

Week of July 16 - 22

Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

Paul says he wanted to write about the special abilities the Holy Spirit gives to each Christian. Before they became Christians, they went around from one idol to another, none of which could speak a single word. But now they were meeting people who claimed to speak messages from God. How can they know whether God really inspired them or whether they were fakes? Here was the test: no one speaking by the power of the Spirit can curse Jesus, and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," and mean it unless the Holy Spirit is helping him.

God gives Christians many kinds of special abilities, but it is the Holy Spirit, who is the source of them. There are different kinds of service to God, but it is the same Lord they were serving. There are many ways in which God works in lives, but it is the same God who does the work in and through all who are his. The Holy Spirit displays God's power through each of us as a means of helping the entire church.

To one person, the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; someone else may be good at studying and teaching, and this is his gift from the same Spirit. He gives special faith to another, and the power to heal the sick to another. He gives power for doing miracles to some, and to others the ability to prophesy and preach. He gives others the power to know whether evil spirits are speaking through those who claim to be giving God's messages-or, whether it is the Spirit of God who is speaking. Still, another person can speak in languages he never learned; and others, who do not know the language either, are given the power to understand what he is saying. It is the same Holy Spirit who gives all these gifts and powers, deciding which each one of us should have.

Unity in Diversity (1 Corinthians 12:12-26)

Paul explained that our bodies have many parts that make up one body when they are put together. Each of us is a part of the body of Christ. Some are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But the Holy Spirit has fitted us all together into one body. We have been baptized into Christ's body by the Spirit, and have all been given that same Holy Spirit.

The body has many parts. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that doesn't make it any less a part of the body. And what would you think if you heard an ear say, "I am not part of the body because I am only an ear and not an eye"? Would that make it any less a part of the body?

But God has made many parts for our bodies and has put each piece where he wants it. So, he has made many parts, but still, there is only one body.

Some of the parts that seem weakest and unimportant are the most necessary. We carefully protect from the eyes of others those parts that should not be seen, while the parts that may be seen don't require special care. God has put the body together so extra honor and care are given to those parts that might otherwise seem less important. All the parts have the same care for each other that they do for themselves. If one part suffers, all parts suffer, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

Specific Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)

All of you together are the one body of Christ, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part. Some of the parts he has placed in his church, which is his body include apostles, prophets—those who preach God's Word, teachers, those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who can get others to work together, and those who speak in languages they have never learned.

Is everyone an apostle? Of course not. Is everyone a preacher? No. Are all teachers? Does everyone have the power to do miracles? Can everyone heal the sick? Of course not. Does God give all of us the ability to speak in languages we've never learned? Can just anyone understand and translate what those are saying who have that gift of foreign speech? No, but try your best to have the more important of these gifts.

The Gift of Love (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

Still explaining to the Corinthians not to be divided, Paul speaks about the most important factor to consider, which is love. Loving others is essential because it is what binds us together as a people. Paul's entire argument in this chapter is an explanation for the believers in Corinth to be united and stop being divided on meaningless issues. Loving others is the foundation of God's commandments, as is loving God above all.

He says if he had the gift of being able to speak in other languages without learning them and could speak in every language there is in heaven and earth, but didn't love others, he would only be making noise. If he had the gift of prophecy and knew all about what is going to happen in the future, knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would it do? If he gave everything he had to the poor, and if he were burned alive for preaching the Gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever.

Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude, does not demand its own way, isn't irritable or touchy, doesn't hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him.

The unique gifts from God will come to an end someday, but love goes on forever. Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will disappear. But when we've been made perfect and complete, then the need for these gifts will come to an end.

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned like a child. But when I became a man, my thoughts grew far beyond those of my childhood, and now I have put away the childish things. In the same way, we can understand only a little about God, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we're going to see him face to face. All I know now is hazy and blurred, but then I will see everything clearly.

There are three things that remain—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

Prophecy and Tongues (1 Corinthians 14:1-33)

Paul tells the Corinthians to make love their focus. He instructs them to pursue prophecy and explains that prophecy is beneficial to others, whereas speaking in tongues only benefits oneself. He intended to have structure in the church. Paul wanted the church to be united and orderly; he was opposing the divisions and chaos that has been created by the believers, explaining that these displays of God's power are for the building up of the church, not for creating a chaotic environment.

Speaking in tongues is for building up ourselves and is a sign for unbelievers, whereas prophecy is for building up others and is mainly a sign for believers.

Many people think of prophecy as telling the future, but prophecy is more than that, including knowing information about something that is hidden from the world. This is why the Samaritan woman calls Jesus a prophet.

Paul tells them that if there is no one to interpret someone speaking in tongues, then those who speak in tongues should remain silent in church. Paul also says to let only two or three people speak prophecy and that others should judge what is said.

Women Speaking in Church (1 Corinthians 14:34-40)

Like Paul's instructions on head coverings in chapter 11, Paul gives the church specific instructions on women not speaking in church. In cultures where it is common for women to speak in public, this instruction would make little sense. His reasoning for giving these instructions is to have orderly worship and not be perceived as evildoers by nonbelievers.

Paul then tells the Corinthians that "Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord."

He is challenging his opposition, saying if anyone claims to have signs from God's Spirit, then they will agree with what Paul is writing about regarding worship. If someone disagrees with Paul, he is setting them up to be viewed as a counterfeit Christian (or at least to be viewed as faking the signs and powers of God's Spirit).

Paul has been speaking about this one subject from chapter 1 to chapter 14: ordered and structured worship. In the last verses of this chapter, Paul gives final instructions saying to "not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order."

The Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15)

Paul reminds the believers in Corinth of the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, also telling them that more than five hundred people saw Jesus alive after he had died on the cross and had been dead for three days.

Paul then talks about the importance of the resurrection, teaching how the sacrifice of Jesus Christ saves us. He tells them to "sin no more," continuing to explain the future resurrection of true believers.

When we are resurrected, we will have an imperishable spiritual body given to us by God. "What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."

Paul explains that not everyone will have died when everyone who is saved is changed and instantly given an imperishable body.

Final Words (1 Corinthians 16)

Paul then speaks of an offering being collected for the saints in Jerusalem, telling them to follow the instructions that he gave to the churches in Galatia. Paul tells them to be hospitable to Timothy if he visits them.

Paul's concluding statement of all he's told them in this letter is, "Let all that you do be done in love."