

THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Among the issues Paul has to correct is the abuse of spiritual gifts. There were divisions in the church over their favorite preacher that they “followed.” There was the abuse of Christian liberty in the matter of eating meat offered to idols. There was selfishness during the agape feasts; the rich would not share with the poor. So when they observed the Lord’s Supper some were even getting drunk and Paul tells them it would better for them not to observe the Lord’s Supper in such an unworthy manner.

So when Paul addresses their spiritual gifts he points out that they were making their gift (s) a matter of personal pride and not for the benefit of the church.

Of particular note was their abuse of the gift of tongues; and that tongues was the least of the gifts listed.

Paul puts gifts and others distinctions in perspective in chapters 12-14.

1. ONE SPIRIT, MANY GIFTS

a) The Oneness of God

12:1-6

1 Cor 12:1-6

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore 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.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ESV

Apparently the matter of spiritual gifts was one of the questions asked when those of Chloe’s household were sent to Paul [Cf. 1:11].

Did these people understand the source and the intent of these signs of divine power? Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

Paul does not want them to be ignorant of the purpose of these gifts and also to be able to discern between the true and the false practice of these gifts.

² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.

You were pagans [Gentiles] and were led astray to dumb [mute] idols.

The “voicelessness” of the idol shows its nothingness. [Cf. 10:19]

Ps 115:1-8

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

² Why should the nations say,
“Where is their God?”

³ Our God is in the heavens;
he does all that he pleases.

⁴ Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

⁵ They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.

⁶ They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.

⁷ They have hands, but do not feel;
feet, but do not walk;
and they do not make a sound in their throat.

⁸ Those who make them become like them;
so do all who trust in them.

³ 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.

Not every religious “experience” is from the Holy Spirit.

No one who is led by the Spirit of God could say, “Anathema Jesus.”

“Jesus is accursed.”

Apparently someone in the church was saying “Jesus is cursed” thinking that this helped in the worship.

But “Jesus is Lord” and the Holy Spirit would not move anyone to take away from His glory. No matter how ecstatic or enthusiastic an expression may be; a prophecy, a doctrine, or a tongue, if it in any way detracts or degrades Jesus, it is not of the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

There is but one God. God is not confused. When the Corinthians had divisions and boasting over gifts they had missed the divine purpose and unity of the distribution of the gifts among them. Paul is going to use the metaphor of the human body to show the unity of the gifts.

b) The Many Gifts of the Spirit

12:7-11

1 Cor 12:7-11

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
[...for the profit of all.] This is the key to the purpose of spiritual gifts.

So when anyone uses a gift for personal boasting it is a sin against the Giver of the gift and against the church for whose benefit it was meant.

How do people today decide which gifts are current?

“All the gifts listed here were supernatural endowments of the Spirit which were as temporary in their manifestation as was the apostolic office itself; “the extraordinary gifts belonged to the extraordinary office and showed themselves only in connection with its activities.”

“Hence it is hardly surprising that today we are unable exactly to determine the nature of these gifts and how they were exercised in the apostolic church. Paul begins with the highest of these gifts and proceeds to the least useful of them.”
The Cessation of the Charismata, B. B. Warfield, page 23

Using 1 Cor 14:14-20 as the basis, Findley makes the following classification:

I. Gifts which exhibit the Spirit working *through* the mind: The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge.

II. Gifts which exhibit the Spirit working in *supersession* of the mind: Tongues and their interpretation.

What is the meaning of the various gifts?

1 Corinthians 12:8

[**Word of wisdom**] In all these places I consider that the proper translation of *logos* is doctrine, as in many other places of the New Testament. It is very difficult to say what is intended here by the different kinds of gifts mentioned by the apostle: they were probably all supernatural, and were necessary at that time only for the benefit of the church.

1. By doctrine of wisdom we may understand, as Dr. Pearce and Dr. Whitby observe, the mystery of our redemption, in which the wisdom of God was most eminently conspicuous: see 1 Cor 2:7,10; and which is called the manifold wisdom of God, Eph 3:10.

Christ, the great teacher of it, is called the wisdom of God, 1 Cor 1:24; and in him are said to be contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, Col 2:3. The apostles to whom this doctrine was committed are called *sophoi*, wise men; (Matt 23:34;) and they are said to teach this Gospel according to the wisdom given them, 2 Peter 3:15.

2. By the doctrine of knowledge we may understand either a knowledge of the types, etc., in the Old Testament; or what are termed mysteries; the calling of the Gentiles, the recalling of the Jews, the mystery of iniquity, of the beast, etc., and especially the mystical sense or meaning of the Old Testament, with all its types, rites, ceremonies, etc.

3. By faith, 1 Cor 12:9, we are to understand that miraculous faith by which they could remove mountains, 1 Cor 13:2; or a peculiar impulse, as Dr. Whitby calls it, that came upon the apostles when any difficult matter was to be performed, which inwardly assured them that God's power would assist them in the performance of it. Others think that justifying faith, received by means of Gospel teaching, is what is intended.

4. Gifts of healing simply refers to the power which at particular times the apostles received from the Holy Spirit to cure diseases; a power which was not always resident in them; for Paul could not cure Timothy, nor remove his own thorn in the flesh because it was given only on extraordinary occasions, though perhaps more generally than many others.

5. The working of miracles, *energeemata dunameoon*, 1 Cor 12:10. This seems to refer to the same class as the operations, *energeematoon*, 1 Cor 12:6, as the words are the same; and to signify those powers by which they were enabled at particular times to work miraculously on others; ejecting demons, inflicting punishments or judgments, as in the cases mentioned under 1 Cor 12:6. ...

6. Prophecy. This seems to import two things:
a. the predicting future events, such as then particularly concerned the state of the church and the apostles; as the dearth [famine] foretold by Agabus, Acts 11:28; and the binding of Paul, and delivering him to the Romans, Acts 21:10, etc.; and Paul's foretelling his own shipwreck on Malta, Acts 27:25, etc. And
b. as implying the faculty of teaching or expounding the Scriptures, which is also a common acceptance of the word.

7. Discerning of spirits. A gift by which the person so privileged could discern a false miracle from a true one; or a pretender to inspiration from him who was made really partaker of the Holy Spirit. It probably extended also to the discernment of false professors from true ones, as appears in Peter in the case of Ananias and his wife.

8. Divers kinds of tongues. *Genee gloossoon*, Different languages, which they had never learned, and which God gave them for the immediate instruction of people of different countries who attended their ministry.

9. Interpretation of tongues. It was necessary that while one was speaking the deep things of God in a company where several were present who did not understand, though the majority did, there should be a person who could immediately interpret what was said to that part of the congregation that did not understand the language. This power to interpret was also an immediate gift of God's Spirit, and is classed here among the miracles.

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¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

All of the various gifts are the work of the one Spirit who distributes them as is appropriate in accordance with His own wise and sovereign will.

2. ONE BODY, MANY PARTS

a) The Oneness of the Body 12:12-13

1 Cor 12:12-13

¹²For 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. ¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Paul uses the metaphor of the human body; one body has one life and so do all the members of the mystical body of Christ. For the human body to be healthy all of its parts must work in harmony; so it is with the church.

Before you were baptized by the Spirit you could be distinguished by race, gender, or social status but now you are all the same in Christ.

and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

The Greek is aorist tense and points to a one time experience and not a repeated act.

b) The Many Parts of the Body 12:14-20

1 Cor 12:14-20

¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If 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? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Vs. 14-16 Which part of the body will you throw away without affecting the rest?

Vs. 17 The body depends on each part functioning as it was designed.

Vs. 18 Every sane person knows that the human body did not come into being by a random process of time and chance; and God gives each member in the body of Christ a function that God has meant for the good of the whole body.

Vs. 19-20 Just as the members of the human body has diversity in order for it to function God has so ordered the members of the church, the body of Christ.

c) The Interdependence of the Parts of the Body 12:21-31

1 Cor 12:21-27

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." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Every member of the body of Christ needs every other member.

Vs. 21 "Up to this point Paul has been showing what the duty of the less honourable members is, viz. to give their services to the body, and not to be envious of the more outstanding members. Now, on the other hand, he is instructing the worthier members not to despise the inferior ones, for they cannot do without them. The eye is superior to the hand, yet it cannot treat it with disdain, or scoff at it as a useless thing." [Calvin]

Vs. 22-26 God created the members of the human body in a manner that there can be no division. There is no competition between the members of the human body because they all have the common goal of the well-being of the entire body.

Vs. 27 Paul is sure that the Corinthians will understand the metaphor.

d) The Interdependence of the Spiritually Gifted 12:28-30

1 Cor 12:28-31

²⁸ 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. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

“Man may appoint men to offices for which they have not the necessary gifts, but God never does, any more than He ordains the foot to see or the hand to hear. If any man, therefore, claims to be an apostle, or prophet, or worker of miracles, without the corresponding gift, he is a false pretender. In the early church, as now, there were many false apostles, i.e. those who claimed the honour and authority of the office without its gifts.” [Hodge]

1. Apostles: Immediate messengers of Christ, rendered infallible as teachers and rulers by the gift of plenary inspiration. [Hodge]

2. Prophets: Men who spoke for God as the occasional organs of the Spirit. [Hodge]

3. Teachers: Men whose natural powers and acquired knowledge were augmented by a special gift. [Robertson and Plummer]

4. 5. Miracles, Gifts of Healing: Those who had these gifts ranked below “teachers,” as teaching is more edifying, though less dazzling than working miracles. [Fausset]

6. 7. Helps, Administration: Perhaps Paul refers to the ministry of mercy, and the task of church government. “But when we boil it all down, we know nothing about these gifts or their possessors. They have vanished without leaving visible trace.” [Leon Morris]

8. Diversities of Tongues: “Last and least.” [Edwards] The exciting gift upon which the Corinthians set such store is again placed firmly at the bottom of the list.

Vs. 29-30 Certainly not! “All are not, nor can be, any more than all the body can be an ear, or an eye, or a hand, or a foot: you cannot expect, that in a governed body all should be governors; and you see by experience, that all cannot work miracles, prophesy, speak with tongues, or heal those that are sick.” [Poole]

31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Although these gifts are sovereignly bestowed, Paul sees no inconsistency in urging the Corinthians to strive for the more valuable spiritual gifts.

[Arndt-Gingrich]

“A man must not, for example, be content to ‘speak with tongues’ when he might ‘prophesy’ {Cf. 14:1}, nor to work miracles when beside that he might teach in the ‘word of wisdom.’ ” [Findley]

And I will show you a still more excellent way.