



Use Your Gifts!

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

The last chapter addressed the socioeconomic stratification and the divisions between the rich and the poor that were evident in the life and practice of the church at Corinth. Paul was shocked. The lifestyle of the church and the way it mirrored the division of the broader culture were antithetical to the gospel of grace that the Corinthians had received. In our current passage Paul addresses spiritual status stratification.

The members of the church are looking at one another and are placing value judgments on one another based on performance, competence, and charisma. Some members have more “impressive” talents, skills, and gifts than others, and the Corinthian obsession with power and status is causing them to overvalue some members’ contributions and to undervalue the contributions of others. In this context Paul is looking to level the playing field—to underscore the inherent equality of all of the members and what they bring to the community.

This passage represents another thought transition in the letter, as Paul begins with, “Now concerning spiritual gifts . . .” (v. 1). The word pneumatikon here is different than the word for gifts in verse 4 (charismata). The word in verse 1 is probably best translated “spiritual things.” The Corinthians have written a letter to Paul, and they are interested in learning about “spiritual things,” and Paul says, “I do not want you to be uninformed.” This indicates that what Paul wants them to take note of is an important subject. Paul’s logic on the important matter of “spiritual things” will be examined in three different movements:

- The Givenness of Gifts
- The Reception of Gifts
- The Giver of Gifts¹¹

BREAK THE ICE

Can you remember a gift you opened on Christmas or your birthday that you never actually used?

¹¹ Hughes. Kent R., Um, Stephen T., 1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross (Preaching the Word) Article: A Gift-Giving God (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). Crossway. 2015.

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

EXPLORE IT

1. What kind of objects did the Corinthians use to worship? (v. 2)
2. Who can never say “Jesus is accursed?” (v. 3)
3. What three essentially synonymous categories within the church demonstrate variety? (v. 4)
4. Why does God give manifestations of the Spirit? (v. 7)
5. Which nine gifts are given by the Spirit? (vv. 8-10)
6. Who decides which Christians get which gifts? (v. 11)

10. All true Christians proclaim that “Jesus is Lord.” How does this purge artificial levels of elitism from among followers of Jesus?

How to Receive Our Gifts with Gratitude (vv. 4-6)

In virtually all modern Christian churches there remains a great need to examine carefully the gifts of its members and to make use of them. This will mean each person, and no doubt especially the leadership, looking out for others and seeking out the gifts God may have given them so they may bring them to the community. For those who lead and have a tendency toward pride and self-sufficiency, it may be humbling to know that God wants them to depend on and be built up by others with different gifts. For others, though, this will mean accepting what God has given them and then living and working in the community for the benefit of the body, knowing that this is their God-given and Spirit-enabled duty to the body. Just as there is no place for pride, so there is no place for false humility.¹³

11. What’s one gift God has given to you so you can bless the others in your small group or at your church?

12. Even though each Christian has a different gifting mix, all the gifts come from the same triune Giver (Spirit, Lord Jesus, and God the Father). How can we, like our triune God, live out our differences but still be unified?¹⁴

¹³ Gardner, Paul. 1 Corinthians (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). Zondervan. 2018.

¹⁴ Crossway. 10 Key Bible Verses on Spiritual Gifts. <https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-key-bible-verses-on-spiritual-gifts> February 26, 2023.
- “Spirit . . . Lord . . . God. A Trinitarian reference to the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus, and God the Father (cf. 2 Cor. 13:14). The most common pattern in the NT Epistles is to refer to God the Father with the word “God” (Gk. Theos, which is the normal Septuagint translation for the OT Hb. ‘Elohim, “God”) and to refer to God the Son with the word “Lord” (Gk. Kyrios, which is used in the Septuagint over 6,000 times to translate the OT Hb. name YHWH, “Yahweh” or “LORD”). Therefore both names are evidence of deity. The diversity of divine persons within the unity of the Trinity should be reflected in the diversity of gifts within the unity of the body of Christ in Corinth. (See also Eph. 4:3–16.) Therefore Paul wants the Corinthian church to understand how their unity can be enhanced by appreciating the variety of gifts God has given to them.”

13. Have you ever felt like you have nothing to offer in the church? What does the word “everyone” in verse 7 mean about God’s vision for each Christian’s service?

For the Good of the Community (vv. 7–11)

Paul has established that all Christians are “spiritual” on two grounds: (1) all proclaim that Jesus is Lord and can only do so “by the Holy Spirit,” and (2) all are given different gifts by the same Spirit, that is, by God. Paul will move on to examine these different gifts, but for now he must return briefly to the second matter, that is, the purpose of the gifts. If they are provided to all Christians and are not given for the sake of indicating degrees of spirituality or status, then what are they given for? This verse offers a full answer that will be developed in detail as chapters 12–14 progress.

Gifts are given for the good of the community, that is, to build up the people of God.¹⁵

14. Which of the gifts listed below do you believe God has given to you? Check all that apply.

Prophecy	Serving	Teaching	Encouraging
Giving	Leadership	Mercy	Word of Wisdom
Word of Knowledge	Faith	Healing	Miraculous Powers
Discerning Spirits	Speaking in Tongues	Interpreting Tongues	Helps ¹⁶

15. Is there a form of service you sense God is calling you towards? What would be your next step in that direction?

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Is there a biblical spiritual gifts list? <https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-gifts-list.html> - “There are actually three biblical lists of the “gifts of the Spirit,” also known as spiritual gifts. The three main passages describing the spiritual gifts are Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; and 1 Corinthians 12:28. We could also include Ephesians 4:11, but that is a list of offices within the church, not spiritual gifts, per se. The spiritual gifts identified in Romans 12 are prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy. The list in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 includes the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues. The list in 1 Corinthians 12:28 includes healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

16. Paul lists more gifts than just the ones the Corinthians thought were impressive. What does this say about serving in low-visibility roles?

17. The power to succeed in serving God always comes from God in the first place. How can we remember to serve in God's power, rather than our own?