

# “THROUGH THE BIBLE”

PASTOR SANDY ADAMS

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12

Betty was the clerk at a Christian bookstore, and enjoyed chatting with customers. One day she was complimenting a local pastor on his wonderful church. Betty blurted out, “Oh, Pastor Tom, I just love your body.” *Oops!* Betty was speaking of “*the Body of Christ,*” but that’s not how it was heard by everyone else in the store. It made for an embarrassing moment. The NT refers to the Church metaphorically as “*the body of Christ.*” At the Incarnation Jesus clothed himself in a human body to touch, and help, and heal. Today, He carries on through another body, the Church.

Just as our spirit and mind interact with our surroundings through our body; likewise the Church is the means by which Jesus reaches out to a needy world. We are the hands, and feet, and eyes, and mouth of Jesus! 1 Corinthians 12 teaches us that *the Spirit of Christ* works through *the Body of Christ*. Our job is to cooperate with the Spirit, not hinder His work. I hope people look at our church – then say, “Lord, I just love Your body!” Chapter 12 is divided into two parts... Verses 1-11 discusses **the power of the Spirit** - then verses 12-31 describes **the participation of the Body**.

Verse 1, “**Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant...**” The Holy Spirit was active in the church at Corinth. Spiritual gifts were *commonplace*, but they weren't always coupled with *common sense*. There was ignorance in the church over the proper use of spiritual gifts. As a result these gifts were being *abused* and *misused*. It’s sad, but today there's still much ignorance among Christians in regards to spiritual gifts. God intends for them to unite us. Instead they often lead to division and schism. When it comes to spiritual gifts people tend to gravitate toward two extremes... **charismania** or **charisphobia**.

I grew up in a church dominated by **charisphobia**. The supernatural gifts of the Spirit were explained away as having passed with the apostles. We were taught the compilation of the NT made spiritual gifts obsolete. But that’s not what the Bible teaches. Nowhere does it suggest that healings, and miracles, and tongues, *and the like*, have passed away. Rather, these are gifts that every Christian should seek.

My old church was afraid of the “*charismata*” or spiritual gifts. But I soon found other churches that were dominated by them. This is **charismania**. It’s possible to be so enamored with the *gifts* you neglect the *Giver*. The Christians in Corinth were thrilled with these supernatural displays of God’s power, but that power was never applied to holy and godly living.

Here’s where the church needs a balance... We need the power of God’s Spirit, but we also need the knowledge to use that power effectively. Some churches are **a fireplace with no fire** – empty and cold. They’re all orthodoxy, but no life... Other churches are **a fire without a fireplace**. A spiritual emphasis burns out of control... We need **the fire in the fireplace**. We need *the fire of God’s Spirit*, but within *the fireplace of God’s Word*.

We want to see people warmed – not burned. It's said, "As a dove climbs on two wings, likewise the Holy Spirit lifts the church on both the **graces** (or fruits of the Spirit) and the **gifts** of the Spirit."

Verse 2, "You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led." Apparently, the Corinthians were particularly enamored with the vocal gifts - *prophecy, tongues, and interpretation*. And here we learn why... They had lived their whole life serving mute idols – *gods with no voice*. Now they had embraced an audible God. The Holy Spirit spoke to them and through them. No wonder they'd gotten a little carried away?

But Paul warns them, "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." In other words, every time you hear "Thus saith the Lord" don't assume what comes next is really from the Lord. Test the voices to see if they *harmonize with the Word of God and honor the Son of God*. This is why Paul says no one speaking by the Holy Spirit will ever speak ill of Jesus. The Spirit moves upon a person's heart to submit to His Lordship - to proclaim their allegiance - not deny His authority. When we study spiritual gifts remember miracles can be counterfeited. The pagan priests in Egypt were able to duplicate Moses' miracles – up to a point... The end-times Antichrist will work "lying wonders..." Mormons claim to speak in tongues... The gifts of the Holy Spirit build up of the Body of Christ - they're good - that's why Satan does his best to discredit them.

Verse 4, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all." Not everyone agrees, but in my opinion, here Paul categorizes three types of spiritual gifts... The first he calls "gifts." These are *the motivations of the Spirit* listed in Romans 12. They're the basic motivations for service that the Spirit births in us at conversion. They color and shape our perspective on ministry. The second type of spiritual gift Paul refers to as "ministries." *Ministries of the Spirit* are supernatural callings placed on individuals within the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4 lists "apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher." And the third type of spiritual gift are called "activities." The Greek word is "energeo" or "energies." Verse 7 refers to these gifts as "*manifestations of the Spirit*." These seem to be spontaneous eruptions of spiritual power.

Paul lists nine of them in verses 7-10... "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one..." Notice spiritual gifts are not *natural abilities*, we're born with them – nor *learned skills*, we cultivate through practice. They are the evidence of the Holy Spirit working in and through me.

Once an old lumberjack was told he needed to purchase a chainsaw. He was told, "You'll chop four times more wood with a chainsaw than with an ax." But after several outings with the chainsaw, the lumberjack was chopping less wood. In frustration he took it back to the hardware store. The clerk was surprised. He cranked the saw to troubleshoot problem. But as soon as he did the lumberjack got this strange look on his face. He asked, "what's that noise?"... Spiritual gifts are like power tools. The Holy Spirit revs up supernatural, spiritual capacities in our lives that enable us to do *more* and do *better* for God. To each Christian a gift is given.

But notice the outcome of these gifts... Paul says they're "for the profit of all..." Each Christian gets a gift, but the whole body benefits from them. Before we tackle this list of gifts - understand, why God gives them. For *the pride of a few*? No! For *the promotion of the special*? No! Paul is emphatic. Spiritual gifts are given by God for *the profit of the whole church!*

Here's the list (verse 8)... "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit..." Knowledge is *information*. Wisdom is *application*. We need both! A *word of wisdom or knowledge* is just that - a word - not a whole book, just a bit or fragment. Suddenly, in the midst of a perplexing situation the Lord gives you a piece of the puzzle. Maybe, not all the info you'd like, but enough to make sense of your situation, and know what course to take. It's like a flash of genius. An idea or insight comes across the screen of your mind. It's information you couldn't have known apart from God's Spirit.

Verse 9, "to another faith by the same Spirit..." It's said, "Nobody ever gets over a canyon in two steps. At times you need to take a leap of faith." *The gift of faith* is a leap. It's a special faith given to you by the Spirit that enables you to rise up under duress and be bold for God. This is lion's den faith, giant-slaying faith, water-walking faith, mountain-moving faith!

"To another gifts of healings by the same Spirit..." Ultimately, God will heal all our sickness. When we arrive in heaven we'll receive perfect health. On earth there're times when God doesn't heal. We all die at some point! Commonly, God heals naturally. The human body was designed with amazing rejuvenating capabilities... God can also heal medicinally – by doctors. The marvels of modern medicine are no less a miracle from God. But on occasion, I believe God will heal us supernaturally.

There is a gift of healing. God uses individuals within the church to lay hands on the sick and pray for their recovery. We've seen these miracles. I remember specifically a lady suffering from serious heart disease. She was facing major surgery. She asked if we'd come by her house and pray. We did. The next day she called. After her pre-op exam her doctor said the problem was gone. The surgery was canceled. We were praising the Lord! *Is there a doctor in the house?* You bet! His name is Jesus!

And notice the double plural here... It's the "gifts of healings." Apparently, there're different types of "healings" – physical, mental, emotional... There's also different "gifts" or ways of mediating God's healing. Through prayer, or through physical touch like the laying on of hands.

Verse 10 continues the list. "To another the working of miracles..." If you believe Genesis 1:1, "God created the heavens and the earth" you should have no problem with miracles. If God created the laws of nature, then He can suspend them or override them when and if He desires! I've never validated the story, but I heard Pastor Chuck tell it. A girl didn't have gas to get to church. She really wanted to come so she took the garden hose, filled her tank with water, and asked God to turn the water into gasoline. When she finished praying, she drove her car to Calvary Chapel. Billy Graham has written, "As we approach the end of the age I believe we will see a dramatic recurrence of signs and wonders which will demonstrate the power of God to a skeptical world. Just as the powers of Satan are being unleashed with greater intensity, so I believe God will allow signs and wonders to be performed." We should be open to the miraculous!

"To another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues..." In chapter 14 we'll discuss *prophecy*, *tongues*, and *interpretation* in-depth. Here Paul also mentions, "discerning of spirits." We teach our kids to read - to recognize words, and sentences, and paragraphs. But understand for kids to survive our crazy world they also have to *read between the lines*. Not everyone is honest and straightforward. Our kids need to discernment that goes beyond what can simply be seen. And this is one of the gifts of the Spirit – "discerning of spirits." A false prophet comes as "a wolf in sheep's clothing." Satan appears as an "angel of light." The gift of discernment enables us to see beyond the facade.

Verse 11, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” In other words you or I don’t get to pick the gift we want. You can’t say, “Oh, I’d like healing... How cool would it be to run around healing folks.” It doesn’t work that way. The Holy Spirit chooses what gifts to distribute to each person. Spiritual gifts are ours to use, but they remain God’s gifts. He is the power behind them – not you. Thus, when we exercise them we need to rely on the Holy Spirit’s direction. The Spirit is sovereign over His gifts.

The Greek word translated “*spiritual gifts*” back in verse 1 of Chapter 12 is “*pneumatikos*,” which means, “*things belonging to the Spirit*.” This is why I don’t believe a spiritual gift is something you carry around in your back pocket, and just whip it out whenever you want to show it off... Neither can you teach another person to speak in tongues or prophesy. These gifts are administered by the Holy Spirit. They’re God’s gifts!

Now, Paul has introduced us to the gifts. From here on he describes to us how they operate in church life. How they exist for “*the profit of all*.” Verse 12, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”

If you’re an average adult here’s what you accomplish every 24 hours... “Your heart beats 103,689 times, your blood travels 168,000,000 miles, you breathe 23,040 times, you inhale 438 cubic feet of air, you eat 3.5 pounds of food, you drink 2.9 quarts of liquid, you lose 7/8 pound of waste, you speak 4,800 words, you move 750 muscles, your nails grow .000046 inches, your hair grows .017 inches, and you use 7,000,000 brain cells.” No wonder you feel exhausted at the end of the day! Your body is a miracle of engineering. It consists of several trillion cells, and ten major organs working in precise synchronization with one another.

The human body is a blend of *unity and diversity* - and so is the Body of Christ. We’re many members, but one body. Look around at the people in this room – *we’re different folks, from divergent backgrounds, with varied gifts, and diverse callings* - yet God has put us all together in one Body. And He wants us to function and work in harmony with each other.

Verse 13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” Paul is saying we all have a common spiritual starting point. Every believer was born into God’s family by the same Spirit.

Here’s where we need to clear up some confusion. Non-Pentecostals point out from verse 13 that Spirit-baptism is used synonymously with Christian conversion - *and they’re right*. But then they conclude that Spirit-baptism always speaks of conversion - *and it doesn’t*. The term “*baptized*” is like the term “*watch*” – it has multiple meanings. You can *wear a watch* or *stand watch*... Likewise “*baptism*” can mean “*to initiate or make part of*” – like when we say of a rookie, “*Well, he got his baptism*.” Or it can mean “*to engulf, or immerse*” – as in water baptism.

Whenever **Paul** uses the term “*baptism*” it refers to *conversion*. Romans 6 says that by faith we’re baptized into Christ. We’re united spiritually into the life of Jesus. In Christ, I share in all that He is, and has accomplished. But when **John** or **Luke** or **Jesus** or **Peter** use the term, it speaks of *immersion* not *conversion*. In Acts Luke describes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, with the phrase “*filled with the Spirit*” or

“baptized in the Spirit.” In essence the same word is used to denote two separate experiences. The correct interpretation of a text depends on its context. **Initiation** is salvation. **Immersion** occurs at or afterwards. Paul uses the term “**baptism**” to mean *origination into Christ*. – elsewhere its our *saturation with Christ*.

And here Paul says when we’re initiated into Christ we’re initiated into His body. You might join a *church* by coming forward and applying for membership. But you join *the Church* the moment you connect with Christ. *Spiritual baptism is like a merger*. A smaller company gets gobbled up by a larger corporation. The smaller outfit still does business - but now under new leadership, with a new mission, and new resources, and new partners. We’re no longer a “*mom and pop*.” The Church is part of God’s kingdom!

Verse 14, **For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?"** One of the hindrances to harmony in the church is jealousy. A person refuses to accept their place. If they can’t play the position they want – they take their bat and ball and go home. They refuse to follow. If they can’t teach or lead they bail out. At church you need to leave your agenda at the door. Church is not about any *one of us individually*, but *the whole of us*. Don’t expect to serve or give on your own terms. The Spirit dictates your calling.

It’s like your foot getting tired of its place in your body. It grumbles, *"It’s hot and smelly in this sock. Dr. Shoals is my only friend. I have to bear the ever-increasing weight of everyone else in the Body! I’m tired of being treated like a heel. My sole is weary. I’m the one who’s always toeing the line. I keep putting my best foot forward and nobody ever notices me I’ve had enough, I’m putting my foot down!... people even think I’m corny!"* Or imagine your ear complaining, *"I’m tired of getting waxed. If someone sticks a needle in me one more time, I’m outta ear!"* *What if the members of your body got tired of playing their role, and competed with each other?* You’d become spastic. You wouldn’t be able to accomplish much. And the same would happen to the Body of Christ... If everyone refused to cooperate with each other the Body of Christ would be useless.

Verse 17, **“If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”** If you told your Little League team everyone could play the position they wanted, you would end up with ten pitchers and maybe a shortstop. Everybody wants to play the glamor positions. But you’d have a lousy team. The same is true with the Body of Christ. Here Paul paints a grotesque image - what if the whole body were an eye! A big eyeball rolling around. *We’d all be blue!* We could see, but with no feet, hands, legs, or arms - *we couldn’t go anywhere or do anything*.

And I’m afraid that’s what becomes of many churches - they turn into one big *"I" - "I want this" or "I deserve that."* Some churches suffer from *I-strain!* We need to be led by the Holy Spirit, not our own ego.

Paul adds in verse 19, **“And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.”** Remember the Body of Christ is a blend of *unity and diversity* – to stress one above the other is a mistake. We need a healthy balance of both. On the one hand, *to over-stress our unity, robs us of our diversity*. The big story in 1997 was the successful cloning of a sheep by Scottish scientists. They named her *Dolly*. I remember reading that and thinking, *"That’s no big deal, the church has been cloning sheep for centuries."*

Often the church will strip folk of their individuality in the name of discipleship. We conform them - not into the image of Christ, but into our image. Listen to this poem, "Be what I want - no more, no less - because I am right and no one else. Think what I think, do only what I do, then and only then, can I fellowship with you." That's the attitude we want to avoid.

Yet on the other hand, *to over-stress diversity hinders a church's unity*. At times the health of the Body needs me to *express my individuality*, but at other times our health is best served by *suppressing my individuality*. There're Christians who never settle in and become part of a church because they're unwilling to swap their own personal agenda for the goals of the group. *They insist on their own thing, and miss out on a God thing! Unity and diversity need to be balanced with maturity!* Remember the gifts of the Spirit are for *"the profit of all."* This should be our motivation.

Verse 21 says it best, *"And 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."* Certainly, we all have a place... we all need each other!

One day the ship's *captain* and *chief engineer* were arguing over who's job was most vital. They decided to swap places to prove their point. The engineer ascended to the bridge. The captain went to the engine room. An hour later the captain appeared on deck covered with oil and grease, and waving a monkey wrench. He shouted to the engineer, *"Chief, you need to get down there. I can't make her go!"* The engineer shouted back, *"Of course you can't I just ran her aground."* *Both men needed each other!* You have gifts that can bless and benefit me, and I have gifts that can bless and benefit you - we should recognize that we need each other!

At the close of WW2 Jimmy Durante was invited by Ed Sullivan to a veteran's hospital to entertain some wounded soldiers. Durante had a radio show scheduled that night, but said he'd try to squeeze in a short routine. Sullivan was shocked when that short routine turned into a couple of hours. Later Sullivan asked him why did he stay... Durante pointed to two soldiers sitting side-by-side on the front row. Both had lost an arm and they did their clapping with their two remaining hands. It so moved him he couldn't leave. And this is what moves the Spirit of God to move upon us. Spiritually speaking we're all disabled in some way. Where I'm weak you make me strong, and where you're weak I can help. God wants us to see that we're better for Him together than we are apart!

Verse 22, *"No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor..."* For example... There's a tiny valve that acts as a lid to your stomach. When the valve weakens stomach acids float back up into your esophagus. The result is called *"esophageal reflux"* - or in layman's terms, *"major league heartburn!"* And speaking from experience this is no laughing matter! It amazes me that the weakening of one tiny flap of flesh can create such intense pain. It's a reminder that every member of the body plays a pivotal role. You may be a tiny valve, but if you don't do your part the body fails to function.

There're parts of the body like the stomach valve that *serve*, but are never *seen*. No one thinks of them until there's a problem. If a nursery worker fails to show up, or the sound man sleeps in, or the cleaners miss a week - suddenly everyone realizes how important their role happens to be. Some might say, *I have the glamor job* - I get to teach God's Word week to week - but if everyone else didn't do their job I'd never get to do mine.

Verse 23 teaches us to make sure the people behind the scenes don't have to breakdown to be appreciated. The Church should go out of its way to give honor to those members who might end up getting overlook.

Verse 23 ends, “**And our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our representable parts have no need.**” In other words, the service I perform is obvious, but not so for those who serve behind the scenes. I get plenty of recognition. Our shows of appreciation should be for the unseen members. “**But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.**” Division in the Body is less likely if the attention and care is divided equally among all members.

Verse 26, “**And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.**” If I accidentally pound my thumb with a hammer, it won't just cause a swollen thumb – my entire body throbs. When one member hurts the whole body suffers. Just as the human body is interconnected, so is the Body of Christ. It's been said, “**Real fellowship doubles our joys and divides our grief.**” The church ought to be either *praying for each other* or *rejoicing with each other*. Sharing both our pains and our joys - living life side-by-side.

Verse 27, “**Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.**” Verse 8 provided us a list of spiritual gifts. Here Paul mentions two additional gifts - “**helps**” and “**administrations.**” The gift of “**helps**” is a supernatural knack for assisting someone without making them feel like you're taking over. I've had people help me in a way that only highlighted *their competencies* and *my inadequacies*. A person with this gift has the ability to empower a person, and bring out their best.

Whereas, the gift of “**administrations**” is a valuable gift within the Body. A person with this gift is able to help organize and manage ministry. Business mogul Andrew Carnegie use to brag, “**Take away our factories, our trade, our avenues of transportation, our money - leave us with nothing but our organization and in four years we could reestablish ourselves.**” Spirit-inspired organization is a powerful tool in the Body of Christ. Seldom does a church need *more* organization, but every church could use *better* organization. Its been said, “**We need men and women with the courage to dream, the ability to organize, and the faith to execute.**”

Verse 29, “**Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings?** Paul is emphasizing diversity within the Body. We all have different spiritual gifts and callings. *I have no doubt the most frustrating experience in the world is to try and be something you're not.* Try to function in someone else's calling, or mimic their gift, and you're destined for misery. We need to find **our** place and use **our** gifts. When we do God will bless us in ways we never dreamed.

Notice Paul's last two rhetorical questions: “**Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?**” The obvious answer is the same as it is to the previous five questions, “**No.**” This is why I don't agree with the Pentecostals who believe that everyone filled or baptized with the Spirit will speak in tongues. Tongues is a wonderful way to *praise God* and *pray to God*. Everyone should be open to speaking in tongues - but Paul is clear, not everyone will! In some circles the gift of tongues is worn like a badge of honor - it separates the spiritual haves from the have-nots. If you don't speak in tongues you're treated as spiritually inferior. This is sad! We're going to learn in Chapter 14 that the gift of tongues is actually the least of the gifts.

Paul concludes Chapter 12, *“But earnestly desire the best gifts.”* Of course, this begs the question, *“What are the best gifts?”* I believe the best gift is whatever I need at the time... If I need info to make a decision then the best gift is a *word of knowledge*. To sort out my options I might need a *word of wisdom* or *gift of discernment*. If I'm afraid, I need a *gift of faith*. If I'm sick, the best gift would be *gifts of healings*.

Yet there's one commodity more important than even the best gifts. Paul concludes, *“And yet I show you a more excellent way...”* This is what Chapter 13 is all about. Sandwiched between the two great chapters on spiritual gifts is *“The Love Chapter”* – for the greatest gift of all is love. Here's the surest way to know you've been filled with the Holy Spirit! You can speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but if you have not love you're just a clanging cymbal... Next week we'll talk about love.