

Christ's Spiritually Gifted Body

Thomas Robinson, *The Ways of the Holy Spirit* 5, May 28, 2017

I Corinthians 12:1-31

God's Spirit is Alive and Powerful and Speaks with a Recognizable Voice

¹ Now brothers and sisters, concerning the **Spirit's empowering work**, I don't want you to be **ignorant**. ² **You do know** that when you were **Gentiles** you were attracted to **idols** that **cannot speak**, carried away again and again. ³ Therefore I want you all **to know** that those **in God's Spirit**, when they **speak**, never say "**Jesus is anathema!**" Also no one can affirm "**Jesus is Lord**" except **in Holy Spirit**.

One Spirit of God Empowers a great Variety of Gifts in Various Individuals

⁴ There are varieties of **gifts of grace** (*charisma*), but the **same Spirit**; ⁵ and there are varieties of **service** (*diakonia*), but the **same Lord**; ⁶ and there are varieties of **effective works**, but it is the **same God** who works them all effectively in everyone.

⁷ God **gives** to each one **the process of manifesting the Spirit** for the **common good**. ⁸ For to one through **the Spirit** he **gives a word of wisdom**, and to another **a word of knowledge** in accord with the **same Spirit**, ⁹ to another **faith** in the **same Spirit**, to another gracious gifts of **healings** in the **one Spirit**, ¹⁰ to another works of **powers**, to another **prophecy**, to another **differentiations of spirits**, to another kinds of **tongues**, to another **interpretation** of tongues. ¹¹ **One and the same Spirit** powerfully **produces all of these things**, as he apportions to each individual just as **he wills**.

The Varied Parts of the Body are Needed and United in One Whole

¹² For just as **the body is one whole** and has **many parts**, and all the parts of the body, though many, are **one body**, so also is **the Messiah** (*Christos*).

¹³ For **in one Spirit** we were **all baptized into one body** – whether **Jews** or **Greeks**, **slaves** or **free** – and all were granted to **drink of the one Spirit**.

¹⁴ For in fact **the body is not a single part but many**. ¹⁵ If the **foot** says, "Because I'm not a **hand**, I don't belong to the body," would that make it any less a part of the body?

¹⁶ And if the **ear** says, "Because I'm not an **eye**, I don't belong to the body," would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the **hearing** be? If the whole were hearing, where would the **smelling** be?

Since all Parts of the Body are God's work, No Part can treat Another as Useless

¹⁸ But as it is, **God arranged the parts**, each one of them **in the body** as he wished. ¹⁹ If all were a single part, where would the body be? ²⁰ The reality is, **many parts but one body!** ²¹ The **eye** can't say to the **hand**, "I don't need you," nor the **head** to the **feet**, "I don't need you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem **weaker** are **indispensable**, ²³ and on the parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the **greater honor**, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with **greater modesty**, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require.

But **God has so mingled the body**, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be **no division in the body**, but that the parts may have the same **care for one another**. ²⁶ If **one part suffers**, **all suffer** together; if one part is **honored**, **all rejoice** together. ²⁷ Now **you are Christ's body** and **parts of a part**.

We Interact with God's Work to Desire and Seek Greater Ways of Service

²⁸ And **God** has arranged in the **church** first **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, then **powers**, then gifts of **healings**, ways of **helping**, times of **guidance**, and kinds of **tongues**. ²⁹ Not all are apostles, are they? Not all prophets? Not all teachers? Not all powers? ³⁰ Not all have gifts of healings? Not all speak with tongues? Not all interpret do they? ³¹ But earnestly **desire the greater gifts of grace** (*charisma*).

And I will show you a still more excellent way. ...

The Spirit of the Living God Speaks – vv 1-3

The Believers in Corinth loved the work of the Holy Spirit among them and asked Paul about people and things empowered by the Spirit (*pneumatikos*) – not just “spiritual gifts.”

Paul contrasts their experience as Gentiles (before sharing God's promises to Abraham).

They knew only voiceless idols – you could make them say anything. But the Living Spirit has a distinct will and voice. If someone is “in God's Spirit” (like “in Christ,” “in the Lord”) they'll never say “Jesus is Anathema.” “In Holy Spirit” is where you know “Jesus is Lord.”

One Spirit Gives Life to Diverse Individuality – vv 4-11

There is One God – Spirit, Lord, God. All are working as the Spirit works. Varied gifts of grace (*charisma*), service/ministry (*diakonia*), effective works (*energema*) are united at source.

God gives every believer a part in showing the Spirit and his work into community and world.

Paul seems intentionally unsystematic. God loves and creates diversity. No two believers are the same. Our personal identity, talents, passions combine with the Spirit's purposes.

The gifts are diverse: Maybe “a word.” Something basic: “faith,” “prophecy.” Particular signs from the Spirit: “gracious gifts of healings,” “works of powers,” “kinds of tongues,” etc.

These don't become our possessions, but the Spirit gives them individually as he wills.

The Spirit Unites Diverse Parts that Can't Function Alone – vv 12-17

Paul focuses on the image of the Body – a single whole with many parts or members. The word member can wrongly suggest a club where each has uniform functions. Body parts are widely diverse in character and function but are united into a single living whole.

If we are “in God's Spirit” or “in Christ” it is because we have joined with God's Spirit in being plunged / baptized into one body. God gave us a drink of his own Spirit. We're part of a body and must always share in the whole, including parts we don't like or understand.

One Part Can't Exclude Another – vv 18-27

The body is God's doing. We can't cut ourselves off from Christ's body and stay alive in Christ and we can't cut off parts that God has included. The church was never intended to have everyone alike, nor to appear as a place for upward or downward societal mobility.

We learn love in the diversity and become the full humans God created us to be, suffering and grieving together, rejoicing together. In that way the community is the continuing incarnation of the Messiah – Christ's body. We are all parts of a part of God's whole.

Desiring Greater Gifts of Grace – vv 28-31

But this body is a dynamic, living thing, empowered by God's Spirit. We share in the life and learn new roles to play. Prophets, teachers, agents of healing or guidance. Don't stay still.

Seek greater gifts of grace. The path of that seeking is the most excellent way of Love.