

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Week #15 – Adult Bible Study

I Corinthians 12:1-31a

January 21 & 22, 2025

12:1-3

1. With this new chapter, Paul begins a long discussion of yet another issue that is dividing and harming the Corinthian church, which is the proud and disruptive display of speaking in tongues in the midst of worship.
2. In chapters 12-14 Paul will try to moderate these self-centered and disorderly worship practices so that the church as a whole will be built up
3. With the phrase “now concerning” Paul introduces yet another topic that apparently the Corinthians themselves had asked Paul to address
4. Some of the Corinthians are saying that they and they alone are the “spiritual” ones because they speak in tongues, but Paul counters that any person who genuinely confesses “Jesus is Lord” is filled with the true Spirit of God
5. In a subtle way, Paul belies that he sees the formerly pagan/Gentile Corinthians as now engrafted into the true people of God. In v2 Paul writes, “...when you were pagans/Gentiles...” which therefore says that they are *no longer* pagans/Gentiles.

12:4-11

6. Paul shifts to a discussion of the many manifestations of the Spirit
7. By mentioning Spirit, Lord, and God, Paul indicates that he understands “God” from a Trinitarian perspective, though it will be centuries before a formal doctrine of such is developed by the church
8. The word “gifts” (*charismata*) is important – the things that make for the existence of the church are from God’s grace, freely given
9. These gifts are diverse, yet meant for the building up of the whole community
10. Paul mentions “gifts, services, activities” as indicative of differences in the way the Spirit manifests, but again, all for the purpose of creating and nourishing the community of the church
11. Paul says that all the members of the church are given spiritual gifts, not just some
12. Stated in a negative sense, those few who claim to have special or unique gifts, while others do not, are wrong
13. In the modern day, it is thought that any emotional or supernatural experience is suspect or somehow “less than” intellectual or rational experience, but in the first century, it was accepted that esoteric or angelic speech was a sign of super-spirituality – there was room for both
14. The many gifts that Paul mentions are not meant as an exhaustive or complete list – they are only suggestive or illustrative
15. For those who would boast of their superior spirituality, there is no ground whatsoever to this claim, though, and it only serves to damage the work of the Spirit

12:12-26

16. Next Paul moves to an analogy of the human body to illustrate his point
17. This analogy was common in the ancient world and belies its simplicity, clarity, and power
18. There is a major difference, however, in how Paul interprets this analogy
 - a. In the ancient world, the analogy was used to discuss the superiority of some parts of the body over the other parts, and thus enforce a hierarchical view of human society
 - b. Paul, though, emphasizes the interdependence of the parts and therefore their essential equality
 - c. Further, he says that the greater parts of the body (or those more public) should give honor to the lesser parts (or those generally not celebrated or given public exposure)
 - d. In this analogy, we see as well that there is a necessary diversity of the parts of the body – hence each individual cannot and should not be like all the rest
 - e. And, in yet another useful analogy, Paul notes that when one part of the body is in pain, then all the body is in pain, a further sign of the interdependence of the body and of the necessity of the body to strive toward unity and perfect functionality

19. Paul expands the “body” imagery to indicate that the Church is the body of Christ himself
 - a. The work of the Spirit is bring people into the body, through the visible symbol of baptism
 - b. The body, as with any body, is a single entity, further stressing the unity of the church

12:27-31a

20. Here Paul explicitly states what he has been talking about in metaphorical form: every person in the church is part of Christ’s body
21. Paul mentions some specific functions of individual members, but we should not discern a hierarchy of importance in the listing
22. Apostles, prophets, and teachers indicate the trajectory of how the church is formed: first the apostles share the news of Christ, and then prophets and teachers nurture and instruct the newly-formed church in the Way of Christ
23. The gift of tongues – the ‘presenting issue’ that precipitated the writing of this part of the letter – is one of many, not something special or above any others
24. With v31, Paul does, however, indicate a preference for “greater gifts” – and what these are is an interesting question
25. In 14:5, Paul indicates that prophecy (telling truth, explaining truth) is greater than tongues – clearly a preference for gifts that build up the body (all) and not just the individual person
26. And...with what will follow in chapter 13, Paul goes on to describe even more important manifestations of the Spirit as he moves into a discussion of faith, hope, and especially, love

Questions for Your Life Today

- A. In what ways do you see modern Christians place greater importance and status on some members over others?
- B. In what ways have you felt either superior or inferior to other Christians?
- C. What kinds of gifts has the Spirit given to you?
- D. In what way do you personally contribute to the Body of Christ?
- E. What do you appreciate about the gifts that others within the Body contribute?

Notes by The Rev. Dr. Jack Baca, Senior Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California

Resources:

- Interpretation Commentary on First Corinthians, Richard B. Hays, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997
- Interpretation Commentary on Second Corinthians, Ernest Best, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1987
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of I Corinthians – Life in the Local Church, David Prior, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of 2 Corinthians – Power in Weakness, Paul Barnett, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1988
- The Communicator’s Commentary, 1, 2 Corinthians, Kenneth L. Chafin, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1985