

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Chapter 12

Spiritual Gifts

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Chs 12–14 Paul primarily instructs congregational leaders, the “spiritual,” who have adopted different practices and divided the congregation. (TLSB)

12:1 *Now concerning.* Suggests Paul is answering another question raised by the Corinthians in their letter (cf. 7:1; 8:1; 16:1). (CSB)

Paul presents the word of the cross as the basis for the church’s worship in chapters 11-14. In chapter 12 he deals with another problem affecting the congregation’s worship; their ignorance concerning spiritual gifts. His efforts to correct their misguided thinking will occupy the next three chapters. Their abuse of the gift of tongues will not be confronted directly until chapter 14, after he has prepared the way by presenting a broad theology of the role of spiritual gifts (ch 12) and stressed the need to use each gift in love (ch 13). (CC)

spiritual gifts. Here it could mean “those who possess spiritual gifts” instead of the gifts themselves. This would agree with vv 1-3, which concern how to recognize people who have the Holy Spirit by their confession of faith, (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Spiritual gifts are more than the natural abilities we may inherit from our parents or learn about from our teachers. They are not something we can fully develop and use on our own through effort and experience. Each of us is born with talents and strengths given by God. The Holy Spirit can cultivate and develop those gifts, and even give us new ones. God may help develop these gifts through the instruction and influence of other Christians. (LL)

I do not be uninformed – He wanted to teach the proper use of spiritual gifts, just as he had given them the right information about the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. (CSB)

12:2 *when you were pagans* – In order to put his readers into the right relation to the admonition which is about to make and to keep them in the proper state of humiliation as to their absolute

lack of merit in the acceptance of these gifts he reminds them of their former state. He is doing a before and after. (CSB)

led astray to mute idols. At one time the Corinthians had been led by various influences to worship mute idols (cf. 10:19–20), but now they are to be led by the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

In contrast, the living God speaks to His people through servants of the Word such as the prophets. *you were led.* They were captive to false religion, subject to Satan’s deception. (TLSB)

Paul contrasts the Corinthians’ former belief in idols incapable of speech to their faith by the Holy Spirit, who enable believers to speak the words of faith: “Jesus is Lord.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

The apostle reminds the Corinthians that “ecstasy” is not limited to Christians. The Corinthians knew this from past experience. Before they were children of God, the very essence of their religious experience was their feeling of being carried away by spiritual forces. But then they were being led away to dumb idols. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

But although the idols were ineffective in themselves, behind them, as Paul demonstrated in 1 Cor 10:19-22, lay powerful demonic forces which sought to suck idol-worshippers into their maw. In their pre-Christian days, the Corinthians were not strong, independent people freely following their choices. Devotees of ecstatic pagan cults, like the cult of Dionysus, for example, might persuade themselves that they had been filled with extraordinary spiritual power. In reality, however, they had been captured by forces far stronger than themselves. They had become the helpless victims of demonic powers which led them off to their fate as a prisoner is led away for execution. Paul does not name the agent who carried them away, but no doubt he primarily has in the mind the devil. (CC)

12:3 *speaking in the Spirit of God* – The Holy Spirit directs believers’ conversation and life. (TLSB))

“*Jesus be accursed*”... “*Jesus is Lord.*” One who is regenerated by the Holy Spirit cannot pronounce a curse on Jesus; rather, he is the only one who from the heart can confess, “Jesus is Lord” (cf. Jn 20:28; also 1Jn 4:2–3). The Greek word for “Lord” here is used in the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint) to translate the Hebrew name. (CSB)

Perhaps someone in Corinth who claimed spiritual authority in the congregation voiced this evil confession. (TLSB)

In speaking of “Jesus be cursed” Paul’s words may be directed to “liberated” Corinthian Christians who thought they could flirt with idolatry by reclining in idol-temples and participating in the cup and the table demons (8:10; 10:21). Like synergistic Christians of all ages, they thought they could “have it both ways.” It suited them on occasion to be indistinguishable from the world. And on those occasions they may even have thought it did not matter if they joined their heathen associates in cursing Jesus, either out loud or by actions that, in effect, denied that Jesus is the only Lord. It is conceivable that some of the overconfident Christians, carried away by their “liberty” in the spirit, had given expression to blasphemous remarks, perhaps while under the influence of alcohol in an idol’s temple. (CC)

Evidence from a later date shows that 12:3a (or at least the idea it expresses) quickly became known even to non-Christians. Christianity came under intense persecution in the second half of

the first century and during the second century A.D. In A.D. 112, Pliny the Younger, the Roman governor of Bithynia wrote to the emperor, Trajan, that in his investigation of those accused of being Christians, if a suspect would curse Christ and worship statues of gods and the emperor, he would let the suspect go because these were things “those who are really Christians cannot be made to do. Those who refused to curse Christ and worship the emperor were executed. (CC)

The phrase “Jesus is Lord” may have been in contrast to the phrase “Caesar is Lord,” which loyal Roman citizens were asked to confess to show their loyalty to the Roman emperor. Some scholars hold that “Jesus is Lord” was the first Christian confession of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Lord. (“the LORD”). (CSB)

Christ is not simply “a” lord but is “the” Lord, Yahweh, the Savior. (TLSB)

except in the Holy Spirit – Where the Holy Spirit is present, Jesus will not be vilified. On the contrary, the Spirit’s chief role is to glorify Jesus (John 16:14). Thus the Corinthians should not conclude that so-and-so is a stranger to the Spirit because he or she lacks a certain gift. Only the person who is reborn spiritually by baptismal water and the Spirit (John 3:5) is able to believe and confess Jesus as Lord and Christ (Romans 8:9; 10:9; 1 John 5:1). Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Creed is the Small catechism states this clearly: I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel... (CC)

“Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe on Him, and have Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel” (LC II 38). (TLSB)

12:4–6 *same Spirit ... same Lord ... same God.* These verses, reflecting the Trinity, show the diversity and unity of spiritual gifts. (CSB)

As has been well said, here we have an important part of the Pauline “stuff” from which the Trinitarian doctrine was later formulated. Other significant Trinitarian passages in Paul are 2 Cor 13:14 and Eph 4:4-6, which mentions the persons in the same order and with the same designations: “Spirit... Lord ...God.” (CC)

12:4 *varieties* – diareseis – This can mean allotments, apportionments, or divisions. The Spirit is the one who does the dividing. (CSB)

“Different” is not an adjective as in the NIV translation, but a noun. It can mean allotments, apportionments, or divisions. The Spirit divides His gifts among God’s people so that He can multiply those who confess Jesus as Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Note the linkage between these terms, which describe the “spiritual” in v 1. The gifts are embodied in works of ministers, the “spiritual” people. (TLSB)

gifts. † Gifts produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit. (CSB)

12:5 *activities.* The Greek word in its various forms is used to indicate service to the Christian community, such as serving tables (Ac 6:2–3); it is also the word used a little later in the first-century Christian church for the office of deacon (Php 1:1). (CSB)

same Lord – The bottom line is that the Church is built up. (CSB)

The Persons of the Trinity in reverse order. The varieties of service are united by the one God, who gives them. Just as the Lord is triune but not divided, so the ministry is various but not divided. (TLSB)

12:6 *working*. The Greek word indicates power that is in operation. Spiritual gifts produce results that are obvious. (CSB)

Gk *energeo*, “to work.” The Lord is the only source of righteous “spirituality.” (TLSB)

12:7 *given to each one the manifestation ... given for the common good*. Every member of the body of Christ has been given some spiritual gift that is an evidence of the Spirit’s working in his life. All the gifts are intended to build up the members of the Christian community (see 1Pe 4:10–11). They are not to be used for selfish advantage, as some in the Corinthian community apparently were doing. (CSB)

Each member of the body (“brother,” v 1). *manifestation of the Spirit*. The Spirit’s work through the brothers. *common good*. The Spirit ministers to the whole congregation through their service. (TLSB)

In the divine plan it is the benefit and edification of the whole church that counts. There is no room for the divisive spirit that jealously eyes others’ gifts or looks down on what others have been given. After all, the gifts of the Spirit are precisely that: gifts, not personal accomplishments. (CC)

Spiritual gifts are service-oriented. They are not given in order to make us look good or feel good. They are given in order to equip us for work in Christ’s kingdom. These gifts enable us to help other people spiritually – to inform them about their Lord, to encourage them and strengthen them in their faith, to bring them into contact with His love and power, to guide them and to guard them against evil. Spiritual gifts are spiritual abilities for spiritual service. (LL)

God also gives us valuable and important natural abilities – social skills, intellectual knowledge, the skillful hands needed for performing brain surgery, a head for figures, acting ability, and so on. We call these “First Article gifts.” They come to us from God’s creative hand. Sometimes the Holy Spirit builds our spiritual gifts upon one or more of these natural talents. However, spiritual gifts as Paul describes them here appear to be abilities beyond or outside what we might consider natural talents. The Holy Spirit gives them for the specific purpose of equipping us to meet the spiritual needs of people. (LL)

12:8-10 The key point of these passages is that the one Holy Spirit produces all these works through the “spiritual” (v 1) of the congregation. Therefore, these callings and gifts are not to divide God’s people. (TLSB)

12:8 *To one ... to another*. Not everyone has the same gift or all the gifts. (CSB)

utterance of wisdom ... knowledge. Gifts that meet the need of the Christian community when knowledge or wisdom is required to make decisions or to choose proper courses of action. (CSB)

The blessings of Christ's Gospel are topics most valued by the Corinthians (1:5). Wisdom rightly applies knowledge. (TLSB)

It is not surprising that Paul mentions first in this verse wisdom and knowledge for by the Gospel the Corinthians had been especially enriched with these gifts ("enriched... in all speech and all knowledge," 1:5). God's wisdom and knowledge are found in the Gospel of Christ crucified; that was Paul's theme in 1:18-2:16. The precise nature of these gifts in 12:8 is not easily determined. However, it seems reasonable to suppose that Paul begins with these two gifts because these were the ones most commonly found among those who had been led to the Spirit-inspired confess "Jesus is Lord" (12:3). (CC)

12:9 *faith*. Not saving faith, which all Christians have, but faith to meet a specific need within the body of Christ. (CSB)

Not the gift of saving faith but trust in God's mercy and help in the face of great difficulty and need (cf Mt 17:14–21). (TLSB)

This must be an addition to saving faith, for that trust is God's power displayed in the cross is bestowed on all Christians. In this verse Paul has in mind a greater measure of faith, as displayed, for example, by the Syro-Phoenician woman ("O woman, great is your faith," Mt. 15:28) in contrast to the disciples, whose faith often was weak. Sometimes this greater measure of faith will manifest itself as a "heroic faith" which wrestles with God in prayer and moves mountains without doubting (Mt 21:21; 1 Cor 13:2), bringing about an extraordinary turn of events. Often, however, there may be nothing spectacular about this faith; it will simply take the form of a cheerful and steadfast trust and endurance in the middle of life's pain and difficulties. By their patience and their ability to see the hand of God in everything, people gifted with such faith are able to encourage others and build the congregation's morale. (CC)

gifts of healing. Lit. "gifts of healings." The double plural may suggest different kinds of illnesses and the various ways God heals them. (CSB)

Lit, "healings." Such blessings accompanied the ministry of Jesus and the apostles (cf Lk 9:1–2; Ac 3:1–10; 5:12–16). Luth: "Many people have been preserved by prayer, as we prayed Philip back to life" (AE 54:453–54). (TLSB)

It is debatable whether these "gifts of healings" are found in precisely the same form in the church today. None of the so-called healing ministries in the church today exhibit the six traits of the healings performed by Jesus and the apostles: the ability to heal with a word or a touch, the ability to heal instantly, to heal totally, to heal anyone, to heal organic disease, and to raise the dead. On the other hand, as countless Christians will attest, God often answers prayers for healing in a remarkable way, in keeping with John's assurance: "This is the confidence which we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He will hear us" 1 John 5:14; cf Mt 8:2). Through His good Spirit He also enhances the natural healing skills of a Christian doctor or nurse or parent. (CC)

12:10 *working of miracles*. Lit. "deeds of power." In Scripture a miracle is an action that cannot be explained by natural means. It is an act of God intended as evidence of his power and purpose. (CSB)

Lit, “workings of powers.” Another reference to God doing miracles (cf Mt 11:20–23). God’s power is made perfect in our weaknesses, which illustrate our helpless condition due to sin and His almighty power to save (2Co 12:7–9). (TLSB)

Included in this category would be exorcisms and other notable displays of spiritual power (e.g., Acts 13:9-11; 16:16-18). There is some overlap with these terms in 1 Cor 12:9-10; “healings” could also be called “miraculous powers,” and exorcisms could be called “healings.” (CC)

prophecy.† A communication of the mind of God imparted to a believer by the Holy Spirit. It may be a prediction (cf. Agabus, Ac 11:28; 21:10–11) or an indication of the will of God in a given situation (cf. 14:29–30; Ac 13:1–2). Apparently it also refers in a broader sense to edifying speech of various kinds (14:3), including proclaiming the gospel. (CSB)

God speaks through His called servants to warn, instruct, forgive, and encourage. (TLSB)

As is clear from further references to prophecy in chapter 14 though, Paul uses the term here as a synonym for proclaiming the Word of God or preaching. “Prophecy” is the gift of being able to proclaim God’s wrath at human sin (law) and His forgiving love in Christ (Gospel) in order to strengthen and encourage Christians. (LL)

With study and practice, many Christians without these gifts can and have improved their abilities to proclaim law and Gospel. And those believers gifted in these ways do need to study God’s Word with diligence. However, Paul’s words seem to talk about unusual power in communication, a power given some by the Holy Spirit, thus investing in them a gift for service in these areas. (LL)

distinguish between spirits. Since there can also be false prophecies that come from evil spirits, this gift is necessary in order to distinguish the true from the false (cf. 1Jn 4:1–6). (CSB)

Cf 1Jn 4:1–3; Dt 18:20–22. (TLSB)

This is the ability to tell the difference between what comes from the Holy Spirit and what comes from evil spirits. Whenever God speaks to us, the devil will try to distort it or confuse us about it. He wants us to misunderstand God and get us off-track in following God’s will. Elsewhere Paul reminds us that the devil masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). To protect us against such deception and misdirection, the Holy Spirit gives some Christians special sensitivity to the presence and influence of Satan and his servants. With this gift they can detect the error and the sins into which these evil spirits try to lead us and warn us against them. (LL)

various kinds of tongues.† Since the Greek word for “tongues” also means “languages,” some understand it to refer to the ability to speak in unlearned human languages, as the apostles did on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:4, 6, 11; cf. also 1Co 14:9–10). However, this phenomenon is not the same as at Pentecost; there “tongues” was modified by “his own” (Ac 2:6, 8) or “our own” (Ac 2:11) and was equivalent to “dialects” (Ac 2:8), but not in chs. 12–14, where the term “tongues” may refer to both earthly and heavenly languages, including ecstatic languages of praise and prayer (13:1; 14:2, 10). (CSB)

Various languages (TLSB)

interpretation of tongues. The communication of the message spoken in a tongue so that hearers can understand and be edified (cf. 14:5, 13, 27–28). (CSB)

Translation of languages. Luth: “He refers to ‘speaking in tongues,’ which is nothing else than reading Scripture orally” (AE 14:36; see also AE 28:329). Regarding Ac 2, early Christian and medieval interpreters, like Luther, viewed tongues as natural human languages, not ecstatic babbling. In multilingual congregations, the readings, liturgy, prayers, and sermon were often given in more than one language. The rabbis described these circumstances in the early synagogues and provided guidelines. (TLSB)

12:11 *are empowered by one and the same Spirit* – eneqgei – Here Paul draws attention away from the individuals who possess the gifts and places the focus on God to be the giver of the gifts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

They are not intended to serve individual self-glorification nor the centrifugal forces in the church (cf. 1:10-15). Rather they are to serve the Spirit’s edifying purposes. (CC)

apportions † The Holy Spirit determines which gift or gifts each believer should have. (CSB)

He remains sovereign, distributing the gifts to each person in keeping with His own free will. The Spirit “blows where He wills” (John 3:8; cf. Ps. 135:6). (CC)

12:1–11 God, who is one, unified and blessed the Corinthian congregation through His Spirit and gifts. Like the congregation at Corinth, we also suffer from divisions and party spirit, which undermine God’s work among us. Yet the Lord still leads us to true confession through Jesus, our Savior, and the Spirit’s work among us. • Mute our idolatrous pride and curb our party spirit, O triune Lord. Combine our hearts in works that praise You, even as You unite our voices in the true confession of Your name. Amen. (TLSB)

One Body with Many Members

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. **14** For the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. **21** The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” **22** On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23** and on those 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 composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, **25** that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. **26** If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. **27** Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. **28** And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. **29** Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? **30** Do all possess gifts of

healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

12:12 *body is one...members...many.* This example illustrates the unity and diversity of the different spiritual gifts exercised by God's people, who are all members of the one body of Christ. (CSB)

The image of the body was often used by Greco-Roman authors concerned for the unity of the body politic. Here Paul's concern is the unity of the church. The analogy of the body and its members was a favorite of his. (CC p. 444)

with Christ. With Christ's body, the church, of which he is the head (Eph 1:22–23). (CSB)

12:13 *one Spirit we were all baptized.*† Through baptism, a means of grace, the Holy Spirit produces faith in believers and makes them members of Christ's body, the Christian church (cf. Jn 3:3, 5). (CSB)

Ebaptisothamen – This is the Spirit's action in Baptism that makes us part of the community. We are not chosen by peers, nor do we pass some kind of test that qualifies us for membership. It is done to us and not by us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

The Spirit not only surrounds us through the water of Baptism but is within us, as the Spirit dwells within. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

The basis for unity of the diverse parts within the body of Christ is their common Baptism with one Spirit into one body. Paul has in mind here the sacrament of Christian baptism, whereby a person is incorporated into the body of Christ (Gal 3:27-28). Baptism – Christian Baptism with water in the triune name of God (Matt 28:19) – grants the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, and incorporates the baptized believer into Christ and the Christian church, Christ's body. (CC p. 444)

Pentecostal doctrine of a second baptism is, by its very nature, divisive, because some believers then consider themselves to be on a high spiritual level than other ordinary Christians. It leads to arrogance and to despising brothers and sisters who are equals in Christ. (CC p.445)

Jews or Greeks. In Christ there is no racial or cultural distinction. (CSB)

slave or free. No social distinction. (CSB)

all were made to drink of one Spirit drink. God has given all his people the Holy Spirit to indwell them (6:19) so that their lives may overflow with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; cf. Jn 7:37–39). (CSB)

12:14–20 Addressed mainly to those who feel that their gifts are inferior and unimportant. Apparently the more spectacular gifts (such as tongues) had been glorified in the Corinthian church, making those who did not have them feel inferior. (CSB)

Paul presents an imaginary conversation among the parts of the body. The spokesmen are those parts of the body who may be inclined to make invidious comparisons with other parts that seem more important. So the foot, depressed by its comparatively lowly status and the drudgery of its

work in supporting the whole body, compares itself with the more versatile and skillful hand; the ear becomes discontent with its simple and less-prominent function and compares itself with the more attractive eye. As Chrysostom noted, we are not so likely to envy those who are far superior to ourselves, but those who are a little superior. In their depression and jealousy, the foot and the ear are tempted to opt out, discontinuing their faithful service to the body. (CC p. 446)

But Paul insists they cannot opt out. Their only proper place is within the body. If everyone could have his wish and become the eye, we would have a grotesque situation, a body consisting only of an enormous eye. In that case, how would that fantastic organism hear? Their distinctive functions are part of His perfect plan for the whole, a plan which the individual believers should accept humbly without jealously eyeing what another has been given. As one commentator explains:

Every member cannot have the same function, and therefore there must be higher and lower gifts. But pride and discontent are quite out of place, for they are not only the outcome of selfishness, but also rebellion against God's will. This has two points; it was not our fellow-men who placed us in an inferior position, but God; and He did it, not to please us or our fellows, but in accordance with His will, which must be right. Who is so disloyal as to gainsay what God willed to arrange?

The body is like a choir or an orchestra, where each singer or musician has an assigned and vital role in producing a pleasing result. The quiet worker may be disregarded by the “movers and shapers,” and yet be making a greater contribution to the life of the church. No one's service is insignificant. (CC pp. 446-447)

12:14 As the human body must have diversity to work effectively as a whole, so the members of Christ's body have diverse gifts, the use of which can help bring about the accomplishment of Christ's united purpose. Each must properly exercise his gifts or effectively use his position for the good of the whole: e.g., the gift of the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, the position of apostle, elder (1Pe 5:1), deacon (Ac 6:1–6). (CSB)

12:17 *whole body were an eye* – This shows that each part is important and is needed. Each of us an individual cannot provide all the services that the body needs

12:18 Paul stresses the sovereign purpose of God in diversifying the parts of the body; by implication he is saying that God has arranged that different Christians in the body of Christ exercise different spiritual gifts, not the same gift. And this diversity is intended to accomplish God's unified purpose. God's method employs diversity to create unity. (CSB)

God arranged the members – *etheto* – He does this just as he wishes because he knows what is best for the whole body and also for each individual part. He does so for the purpose of the kingdom. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Paul attributed the diversity within the congregation to part of God's plan. People are most comfortable with those like themselves. Paul is asking them to see the benefits of their diversity. (TLSB)

12:19 *were a single member* – It is very common to criticize others when they think and act differently than we do. But if we were all the same many of us would be redundant. A body with all eyes isn't a functional body.

12:21–26 Addressed mainly to those who feel that their gifts are superior and most important. These verses provide another indication that some gifts, like tongues, had been magnified as being preeminent. (CSB)

12:21 The principle here is the interdependence of the parts of the body in the one whole. Christians in the body of Christ are mutually dependent as they exercise their distinctive functions. (CSB)

12:22 *weaker are indispensable.* Christians who seem to have less important functions in the body of Christ are actually indispensable. (CSB)

Paul’s use of the word “weaker” reflects his statement in 1:26-27, where he speaks of God’s choice of “the weak things of the world” (the apparently less influential things) to shame the strong things. Paul may also be alluding to 8:7, 9, 10, where he told the Corinthians not to offend, but to protect the “weak” Christians. They are essential parts of the body, Paul says here. (CC p. 443)

God’s ways are paradoxical, as demonstrated in the OT (cf Gn 48:17-20) and Jesus’ teachings about His kingdom (cf Mt 19:30). (TLSB)

12:23 *the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.* Just as we give food to the stomach, though it is a less attractive part of the body, so we should give honor and support to the Christians in the church who have ordinary gifts (in their functions). (CSB)

the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty. Christians whose functions may be very obscure in the church are to be given special respect. (CSB)

Our unrespectable parts are treated with even more respect. This seems to be the best way of reproducing the play on words in Paul’s Greek. (CC p. 443)

The hand and the feet are respectable enough not to need covering. Other less sightly parts of the body, however, such as the arms, the chest, and the legs were normally covered by the tunic and cloak. And even greater care was taken to provide a modest covering for the sexual organs and the buttocks. A feature like the face, however, needed no covering. (CC p. 448)

2 Samuel 10:1-7, 13-14, “*In the course of time, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him as king. ² David thought, “I will show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me.” So David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father. When David’s men came to the land of the Ammonites, ³ the Ammonite nobles said to Hanun their lord, “Do you think David is honoring your father by sending men to you to express sympathy? Hasn’t David sent them to you to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?” ⁴ So Hanun seized David’s men, shaved off half of each man’s beard, cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks, and sent them away. ⁵ When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet the men, for they were greatly humiliated. The king said, “Stay at Jericho till your beards have grown, and then come back.” ⁶ When the Ammonites realized that they had become a stench in David’s nostrils, they hired twenty thousand Aramean foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah, as well as the king of Maacah with a thousand men, and also twelve thousand men from Tob. ⁷ On hearing this, David sent Joab out with the entire army of fighting men. ¹³ Then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans, and they fled before him. ¹⁴ When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans were fleeing, they fled before*

Abishai and went inside the city. So Joab returned from fighting the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.”

12:24 Persons with more spectacular gifts do not need to be given special honor. (CSB)

composed – Used to describe the blending of paint colors. (TLSB)

12:25 *no division*. Paul used the same word (schisma) in 1 Cor 1:10 and 11:18 to describe the “factions” in the church, which involved a faulty understanding of Holy baptism (1:12-17) and an improper practice of the Lord’s Supper (11:20-26). His concern for the Corinthians’ unity in the Gospel keeps resurfacing. (CC p. 443)

same care for one another – The verb *marimnao* means to take “anxious care.” The believer is released from care for himself, for he is assured of his heavenly destiny. But this release from self-centered cares sets him free to care for others. Both Paul and Timothy exercised genuine pastoral care for the churches (2 Cor 11:28; Phil 2:20). (CC p. 443)

Instead of nurturing divisiveness, the various parts of the organism should be anxiously and thoughtfully concerned about one another. The heart should care for the kidneys for the lungs, and so on, “for we are members of one another” (Rom 12:5). In his emphasis on caring for one another, Paul is laying the groundwork for 1 Corinthians 13, his great chapter on love. Self-centered individualism can only prove destructive for the welfare of the whole; love on the other hand, always builds up. (CC p. 448)

12:26 *every part suffers*. In the body of Christ if one Christian suffers, all the Christians are affected (cf. Ac 12:1–5—the martyrdom of James and the imprisonment of Peter). (CSB)

A toothache makes one feel miserable all over. The philosopher Plato remarked that “when one’s finger is hurt, one does not say, ‘My finger is in pain,’ but ‘I have a pain in my finger.’” And the presence of pain causes the whole body to react, releasing adrenaline. When a runner has one inflamed Achilles tendon or one pulled muscle, even if the rest of his body yearns for exercise, he must wait until the one injury is healed. (CC pp. 448-449)

On the other hand, when a part of the body has been suffering finds relief, the whole body shares that sense of relief. And when a part of the body is honored (e.g., “you have a beautiful smile”), the whole person basks in the glow of the compliment. (CC p. 449)

12:27 *you are the body of Christ*. Addressed to the local church at Corinth. Each local church is the body of Christ just as the universal church is Christ’s body. (CSB)

The body is Christ’s and it is our privilege to be a part of it. As a result of being chosen to be a part of it, it also a privilege to use our gifts to serve the whole body as our reasonable response. (CSB)

12:28† The list here differs somewhat from that in vv. 8–10. Paul notes three of the gifted individuals of Eph 4:11, then five of the spiritual gifts listed in vv. 8–10. The apostles and prophets were part of the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20), and teaching was associated with the pastoral office (Eph 4:11; 1Ti 3:2). These three gifted individuals are listed as “first,” “second” and “third,” indicating their importance in the church. The rest of the list is introduced with “then,” indicating the variety that follows. Paul’s lists of spiritual gifts seem to be largely random samples. (CSB)

apostles. Those chosen by Christ during his earthly ministry to be with him and to go out and preach (Mk 3:14). They were also to be witnesses of the resurrection (Ac 1:21–22). The term may occasionally have been used in a broader sense (Ro 16:7; Gal 1:19). (CSB)

In Corinthians “apostle” usually refers to the Eleven plus Paul and has the specific or narrow meaning of an eyewitness of the risen Christ, who was also called to the office of “apostle.” In 15:7 (and possibly 15:9), and sometimes in Paul’s other epistles (e.g. 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25) “apostle” may have a more general or broader meaning akin to “minister” or “church worker.” (CC p. 452)

Pastors today are not eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (unlike the “apostles,” who were), nor do they receive immediate special revelations (unlike the “prophets” who did). But pastors are called to the office of preaching and teaching the Gospel from the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, which are God’s definite special revelation. (CC p. 452)

prophets – These gave vital guidance to the young church at critical moments and shared with the apostles the honor of having a foundational role. They received special divine revelations. Like the “apostles,” they were unique to the early church. (CC pp. 452-453)

Just as the OT prophets were essentially “seers,” who were given visions and taken into God’s council (Jer. 23:18) to receive His word and then communicate it to the people, so the NT prophets were filled with the Spirit and given special revelation to proclaim (Luke 1:41, 67). Thus the quintessential prophetic book in the NT is the book of Revelation, which the Spirit-filled seer calls words of the prophecy. In addition to John, other apostles also were given special revelations, including Paul himself. (CC pp. 429-430)

Stemming as it does from direct divine revelation, the phenomenon of biblical prophecy may not simply be equated with preaching. The distinction is that prophecy involved new revelations from God, while preaching was the proclamation and dissemination of the Gospel and other articles of the faith that had already been revealed. (CC pp. 430-431)

Paul wanted everyone in Corinth to be able to prophesy (1 Cor 14:5). But with the passing of the apostolic age and the decreasing need for this foundational gift (Eph 2:2), it gradually faded from the scene. In the OT the prophets were not a continuous institution; God raised up prophets when and where He willed. Sometimes they abounded. At other times in Israel’s history, prophecy was scarce. (CC p. 431)

Therefore we should not be surprised if in the NT period too the gift of prophecy came and went in various places and times as the Lord saw fit. The chief reason for the decline of prophecy is that it was replaced by the written Word of God. Holy Scripture is even more reliable than firsthand experience. (CC p. 431)

teachers – This third group seems to designate a distinctive kind of church servant, paralleling the fourth group listed in Eph 4:11. those who were both “pastors and teachers.” Paul refers to the teaching role of the overseer (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7) and the elder (1 Tim 5:1-2, 17, 19; Titus 1:5) entrusted with the pastoral care of local churches (teach – 1 Tim 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2). One of pastor’s chief qualifications is that he be “apt to teach” (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24). Especially since the price of hand-copied books was beyond the reach of most Christians, the pastor-teacher had an important role in publicly reading and expounding the Scriptures (1 Tim

4:13). That teaching office continues to be carried out today by pastors and by Christian teachers and other called ministers of the Gospel. (CC p. 453)

helping. Any act of helping others may be the product of a spiritual gift (cf. Ro 12:6–8), though the primary reference here is probably to a ministry to the poor, needy, sick and distressed (cf. Ac 6:1–6). (CSB)

administration. Those with gifts of administration were enabled by the Holy Spirit to organize and project plans and spiritual programs in the church. (CSB)

The list in this verse is not meant to be exhaustive. If Paul were to try to list every gift, there might be as many as there are parts of the body. (CC p. 454)

12:29–30 *Are all apostles ... ?* Christians have different gifts, and no one gift should be expected by everyone. (CSB)

12:31 *earnestly desire the greater gifts.* The Corinthians were apparently seeking status through the exercise of the gifts that seemed to them to be more important. (CSB)

Paul lists these edifying gifts first. [Prophecy is established as one of the chief gifts (12:28–31). Luther first applied ch 14 to the whole congregation (AE 40:22–23), but his view changed. He later wrote, “He is not commanding the congregation to preach, but is dealing with those who are preachers in the congregations or assemblies.... The lesson was sung or read by one or two.... Then one of the prophets whose turn it was spoke and interpreted the lesson.... When one was through, another might have something to add in confirmation or clarification” (AE 40:389). Luther’s mature view agrees with synagogue practices in the first century, which the early Christians adopted (cf Ac 13:14–16; 15:13–21)]. Prophecy, as preaching, makes the meaning and application of God’s teaching clear (vv 24–25). Luth: “St. Paul writes of the office of preaching in the congregation, to which [the congregation] is to listen and to learn from it, when he says: Whoever comes forward, and wants to read, teach, or preach, and yet speaks with tongues, that is, speaks Latin instead of German [as happened in Luther’s day], or some unknown language, he is to be silent and preach to himself alone. For no one can hear it or understand it, and no one can get any benefit from it. Or, if he should speak with tongues, he ought, in addition, put what he says into German, or interpret it in one way or another, so that the congregation may understand him” (AE 40:142).] (TLSB)

still more *excellent way.* Paul now shows the right way to exercise all spiritual gifts—the way of love. He does not identify love as a gift; rather, it is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). (CSB)

There is something greater than attaining these gifts: love, as described in ch 13. (TLSB)

To be sure, he has just encouraged the Corinthians to strive for the greater gifts. But he would have them aspire to something higher still. Whatever their gift may be, he would have them exercise it in the superior way of Christian love. For only through love will the whole body of Christ be able to function smoothly and grow (Eph 4:16). Paul does not classify love here among the spiritual gifts. As we have seen, the gifts are not parceled out equally; one person receives one gift, another person receives something different. But love, as the first and highest fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), transcends all the gifts and is to be cultivated equally by all believers. (CC p. 455)

12:12–31 Paul seeks to settle and unite the Corinthian congregation by emphasizing the order God established in creation and the priority of the Gospel. The sin of arrogance plaguing the Corinthians still disrupts congregations today when roles of service are not clearly defined or valued. Yet also today, Christ unites us in Baptism and makes us His very Body. Though wounded and afflicted, His Body can never be destroyed but carries out God’s loving purposes. • Grant me refuge, dear Jesus, in Your holy wounds, from which You poured life and blessing for me and for all. Because You value all Your people, teach me to love and serve them humbly according to my calling. Amen. (TLSB)