

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31

- **SCRIPTURE READING:** 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 (NKJV, NASB)

- **FIRST IMPRESSIONS:**

The subject matter of this chapter is SPIRITUAL GIFTS. The Corinthian Christians appear to have some confusion about SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

- **PRELIMINARY REMARKS**

Chapter 12 is linked to Chapter 13 and Chapter 14. All three chapters deal with the same subject: SPIRITUAL GIFTS. From Chapter 14, we know that the Corinthian Christians are abusing their gifts and wrongly exalting some gifts. They have failed to see or forgotten that the purpose of gifts is to build up the Body of Christ, not pull it apart.

This is yet another example of how we sinners are so good in morphing what is good into what is bad, turning what is meant to build us up into what tears us apart! Of course, the devil has a part in this as well, fanning the fire as he aims at our confusion and destruction, if possible. He knows our tendency to pride, and hence will stir it up so that we despise others and think overly high of ourselves.

It appears that there's an idea among the Corinthian Christians then, that the more ecstatic the thing is, the more out of control a person is, the more is he filled with the Spirit, full of His gifts. In other words, what is mysterious and unexplainable attracts!

- **V1-3**

++ V1 ~ I do not want you to be *ignorant*

Ignorant - the word in Greek is 'agnoeo', from which we get our English word agnostics. An agnostic is one who claims that he cannot know the truth, though the truth exists. Paul does not want us to take such a position when we come to SPIRITUAL GIFTS, that we claim that we cannot know what is right or what is wrong, we are agnostic.

The subject matter of SPIRITUAL GIFTS is important. That's what this verse says. God doesn't want us to be ignorant, because it is important. It is so important that Satan is busy counterfeiting them!

++ V2 ~ carried away to these *dumb idols*, however you were led

The phrase 'carried away' is a verb used frequently in the Bible to speak of leading a prisoner away to prison (Mark 14:44, 15:16). The prisoner is under the control of another.

Another picture is like one falling into a river and being swept along by the mighty, raging current. The person is not in control at all, where the current just sweep him left and right, where it goes, and finally drowning him.

It is a picture of helplessness, of being led away, of being a victim. This is how the Bible views a non-Christian!

What do you think is the subject matter of this chapter?

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Led away to dumb idols --- 'dumb' here means 'mute', 'voiceless'. Our God speaks. He communicates. But idols don't, because they can't. They can't because they are not alive. But behind those idols are demons!

Hence, the overall picture is people being led and swayed, not by reason and intelligences, but the mind is subverted, the passion and emotions are emphasized, superstition reigns. It thrives in darkness and ignorance, with the result that we can do very foolish things (noetic effect of sin)

++ V3 ~ no one can say that Jesus is Lord . . .

The point here is not simply the words. It is the commitment. To 'say' does not mean to 'parrot'. A skeptic can say, "Jesus is Lord". You can pay a person to utter these 3 words. But no man can truly say, really confess and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. Sinners will not want to bow to His Lordship, preferring to being the master of his own life, so he thinks. And if 'Lord' in Greek means 'Yahweh' in Hebrew, then the confession here is to say that the Man Jesus is God. This is a big confession! Unless the person is subject to the gracious work of the Spirit, he will not so confess.

Paul now puts forward the test: The test of who is spiritual, the test of spiritual gifts is doctrinal. Who is Jesus? Will you exalt Jesus in the exercise of the gift, or self? For the purpose of the gifts, at the end o the day, is to exalt and glorify Jesus.

○ **V4-6**

Diversities of gifts	Same Spirit
Differences of ministries	Same God
Diversities of activities	Same Lord

Note the rhythm in verses 4-6: different, same; different, same; different, same.

++ Unity and diversity

Same Spirit gives different gifts, same God gives different ministries, same Lord gives different activities. Moreover, Spirit, God and Lord are 3 Persons but one God. From the one God come all these various, different gifts. There is unity and diversity!

++ Gifts

The word 'gifts' in Greek is charismata, which means grace-gifts. The simple message therefore is that these gifts come as a result of God's grace, not our merits. Hence, there are simply no grounds for boasting.

++ Ministries

The word 'ministries' in Greek is diakonia, which means God-given ability to serve others. It is the same word as deacons. The simple message therefore is that these gifts are to be employed for the service of others, not for self-gratification.

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++ Activities

The word 'activities' in Greek is energemata, which means energy. It is God's energy/power working through us. Once again, the focus is on God, on His power enabling us to do what we do, not on how great and capable we are.

++ cf. V7 ~ manifestation

This is another word used by Paul to describe spiritual gifts. It is 'manifestation', meaning to make clear, make visible, make known. It is the very opposite of to hide, to be private. Spiritual gifts are for manifestation. Hence, there is no such thing as a private gift, for private exercise and enjoyment.

○ V7-11

++ V7 == personal to each, profitable to all

Every Christian has (at least) a gift from the Spirit to be exercised. And in the exercise of it, it is for the good of the church. The reason for giving the gift is also the criterion for its exercise - not self-fulfillment but body benefit.

++ V8-10

Various gifts are mentioned, but the emphasis is on the Giver, not the gifts. Rather than focus on the Giver, we major on the gifts.

++ V11a ~ one and the same Spirit works all these things

So the focus comes back to the Spirit - it is He who works all these things, He who gives.

++ V11b ~ distributing to each one individually as He wills

Every one gets a gift (at least) from the Spirit. Who gets what, and to what proportion, it is all decided by the Giver! He distributes as He wills!!

○ V12-31

++ V12 == the principle stated

Illustration of the human body - one body, many members. Now, this is applied to the Body of Christ, to the Church. We are meant to think of the church in this way. Just as parts of the body has no meaningful separate existence, so individual believers have no meaningful independent existence apart from the Body of Christ!

++ V13 == the reason why

We belong to the body on exactly the same term - we are baptized into this body, by the Spirit. This is a reference to the new birth. We are all saved by the same gospel, indwelt by the same Spirit and members of the same body.

++ V14-19 == 1st error: *I do not belong to the body*

Those without the spectacular gifts may feel inferior and hence think that they have no part to play in the body. This is an error that Paul wants to address here.

NB: V18 == *You are this part of the body and not that part, because God decides it that way. Bow to His sovereignty and use what He has allotted to you for His glory!*

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++ V20-26 == 2nd error: *I have no need of you*
Those with spectacular gifts may despise others, thinking they are the elite, the favoured ones.
Paul wants to correct this other extreme idea as well.

NB: V24b-26 == *The correct attitude is to reach out to others, to identify with one another, instead of despising others, adopting a proud and complacent attitude.*

++ V27-31 == Applications

Application #1: V27
Remember your true identity.

Application #2: V28a
God has appointed . . . See His sovereignty and bow to it. Accept His arrangement.

Application #3: V28b
First apostles, second prophets, . . . Some gifts are indeed greater than others in their immediate and long-term benefits to the church. But greater does not imply superiority. Rather, all come from God and all are meant for the building up of the church.

Application #4: V29-30
Answer is 'NO' to all the questions. This means, don't expect uniformity, but accept differences in gifts and gifting.

Application #5: V31
The most important thing to consider and remember and pursue is LOVE.

○ SOMEONE SAID . . .

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13 FOR NEXT STUDY

New American Standard Version

¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

¹²For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹If they were all one member, where would the body be?

²⁰But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²²On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, ²⁴whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, ²⁵so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

²⁷Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? ³⁰All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? ³¹But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.