

# 1 Corinthians

12:1–31

## Introduce

What thing did you most identify yourself with in high school? How did you feel about the people who were better than you in that subject, sport or activity? Tonight we will look at how we should respond to the diversity of gifts and abilities within the church.

## Investigate

### Background

In his larger discussion of issues the Corinthian church had written him about Paul addresses issues of abuse within the church itself. After dealing with head coverings and the Lord's Supper in Chapter 11 Paul now turns to an extended discussion about spiritual gifts. In Chapters 12-13 Paul gives necessary background to help the Corinthian believers understand the issue before giving them detailed instructions about spiritual gifts, specifically tongues, in Chapter 14.

### Explore the Passage

#### 12:1-3

- What does the phrase "Now concerning" clue us in to what Paul is addressing here?
- Why might it be important that Paul says he does not want them to be uninformed? What does that seem to imply related to their knowledge of spiritual gifts?
- Why does Paul bring up the issue of idol worship and speaking in the Spirit? Think about Paul's discussion of idolatry in Chapters 8-10. *[They likely had experienced "inspired utterances" in their former pagan worship. Paul here wants them to be clear that what is important is not inspired speech itself but the intelligibility and content of that speech. This means that inspired speech by itself is not evidence of being led by the Spirit.]*

#### 12:4-11

- What is the importance of emphasizing the oneness of God in relationship to different gifts or service or activities? *[As we observe the diversity of gifts within the church our emphasis should always be on the God who gave the gifts.]*
- What is the purpose of the manifestation of the Spirit in the lives of believers? *[the common good]*
- How do believers get their gifts? Why is this important? What is our role in the attaining of spiritual gifts?

#### 12:12-26

- According to verse 13 what is the baptism of the Spirit? When does this occur? *[Make sure they see that we are baptized IN one Spirit and INTO one body. This is to counter the thinking in some Christian circles that the baptism of the Spirit is a "second blessing" that comes sometime after salvation.]*
- What is Paul's big idea in this analogy of the body?
- Why would Paul feel the need to address the unity of the body with this audience?

- How might the Corinthian church have been experiencing the kind of disunity talked about in this analogy concerning spiritual gifts?
- According to verses 25-26 what does God desire the relationship between the members of the church body to look like?
- What are ways that we can look down on the gifts of other members of the body? How can we honor certain offices or gifts more than others?

#### 12:27-31

- Again, where do church offices or spiritual gifts come from?
- What is the answer to each of the questions in verses 29-30? What is Paul's point?
- Verse 31 is a difficult verse. What might Paul mean by "higher gifts"? Why would Paul want them to desire the higher gifts? *[Have them look at 14:1. Comparing this verse with that it seems that Paul is saying "Pursue the higher gifts of prophecy and knowledge rather than tongues."* Another option: *The Greek structure of verse 31 is ambiguous. It can be translated "And you desire the higher gifts; but I will show you a still more excellent way." The lack of a command is an attractive option, but the repeated command in 14:1 argues against this.]*

#### *Discover the Big Idea*

What do we learn about spiritual gifts in this passage?

Summary: Spiritual gifts are given to each believer by the Holy Spirit according to His will. They are apportioned, not necessarily equally, and their purpose is for the common good of the church.

#### **Respond**

- How have you downplayed the gifts God has given you?
- How have you elevated your gifts above the gifts of others?
- What causes us to go toward either of these extremes? Why do we have such a difficult time rejoicing in the honor of another or suffering with someone who is suffering? *[Make sure they see that there is a cultural component that causes us to believe we are in competition with each other. That we think that the success of one means failure for ourselves.]*
- How might a proper perspective on the source and nature of spiritual gifts help us maintain a healthy balance in how we view ourselves and others?