

1 Corinthians 12 and Serving One Another

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- In what ways do you need other Christians in your life?
- What is a *spiritual gift*? What are examples of spiritual gifts?

Overview of the Lesson

1 Corinthians 12 teaches that churches have *diversity within unity*—focusing on diverse spiritual gifts within the one body of Christ. For example, with respect to diversity, each Christian is given “a manifestation of the Spirit;” with respect to unity, these gifts are “for the common good” (v. 7). That emphasis—diversity within unity—runs throughout the chapter (Naselli, *ESVBEAC, Vol. 10: Romans–Galatians*, 334–335).

We organize 1 Corinthians 12 into four main sections: (1) Gifts and Guidance from the Spirit (vv. 1–3), (2) The Triune God and Spiritual Gifts (vv. 4–11), (3) One Body with Interdependent Parts (vv. 12–26), and (4) Members of and Gifts within the One Body of Christ (vv. 27–31). We conclude this lesson by summarizing how we serve one another.

1. Gifts and Guidance from the Spirit

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware.
 2 You know that when you were pagans, you used to be enticed and led astray by mute idols.
 3 Therefore I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:1–3)

The main topic of 1 Corinthians 12–14 is *spiritual gifts* (v. 1). They are *Spirit-empowered abilities that we use to minister in the church*. Before becoming Christians, the Corinthians followed idols that could not speak (v. 2). And unbelieving Jews said, “Jesus is cursed,” which they believed occurred when he was crucified (v. 3; Deut. 21:23). But the Spirit enables us to believe and speak truths such as “Jesus is Lord,” and the Spirit empowers the use of his gifts (v. 3).

- Prior to becoming a Christian, what idols did you follow? How did you view Jesus?
- How do you know if someone’s words and actions are guided by the Spirit?

2. The Triune God and Spiritual Gifts

4 Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are different activities, but the same God works all of them in each person. 7 A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: 8 to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, 9 to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. 11 One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills. (1 Cor. 12:4–11)

There are different “gifts,” “ministries,” and “activities,” which are three complementary ways of referring to the same works of God (vv. 4–6). And there is one triune God—the “Spirit,” the “Lord” Jesus, and “God” the Father—who gives and empowers the gifts/ministries/activities (vv. 4–6). Each of us is given one or more gifts for the common good (v. 7). These gifts include *wisdom* and *knowledge* to edify others; *faith* (extraordinary trust in God); *healing* and *performing of miracles*; *prophecy* (sharing spontaneous revelation from God); *distinguishing between spirits* (evil spirits vs. those from God); *tongues* (speech to God that does not reflect human languages); and *interpretation of tongues* (vv. 8–10). The Spirit distributes each as he wills (v. 11).

- Gifts/ministries/activities—explain each term in your own words.
- Do you possess/participate in one or more of these gifts/ministries/activities? Explain.

3. One Body with Interdependent Parts

- 12 For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. 14 Indeed, the body is not one part but many. (1 Cor. 12:12–14)
- 15 If the foot should say, “Because I’m not a hand, I don’t belong to the body,” it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I’m not an eye, I don’t belong to the body,” it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted. 19 And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (1 Cor. 12:15–20)
- 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” Or again, the head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that are weaker are indispensable. 23 And those parts of the body that we consider less honorable, we clothe

these with greater honor, and our unrespectable parts are treated with greater respect, 24 which our respectable parts do not need. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, 25 so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. 26 So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Cor. 12:21–26)

In verses 12–14, Paul explains that *one Spirit* created the *one body of Christ*, which has *many parts*. All Christians were baptized (immersed) in the one Spirit and “given one Spirit to drink” (v. 13). In verses 15–20, we read that each part of the body is important and necessary to contribute to the functioning of the body, and God has arranged each part of the body as he sees fit. In verses 21–26, we read of “the relative merits of each body part, the point being that even “weaker” or less presentable body parts are essential to the healthy functioning of the body” (Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 147). These truths help us to fight division and motivate us to have concern for one another. Therefore, we suffer and rejoice together (v. 26).

- In what ways do we *overvalue* or *undervalue* different gifts within the body of Christ?
- What are examples of how we *suffer* together? How we *rejoice* together?

4. Members of and Gifts within the One Body of Christ

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, next miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, leading, various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all do miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But desire the greater gifts. And I will show you an even better way. (1 Cor. 12:27–31)

Christians comprise the one “body of Christ,” and yet we are “individual members of it” (v. 27). God has appointed *people* (apostles in the first-century, prophets, teachers) and *gifts* (miracles, healing, helping, leading, tongues) for the strengthening of the body (v. 28). Each Christian has a gift/ministry/activity to strengthen the body of Christ, yet no Christian has all the gifts/ministries/activities (vv. 29–30). Instead of focusing on tongues, we should desire “greater gifts” that edify the body (like prophecy) and prioritize love (v. 31; chapters 13–14).

- Why is *the body* such an appropriate and important metaphor for a church?
- Explain these errors: (a) overemphasizing *diversity* and (b) demanding *uniformity*.

Sound Doctrine: Serving One Another

Below are five ways to approach serving one another in the body of Christ.

1. **Love, Listen, and Serve:** You don't need to wait to discover your gifts and areas of service. Love others deeply, listen well to discern their needs, and serve them to the best of your ability. "How can I help you?" is one of the most powerful questions you can ask.
2. **Identify Gifts and Ministries from God:**

<p>An Office Unique to the First Century</p> <p>Apostles (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11)</p>
<p>Persons Who Speak & <i>Gifts of Speaking</i> (1 Pet. 4:11)</p> <p>Prophets/ <i>Prophecy</i> (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28; Eph. 4:11); Teacher (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28); Exhorter/Encourager (Rom. 12:8); Word of Wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8); Word of Knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8); Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10, 28); Interpretation of Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10); Evangelist (Eph. 4:11); Pastor-Teacher* (Eph. 4:11)</p> <p><small>*Pastor-teachers both speak and serve for the benefit of the body of Christ (see the category below).</small></p>
<p>Persons Who Serve & <i>Gifts of Serving</i> (1 Pet. 4:11)</p> <p>Service (Rom. 12:7); Giver (Rom. 12:8); Leader (Rom. 12:8); One Who Does Acts of Mercy (Rom. 12:8); Faith (1 Cor. 12:9); Healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28); Miracles (1 Cor. 12:10, 28); Distinguishing between Spirits (1 Cor. 12:10); Helps (1 Cor. 12:28); Administration (1 Cor. 12:28)</p>

3. **Desire Gifts and Ministries from God:** We should eagerly desire that God would give us gifts and ministries to serve others—especially those that powerfully edify the body, like prophecy (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1; cf. 1 Tim. 3:1).
4. **Develop Your Gifts:** While a spiritual gift/ministry may come to us instantaneously and in full force (such as healing), we develop most of the gifts/ministries over time (such as teaching or leading). This occurs through experience (using the gift), through hard work (cultivating the gift), and, most importantly, through God's unfolding grace and power.
5. **Glorify God:** When we use our gifts (engage in our ministries), God is "glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet. 4:11). Individually and collectively, we worship God as the Giver (James 1:17).

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What questions or comments do you have about this lesson? • How can you serve others in this community more faithfully? |
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Prayer

Applying God's Word

Use these two pages to reflect on and apply this lesson. Schedule a time to discuss your answers and pray with family members and friends during the week, and/or as part of your next group meeting.

1. Renew Your Mind

- a. What did you learn about **God the Father, God the Son, and/or God the Holy Spirit** (concerning their character qualities, words, and/or actions)?
- b. What did you realize about **your sinful tendencies** (concerning your desires, values, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? "I sin against God by _____."
- c. What did you learn about **God's will for your life** (concerning your desires, values, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? "God desires that I _____."

2. Memorize the Word

Identify one or more verses of Scripture from this lesson that you plan to memorize and write them out below.

3. Obey the Word

In response to this lesson:

- a. How do you want to grow in **your character**? “By God’s grace, I want to become more (or less) _____. I will work on that by _____.”
- b. How can you apply this information in **your words and/or actions** (with your family, church community, neighbors, and/or coworkers)? “By God’s grace, I will _____.”

4. Express Your Desires

- a. Write out one or more prayers to God in response to this lesson.
- b. What other prayer requests do you want to share with your family and friends?