

The Book of 1 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: Spiritual Gifts and the One Body

1 Corinthians 12:1–31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter teaches the unity and diversity of the body of Christ and addresses the spiritual gifts that were causing pride and division in Corinth. What is doctrinally at stake includes the lordship of Christ and the Spirit's role in true confession (12:3), the way believers are brought into the one body (12:13), and the nature and purpose of the miraculous gifts. The teacher should present the miraculous gifts listed here, such as healings, miracles, prophecy, and tongues, as gifts the Spirit distributed in the founding age of the church to confirm the word before the New Testament was complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:1–4). They were given by the Spirit as he willed, not worked up by human effort. This sets up the teaching of the next lesson, that when the perfect, completed revelation came, these confirming gifts ceased. Present this clearly and confidently, guarding students from the confusion of modern claims to such sign gifts, while fully affirming the Spirit's abiding work in the church.

At the same time, the chapter is wonderfully formational. The body imagery frees students from the twin miseries of comparison: feeling superior because of impressive abilities, and feeling worthless because of ordinary ones. It calls every member to find and fill their God-given place, to use what they have for the common good, and to care for one another so deeply that they suffer and rejoice together.

Aim, then, for humility, belonging, and mutual care. Send students home secure that God designed their place in the body on purpose, freed from comparison, committed to serving others with their gifts, and clear-minded about the founding role of the miraculous gifts. The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (12:3). What does this teach about the lordship of Jesus Christ and about the Spirit’s role in bringing a person to genuine faith and a true confession of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open up the confession at the heart of 12:3. Against the pagan background where people claimed inspiration for all sorts of utterances, Paul gives a test: the Spirit of God leads people to confess that Jesus is Lord, never to curse him.

Draw out the lordship of Christ. To say Jesus is Lord is the foundational Christian confession, acknowledging him as the risen, reigning Lord to whom all authority belongs. It is far more than a slogan; it is submission.

Explain the Spirit's role. No one comes to this genuine confession by mere human reasoning or willpower; the Spirit works through the gospel to bring a person to true faith. This honors the Spirit without making the confession irrational or magical.

Apply it. The real evidence of the Spirit's work is not flashy phenomena but the genuine confession of Jesus as Lord, worked out in a life submitted to him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The confession that Jesus is Lord as the foundational Christian confession (12:3)
- The lordship of the risen, reigning Christ
- The Spirit's role in bringing a person to genuine faith through the gospel
- True confession as submission, not mere words
- The Spirit's work evidenced by Christ-honoring faith and life

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to confess that Jesus is Lord?
- How does the Spirit bring a person to genuine faith?
- Why is this confession more than a slogan?

Question 2

Student Question:

To confess that Jesus is Lord is to surrender to his rule over everything. Is Jesus actually Lord of every area of your life, your time, money, relationships, ambitions, or are there corners where you still rule yourself? Name one area where you need to bow more fully to his lordship.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the lordship confession into the corners of the student's life. It is easy to say Jesus is Lord and quietly reserve certain areas for self-rule.

Help students survey the territories: time, money, relationships, ambitions, entertainment, the hidden thought-life. Lordship means none of these is off-limits to Christ.

Frame submission as freedom, not loss. Bowing to the good Lord who gave himself for us is the path to life, not a diminishment of it.

Aim for one surrendered corner. Ask each student to name one area where self still rules and one step toward bowing to Christ there this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lordship of Christ over every area of life
- Hidden corners reserved for self-rule
- Submission to Christ as freedom rather than loss
- Concrete surrender to his rule

Discussion Prompts

- Is Jesus truly Lord of every area of your life?
- Where do you still rule yourself?
- What would bowing more fully to him look like there this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul stresses that there are “varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit,” varieties of service and activities, all empowered by the same God, and that each is given the manifestation of the Spirit “for the common good” (12:4–7). What does this teach about the source of every good ability in the church and about the purpose for which God gives such gifts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring out the threefold sameness of 12:4–6: same Spirit, same Lord, same God, behind the variety of gifts, services, and activities. The diversity comes from one divine source.

Stress the source. Every genuine ability for serving the church is a gift of God, not a personal achievement. This cuts the root of both pride (it was given) and envy (the Giver chose).

Underline the purpose in 12:7: each manifestation is given for the common good. Gifts are not private trophies but tools for building up the body. A gift used only for self-display has been misused.

Apply it. The two questions to ask of any ability are: who gave it, and whom is it meant to serve? The answers, God and the body, reorder how we hold our gifts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One Spirit, Lord, and God behind the diversity of gifts (12:4–6)
- Every ability as a gift of God, not a personal achievement
- Gifts given for the common good, not private display (12:7)
- The cure for both pride and envy in the giftedness of others
- Gifts as tools to build up the body

Discussion Prompts

- What does it teach that all gifts come from the same Spirit?
- For what purpose does God give spiritual gifts?
- How does this guard against both pride and envy?

Question 4

Student Question:

Every ability you have was given to you by God to serve others, not to exalt yourself. How are you using the gifts, talents, and opportunities God has given you for the good of the body? Where might you be burying a gift, using it only for yourself, or envying gifts God gave to someone else?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the purpose of gifts into the student's stewardship. God gave each of us abilities and opportunities to serve others.

Help students take inventory honestly. Are they using their gifts for the body, burying them out of fear or apathy, hoarding them for self, or envying gifts given to someone else?

Encourage a generous view of giftedness. Not every gift is dramatic; teaching, helping, encouraging, showing mercy, and serving behind the scenes are all needed and honored by God.

Aim for one act of service. Ask each student to name one gift they could put to work for the body this week, or one envy they need to lay down.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Stewarding gifts for the good of the body
- Burying, hoarding, or misusing what God has given
- Honoring quiet and ordinary gifts alongside dramatic ones
- Laying down envy of others' gifts

Discussion Prompts

- How are you using your gifts for the good of the body?
- Where might you be burying or hoarding a gift?
- Is there a gift in someone else that you envy rather than celebrate?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul writes, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free," and that the body "does not consist of one member but of many" (12:12–14). What does this

teach about how a person becomes part of the body of Christ, and about how God unites very different people into one church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open up 12:13. By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Paul connects entrance into the body of Christ with baptism, the point at which, in response to faith, the Spirit unites a believer with Christ and his people. The one act joins Jew and Greek, slave and free, into a single body.

Draw out the unity-in-diversity. The body does not consist of one member but of many; God deliberately unites very different people, erasing the old divisions of ethnicity and status that the world treats as ultimate.

Stress that this unity is God's doing, not human achievement. We do not manufacture the oneness of the body; we are baptized into a unity God creates and then called to live it out.

Apply it. The church is meant to be the one place where the dividing walls of the world come down, where people who would never otherwise belong together are made one in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Entrance into the one body associated with baptism and the work of the Spirit (12:13)
- Jew and Greek, slave and free, united into one body
- Unity in diversity as God's deliberate design
- The church as God's creation, not a human association
- Living out the oneness God has made

Discussion Prompts

- What does 12:13 teach about how a person becomes part of the body?
- How does God unite such different people into one church?
- Why is this unity God's work rather than ours?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul pictures the foot saying, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," and the eye saying to the hand, "I have no need of you" (12:15–21). Which temptation is more yours, feeling that you do not matter because your gifts seem less impressive, or quietly thinking you have no need of certain other members? How does this passage correct you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question names the two opposite temptations Paul addresses. The foot feels it does not belong because it is not a hand; the eye tells the hand it is not needed. Inferiority and superiority are both denials of the body.

Help students identify which is more theirs. Some quietly believe they do not matter because their gifts seem unimpressive; others quietly believe they could do without certain other members.

Apply Paul's correction. To the discouraged: God placed you in the body on purpose, and the body needs you. To the self-sufficient: God made you dependent on members you are tempted to dismiss.

Aim for one corrected attitude. Ask each student to name their besetting temptation, inferiority or superiority, and one truth from this passage that answers it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The twin temptations of feeling inferior and feeling superior (12:15–21)
- God's placement of each member on purpose
- The body's need for every member
- Dependence on members we are tempted to dismiss

Discussion Prompts

- Which temptation is more yours, feeling unneeded or feeling self-sufficient?
- How does this passage correct that temptation?
- What truth do you most need to take to heart here?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose," giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another" (12:18, 24–26). What does this teach about God's intentional design of the church and about how we are to treat one another, including suffering and rejoicing together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring out the sovereignty and care of God in the body's design. God arranged the members, each one, as he chose (12:18). Our place is not an accident but his deliberate gift.

Highlight the surprising honor God gives the weaker and less presentable parts (12:22–24). In God's economy, the overlooked members are indispensable and clothed with special honor. This overturns the world's ranking.

Draw out the purpose in 12:25: that there be no division, but that the members have the same care for one another. God's design is aimed at unity and mutual care, the opposite of the Corinthian competition.

Apply it to the church's life. We honor the overlooked, refuse division, and cultivate genuine care, because that is how God built the body to work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's deliberate arrangement of every member (12:18)
- Special honor given to the weaker and overlooked parts (12:22-24)
- God's design aimed at unity and mutual care (12:25)
- The overturning of the world's ranking within the body
- Honoring the overlooked and refusing division

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God arranged each member as he chose?
- Why does God give greater honor to the parts that seem weaker?
- How should this shape the way we treat one another?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says that "if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (12:26). How good are you at genuinely weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice in your church family? Where do you need to enter more deeply into the joys and sorrows of other believers this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes 12:26 into the student's actual relationships. Suffering and rejoicing together is the mark of a true body, and it is harder than it sounds.

Help students examine their capacity for both. Rejoicing with those who rejoice can be hard when envy stirs; weeping with those who weep can be hard when we are busy or uncomfortable.

Encourage concrete entering-in. Real care means showing up, listening, bearing burdens, and celebrating sincerely, not from a distance.

Aim for one act of shared joy or sorrow. Ask each student to name one fellow member whose joy or grief they could genuinely enter into this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering and rejoicing together as the mark of a true body (12:26)
- The difficulty of rejoicing without envy and weeping without distance
- Concrete care: showing up, listening, bearing burdens
- Entering into the joys and sorrows of others

Discussion Prompts

- How good are you at weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice?
- What makes each of those hard?
- Whose joy or sorrow could you enter into this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul lists gifts the Spirit distributed in the early church, including healing, miracles, prophecy, and various kinds of tongues, and says “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers,” and so on, with the Spirit apportioning them “as he wills” (12:8–11, 28–30). What was the purpose of these miraculous gifts in the founding age of the church, why were they given by the Spirit rather than chosen or worked up by people, and how does understanding their role guard us from confusion about such claims today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson; handle it clearly and confidently. Paul lists gifts the Spirit distributed in the early church, including words of wisdom and knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the ability to distinguish spirits, and various kinds of tongues with their interpretation (12:8–10), and he names appointed roles such as apostles, prophets, and teachers (12:28).

Explain the purpose of these miraculous gifts. In the founding age of the church, before the New Testament was written and gathered, God confirmed the message of the apostles by accompanying signs. The Lord worked with them, confirming the word by the signs that attended it (Mark 16:20), and the great salvation was attested by God through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 2:3–4). The miraculous gifts served to authenticate the gospel and the men who delivered it.

Stress that the gifts were given by the Spirit, who apportioned them as he willed (12:11). They were not worked up by human technique, claimed at will, or earned by spirituality. This already rebukes the Corinthian pride, since no one could boast in what was sovereignly given.

Point forward to the next lesson. Paul will go on to say that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge would pass away when the perfect came (13:8–10). Because these gifts served to confirm and complete the revelation of the word, they belonged to the apostolic age and ceased when that revelation was complete. The church today possesses the finished and sufficient New

Testament; we do not look for new revelations, present-day apostles, or miraculous sign gifts. Present this plainly, so that students are not confused or troubled by modern claims to such gifts.

Guard the balance carefully. To say the miraculous sign gifts have ceased is not to deny the Spirit's ongoing work. The Spirit dwells in Christians, produces his fruit, strengthens, and works through the word and through the ordinary gifts of teaching, serving, and leading that continue in the church. Affirm the Spirit's abiding presence while being clear about the founding role of the miraculous gifts.

End with the pastoral point Paul is making. Whatever gifts God gave, they were never grounds for pride or division, because they were given by the Spirit for the common good. The lesson for every age is humility and service, not the chasing of spectacular experiences.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The miraculous gifts of the founding age: healings, miracles, prophecy, tongues, and more (12:8–10)
- Their purpose to confirm the apostolic word before the New Testament was complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4)
- The Spirit distributing gifts as he willed, not human technique or merit (12:11)
- The ceasing of these confirming gifts when the perfect, completed revelation came (13:8–10)
- The completed, sufficient New Testament as our authority, with no present-day apostles or sign gifts
- The abiding work of the Spirit in the church affirmed, distinct from the miraculous sign gifts
- Gifts never a ground for pride, but given for the common good

Discussion Prompts

- What was the purpose of the miraculous gifts in the founding age of the church?
- Why does it matter that the Spirit gave them as he willed, rather than people working them up?
- How does understanding their role guard us from confusion about such claims today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter. Paul roots our confession in the Spirit, distributes gifts for the common good, and joins us as one body that cares for every member. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Corinthians 12 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone asks students to gather the chapter and name one way Christ is forming them. Let them speak first.

If needed, recall the movements: the confession of Jesus as Lord by the Spirit, gifts for the common good, the one body of many members, God's careful design, and the founding role of the miraculous gifts.

Draw the thread toward the next lesson. Paul ends by pointing to a still more excellent way, love, which will be the theme of chapter 13. Whet their appetite for it.

Push toward the specific and close in prayer that students would find their place in the body, serve with their gifts, and care for one another this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal formation through belonging and humble service
- Finding and filling one's place in the body
- Anticipating the more excellent way of love
- Moving from general agreement to a specific, named response

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this chapter pressed on you most, and why?
- What is the one truth from 1 Corinthians 12 you most need this week?
- What named step is God asking you to take in response?