jesus Christ.

This is important for those of us who are not Christians to understand. The first and most important work of the Holy Spirit is orienting you to Jesus Christ.

Enabling you to repent and to have the faith that saves. Jesus Christ gave himself over to death to atone for sin, and he rose again to defeat evil and death.

And to be put in relationship with him is an act of the Holy Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 1, 4 and 5, John 16, 7 to 11.

[13 : 25] To be a Christian, then, means to have Jesus as your Lord. So as Christians, then, it's important for us not to forget, as we debate all of this stuff about spiritual gifts, that it is the Holy Spirit who points us to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

This is the first mark of spiritual maturity. And so whatever else you think about spiritual gifts, it is fundamentally about Jesus. 4 to 13. Unity.

Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord.

And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all and everyone. Do you notice the repetition? There's a variety of gifts, and he goes on to name them.

But the emphasis is on that which every Christian has in common, the same Spirit, the same Lord Jesus Christ, the same God and Father.

[14 : 37] This emphasis comes up again at the end of the section as well, verse 11. All these gifts are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

There are a variety of gifts, but the gifts collectively unify us in the Spirit. The same triune God. Again, Paul closes the section on this notion of unity.

Verses 12 to 13. 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.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Jews are Greek, slaves are free, and all were made to drink of one Spirit. This unity is also the purpose of the gifts.

Look at verse 7. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. So whatever spiritual gift you have, Paul is saying it is for building up the church and the common good.

[15 : 46] So use your gifts for the unifying good of the church. Use your God-given talents as well, those talents that you've had from birth, but also consider what gifts the Spirit gave you when you became a Christian.

Consider what desires he gave you to contribute to the health of the church. 14 to 31. Necessity of a variety of spiritual gifts.

Where this last section, I think, emphasized unity, particularly oriented to the common good, this section emphasizes necessity of a variety of gifts for that unity.

In other words, while the gifts are unifying, we don't want to make the mistake of thinking that therefore everybody has to have the exact same gifts.

That's actually, I think, a misunderstanding of unity. To make this point, Paul picks up the metaphor of body that he introduced at the end of the previous section, and then paints here a gruesome picture of handless, eyeless, earless bodies on the one hand, and bodies consisting entirely of eyes or entirely of ears on the other hand.

[17 : 04] The implication is that a church, like this one in Corinth, that overvalues one set of gifts or one particular gift, and we're going to find out in chapter 14, they overvalue the gift of tongues, this kind of church that overvalues gifts to the point that some people become second-class members is at best a perversion of the way God has designed the church.

The effect is, I think, quite serious. It divides the church on the basis of gifts, and it makes it the sort of worst kind of meritocracy.

Remember Paul's agenda back from chapter 1, verse 10. This is his main aim for the whole book. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no division among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

And here in chapter 12, I think he adds, what's this mean for us? I think it means that, well, I think it means a couple of things.

First, I think it means we should not feel inferior or ashamed about spiritual gifts. We don't need to be nervous about gifts, and we don't need to be self-conscious of our particular gifts.

[18 : 46] Let me say that again. We don't need to be nervous about the expression of spiritual gifts, and we particularly don't need to be ashamed or self-conscious of our particular gifts.

Verse 14, For the body does not consider, I'm sorry, For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. And again in verse 20, As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

To put it bluntly, if we require a certain gift in order to think that you're a Christian, a gift like tongues, we require, or even if we require particular gifts before we'll allow you to serve in the church in a way that's apart from that actual gift.

So what I mean is, if we require you to speak in tongues, to serve in the church, even if your service isn't speaking in tongues, even if it's something else, then we have become Corinthian in our spiritual immaturity.

Not everyone's a prophet, not everyone is a teacher, and there should be no, this should not be a source of shame or inferiority for anyone in the church.

[20 : 09] Whether you have the gift of administration, and we have a very gifted administrator who coordinates this service, or maybe you have the gift of helping. One of my best friends is gifted as a helper.

He is the most helpful person I think InterVarsity on this campus has ever known. I mean, thousands of people who don't know his name have sat in chairs that he has moved and listened to sound systems that he has set up.

He's gifted in other ways too, but, or maybe you have the gift of teaching. Either way, we are all one body, and nobody should ever feel like they don't fit because they don't have a particular gift.

Second, I think, is the other side of the coin, and that is, we shouldn't ever feel superior either. Verse 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.

Not all the gifts are the same. Some of the gifts are more helpful for building up the church, something we're going to look at in chapter 14. And it's right and good to desire these higher gifts.

[21 : 24] But at the same time, just because one is given a higher gift does not entitle them to look down upon or to dishonor anyone else in the church with another gift.

Any gift is an expression of the one Holy Spirit from whom we all drink. So do you?

Do we value everyone serving in this church? Do we value them enough? Verse 22, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

So to conclude, Christians, you have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, meaning you have been given at least one spiritual gift.

And as important as considering what that gift might be, and if you want to talk about that, I'm happy to talk about this list of gifts or any of the other lists of gifts.

[22 : 17] And I'm happy to meet with you over coffee. We can talk about them, what they mean, what gifts you think you might have, how we can put you to work in this church. I know Arthur would be happy to do that too.

As important as all of that is, much more important is what our attitude toward the rest of the church and its giftedness is. So are you using your gift for the common good of God's people?

I hope so. Does your lack of a particular gift make you feel inferior? I hope not. Does your particular gift make you feel superior? May it never be.

When it comes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the attending roles in this church, how do we treat each other? What's our attitude?

What does our use of these gifts say about our spiritual maturity? For the Corinthians, the prognosis is not so good. Fortunately, Paul closes with this brilliant little phrase, and I will show you still a more excellent way.

[23 : 30] For us, that means come back next week. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, as your Son humbled himself to become man, dying for us that we may be saved, so give us attitudes of humility and generosity toward one another in the expression of the gifts of grace that you have given us.

we thank you for these gifts and ask that you may be glorified in them. We pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.