

Chapter 12

Spiritual gifts 12:1-31

1. Jesus is Lord 12:1-3

v1 Now about the Holy Spirit's gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want to leave you in any doubt. v2 You know that at one time you were pagans. You felt a power that you could not oppose. It led you to worship idols that could not speak. v3 So I tell you something. Anyone who is speaking with the help of God's Spirit cannot say, 'Let God curse on Jesus.' And without the help of the Holy Spirit, no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord.'

Verse 1 The Christians at Corinth had asked Paul about spiritual gifts. They may also have asked how to recognise the difference between evil spirits and the Holy Spirit.

Verse 2 Before they became Christians, they worshipped idols. Idols are not real. But people were really worshipping demons when they worshipped idols. That is what Paul said. The demons had led them to believe that wild cries were messages from the gods.

Verse 3 There was a way to decide whether a spirit was good or bad. Those who spoke a curse on Jesus could not have spoken by God's Spirit. Jews would use a curse like this because Jesus died on a cross. This was because of the Law in Deuteronomy 21:23. It said that God would curse anyone who hung on a tree. Paul had tried to make Christians curse when he was opposing them (Acts 26:11). This was before he became a Christian. Later on, Roman rulers attacked Christians. Then Christians had to curse Jesus or die.

'Jesus is Lord' was probably the earliest statement of Christian belief. It meant that a person obeyed Christ as his master. The Holy Spirit would help him to love other

people. The selfish Christians divided the church. They were as bad as those who cursed Jesus.

2. A variety of gifts 12:4-11

v4 There are different kinds of gifts. But the same Holy Spirit gives them all. v5 There are different ways to serve. But they all come from the same Lord. v6 There are different ways to work. But the same God is giving all of them to people. v7 The Holy Spirit gives each person a special gift to use for the benefit of everyone.

v8 The Holy Spirit's gift to one person is the power to speak with wisdom. To another person, the same Holy Spirit gives the message of knowledge. v9 To another person, the same Holy Spirit gives faith. To another person, that one Holy Spirit gives the power to heal. v10 To another person, he gives the power to do miracles. To another person, he gives the gift of prophecy. To another person, he gives the power to see the difference between spirits. To another person, he gives the power to speak in different tongues. And to another person, he gives the power to explain what people said in those tongues.

v11 All these gifts are the work of the same Holy Spirit. He gives these gifts to each person exactly as he has decided.

Verses 4-7 Paul wants to emphasise the unity of the church. He also wants to show that in the church there are different gifts. But these gifts are for the benefit of the whole church. They are not just for the benefit of the person who received the gift. Paul speaks about God (verse 6), the Lord (verse 5) and the Holy Spirit (verse 7) as the source of spiritual gifts. He did not mean

that each gift had a different origin. The same God gives every gift.

Verses 8-10 Paul gives a list of the Holy Spirit's gifts. He did not intend to write a complete list. There are other gifts in similar lists (1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Romans 12:6-8). Paul was just giving examples of the Holy Spirit's gifts to Christians.

There are nine examples. Writers try to put them into different groups:

1. wisdom and knowledge, verse 8.

Paul probably began with these because the people in Corinth emphasised them.

'Wisdom' comes from God. In 1 Corinthians 2:10-13 Paul speaks about God's plan to give us salvation by Christ. By 'wisdom', Paul means that we understand this with the help of the Holy Spirit. And we speak it. The Holy Spirit speaks to us. And he shows us what God is like. Then we can share spiritual truth with other people. 'Knowledge' is to understand God's message for a particular situation.

2. faith, power to heal and miracles, verses 9-10.

'Faith' means great faith that the Holy Spirit gives. Someone with this faith believes that God will show his power or mercy in a special situation. Elijah on Mount Carmel had this faith (1 Kings chapter 18). A hundred years ago in England, a man had a home for hundreds of children without parents. He had the faith to believe that God would supply their needs. God did supply their needs, sometimes in very wonderful ways.

'Power to heal' The book of Acts shows that the early apostles healed the sick in the name and power of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Today God continues to heal the sick. He does so through prayer and the faith of particular Christians. He also works through doctors and medical discoveries.

'Miracles' These would include power to heal and other works of power. The exorcism of evil spirits would be one example.

3. 'prophecy', verse 10.

By prophecy, Paul means a message that the Holy Spirit gives. It is to call people to live in God's way. Like the Old Testament prophets, a Christian could warn those who were not obeying God. He would urge them to change their ways. He would show them the behaviour that God expected.

4. 'the power to see the difference between spirits', verse 10.

God's Spirit would tell members of the church who was speaking the truth. Other spirits came from the devil.

5. The gift of tongues and the power to explain their meaning, verse 10.

'Tongues' are sounds usually in no known human language. Other members of the church could not understand what the speaker was saying to praise God. It needed someone with a special gift to explain the meaning. It seems that the Christians at Corinth emphasised this gift very much. In parts of the Christian church today, to speak in tongues is important to the members. Paul shows his own attitude in chapter 13. In chapter 14, he also gives advice about what should happen in church meetings.

Verse 11 All the gifts that Paul has mentioned are the work of God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit decides what gift or gifts each Christian should have. He gives them to help all the Christians to work together. Then they can spread God's kingdom.

3. The body of Christ 12:12-31

v12 A human body is one body. But it has many parts. Although it has many parts, they make up one body. It is the same with

Christ. v13 The Holy Spirit baptised us all into one body. It was the same for Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men. Now we all drink from that same Spirit.

v14 Now it is not only one part that makes the body. It has many parts. v15 Suppose that the foot says, 'I am not a hand. So I do not belong to the body.' It would still be part of the body. v16 And suppose that the ear says, 'I am not an eye. So I do not belong to the body.' It would still be part of the body. v17 If the whole body were an eye, it could not hear. If the whole body were an ear, it would have no sense of smell. v18 But God has arranged the parts of the body. They are just as he wanted them to be. v19 It would not be a body if all the parts were the same. v20 As it is, there are many parts. But there is only one body.

v21 The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I do not need you!' v22 It is the opposite. We cannot do without the parts of the body that seem to be weaker. v23 And we give special attention to those parts that we consider less important. We give special care to the private parts. v24 The parts that we can see do not need special care. But God has joined together all the parts of the body. And he has given more honour to the parts of the body that had no honour. v25 In that way there should be no divisions in the body. All of the parts will look after each other. v26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part receives honour, every part shares its joy.

v27 You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is part of it. v28 First, God has appointed apostles in the church. Second, he has appointed prophets. Third, he has appointed teachers. Then he has appointed people who do miracles. And he has appointed those who have the power to heal. He has also appointed those who are able to help other people. And he has appointed

those who are able to organise things. He has given some the power to speak in different kinds of tongues. v29 Everyone cannot be an apostle. Not everyone can be a teacher. Everyone cannot work miracles. v30 Nor does everyone have power to heal. Not everyone can speak in tongues or explain the meaning of tongues. v31 But you should be eager to have the better gifts. And now I will show you the best way of all.

Verses 12-13 Paul has already said, 'We, who are many, are one body' (10:17). The Holy Spirit had baptised them all into one body. There was no difference between those from different nations, or in different places in society. Christians are like Christ's body on earth. They should speak and work for him.

Verses 14-21 Some Christians in Corinth thought that they were superior to other people. Their gifts were easier to see and other people noticed them. Other people thought that they had no gifts. Or they thought that their gifts were less important. So there was false pride in the church. And some people became jealous. A human body is only healthy if all the parts work together. Every part is essential. Each limb is important. It would be stupid for the foot to be jealous of the hand. The word for 'foot' in Greek is very similar to the word for 'ear'. So, Paul chose the ear as his second example. Both the ears and the eyes are important parts of the body. One without the other would stop the body from being whole. Paul shows that there would be no sense if a body had only one part. God has created a body with many different parts. But it is still one body.

Verses 22-24 The 'weaker' parts are the internal parts like the heart. Although they are not in view, no one can live without them. The 'private parts' means the parts of the body that are for sexual functions.

People make sure to be modest because they cover them with special care. There is no need to give special honour to the parts of the body that we can see.

Verses 25-26 God has arranged the parts of the body so that they all work together. One part that suffers makes the rest of the body suffer. An ache in a tooth affects the whole body. A pleasant meal satisfies the stomach. And it makes the whole person feel good. When believers are really like the body of Christ, they respect each other. They sympathise with each other. They are sad when something or someone hurts another Christian in any way. They are glad when something makes another Christian happy.

Verses 27-28 Paul describes the functions of different parts of the body of Christ. He seems to give them in order of their importance because he says 'first', 'second' and 'third'. But Paul has been writing about the importance of all parts of the body. So, he is probably thinking about the way that people become Christians. Then he thought about the way that people make progress in their faith. 'Apostles' gave the message about Jesus Christ. 'Prophets' continued the work because they made them spiritually stronger. 'Teachers' gave them more

information and helped them to understand their faith better.

Paul has already mentioned miracles and power to heal (12:9-10). He adds the power to help other people. Christians can help in all kinds of practical ways. A person who organises things is like a person who guides a ship into harbour. It is the same word as the modern Greek word for a pilot who makes his aircraft land safely. A person with this gift gives wise advice to the whole church.

Paul mentions 'tongues' last of all because it was a problem in the church at Corinth. He wanted to show that it was only one of many different gifts. Therefore, he spoke about other gifts first.

Verse 31 This command seems to oppose what Paul says in verses 29-30. There he emphasises the variety of gifts. And, in verses 21-26, he shows how each person's gifts are necessary for the rest of the Christian 'body'. He is not saying that some people are more important than other people. But he will explain in 14:1-25, which are the greater gifts. They are those that benefit the church. But he first shows that no spiritual gift has any value without love.

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This publication is written in EasyEnglish Level B (2800 words).

December 2004

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