

# The Body of Christ

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 17 September 2023

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[ 0 : 00 ] You'll find it on page 1153 of the Church Bible. Page 1153, chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians.

Paul speaks of spiritual gifts. Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I don't want you to be uninformed.

You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to dumb idols. Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus be cursed, and no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone, it's the same God at work. Now to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

[ 1 : 19 ] To one that is given through the Spirit, a message of wisdom. To another, a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit. To another, faith by the same Spirit.

To another, gifts of healing by that one Spirit. To another, miraculous powers. To another, prophecy. To another, distinguishing between Spirits.

To another, speaking in different kinds of tongues. And to still another, the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit.

And he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. Now just as a body, though one has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit, so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free. And we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

[ 2 : 27 ] And so the body is not made up of one part, but of many. Now if the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body, it wouldn't for that reason stop being part of the body.

And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?

If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you.

And the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you. On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

[ 3 : 35 ] And the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, while our representable parts need no special treatment.

But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

And if one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, Christ.

And each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church, first of all, apostles, second, prophets, third, teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues?

[ 4 : 50 ] Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire these greater gifts, and yet I will show you the most excellent way. Thanks be to God.

Thanks, Malcolm, for reading. Good morning, St Silas. If we've not met, I'm Martin Ayres, the lead pastor here. And as Darren said, we are, regular diet as a church is to work through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter.

And as we do that, we're letting God set the agenda. And we're not sort of cherry-picking bits of the Bible and missing out bits we don't like, but we're just, week by week, looking at what's next in the Bible.

And in this series in 1 Corinthians, we've come to chapter 12. You can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you find that helpful, as we look at this together. But it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open.

If the fallen closed, it's page 1153, as we look at that together. So let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Mighty God, and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you for your word, breathed out by your spirit concerning your Son.

[ 6 : 07 ] And we ask that you would speak to each of us now, and that by a gift of your Holy Spirit, he will open your word to our hearts, and open up our hearts to your word.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So hopefully you picked up, as we heard that read by Malcolm, that our Bible reading this morning makes us ask the question, what makes someone a spiritual person?

Our world has answers to that question. If you think about if a friend who doesn't go to church described somebody as a spiritual person, what might they mean?

Often it wouldn't be connected with the God of the Bible. For someone to be described today as a spiritual person, they might mean someone who is especially reflective and thoughtful.

Someone who is open-minded. and not judgmental. Someone who is in harmony. They might think of someone who is in harmony with nature. Or someone who is in harmony with their inner self.

[ 7 : 13 ] They're being true to themselves on the inside. It gets a bit like the force in Star Wars. This idea that the universe has some kind of spiritual plane, and if you're in tune with the force, you're a spiritual person.

So what do we mean in church by being a spiritual person? Well, I wonder if sometimes we take those ideas of what the world would think of as a spiritual person, and we kind of Christianize them. So if someone described, someone in church described someone you've not met yet in our church as a spiritual person, what would you think they would mean by that? Paul is writing this letter to a church, the church in Corinth, where there were divisions.

We've been hearing that through the letter. And since chapter 7, Paul has been addressing a few big subjects that they've written to him about, they've been asking about. And he approaches this new one in chapter 12.

As he says in verse 1, now about the gift of the Spirit. He's going to look at this for three chapters of the letter. So he's entering this new section, and it looks like a subject they've raised with him, the gifts of the Spirit.

[ 8 : 27 ] And clearly, as we get into it, this was an issue where an invisible line had been drawn within the church community. We only hear half the conversation here, and there's lots that we don't understand about quite what was going on in Corinth.

We see that, especially as we get to chapter 14, that we're only seeing half of the conversation. But even here in chapter 12, I don't know if you noticed as it was read, in verse 8, Paul distinguishes between messages of wisdom and messages of knowledge and gifts of faith in verse 9.

And it's not clear to us what he means by each of those particular terms at that time. But what we can see is that they've drawn a line within the church that defines some people in the church as spiritual because they had a particular gift, a spiritual gift, the gift of tongues.

And there were haves and have-nots who, you can imagine, may well have been quite critical of each other. And they want to know something like, Paul, is the spiritual gift of tongues reserved for spiritual people?

And if you don't have that gift, are you unspiritual? So that question brings out our three points this morning from the chapter. The first is this, the Spirit fills everyone who receives Christ.

[ 9 : 50 ] So let's pick things up again in verse 1. He says, Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. Then he talks about how there was a time when

they were uninformed, verse 2, before they were Christians.

And then look at verse 3. Therefore, I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus be cursed. And no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, if you want to be a spiritual person and if you want to know if someone else is a spiritual person, it's all about what you make of Jesus. How are you responding to him?

If someone rejects the Lordship of Jesus, that he is the risen Lord, they don't have the Spirit. If, on the other hand, someone believes the message of the apostles about Jesus, the message we have in the New Testament, it's because the Spirit has done a miracle in their lives.

He has given them spiritual life, new life. That's true of everyone who believes in Jesus, that there's been this great miracle in your life. The Holy Spirit has given you life.

[11:02] Now, Paul calls that message Jesus is Lord here in verse 3, but there's a kind of shorthand there. In chapter 2, he called it the message of Christ and him crucified. And in chapter 15, he'll say more about what it means to believe what he calls the gospel, the message about Jesus, the saving news that Jesus died for sins and was buried and then he was raised to life in accordance with the scriptures and was seen.

So it's the news about Jesus, who he is, and what he's done. And the big idea this morning is that it's only by the work of the Holy Spirit in your life that you believe the apostles' message about Jesus.

The secret to being a highly spiritual person, respond rightly to Jesus. Or put another way, the Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus, not the other way around.

He, the Holy Spirit, makes you a spiritual person when you put your trust in Jesus. And lots of the rest of the chapter is simply about making sure that we, the church, don't divide over anything else. All the differences we have, and there are many differences, all our diversity, except in what we believe about Jesus, that diversity is part of God's good design for his people working together and helping each other grow.

[12:25] I don't know what you think could become a dividing line in our church where one group are the spiritual class of people and the others we might think of as less spiritual or unspiritual or unenlightened.

We might see it today just informally about whether somebody has been on a particular kind of Christian conference or Christian camp and we kind of have the people who've done that, they're the kind of in crowd and people who haven't, well, they're on the outside or if they've read a particular Christian book.

Or it might be that we make the same mistake as they did in Corinth when it comes to this particular gift, the gift of tongues, would we think that people who have that gift are more spiritual than other people?

Now, what was the gift of tongues and what is it today? In Acts chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit first descended after Jesus had ascended into heaven and the church was born at Pentecost, the apostles were there in Jerusalem and there was this great miracle of tongues.

The Holy Spirit came and they were heard to be speaking in different languages so that lots of people from different countries could hear them and understand as they declared the wonders of God.

[13:44] I think that the gift of tongues that Paul is describing here that was happening in Corinth seems to be a different kind of gift to that because what the reason he kind of, what we'll see in chapter 14 is he devalues this gift, the gift of tongues in Corinth compared to their understanding of it and that the reason he wants to give it less value is because he says people can't understand you when you're speaking in tongues which is the opposite of what happened in Acts chapter 2.

So I think the Corinthian gift of tongues was a kind of ecstatic experience, an experience given by God to people where when they were speaking to God in prayer it was like they went into a different state of consciousness where they no longer think or thought about the words they were saying. They weren't articulating in their own language anymore their prayers they're just it sounded like a different language like a babble as they were expressing to God their desires their worship to God. So is that gift still in the church today? Well it's not difficult to find examples today of people praying for the gift of tongues in quite bizarre ways today in the church that look as though they are emotionally manipulative and I'd be very wary of anyone in a church context who starts kind of ordering the Holy Spirit around commanding the Holy Spirit to come which we see happening and

people talk about ways that that seems sometimes to follow a pattern that could lead to psychological phenomena at the same time I don't see a reason in the scriptures why these gifts were just for the early church and would have stopped before Christ's return so for my money I think the gift of tongues is an ongoing grace gift from God freely given by the Holy Spirit to some Christians and it's usually a real blessing for a

Christian at a time of personal prayer and communion with God language is a helpful thing when we're praying to God because we articulate how we feel as we praise him and as we pray for things but language is limiting and Christians who have the gift of tongues have times in their prayer life especially when they feel particularly anxious or troubled or they feel particularly joyful about knowing God when they stop praying in their own language and they just babble for want of a better word they speak in a way that's just expressing a different tongue not a human language and it's aware of them communing with God expressing deep personal closeness to God and their emotional feeling towards him so tongues is a good gift and I think it's good for every Christian that you could ask God to give you the gift of tongues knowing that if he doesn't give you that gift he's given you everything you need for the

[16:58] Christian life in Jesus Christ but he might give you that gift and there are people in our church family who have that gift the key point Paul is making is that having the gift of tongues doesn't make you more spiritual than someone who doesn't have it what makes you a spiritual person is that you believe in Jesus and you believe what the Bible says about him the spiritual person believes Jesus is their Lord and their saviour the unspiritual person doesn't know Jesus so that because that clear line is drawn it means that our concern and energy in the Christian life is more towards the people outside the church longing to show them Christ praying that the spirit will do that miracle in their lives so that they see Jesus it's more about that than us being really concerned and energetic to get the people who don't have a particular gift to have it so if every

Christian is a spiritual person what do we make then of our differences as Christians that's our second point the spirit gives various gifts to serve Christ so Paul describes now gifts from God and its gifts of variety from a God of variety we see that in verse 4 if you have a look there are different kinds of gifts but the same spirit distributes them there are different kinds of service but the same Lord there are different kinds of working but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work now crucially Paul changes the language here the Corinthians asked him in verse 1 about gifts of the spirit Paul though uses a different word from verse 4 for gifts he calls them grace gifts it's the word in the original language charismata where we might get the word charismatic today but it just means grace gift a gift of grace an undeserved gift from a generous

God so then notice the parallels in verse 4 and verse 5 and verse 6 with what he calls gifts so there's the grace gifts of verse 4 are kinds of service in verse 5 and kinds of working in verse 6 and he clarifies that's God at work in his people and through his people so if a gift is given by God to one person the benefit God the whole church is built up as that gift is used although it might be with something like the gift of tongues as I described it that if someone has the gift of tongues and it's helping them in their personal prayer life with God that that benefits the whole church because of the ways that it bears the fruit in their lives in godliness and a desire to serve other people so they come into church looking to help others the next parallel is in who gives the gifts so notice in verse 4 it's the spirit in verse 5 the same lord in verse 6 the same god at work so

Paul here so carefully writing these verses to help us see that God the Holy Spirit gives the gifts but God is one and God is three Father Son and Holy Spirit so within God we have oneness and we have distinction and variety and just as that is what God is like so in his people he wants to see unity and diversity just think about the contrast there with the God of Islam so in Islam God is one one God and one person he is unity unitary and you see that oneness reflected in Muslim communities you end up with a community of uniformity if you think about Islamic societies they tend towards uniformity in what people wear especially but also in how people worship and how people pray there is the way to do things but in a healthy

Christian community we should see tremendous diversity unity and unity held together because this is what God is like the living God the God who is really there is one God three persons in eternal other person centred love now next Paul tells us that these grace gifts from God manifest the Holy Spirit if you look at verse 7 now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good so when we see a church family with various different gifts this is God the Holy Spirit way of showing his people that he is there as we use the gifts he's given us to help each other not because

of any one particular gift so if you look at verse 11 he says all these are the work of one and the same spirit and he distributes them to each one just as he determines so wherever there are spiritual people Jesus people people who believe in

[ 22 : 16 ] Jesus coming together to encourage each other the spirit is there manifesting himself in the way we help each other and Paul then wants to make clear that none of us gets all the gifts so he has two lists here of gifts from verse 8 and then over the page from verse 27 and they're not an exhaustive list between them but he uses a series of pointed questions about the gifts at the end of the chapter with all those questions you think it's the same answer every time from verse 29 are all apostles no Paul are all prophets no Paul are all teachers no do all work miracles do all have gifts of healing do all speak in tongues and so on in other words the gifts are spread out none of us is to think well I'm a more spiritual person because of a particular grace gift given to me because none of us has them all and as we get into the lists themselves what we find is

Paul blurs the boundary that we might have in our mind between what we might think of as extraordinary gifts and ordinary gifts or we might have a distinction of between what we think of as supernatural gifts and just natural gifts or abilities and Paul doesn't seem to have that distinction he blurs those lines for us so if you look at the list at the end of the chapter from verse 28 you've got the apostles people like Paul who saw the risen Lord Jesus he talks about prophets and teachers so you've got there through apostles prophets and teachers you've got the gifts that bring God's word into the church then he talks about miracles and then gifts of healing so again these are two gifts that we would see as more extraordinary aren't they gifts of miracles gifts of healing when you're in a church family where people are helping each other and giving guidance to each other that comes next helping and guidance so you've got miracles and healing and as

I said I take it that these gifts are for today as well so when somebody in our church family is unwell it's appropriate that we would pray that God would heal them that the spirit would grant that gift and he may do that but then the next two gifts after miracles and healing are helping and guidance so when anyone in our church family is just helping somebody else or providing guidance and wisdom these are gifts that we might think of as very everyday ordinary things but through them the spirit is making himself known so the church is a bit like an orchestra is one picture you could have of the church where every instrument in an orchestra brings something different and together they make the sound that the composer wanted from those different instruments and in a city like Glasgow where there are different churches around and people maybe have traveled to church we sometimes see people with one particular gift looking for a church full of people who have the same gift they want a church of people who are similar to them but if you think of the picture of an orchestra that would be a bit like a bassoonist leaving their

I've had it with this orchestra I'm going to leave and the conductor is saying I'm fed up of all these other instruments I feel unappreciated with my bassoon I've signed up for a bassoon ensemble where the bassoons get their rightful place in the spotlight or we could say that the church is a bit more like a rugby team than it is a triathlon club so if you're in a triathlon club they're all the same but in a rugby team whatever size or shape you are there could be a role for you I watched a rugby match yesterday and the team needed the big forwards the piano shifters just as much as they needed the fast backs the piano players and when Finn Russell in the Rugby World Cup is interviewed and they say you scored loads of points today you must be really happy that you scored the points he will say like anyone who's a kicker in a rugby team

I just do the kicking of the points but the team has to work to make those points happen their team points well in the church we're all on the same team we're all in the same orchestra if you like and through our different gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us we are and the Holy Spirit is making himself known as we serve others and work for others good and knowing that should liberate us from either resentment or from one upmanship about gifts we don't have to look at someone else's gifts and think I'm so angry with God that he didn't give me that gift and we don't look at our own gifts and think God must have seen something pretty special in me that he gave me this gift we have nothing that we didn't receive and what we have received as a gift we've received for the common good of our life together so then

[ 27 : 51 ] Paul not knowing about rugby gives us his own better picture of the unity and diversity the church ecosystem in our third point it's that the spirit makes you part of the body of Christ so if you go back to verse 12 and I think the verse ends with a surprise here if you just had a finger over the last word and we read verse 12 he says just as a body though one has many parts but all its many

parts form one body so it is with and I think we'd expect him to say that so it is with the church which is what he means but he actually says at the end of verse 12 so it is with Christ the church isn't just a body we are in Christ and parts of his body and every local church is a representation of that reality we are the body of Jesus Christ it's true of every believer from the moment we become a Christian in verse 13 he says we were all every

Christian baptized by one spirit so as to form one body and then all the distinctions broken down from the first century world whether Jews or Gentiles slave or free and we were all given the one spirit to drink and so the body is not made up of one part but of many isn't this great every believer has the spirit and we're all brought from the moment we believe into the body of Christ baptized by the one spirit into the body and Paul brings out two application points here the first is that none of us should feel we don't belong in a church because we're different verse 15 if the foot should say because I'm not a hand I don't belong to the body it would not for that reason stop being part of the body in fact he says in verse 17 if the whole body were an eye where would the sense of hearing be it would just be one massive eyeball I take it which is actually a really gross image isn't it if you're thinking to yourself

I don't really belong here because I'm different imagine a massive eyeball that's what the church would be like if we were all the same we need different parts for a body and he says in verse 20 as it is there are many parts but one body so if you've come this morning to St Silas however long you've been coming but you're feeling I don't fit in I'm different to everybody else don't think of that as a bad thing that's a really good thing it could well be that you are just what our church needs because you are different if St there is only one nose on the body don't leave it don't leave here to find a church full of noses that will be an unhealthy church if everyone is a nose and we won't be able to smell because you left so don't feel inadequate and equally don't feel superior to anybody else because of your gift because you need all the other people with their gifts so verse 21 he feet I don't need you and there is this great togetherness in verse 26 of the body if one part suffers in a body every part suffers if one part is honored every part rejoices and so it is with the church as we do life together so we belong to the body because we trust Jesus and each of us can play a unique and essential part in that body and I you feel empowered by the role that you have given by the spirit among God's people the Corinthians they had made too much of one particular gift the gift of tongues and a church could do that with any gift couldn't they in a church like ours at the moment we might fall into that error when it comes to the gift of teaching of kind of handling the Bible faithfully it's right that as a church we want to prize that we want to equip and train people and where we are at

St. Silas with the people we have we have this opportunity to train people to teach the Bible and to send out for the next generation of the church yet we're not to think that being gifted at teaching the Bible makes someone a more spiritual person that would be quite a dangerous thing to think Bible teachers are a gift from Jesus to the church but some spiritual people have a gift of hospitality some spiritual people have a gift of administration and as the body of Christ we all need each other maybe another gift that we might make this kind of Corinthian error with as a church today is music music is really important to us it's important to us it's important to lots of us in our church we listen to Christian music we find it encouraging and when we have musicians which we do have at St.

[ 33 : 11 ] Silas who are really gifted at leading us in an experience of some worship that we find joy giving and we find helpful in prayer and heartfelt that is a grace gift that the Spirit has given to them for the common good but we're not then to then think of our band leaders as on a different spiritual plane just because they know how to do that well how to serve the body well in that ministry and for each of us let me ask are you clear that you're a spiritual person because of what you believe about Jesus if you believe in him this morning not because of any particular gift that you exercise a good way to test that is you could ask yourself how would I feel if I could no longer use my gift at church in the way I've done before if things were to change around my church and I wasn't asked to serve

God in the same way that I've done in the past would I still feel secure as a spiritual person because thanks to Jesus and what he's done for me and the Holy Spirit helping me see Jesus I belong to the body of Christ Paul does say in verse 31 eagerly desire the greater gifts and he's going to show us as we go on in the coming weeks what those gifts are but we already know from the themes of this letter so far that a gift is going to be a greater gift if it's one that is especially helpful for other people learning Christ around us and finally at the end of verse 31 Paul says he's about to show us the most excellent way and that introduces the theme of next week the example of Jesus Christ in how

we use our gifts but we've already seen that most excellent way and Paul said in chapter 9 that he lays down his rights and his freedoms so that others can be built up in their faith and he says follow my example as

I follow the example of Christ Jesus Christ was the one who was gifted beyond compare the Holy Spirit came on him at his baptism to equip him as God's promised king and he used all of his gifts as he laid them down to come and deliver his people moved by love that was willing to do everything necessary for our benefit he lived a life of continually serving others laying down his status using his gifts so that we could be made right with God so how fitting then that we as his body today freely receiving gifts from the Holy Spirit should use them to build each other up let's pray together heavenly father we thank you for the gift of your spirit that we would know in our hearts Jesus is Lord and we ask

Holy Spirit that by your generosity you would continually distribute your gifts to us as your people and enable us each to serve the Lord Jesus and serve one another with the gifts you've given us that the whole body would be built up for we ask in Jesus name Amen