

Conversations on
1 Corinthians
12:1–11

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! Search YouTube for “spiritual gifts” to find a humorous video about mistaken spiritual gifts. Discuss: What are other ways you’ve seen people justify their bad habits by calling them “gifts”? How could any of the genuine spiritual gifts be a help?

WHAT is important to know?

The idea that governs the remainder of the passage (vv. 4–11) is the need for and value of a diversity of spiritual gifts, though still within a unity. Prior to moving into a more detailed explication of this diversity and unity, though, Paul establishes the theological context in which his teaching is grounded. For Paul both the *unity* of source and purpose and the *diversity* of expression for spiritual gifts come from the Godhead, which he distinctly articulates in Trinitarian form. God is diverse and the diversity of the “gifts” (*charismata*, v. 4) given by the Spirit testify to that. (Troy Miller)

- ✧ Why might Paul have emphasized a need for diversity within unity in his letter to the church in Corinth?
- ✧ Why might Paul have reminded the Corinthian church about their Gentile past (v. 2)?

WHERE is God in these words?

Those who truly are in the Spirit will speak and act in ways congruent with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul suggests that the Holy Spirit is not some generic mystical principle. The reference to the phrase “Jesus is Lord” points to Paul’s reliance on the simple and most essential confession of the early church. Because Jesus alone is worthy of trust and obedience, no other political, cultural, or religious lords can be the focus of the Christian’s spiritual interest. All who can confess that Jesus is Lord do indeed share this indwelling of the Spirit. Because the persons of the Trinity always act together, where the second person is so too is the third person. (Lee C. Barrett)

- ✧ What is the theological importance of claiming that God is the source of all gifts?
- ✧ How is Christian unity created through the indwelling of the Spirit?
- ✧ How is the triune God apparent in this Scripture passage?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

All of this discernment, all of these gifts, services, and activities are activated by God for a purpose. Each person, Paul says, is given a manifestation of the Spirit to be used for the *common good*. In the culture that surrounds the church today, and often even within the church, individualism has been exalted to such high status that the phrase “common good” has nearly vanished from the lexicon. Paul’s words offer a refreshing, even shocking reminder that faith, while personal, is never private, and that the gift each person has been given is meant to be shared. (Karen Stokes)

- ✧ How is the Spirit manifested in your life?
- ✧ How has individualism affected your and your congregation’s understanding of “common good”?
- ✧ How does the phrase “faith, while personal, is never private” resonate in your life?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

Many of our churches struggle with issues of unity and diversity. This text addresses one aspect of diversity, that of the gifts exhibited in a community. Such gifts can be a source of disunity when they become the criteria for determining different ranks in the church, leading to a hierarchy of holiness. Here we are reminded that because the gifts have a single source, they are meant to be things that unite the community of faith. Gifts are used for the common good. (Raewynne J. Whiteley)

- ✧ In what ways does your congregation struggle with the issues of unity and diversity?
- ✧ What can your congregation do to avoid having a “hierarchy of holiness”?
- ✧ How can the diverse gifts of your congregation work together for the common good?

Loving God, source of all of our gifts, challenge us to put our diverse gifts into action as we work for the common good in your world. Amen.