

1 Corinthians 12:1–31

The Work of the Spirit and the Unity of the Body of Christ

Introduction: Ignorance That Weakens the Church

Paul opens with a direct concern:

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.”

Few areas of church life have suffered more confusion, misuse, or neglect than spiritual gifts. Some have abused them through excess and disorder. Others have dismissed them entirely, treating them as relics of a past era. Paul addresses both errors by grounding spiritual gifts in truth, balance, and love.

Before Christ, the Corinthians were led by impulse and deception:

“You were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.”

Now, they are to be led by the Holy Spirit—not emotionalism, fear, or human control.

The Central Test: The Lordship of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:2–3)

Paul establishes an unshakable foundation:

“No one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit always magnifies Jesus Christ. Any manifestation that diminishes His lordship is not from God. A genuine confession that Jesus is Lord is itself evidence of the Spirit’s work in a person’s life.

Because Jesus shed His blood on the cross and rose from the dead, confessing Him as Lord means surrendering to the living Savior who reigns now.

Diversity of Gifts, One Triune God (1 Corinthians 12:4–6)

Paul emphasizes unity amid diversity:

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”

The Holy Spirit distributes gifts. Jesus Christ directs ministries. God the Father empowers the results. The diversity of gifts is not a problem—it is God’s design.

God refuses to be reduced to formulas. The same gift may operate differently in different people, because God works personally, not mechanically.

Gifts Are Given for the Good of Others (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Paul makes the purpose unmistakable:

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.”

Spiritual gifts are not trophies, toys, or proof of maturity. They are tools for service. The Spirit empowers individuals so the entire body of Christ may be strengthened.

A Sampling of the Spirit's Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:8–11)

Paul lists several gifts, emphasizing that all are empowered by the same Spirit:

- The word of wisdom — God-given insight to resolve complex situations
- The word of knowledge — supernatural awareness of facts or conditions
- Faith — special confidence for a specific situation
- Gifts of healings and miracles — visible demonstrations of God's power
- Prophecy — speaking forth God's truth under the Spirit's leading
- Discerning of spirits — distinguishing what is from God and what is not
- Tongues and interpretation of tongues

Paul concludes:

“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”

The Spirit is sovereign. Gifts are not earned, demanded, or manufactured. They are given according to God's wisdom.

One Body, Many Members (1 Corinthians 12:12–14)

Paul now turns to a powerful illustration:

“For as the body is one and has many members... so also is Christ.”

Believers do not merely belong to Christ individually—they belong to one another.

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

Every believer, regardless of background or denomination, is united by the same Spirit into one body.

No Room for Inferiority or Superiority (1 Corinthians 12:15–21)

Paul addresses two common errors.

First, inferiority:

“If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body?”

No believer is unnecessary. God places each member intentionally.

Second, superiority:

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’”

No believer is self-sufficient. The body needs every part functioning properly.

God Assigns Honor to Preserve Unity (1 Corinthians 12:22–26)

Paul explains that God deliberately gives greater honor to parts that seem weaker:

“That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.”

Unity is preserved when believers care deeply for one another:

“If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

Each Believer Has a Necessary Role (1 Corinthians 12:27–30)

Paul declares plainly:

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

God appoints different roles and gifts—not all the same, but all necessary. No single gift defines spirituality. No single ministry defines importance.

A More Excellent Way (1 Corinthians 12:31)

Paul closes the chapter with anticipation:

“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”

Spiritual gifts are valuable—but something greater governs them all. Love is the context in which gifts must operate. Without love, even the most dramatic gifts lose their purpose.

Practical Application for Believers

- Be grounded in Scripture, not rumors or extremes, regarding spiritual gifts.
- Use your gifts to serve others, not to exalt yourself.
- Refuse both pride and insecurity; God placed you intentionally in His body.
- Stay yielded to the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to coordinate your life with others.

A Challenge to the Church

The church must stop competing within itself and start cooperating under the Spirit’s direction. Division weakens witness. Unity magnifies Christ. When every member submits to the Spirit, the body functions with strength and grace.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

The Holy Spirit points always to Jesus Christ. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to forgive your sins. He rose from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

If you have never surrendered your life to Him, today you can. Turn to Jesus. Trust in His finished work. Receive forgiveness and new life. He will place you into His body and give your life eternal purpose.

Come to Christ—and become part of what God is doing in the world through His people.