

Unity & Diversity

1 Corinthians 12

Concerning Spiritual Gifts

- ❑ Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. In verses 1-3, Paul introduces the subject of “spiritual gifts,”¹ which he addresses in chapters 12-14. Apparently, some of the Corinthians believed that the more spectacular gifts² were more spiritual, thus more important. At least some of those who had these spectacular gifts were looking down on others, resulting in divisions.
- ❑ In verses 4-6, Paul says there are different kinds of gifts, service, and working, but *all* are from the one God. These “manifestation(s)”³ of the Spirit” (12:7) are for the common good.
- ❑ In verses 8-10, Paul provides a partial list of these gifts, services, and workings. After providing this list, Paul says, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (12:11).



One Body, Many Parts

- ❑ Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-20. Paul uses the human body as a metaphor. The body is a unit consisting of many parts. In this sense, the church is like a body. Thus the church is “the body of Christ” (12:27).⁴ The Spirit makes believers one body (12:13).⁵
 - 📖 “And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18).
- ❑ Though the church is “one body,” divisions (whether social, ethnic or other) can still occur. Sadly, this is still true today. But Christians should promote the unity of the body (12:13).
 1. What does Paul say about the necessity of diversity⁶ (being different) within the one body? (12:14-20) What are the implications for believers who feel inferior to other Christians?



2. Who decides how the different members are arranged? (12:18; cf. 12:11) How should this affect the Christian’s view of his/her gift(s) relative to others?

¹ Verse 1: “spiritual gifts” (πνευματικῶν, *pneumatikōn*) – “spiritual things” (“things of the Spirit”) or possibly “spiritual people.” Paul uses a different word (χάρισμα, *charisma*) in verses 4, 9, 28, 30, 31. *Charisma* is based on the word “grace” (*charis*) and might be translated “grace-gift,” which emphasizes God gracious bestowal of the gift.

² Spectacular gifts would include healing, miraculous powers, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Based on Paul’s statements in chapter 14, it is apparent that some had an extremely high view of speaking in tongues.

³ “manifestation” (φανέρωσις, *phanerōsis*) – showing or revealing the reality and power of the Holy Spirit

⁴ The phrase can refer to the church universal (Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18) or a local congregation (1 Cor. 12:27).

⁵ “by one Spirit” (ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι) – or “in one Spirit”; “one Spirit to drink” – all believers are indwelt by, and experience, the one Spirit, which is the basis of unity. Barriers of nationality, ethnicity, & social status are removed.

⁶ “Diversity” is a popular concept in U.S. culture. In general, promotion of diversity is good because people tend to be egocentric (self-centered) and ethnocentric. However, the term “diversity” has negative connotations for many Christians because the world’s version of “diversity” includes tolerance of immoral lifestyles. The diversity Paul is talking about is within the “one body of Christ.” In the body of Christ, there is a common devotion to Christ and His purposes, and particular moral standards as defined in the Bible.

Interdependence of the Parts

□ Read 1 Corinthians 12:21-26.

3. How are the different parts of the body *not* to treat each other? (12:21-24) What are the implications for believers who feel that their gifts or ministries are superior to others?
4. What is God's desire in his combining of members in the body? How should believers relate to one another? (12:24b-26) Based on your experience and observations in the local church, is this happening?



- Paul concludes the chapter, “But eagerly desire the greater⁷ gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way” (12:31, *NIV*). These words point toward Lesson Twelve.

Reflection & Application

- Are you a member of the “body of Christ?” If not, what do like about the “body of Christ?” Are you open to the possibility of becoming a Christian? I encourage you to ask and seek.
- If you are a Christian, what are your responsibilities in “the body?” Think about how you relate to other Christians in your local fellowship, both in receiving and giving.
- What is your function or ministry in “the body?” Are you using your gifts and abilities for God's purposes? Identify your gifts and abilities, and find ways you can serve in “the body.”

Summary of Lists of “Spiritual Gifts” in the New Testament:⁸

1 Corinthians 12:8-10	1 Cor. 12:28	Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
message of wisdom	apostles ¹⁴	prophecy	apostles	speaking
message of knowledge	prophets ¹⁵	service	prophets	service
faith ⁹	teachers	teaching	evangelists	
gifts of healing(s) ¹⁰	workers of miracles	encouraging	pastors &	
miraculous powers	healing	giving	teachers	
prophecy ¹¹	helps	leadership		
distinguishing of spirits ¹²	administration ¹⁶	showing mercy		
speaking in tongues ¹³	speaking in tongues			
interpreting tongues				

⁷ Desiring “greater” gifts may seem to contradict the spirit of Chapter 12, but Paul is setting up for Chapter 14 (14:1).

⁸ These lists are not exhaustive, but are illustrative of the various gifts God has bestowed on the church. Most of the spiritual gifts listed are God-given *abilities* (combined with their related ministries). However, some of God's gifts are *functions* or *persons* whom God has enabled to perform particular ministries in the church (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). Spiritual gifts are not necessarily limited to special endowments of the Spirit exclusive of the underlay of the believer's “natural” abilities. For example, if the “natural” abilities of teaching or service (also gifts of God) come under the power and control of the Spirit, they are not ruled out as “spiritual gifts.” Certainly, some spiritual gifts are special abilities entirely new to the believer, and such special abilities might be temporary.

⁹ πίστις (*pistis*) – not “saving faith,” but special endowment of faith to perform some extraordinary work

¹⁰ χάρισμα ιαμάτων (*charismata iamatōn*) – miraculous healing (see Acts 14:8-10; 28:7-9 for Paul's experience)

¹¹ προφητεία (*prophēteia*) – public proclamation of a “revelation” from God (inspired words or thoughts)

¹² διακρίσεις πνευμάτων (*diakriseis pneumatōn*) – discerning whether something is from God or demonic forces

¹³ “kinds of tongues” (γένη γλωσσῶν, *genē glōssōn*) – in this context, Spirit-enabled language (particularly in prayer, praise, and worship) that is not understood by the speaker, and usually not understood by the hearer. The “gift of interpretation” is needed to make tongues understandable so that others can be built up.

¹⁴ ἀπόστολος, – probably limited to those who founded the church (Eph 2:20); thus is not a current function.

¹⁵ “Prophets” in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 are not necessarily the same as those with the gift of prophesy.

¹⁶ κυβερνήσεις (*kybernēseis*) – related to a term used for piloting or steering a ship (Acts 27:11)