

# 1 Corinthians 12

*December 1, 2024*

## Lesson Summary

### **Main Passages**

1 Corinthians 12

### **Session Outline**

1. God Gives Gifts to All (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)
2. Diversity and Unity of the Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:12-20)
3. Purpose of the Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:21-31)

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### **Theological Theme**

All believers are gifted by God to serve in some way or another. We each have the responsibility to identify the ways we have been gifted and use those gifts to serve the church and bring glory to God.

### **Call to Action**

Give opportunities for church members to discover their God given spiritual gifts and how they can be used to build up the body of Christ in the church.



## Leader Guide

# 1 Corinthians 12

### Introduction

It has been said, “It’s the thought that counts,” but sometimes you may have wondered what the thought was behind some presents you have received over the years. When it comes time to receive a gift, you may have people who always give you the perfect gift or you may have those who tend to get you things you have no desire for or any idea how to use. Many times, those random unwanted gifts end up in the giveaway pile or rewrapped and regifted to someone who hopefully will find a better use for the item than you did.

While you may be grateful for the thought, unless a gift has use in your life, it doesn’t make much of a difference to you. That is one of the important realities about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He knows exactly what you need because He knows exactly what you’ll face in the future. Every believer has been given certain spiritual gifts that are an exact fit for you because they come from the Father who knows you and created you in His image. No regifting is ever needed.

- ❓ What is a gift you received but never used? What do you typically do with those type of gifts?
- ❓ How can we know that God only gives useful and helpful gifts to His children?

### Session Summary

It is important for all Christians to know and recognize they have been given gifts by the Holy Spirit. These gifts are widely diverse and yet all have a common purpose. The purpose of the spiritual gifts is to be used for the good of the body as a whole and not for personal gain.

We should never get caught up in comparing and grading our gifts against those of another believer. It is easy to get caught up in the temptation to compare and focus on what other people are doing instead of what God has called us to do. When we fulfill the role God has given to each of us, then the body will flourish, and the gospel will continue to spread.

## 1. God Gives Gifts to All (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

God gives spiritual gifts to believers to glorify Him and build up the body of Christ. These manifestations of the Holy Spirit are varied and meant to be used for a common purpose. It is important to remember these gifts all come from the same divine source and are specifically chosen for each individual. Paul stressed the importance of being informed about the gifts and understanding their purpose.

Paul declared clearly that every spiritual gift is given from the same Spirit and the same God working through the group. We tend to look at the gifts given to other people and wish we were gifted in the same manner instead of putting the gifts we have to good use. Letting the gifts result in comparison and jealousy is to miss the purpose for which God has given them.

- ❓ How does it shape your perspective to remember the gifts are all from the same Spirit and the same God who is working them out in the lives of believers individually and together? How does this assure it that the gifts are not meant to work in competition?

It is crucial to realize that all spiritual gifts have a role and value to the kingdom. Paul warned the believers from falling into the temptation of thinking that their gift was better or more important than someone else's. When you realize the common source and the common goal of the gifts, it is easier to see how they all work together and are all vital to the work of the gospel.


- ❓ Why is it important to not think too highly or too lowly about your spiritual gift? What happens if this is our focus?

God's power can be displayed in innumerable ways. There is no reason for inflating the value of your gift or devaluing it in any way. Believers are to appropriately value the gifts we have been given and use them to bring glory to God. The spiritual gifts are described as the manifestation of the Spirit of God because they provide evidence that the He is at work in our lives and in this world. God uses imperfect human beings serve, love, share, teach, and lead, all to bring glory to Him by using their gifts.

Although the Holy Spirit is always with believers, He is more visible or apparent in our lives at different times. When we obey Scripture and use our gifts rightly, others will notice a greater power at work in us. The goal of the spiritual gifts is for the profit of all and not the individual. There is never a time for people to seek personal gain or glorification from our gifts. We are to remember that they were given to individuals for the good of the body of Christ as a whole.


### Jesus is Lord:

The exercise of spiritual gifts in the church was a subject on which the Corinthians had asked for advice. Many of them were attracted by the more spectacular gifts. All spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit. No one speaking by the Spirit's power will use derogatory words about Jesus. The confession "Jesus is Lord" is the touchstone of the Spirit's genuine work in the community.

 Application: How are you seeking to use your gifts to build up the body of Christ? How can you grow in this?


## 2. Diversity and Unity of the Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:12-20)

After he listed some of the specific spiritual gifts that believers receive, Paul identified the way those gifts all work together. Stressing that Christ followers are one body, Paul discouraged comparison of gifts, or viewing a specific type of giftedness as being above the others, because we as believers make up one body. This reminder emphasizes the unity we should strive for as the body of Christ in the local church.


 How can unity or disunity affect the way that the body of Christ functions as a whole? Why does this matter?

To emphasize the importance of each part, Paul compared different giftings with different parts of the human body. We all have experience with the problems that arise when various parts of our body aren't working correctly, no matter how small or unseen. We also know the value of our bodies functioning as they were intended to and with no hindrances.

Just as every part of the body is valuable and important, every spiritual gift is also important and valuable. Each part of the body works better when they work together. This is true of the human body and of the body of Christ, the church. Each part needs and depends on each other to function. Focusing on a desire to have another gift or play another role causes malfunction in the body of Christ.

 When was a time a small or overlooked part of your body didn't work correctly (like a toe)? What impact did this have on your whole body? How does this relate to Paul's teaching on the church?


The illustration of the church as a physical body helps us understand the value of the roles we play in the church. Some lead with the microphone. Others manage the logistics of the building while still others invest in encouraging and supporting church members. If you look around your church on any given Sunday, you will see various roles being carried out by people with many different gifts and abilities. For the church to function properly, every one of those roles and others we often don't see, are necessary. The ear is not more important than the foot and no spiritual gift is most important. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been gifted to serve and build up the body. If you fulfill your role as God calls you, there is no better way for you to glorify God.

-  Application: Consider the ridiculous idea of your entire body being an eye or a hand. Why is this absurd? How does this apply to believers wrongly elevating various gifts in the body? How are you susceptible to this way of thinking?


### 3. Purpose of the Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:21-31)

Paul continued with the body illustration and gave specific examples. Just as most people don't wake up every day thinking about their middle toe and giving it special treatment, if they drop a weight onto that toe, it demands attention. When one part of the body is hurt, it affects the entire body, and we suddenly understand how important that part is. Although there may be certain parts that seem more valuable, each piece supports the whole body.


Paul's reference to less honorable parts was not about value but about taking care of and protecting each part appropriately. Just as each person is careful about his or her body and is concerned about the welfare of each body part, the same should be true of the body of believers.

-  What are various ways we protect and care for different parts of the human body? What does this teach us about the unique care needed throughout the church?

Paul brought the imagery of the body back to the church in a direct way. He outlined various roles in the church and again made clear that no gift is supreme over the others. Though every part of the human body is unique, every part is essential for the body to do what it was designed to do. In the body of Christ, all the individual gifts in the lives of believers come together for the church to be built up. If we can't come together, embracing each other in unity in the church, then what reason will the rest of the world have to believe the message we tell them? For the church to function rightly, every believer must know and embrace who God has made him or her to be in Christ.

-  What problems would arise if all believers had the same gifts and the various gifts were not spread throughout the body? Think back to the idea of the entire body being an eye or a hand.




Paul made clear that God has given all of us gifts, but none of us have received every gift. If we had every gift, we would not need each other or need to rely on the Holy Spirit. God has made His body to work together to fulfill His mission on the earth. None of us is meant to go it alone. The best gift for you is the one that God chooses to bestow on you for the use of the greater good of the body. Trust God's will and submit to His authority as you strive to develop and maximize the gifts you've received so that the body of Christ is built up and God is glorified.

-  Application: How has today's lesson challenged your thinking about spiritual gifts?

## Conclusion

Every believer in Christ is given spiritual gifts. These are not to be used as tools of comparison or jealousy but are given by the same Spirit for a common purpose. These gifts are both diverse and unifying as they are given for the same intent though they are manifested in different ways. These gifts of the Spirit are not for personal gain or glory but are given for the good of the whole body of Christ. We must not give in to the temptation of comparing our gifts with other people's gifts but trust God and allow Him to use us for His glory. Each person's gifts and abilities are important, specific, unique to them and valuable for serving the body.

Paul wrote about the church being one body and every person being a valuable part of it. Every person is gifted in different ways and each of us are to use our gifts and abilities to further the ministry of the church and the kingdom of God. Just as the body works together to function, so the church needs every member working together without being distracted by comparison and jealousy. No one gift is considered more valuable or desirable than another. Each believer must seek to discover his or her own gifts then put them to practice serving the church for kingdom work to continue most effectively.

-  How have you been guilty of comparing or coveting another person's giftedness?
-  How can you encourage another person in the gifts of God you see in their life?
-  How is the gospel advanced as we work together as a body as Christ intends?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank the Lord for saving you and gifting you through His Holy Spirit. Ask for wisdom to identify your unique gifts and talents and direction to know how to best put them to use serving the church.*

## Memory Verse

*But as it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted. —1 Corinthians 12:18*

## Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians* by Daniel Akin and James Merritt
- *1 & 2 Corinthians* by Richard Pratt Jr.
- *Be Wise* by Warren Wiersbe

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples





# Historical Context of 1 Corinthians

## Purpose

Paul's purpose in writing 1 Corinthians was to motivate the Corinthian church to acknowledge the Lord's ownership of them and the implications this had in their lives. Key topics Paul addressed in this overarching theme of the ownership and authority of the Lord include Christian unity, morality, the role of women, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection.

## Author

First Corinthians ascribes Paul as its author (1:1; 16:21). Biblical scholars are almost unanimous that Paul wrote the letter. He wrote it during the last year of his three-year ministry at Ephesus, probably a few weeks before Pentecost in the spring of AD 56 (15:32; 16:8; Ac 20:31).

## Setting

During Paul's second missionary journey, he had a vision at Troas; he heard a man call to him, "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!" (Ac 16:9). That change in plans led Paul to Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and ultimately to Corinth (Ac 18:5). Paul ministered in Corinth for at least eighteen months (Ac 18:1–18). He left Corinth accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla (Ac 18:18), leaving them at Ephesus where they met and instructed "an eloquent man" named Apollos (Ac 18:24–26). Apollos then went to Corinth and had a powerful ministry there (Ac 18:27–19:1).

First Corinthians is the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. He had written them an earlier letter, of which no extant copy exists, that included an admonition not to mix with the sexually immoral (5:9). The writing of this second letter (1 Corinthians) was prompted by oral reports from Chloe's household about factional strife within the church (1:11). Paul had also received reports about an incestuous relationship among the membership (5:1), factions that arose during observance of the Lord's Supper (11:18), and confusion over the resurrection of the dead (15:12). As a result, Paul addressed these issues in 1 Corinthians. Apparently as he was writing the letter, he received a letter from the Corinthians asking his opinion on various issues (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Therefore, he included his replies within this letter to the Corinthian believers.

## Special Features

First Corinthians is the most literary of Paul's letters. With a variety of stylistic devices—irony, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, alliteration, antithesis, personification, framing devices, hyperbole, repetition, picturesque words (with local color), double meanings, and other wordplays—Paul attempted to persuade his readers. He wanted to communicate to the Corinthians the necessity of accepting the Lord's authority over their lives.

## Extended Commentary

### 1 Corinthians 12

12:1–3 Allegiance to Jesus as “exclusive Lord” is made possible only through the working of the Holy Spirit. Pagan Gentiles enticed and led astray by mute idols in ceremonial procession could profess Jesus as one of many deities or else curse him as a fraud, but never could they abandon their false gods and devote themselves to Jesus unless the Spirit of God made it possible.

12:4–11a The Spirit according to his will distributes a diversity of gifts to the body for its common benefit. Verses 4–6 and the beginning of v. 11 have a variety of wordplays that frame this section.

12:4–6 The same triune God brings about a variety of gifts and manifests diverse ministries within the corporate body. The different gifts . . . ministries, and activities within the unified church reflect the essential unity and unified work of the persons of the Godhead (vv. 6, 11, 24, 27–28)—the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God.

12:7–10 Each manifestation of the Spirit in a believer is given by God for the mutual benefit of the whole body of believers (cp. vv. 12–31). “Manifestation of the Spirit” refers to gifts, ministries, and activities made possible by the Spirit’s enabling power (vv. 8–10). Similar lists of spiritual gifts are given in v. 28; Rm 12:6–8; Eph 4:11; and 1Pt 4:10–11.

12:11 The phrase one and the same Spirit is active in all these refers to the Spirit’s supernatural working through a diversity of gifted people to produce one cohesive relationship (cp. v. 7, “for the common good”).

12:12 Christ is compressed language for “the body of Christ,” the church (cp. vv. 27–28).

12:13 Through the work of the one Spirit, individual believers become identified as one body of Christ (i.e., as the unified church). All believers are baptized into one body and are given one Spirit to drink.

12:14–20 Paul tackles the problem of self-deprecation for believers who view themselves as less useful to the corporate body.

12:15–16 Paul personified body parts as speakers to express the absurdity of envy and self-deprecation among members of the physical human body. Some Corinthians apparently fell into grading the gifts, attaching importance to public, showy gifts (such as the gift of utterance), and relative unimportance to less observable gifts.

12:17 A body reduced to just one member would be grotesque and useless.

12:18 The dispersion and diversification of gifts is no accident. God himself has given them just as he wanted.

12:19–20 Many parts, but one body encapsulates our identity as individuals enfolded into the corporate body of Christ.

12:21–22 Counter to Corinthian misperceptions, the weaker body parts are indispensable.

12:23–26 We clothe unrespectable parts (private areas) of the human body, which we regard as less honorable, thus according them greater respect. Similarly, God has arranged the body of Christ in such a way that the “less honorable” members are accorded “greater honor.” Humility is a pinnacle value in the kingdom of God (Mt 18:3).

12:27 Individual members becomes key in chap. 13 (cp. ek merous, translated “in part” at 13:9; “partial” at 13:10; “in part” at 13:12). It occurs nowhere else in the NT.

12:28 Church here refers not just to the local body of believers at Corinth but to the universal church, composed of all believers everywhere and from every age. God has appointed emphasizes that no one can justly appoint themselves to positions within the body. The appointments are God’s prerogative alone. First . . . second . . . third gives us a glimpse at the priority of roles during the early church era. All members are equal, but no church would ever have been founded apart from the Lord’s appointed apostles.

12:29–30 In a series of rhetorical questions, Paul emphasizes that no gift is normative.

12:31a Paul concludes by exhorting the Corinthian church to emphasize the greater gifts that have more direct edification for the assembled body.

12:31b–13:3 And I will show you an even better way introduces the discussion about the relationship of love to the exercise of gifts within the corporate body. Paul uses three hyperboles to show that gifts without love are pointless.<sup>1</sup>

## References

1. F. Alan Tomlinson, “1 Corinthians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1828–1830.