

It's not about you

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[0:00] 1 Corinthians chapter 12 beginning at verse 1. 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.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and 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.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge, according to the same Spirit.

To another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit. To another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between Spirits.

[1:10] To another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

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 or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. For the body, 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 part of the body. not make it any less part of the body. And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any lesser part of the body. 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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? And it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again to the head, to the feet, I have no need of you. On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honourable, we bestow the greater honour, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more representable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it, 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. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?

[3:24] Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way.

Please do sit down. And turn back, if you will, in the church Bibles to page 1154. Page 1154.

It's that reading which we had just now from 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Page 1154. Page 1154.

Now I guess after the momentous events of the last week, a very obvious question to ask is, why are we now going to have a sermon from the Bible explaining what the Bible says?

Surely there are more important issues to discuss, and more useful things we could be doing with our time on a Sunday morning. But a sermon is not meant to be a thought for the day.

[4:29] It is not meant to be a sort of commentary on current affairs or anything like that. Rather, a sermon is meant to be an explanation of what the Bible has to say, with the view that we both understand in ourselves, and then we put into practice.

Because the convictions of Christians is that God is a speaking God. And the Bible is God's word to us. And therefore, actually, what you and I need to hear most of all today, as any other day, is the voice of God himself.

We need to hear the Bible read and explained. So before I start, why don't I pray and ask that we would understand and take God's word to heart this morning. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we rejoice that you are indeed a God who speaks. Thank you for your word, the Bible. And we pray this morning, please would you help us to understand it and to take it to heart in our lives.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now, for those who are visiting, you join us as we work through this letter of 1 Corinthians, written by the Apostle Paul.

[5:44] So this is not a chapter that's been chosen for today. But I think, nonetheless, it is a very suitable chapter to be looking at today because it answers the question, who is truly spiritual?

What does a genuinely spiritual person look like? What does a real Christian, if you like, look like? Just have a look at the very first verse of the chapter.

1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 1. Now, concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. In the original, the word gifts isn't present.

That's acknowledged in the footnote here in the Bibles. So I think a better translation would really be now concerning spiritual people, or now concerning spiritual things, or what it means to be spiritual.

So it's not primarily a chapter about spiritual gifts. It's about who is spiritual, what it looks like to be spiritual, a real Christian. It's a really important question, isn't it?

[6:47] It will be important for Henry as he grows up. It's important for all of us here in this room, whether we call ourselves Christians or not this morning. Our culture, of course, tells us, doesn't it, there are all sorts of ways in which you can be spiritual.

I was at a tube station last week, the most enormous poster, all the way along the side of the tube station, advertising, meditation. On a bus, the most enormous poster on the side of a bus, advertising a huge church service in the O2.

For others, of course, being spiritual simply amounts to having mountaintop experiences, or whatever it is. Now, I put an outline on the back of the service sheet.

You might like to turn to it, just so you know where we're going. We're only going up to verse 26 today. We're going to do the rest of the chapter and chapter 13 next week. But you'll see three points.

First of all, every real Christian is spiritual. Have a look at verses 2 and 3. You know that when you are pagans, you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.

[7:57] 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.

Now, we've seen previously the church in Corinth was a pretty messed up church. In chapters 12 to 14, Paul is addressing the problem of division between those who think they don't really belong, those who don't really think they have anything to offer.

In other words, those who are pretty certain they are not spiritual. And others who think they are the special ones because they have a particular gift.

The gift of speaking in tongues. That is, praising God or praying in a language unintelligible to the speaker, which they regard as a hallmark of being spiritual.

Well, how does the Apostle Paul reply? Well, in verse 3, he makes the point that actually there's a far more fundamental test of the really spiritual person, of what a real Christian is.

[9:05] And it is this. Everyone, verse 3, who makes the basic affirmation that Jesus Christ is Lord, that is the mark of the genuinely spiritual person, of the real Christian.

Jesus came to earth, God in the flesh. He spoke the words of God. He did the work of God. He died on the cross for the forgiveness of sin.

He was raised to life, never to die again. At the end of history, he will return to judge at the end of time. Jesus Christ is Lord. It is a summary of the Christian message.

Obviously, not just to say the words, Jesus is Lord, but to mean and know that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the greatest miracle that God's Holy Spirit works. Because as we've been reminded earlier this morning, none of us by nature recognizes that Jesus Christ is Lord. It's the Spirit who enables us to put our trust in Jesus as Lord.

[10:13] And at that point, it's the same Spirit who then comes to dwell in his people, such that we then recognize and live out what it means to live with Jesus as Lord.

Every real Christian is spiritual. Because every real Christian has the Holy Spirit. It's what we just prayed for, isn't it, for Henry?

That actually, as he grows up, that he will understand the message of Jesus and that he will recognize that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord. It's the fundamental divide in humanity, verse 2.

Following any other religious belief system or non-religious belief system is to be led astray. Notice how the Bible divides humanity into two groups.

We have lots of different divisions, don't we, in our society? But you see, as God looks at the world, there are only two groups of people. There are those who worship Jesus as Lord. And to use the words of verse 2, there are those who worship idols.

[11:18] Might be the idols of a career or family or success or lifestyle or power. Whatever it is that gives you significance and shapes and drives your life is your idol.

Just as the Lord Jesus divided people into two groups. Those who follow him and those who believe in him and those who don't. Those who he called the sheep. Those who he called the goats. It's very challenging, isn't it? To our 21st century mindset. A mindset which so dislikes boundaries of right and wrong. That says that you can find spiritual people in all sorts of faiths.

In all sorts of walks of life. Where all truth is relative. Where all truth is simply a matter of opinion. Where there's no such thing as truth with a capital T.

But of course, because Jesus Christ is at the heart of the Christian faith. The one who came to earth as fully God. The one who perfectly reveals God. Then actually there is such thing as truth with a capital T.

[12:28] So it challenges our culture. It's a challenge too, I think, to church culture. I was hearing last week that more people travel through Heathrow Airport in first class or business class. Than any other airport in the world.

And sadly, in some churches. There can very much be the impression. That there are those who are sort of first class Christians, so to speak. And those who are second class Christians.

That was certainly the case in the church in Corinth. And even churches that we may be familiar with, some of us, can give that impression. So perhaps some of us have come across the Alpha course.

If you have done, you'll know that one of the illustrations the Alpha course uses is the illustration of a gas boiler. And the point is made on the course that some Christians, so to speak, just have the little pilot lights of the Holy Spirit.

Doesn't give off much light. Doesn't give off much power. But then, whereas other Christians, so the course would have us believe, are filled with the Spirit. Or receive some second experience of the Spirit.

[13:33] Such that rather than just having that little pilot light. You know what it's like when your boiler suddenly goes whoosh. And your heating kicks in and everything happens. As if they have that much of the Holy Spirit.

And of course, at that point of the course, it's very easy to feel that there are indeed first class and second class Christians. But wonderfully, the Apostle Paul levels the playing field.

Who is the genuinely spiritual person? Well, the Christian. In whom God dwells by his Holy Spirit. Every real Christian is spiritual.

I take it that is a wonderfully liberating thing. And it is the foundation for the rest of the chapter. And the key verse, really, for the rest of the chapter, if you look at it, the key verse is verse 7.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Spiritual gifts are given to every Christian for the common good.

[14:36] And I reflected that in the next two headings there on the outline. So then, spiritual gifts, first of all, are given to each one. Verses 8 to 11. Now, although these verses are primarily addressed to Christians, I hope others amongst us this morning will see actually how wonderfully attractive is the picture of the local church that is painted for us in these verses.

Especially when there's nothing the media seems to like more than unrelenting stories of church decline and scandal and all the rest of it.

But the picture here is wonderfully attractive. For the simple reason that all of us, of course, are naturally competitive, aren't we? I know that I'm naturally competitive. I think all of us are naturally competitive.

Some of us compete through achievements or possessions or career or appearance or whatever it is. Others through the strength of personalities or social background or through our children. The list is endless.

And, of course, we all know, don't we, where we stand, therefore, in the pecking order. Depending on how we choose to compete. Well, wonderfully, we're going to see that church is not to be like that at all.

[15:49] But if we're going to apply 1 Corinthians 12 today, we need to understand, first of all, I think, what was going on in Corinth, in that church 2,000 years ago.

Because look back to chapter 11, verse 17, which we thought about last week. What was it Paul said to them, to this church in Corinth, chapter 11, verse 17?

In the following instructions, I do not commend you, because when you come together, it is not for the better, but for the worse. In other words, you see, Paul is not here giving us a template for how church should work.

Unless, of course, we want to be a church where our meetings do more harm than good. Now, these chapters are a corrective. And the main idea, I think, is not hard to spot.

Spiritual gifts are given to everyone who believes in Jesus as Lord. You can see that there in verse 7 to each. Verse 8 to one to another. Verse 9 to another, twice.

[16:49] Verse 10 to another, five times. And then verse 11, to each one individually. In other words, Paul is not here giving us the definitive guide to spiritual gifts, which answers all the questions which some of us may have in 2016.

He doesn't define and analyze each gift for us, as we might like him to. Nor does he give us an exhaustive list of all the spiritual gifts. There's another list at the end of the chapter.

There's another list in Romans 12, elsewhere in the New Testament. Another in Ephesians chapter 4. Each one is different. While there are other things which I guess we might regard as gifts, such as the gift of music.

I had wonderful music this morning. Or the gift of hospitality. Which actually aren't mentioned at all in the New Testament. Nor, I think, is there any indication that all these gifts were present in the church in Corinth.

Indeed, it may well be that the point of this list may precisely be to show that they weren't all present. Paul deliberately mentions the gift of tongues. This gift that the Corinthians thought was so important.

[17:56] Why it comes at the end of the list. Verse 10. Perhaps just to prick their pride a little bit at that point. Notice too, there's no distinction between what we might call those gifts which are more supernatural.

And those which are more ordinary. In verse 28, Paul talks about gifts of helping and administration. Paul's point is simply that spiritual gifts are given in variety by the Holy Spirit to everyone who believes in Jesus as Lord.

But I wonder as well if you notice that it's a variety that reflects the character of God himself. Have a look again at verses 4 to 6.

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of service but the same Lord. And there are varieties of activities but it's the same God who empowers them all in everyone. Now notice, will you, as we look at these verses again, notice what Paul doesn't say. Because he could have said this, verse 4. Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service but the same Spirit.

[19:06] And there are varieties of activities but it's the same Spirit who empowers them all in everyone. But he doesn't do that, does he? As if you see to emphasize the fact that God is God the Father, God the Son, who he calls Lord, and God the Holy Spirit.

God in three persons. Each one equally God. Each one with different roles. Just as those who believe in Jesus are all spiritual but all have different gifts or roles.

Indeed that's reflected, isn't it, in the wording there in verses 4 to 6. Paul doesn't notice, just talk about gifts. He also speaks in verse 5, a variety of service.

Verse 6, a variety of activities. In other words, you see, rather than simply thinking in terms of spiritual gifts, we should think more broadly than that.

In terms of, are there ways in which I'm equipped to serve others? Are there activities I can do for the benefit of others? Not just spiritual gifts but spiritual service, spiritual activities.

[20:16] Summary, verse 11. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as he wills. In other words, church is not meant to be like the first day back at school after the Christmas holidays.

Do you remember the first day back at school after the Christmas holidays? Enders bragging about the gifts you've had. I've had an iPhone 6 for Christmas. I've had an iPhone 25 for Christmas. I've had 10 iPhones for Christmas. And the pecking order of who is where has been well and truly established. No, the church is not to be like that.

Because you see, every church and every Christian is what we might call charismatic. The word comes from the New Testament word charis, which simply means a gift.

And because the giver of gifts is the Holy Spirit, and he is the one who gives the gifts to each one as he wills, verse 11.

[21:19] It means we can't demand a particular gift or feel hard done by if we don't have a certain gift or boast in the gifts that we have. No, they're gifts. And so we're thankful for God's kindness and generosity at that point.

Every real Christian is spiritual. Spiritual gifts are given to each. Spiritual gifts are given, thirdly, for all. Verses 12 to 26.

In other words, to serve each other. Not to serve ourselves, but to serve each other. Have a look at verse 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.

For in one spirit we are all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit. Now the principle is there in verse 12. In the human body there is what we might call unity in diversity.

Many members, but one body. Just as verse 13 in the church. There are many members. Paul mentions some of the big divisions in first century society. Between Jews and Greeks.

[22:32] Between those who are slaves and those who are free. But all are one. Those who believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. All are one in Christ. Every real Christian has the spirit given at the point of conversion symbolized in baptism.

As Paul says, verse 13. But of course the fact is that in every church there are those who feel on the edge. In every church there are those who feel as if they don't belong.

Who perhaps think of themselves as outsiders in some way. Perhaps it's because they feel they're slightly different from other people. Perhaps a different kind of personality. And perhaps as well they feel there is a sort of inner core.

An inner group that they're very conscious that they don't belong to. Now what that reveals of course. Is they're actually looking for their sense of belonging in the wrong place.

They're looking for people who are like them. Rather than looking to the Lord Jesus. And recognizing the unity that they already have. Similarly.

[23:41] In every church there are always those who do feel they fit in. They feel very much part of a kind of inner group. So to speak. The insiders. But they may have it just as much wrong.

As the outsiders. Because it may be that the very reason they feel they do fit in. Is because there are others. Who are just like them.

They too you see are failing to recognize. The unity there is in Christ. Yes with those who are similar to them. But also with those who are very different from them.

One body. Many members. So then what does Paul say to the outsiders. And the insiders. Well first of all.

Those who feel they're on the edge. The outsiders. Have a look at verses 15 and 16. If the foot should say.

[24:41] Because I'm not a hand. I do not belong to the body. That would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say. Because I'm not an eye. I don't belong to the body.

That would not make it any less a part of the body. Here you see is the spiritual eel. The person who says. You know I have nothing to give. I'm very ordinary. The church doesn't need my gifts. And of course so often sadly. The results can be some jealousy. Self pity. A discontentment. And a reluctance to serve. And so on. But says Paul stop.

That's not how you treat your body. Verse 16. If the ear should say. Because I'm not an eye. I don't belong to the body. That would not make it any less a part of the body.

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? As it is. God arranged the members in the body. Each one of them.

[25:38] As he chose. If all were a single member. Where would the body be? As it is. There are many parts. Yet one body. Variety is needed. In the human body. Imagine. If you were simply a big eye.

Well you might have fantastic vision. I wouldn't need to wear glasses. I take it. But it would be pretty hard to hear. Wouldn't it? Or to eat. You could zoom downhill. But it would be pretty hard going uphill.

You see. You need a body. Those who feel on the edge. Need to take verse 11. To heart. All these are empowered. By one and the same spirits.

Who apportions to each one. Individually. As he wills. God's Holy Spirit. Is the one who. Is the giver of gifts. And he doesn't get it wrong. He's given you.

The gifts you have. In order to use them. For the benefit. Of others. And therefore you see. We can rejoice in. And value our gifts. Whatever they are.

[26:37] We must not imagine. That just because we don't have. Up front gifts. For example. That we are less needed. And of course. The wonderful reality. So often in church life. Is actually. It's the most gifted people.

Who are least. Aware of it. What about the insiders? Well. I take it. They're those who say.

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. What are they saying?

We're the sort of. We're in the inner circle. We're the spiritual elite. No. We don't have need. Of you lot. We're just down there. To which again.

Paul says. Stop. That's not how you think. Of your physical body. Verse 22. On the contrary. The parts of the body. That seem to be weaker.

[27:32] Are indispensable. And on those parts of the body. That we think less honorable. We bestow the greater honor. And our unrepresentable parts.

Are treated with greater. Modesty.

When you get kicked in the groin. It matters. It hurts. When I went to decathlon. A while back. To buy some running shorts. I discovered. There's a whole industry. Geared to protecting. What Paul calls here. The less presentable parts of the body. See in the local church. We're not to be. Like the world. Which simply honors those.

Of status. And celebrity. Who look impressive. Up front. In summary. Verse 25. Shows us God's two-fold purpose.

In arranging the gifts. In the local church. As he has done so. First of all. Notice verse 25. So there may be no division. In the church. No division. Between those on the edge. So to speak.

[28:28] The outsiders. And those. At the core. So to speak. The insiders. All are needed. But the second reason. Verse 25. Notice. Is so that we care for each other.

Because we recognize. That all of us. Are needed. Just think. What happened. The last time. You stubbed your toe. Did the rest of your body. Just kind of. Ignore it. No.

I should think. Your mouth. Was full of sympathy. Ow. I should think. Your legs. Were full of sympathy. As they stopped. I should think. Your hands. Were full of sympathy. As they perhaps. Tried to rub it better. Or something. Like that. There are two ways. You see. In which God. Could have given. Grace Church Dulwich. Or indeed.

Any other church. The gifts. We need. The first way. Would be to give. Everyone. Every single. Gift. But of course.

[29:22] If that were the case. We wouldn't need each other. In fact. We'd be in competition. With each other. And church. Would simply resemble. An episode of the apprentice. With everyone boasting.

Of their gifts. And abilities. And talents. And frankly. Who would want to be part of a church. Like that. Be a complete nightmare. The second way.

Is the way. God has in fact. Made sure. That Grace Church Dulwich. As any other church. Has the gifts. We need. And that is. He gives different gifts.

To different people. But he then gives us. To each other. Which means. You see. That I need you. And you need.

Me. Our gifts. Are not given. For ourselves. To make ourselves. Look good. They are given to us. For the benefits.

[30:17] Of. Each other. In other words. We should rejoice. In each other's gifts. Because they are given. For the benefits. Of all of us.

As we say. Wow. It's wonderful. That you have that gift. It's wonderful. That you exercise. That gift. So well. For the sake. Of others. And we praise God.

Who is the giver. Of gifts. Just look around you. Those of us. Who are visitors. Those who are visitors. This morning. You'll have to excuse. The church family. At this point. But just look around you. And just think.

God has gifted. Grace Church. Dulwich. As he have. As he has. As he has. As he has. Every church. Very. Very. Wonderfully. A body.

Each one. With different gifts. Each one. With different abilities. Each one. Who has put their trust. In the Lord Jesus. Genuinely. Christian. Genuinely spiritual. Gifts and abilities.

[31:13] All given. For the benefits. Of others. A wonderful thing. Let's have a few moments. Quiet. And then. I shall lead us.

In prayer. To each. Is given. The manifestation. Of the spirit. For the common. Good. Heavenly Father. We praise you. Very much indeed. For this wonderfully.

Attractive picture. Of the local church. As a body. Each one gifted. Each one using. Their gifts. And abilities. And service. For the benefit of others.

And we pray. Heavenly Father. This glorious. Picture. Might be reflected. In our corporate life. Together. In increasing. Measure. And we ask it.

For Jesus sake. Amen.