

The Book of 1 Corinthians

Lesson 10: Spiritual Gifts and the One Body -- 1 Corinthians 12:1–31

Every healthy body works the same way, and most of the time you never notice it. Your eyes read these words while your heart beats, your lungs draw breath, your feet hold you upright, and not one of those parts is competing with the others for attention. They simply do their work, each in its place, for the good of the whole. That ordinary miracle is the picture Paul reaches for when the Corinthians turn the gifts God gave them into one more thing to fight about.

Corinth was a gifted church. The Spirit had distributed remarkable abilities among them in those early days of the church, before the New Testament was complete: words of wisdom and knowledge, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the speaking and interpreting of tongues. These were real and given by God. But the Corinthians had managed to twist even these into a competition. The flashier gifts became status symbols. People with the showy abilities looked down on those without them, and people without them felt like second-class Christians. The very gifts meant to build up the body were tearing it apart.

So Paul lays down the truths that put gifts in their proper place. There are varieties of gifts, but one Spirit who gives them. They are distributed “as he wills,” not earned and not chosen, so no one can boast. And every one of them is given “for the common good,” not for private display. Then he reaches for the body. We are one body with many members. The foot cannot quit because it is not a hand. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you.” God arranged every part exactly as he wanted, and he gave special honor to the parts we might overlook, so that there would be no division, and the members would care for one another.

This is a chapter to set you free. It frees you from the exhausting work of comparing yourself to others, because God designed your place in the body on purpose. It frees you from looking down on anyone, because the body needs every member. And it points us toward the deepest truth of all, which Paul saves for the very next chapter: that gifts come and go, but there is a more excellent way that never ends. Read this chapter and find your place in the body of Christ, neither puffed up nor counted out, but joined to the whole and needed by it.

Group Discussion: Paul says each believer is given a place and a role in the body “for the common good,” yet the Corinthians had turned gifts into a source of pride and comparison (12:7, 21–25). Why are we so prone to compare ourselves with others, feeling either superior or inferior, and how does seeing the church as one body, with every member needed, free us from that trap?

Personal Reflection: Paul writes that “the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,” and that God has arranged the body so its members “may have the same care for one another” (12:22, 25). Do you tend to feel like an indispensable part of Christ’s body or an

unnecessary one? And how well do you actually care for the other members, especially those who are easily overlooked?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1–31

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 12:3–8, the one body with many members and gifts to be used in proportion to faith; Ephesians 4:11–16, gifts given to equip the saints and build up the body until it grows up into Christ; Mark 16:20, the Lord confirming the word through accompanying signs; Hebrews 2:1–4, the message confirmed by signs, wonders, and gifts of the Spirit; 1 Peter 4:10–11, using whatever gift we have received to serve one another