

# One Body, Many Parts

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Preacher: Hoong Phak Ng

[ 0 : 00 ] We are continuing our series in 1 Corinthians and we have reached chapter 12. In this chapter and in the next two, Paul deals primarily with the gifts of the Spirit.

He's responding to yet another problem in the Corinthian church. It involves their wrong attitude, their division over their spiritual gifts, and their misuse in public gatherings.

Let's pray. Holy Spirit, please be with us as we examine your word. Make it clear to us. Soften our hearts to be obedient.

Help us to use your gifts to bless one another. Use my weakness to glorify your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. The spiritual gift caused you unease.

You may have been Christian long enough to have experienced or know of churches that have split because members could not agree with the gifts that were manifested or not manifested in their church.

[ 1 : 10 ] Were you troubled by the eventual failed predictions of victory for President Trump made by prominent prophets in the US? Or were you delighted instead?

Perhaps you have friends who have left for another church which, in their opinion, have a greater measure of the Spirit, or in which strange phenomenon attributed to the Holy Spirit is manifesting. Or perhaps someone noticed you working under the hot sun, trimming some shrubs in the church compound. And you said you were using your gift to serve the church.

And the comment you got back was, You call that a gift, man? Nothing supernatural about that, what? The Corinthian church was no doubt an exciting church.

But definitely not an easy church to pastor. We have heard of how some members pride themselves by being wise and knowledgeable. Others were self-centered, self-seeking, divisive over which leader is wiser, more eloquent, who is a spiritual person and who is not, and who has God's approval and who has not.

[ 2 : 34 ] They continued to hold somewhat to the hierarchical social ranking of the surrounding culture. And this divisive spirit extended to the way they regarded the spiritual gifts.

And they were truly a gifted church. However, the diversity of spiritual gifts, instead of uniting them, divided them.

Those with the most showy, most spectacular gifts, looked down on those who had the more mundane, less observable gifts. They felt that they were the spiritual ones.

They had God's approval. Others felt unimportant. And unwanted. With no sense of belonging to the fellowship. Perhaps some doubted that they even had a single gift.

Or worse, did they even have the Holy Spirit in the first place? There was no unity. There was no interdependence. And so, Paul addresses the problem.

[ 3 : 41 ] He says in verse 1, I don't want you to be uninformed or ignorant about the gifts of the Spirit. He pointed out that when they were pagans, they were influenced and led astray to mute idols.

Paul tells them, therefore, that when someone claims to speak by the Holy Spirit, judge what he says.

You will notice that the speaking gifts were quite active in the Corinthian church. There were prophets, teachers, people speaking in tongues. He says, I want you to understand in verse 3, When someone is truly speaking by the Spirit of God.

He can never curse the Lord Jesus. The unbelieving Jew in the synagogue, the pagan in the idol temple may utter, Jesus be cursed.

But not the person who is a genuine Christian. And also, no one can say, Jesus is Lord with full conviction, except by the Holy Spirit.

[ 5 : 06 ] Only the Holy Spirit can convict a new believer in Christ to defy the power of the day that declared, Caesar is Lord. They confess instead, Jesus is Lord, and meant it with their change of allegiance.

In writing this, Paul wanted to point out to some Corinthians how wrong they were. These people thought that only those who manifested certain gifts, maybe let's say tongues, have the Holy Spirit and are spiritual.

Paul implied, no, every Christian, having made that confession, Jesus is Lord, has already the Holy Spirit and is in fact spiritual.

Paul then makes his first point about unity in diversity in verses 4 to 7. He points out that there are different gifts of grace, different kinds of service with which we serve God, and different workings or activities that we can see expressed in the church.

However, behind them all is the triune God at work. The same Spirit distributes all the different kinds of gifts, the same Lord to whom all services are rendered, and the same God at work in all the activities and in everyone.

[ 6 : 37 ] Different gifts, different services, different activities, one God. What does Paul teach about the gifts of the Spirit?

Look at verse 7. The manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. The gifts are given for a reason.

They are for the mutual benefit of the whole body of believers. Beware then, when we see gifts used for wanglory, maybe just for amusement and entertainment, or to boost the ego of the person, for monetary or political gains.

Beware when it becomes obvious that the declaration, Jesus is Lord, is mere lip service, and that the gospel that is preached is a false one.

We must surely ask, is it truly the Holy Spirit at work? The second point that Paul brings out here in this 4-7 is that every Christian is given a gift from the Holy Spirit.

[ 7 : 49 ] Verse 7 says, now to each one. And verse 11 says, he distributes them to each one. Each one.

Every individual. Brothers and sisters of KEC, see, you are gifted without exception. The third point is that every gift, whatever they are, are given by the same and one Spirit of God.

The Spirit, in verse 11, sovereignly determines what gift is given to you. Verse 8 says, 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, and so on.

He gives as he determines. Right? It is not because of a person's merit that he deserves the gifts. It is the Spirit himself who gives sovereignly.

And what a diversity of gifts he has. In verse 7 to 10, we read, the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

[ 9 : 16 ] Now, is this list exhaustive? Are there only nine gifts? Look down to the list in verse 28. It is not completely identical.

In the list in the verse 28, people are listed, apostles, prophets, and teachers. Other abilities and skills are added. Different versions of the English Bible translates the Greek words as helping, guidance, gifts of counseling, gifts of administration, gifts of leadership, even government or management.

And when you look at Paul's other list of gifts in Romans 12, 6-8, he includes gifts of serving, encouragement, giving, showing mercy, and in Ephesians, he adds the evangelist.

gifts of gifts of gifts of generosity. In 1 Corinthians 3-3, the next chapter, he has the gift of generosity. So what conclusion can we draw from this?

That these lists are not exhaustive. They are just representative. They are sampling. In fact, 1 Peter 4 just lists gifts as speaking and serving gifts.

[ 10 : 42 ] The speaking gifts and the serving gifts. What actually are these gifts and how did they manifest in the Corinthian church or the Roman church? The Corinthians knew exactly what Paul meant, but we will never be 100% sure.

A great schism of time stands between them and us, and Paul does not define the gifts. But we do see examples of some of the gifts being manifested in the book of Acts.

Paul does hint at some of them in other passages. For example, what is a gift or word of wisdom?

In 1 Corinthians 2:6, Paul calls the gospel the message of wisdom. Perhaps then, this gift of message of wisdom is simply a spirit-given ability to properly preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to another. One is given a message or word of knowledge. Some today say that this is the ability to know the secrets of another person's heart.

[11:54] One commentator says that it is the ability to bring spiritual insight to bear in a timely, helpful fashion for a specific Christian context. An example of this would be Paul as he addressed the problem of eating food offered to idols in chapter 8.

And if you read chapter 8 again, you will find the word knowledge all over the chapter. The gift of faith is not the saving faith of believing in Jesus, but rather a faith that can move mountains, as what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:2.

It is a confident trust in God for a specific outcome. Many years ago, KEC had the faith to believe God to plant five daughter churches in different corners of Kuching, and it has come to pass. Some gifts have a more self-evident supernatural flavour to them. This will include the different gifts of healing, miraculous powers, distinguishing between spirits, tongues and interpretation, and perhaps prophecy.

The gifts of healing are manifested in the church when the spirit releases it in response to humble prayers for healing in Jesus' name, with or without the laying on of hands, with or without the use of anointing oil, with or without the mediation of health personnel, as it pleases him.

[13:30] Other gifts seem more mundane. The gift of helping, which could include ministry to the poor or sick, guiding, serving, encouragement, showing mercy, generosity, administration, leadership, management, and even teaching.

This sounds very mundane, but these are equally needed, and some would argue even more important. These gifts seem like natural abilities or traits, or even something we can be trained to do better.

But these two are equally spiritual gifts, because they come from the Spirit. How so? Think about it this way. Whatever good that is in our lives, whatever our abilities, intellect, skills, people's skills, anything good, everything good, they come from God. and none of us will claim otherwise. When these abilities are yielded to the Spirit for God to use and for His people, they become spiritual gifts.

The Spirit infuses them with His grace and with His power. For others who did not have these skills to start off with, the Spirit gives them the necessary new skills as needed in response to their willingness to serve and to learn.

[15:00] And I believe the Spirit gives new gifts for changing times and new challenges. For example, over the centuries, the gift of singing and of music are well recognized in the Church.

And over the past few decades, the Spirit has given to the Churches individuals gifted in the field of information technology and telecommunication, individuals good in audiovisual, broadcasting, webcasting.

Without these gifts, the pulpit of KEC would have been silent for most of the last two years. We can look at them as gifts of helping and service.

Paul summarizes in verse 11, The question now is what about you?

Are you using your gift or gifts for the mutual benefit of all in KEC? Perhaps you have not recognized your gift or gifts or unsure of what they are.

[16:16] Here are some suggestions on how to discover your gifts and it's not taking an inventory. First, go to God in prayer. He is the giver.

Ask him to show you. And think, what am I passionate about? What am I interested in? What am I good at? This may give you a clue to your gift.

Perhaps you care for the poor and the disadvantaged in society. Perhaps you are good in teaching. Perhaps you like paperwork, good in accounting, have a flair for plans, love to get to know new people, enjoy serving and hospitality.

Perhaps you are a brilliant strategist. Or you can ask other Christians, perhaps your leaders, what they think your gift is. Sometimes others see clearer what we can't.

volunteer. And next, actually volunteer. Actually volunteer in ministries you think you may enjoy or may be comfortable in.

[17:25] Because by that you will confirm your giftings as you actually start serving. You will know then what you are good at and perhaps what you are not good at.

your gifts may be upfront in public or quiet in the background. They may seem mundane but remember when yielded to the spirit, when used for the mutual benefit of the church, they take on a new dimension.

They are spiritual gifts. The church then grows and mature together in love and good deeds and in the knowledge of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ and can be an effective witness for him.

Paul comes to his second reason for unity in the midst of diversity of gifts. He calls the church the body of Christ in verse 27 and he compares its structure and function to the human body.

He writes in verse 12, just as a human body though one body has many parts and its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

[ 18 : 40 ] The church is also one body made up of many individuals. How diverse are the people who actually make up this body? In the Roman and Greek world, as you would see here, they were divided into Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, categories of humanity that were polar opposites religiously and socially.

How can people so divided be made one? Paul says in verse 13, all of them, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, have been baptized or immersed by the one Holy Spirit into a community, a body, the church.

If the Spirit can unite such divided people into one body, there is actually nothing that should divide us in the church today. not social class, not economic backgrounds, not ethnicity, not cultural differences or educational levels, nor political differences, or differences in our giftings.

When were we baptized or immersed into that one body? When we believed and confessed Jesus is Lord. It had to happen at conversion because according to verse 13, it is the common experience of all Christians.

We were all baptized by one Spirit, not some, all. Not only do we share the common experience of Spirit baptism, once united in the body, we are all given the same one Spirit to drink.

[ 20 : 37 ] We quench our spiritual thirst from the same one Spirit. From Him, we get our spiritual nourishment, vitality, and our empowerment.

The same Holy Spirit dwells in all of us. Spiritually, we are all united in the body of Christ. It is our spiritual state of being.

in verse 14, so the body of Christ is not made up of one part or one Christian, but of many parts, all of us.

Paul then gives us the picture of a body part divided against each other. In the context of these passages, the issue here is the seeming disparity in the nature and value of the gifts, but they could well be divided over political, social, or personality differences.

Some members of the Corinthian Church, which perhaps, with perhaps the more mundane, less dramatic gifts, gifts, some members of the Corinthian Church, with perhaps the more mundane, less dramatic gifts, let's say service or helping roles, those serving quietly in the background, unseen, they wondered if they were actually needed in the church.

[ 22 : 19 ] I'm just a nobody, unimportant. Nobody will miss me if I leave. Oh, look at those prophets, those tongue speakers and the pastors.

I am not like them, so I don't belong. I don't belong to the body. Verse 15 and 16, the foot says he is not a hand.

The ear says she is not an eye, so they don't belong. Paul says no, no, no, no. That is not reason to stop being part of the body. Verse 17, picture the monstrosity of a body made up of only an eye.

Where would the gift of hearing be? Practically, it means like that. Imagine a church where everyone had only the gift of tongues tongues and nothing else.

Okay? Everybody speaking, no one understand. Or, everyone had only the gift of serving and nothing else.

[ 23 : 34 ] You have a group full of care for one another and the community, but perhaps a false gospel. Thankfully, in verse 18, God has placed the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Just like how God arranged all our organs where he wants them to be so that we have a body able to function as one, he does the same for the body of Christ.

he places people with different gifts into the church so that each differently gifted member contributes a part to its life.

If, verse 19, if they were all one part, where would the body be? There will be no church if there's only one part, if there's only one gifting. As it were, verse 20, there are many parts or members. each of them with their unique gifts, but only one body, one church. On the other hand, there are members of the Corinthian church who felt that their gifts were the essential ones and that they did not need others.

[ 24 : 52 ] Perhaps some had spectacular, high-profile gifts that made heads turn and earned them celebrity status. They looked down on those in the support ministries, the help ministries, serving quietly.

But actually, it could very well have been the administrator who took a look at the tongue speaker with embarrassment and said, I don't need this weirdness.

But Paul said in verse 21, the eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you. Paul then asked us to consider how we treat parts of our own body.

In verse 23, your less honourable parts, you give special honour. The unrepresentable parts, you cover up, treat with special modesty.

The unrepresentable parts, you don't really need to give special treatment. which are the less honourable, unrepresentable parts that require special modesty, that require you to cover up.

[ 26 : 07 ] Most commentators conclude that Paul is referring to the private parts. But Paul reminds us in verse 22, these parts that seem weaker are indispensable.

They are the organs of reproduction, nurturing of babies, organs to get rid of your waste products, and for physical marital intimacy.

They are indispensable. When they are not there, the body suffers, and the human race will be in jeopardy. Verse 24, this is how God so composed the human body, by giving greater honour to the parts that lack it.

Every part of the human body, even the unrepresentable, less honourable parts, are indispensable for the health of the person. When applied to the church, God has made every person equally important, equally honoured, equally indispensable.

No one can claim that another person in the church is unnecessary for the health of the church. no one should say to another, I don't need you.

[ 27 : 31 ] Why did God make the church body so interdependent? Verse 25, so that there will be no division in the church.

No one should feel separated from another in the church, whether by their giftings, family background, social or economic standing, political views, educational levels, or whatever else that can separate us.

Instead, everybody should have equal concern for each other. We will be looking out for each other's well-being, ensuring everyone is cared for, both physically and spiritually, because, verse 26, when one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it.

Suffering in the immediate context is when someone feels unwanted or unimportant because of their gifts. Having someone say to them, I don't need you.

When that happens, the church suffers. They have lost a gift that the spirit gave for the common good. In a larger context, it also means that when misfortune happens to anyone in our midst, the larger church body suffers along.

[ 28 : 55 ] Conversely, if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Verse 26 again. In the immediate context, when we honour every member and accept their giftings and do not think, I don't need you, then everyone is encouraged to use their gifts and the whole church will benefit and rejoice together.

In the larger context, it's also true that when a member receives some form of honour, say, from the community, other members in the church will share in his joy.

The main point here is that the church is really a body. It is really a body. It functions like a human body. Every member is needed for the proper functioning of the church.

Everybody contributes to the well-being of every other member with their gifts. Every member, when every member is honoured and their gifts valued and used, everybody benefits.

The church grows. But don't get me wrong, accepting each other doesn't mean anything goes, anything also okay. Because as we shall see in the next weeks, gifts can be misused, abused, used in an unloving manner, in an uncontrolled manner, practiced in a way that brings confusion and disorder.

[ 30 : 26 ] Even prophecies have to be properly weighted. And the Corinthians are not unfamiliar with demonic counterfeits from their pagan past. So, there is a place for correction.

For correction by submitting to scripture and sound leadership. In that way, what has become dishonourable can be put right and given honour and the church flourishes.

And we see Paul doing exactly that for the Corinthian church. So, Paul reminds the Corinthians in verse 27, now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.

This is who you are. Please stop quarrelling over your spiritual giftings. These gifts are meant for your common good. Don't be divided by them.

Accept one another. Depend on one another. And he reminds them again in verse 28 that it is God who placed the gifts. It is not them.

[ 31 : 32 ] There is no merit in them to receive any particular gifts. So, there is no reason to feel superior or inferior about the different gifts that have been given.

Paul summarises verse 28, and God has placed in the church, first of all, apostles, second prophets, and third teachers, and then miracles, then the gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, of different kinds of tongues, God placed.

They didn't earn it. They are all gifts of grace. Some may ask, why did then Paul write about? Why did Paul enumerate the first three gifts?

Firstly, apostles, second prophets, third teachers, it is not a ranking, because it would invalidate his whole argument before this.

It is probably just to show the primary importance of the apostles, prophets, and teachers in establishing the early church, in terms of chronology.

[ 32 : 37 ] Paul then asks a series of rhetorical questions. Okay? He knows what the answer to expect, because he has carefully chosen a Greek word for the questions, so that every answer can only be answered with a resounding no.

It is built into the Greek that he used in the question. Okay? Nobody can answer yes, because they will be unfaithful to the Greek. Are all apostles?

No. Are all prophets? No. Are all teachers? No. Do all work miracles? No. Do all have gifts of healing? No. Do all speak in tongues?

Haha, some groups would like to say yes, but no. The answer is still a resounding no. Right? As a side comment, because not everyone speaks in tongues, tongues cannot be the only sign of the baptism by the Holy Spirit, as was taught by a denomination in the last century.

It also cannot be the so-called gateway gift to other gifts of the Holy Spirit, as taught by some charismatic preachers. No, not everyone speaks in tongues.

[ 33 : 49 ] Do not do all interpret? No. So early on in this chapter, it was clear that no one person has been given all the gifts. Here, it is clear that no one particular gift has been given to all Christians.

Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 31 to eagerly desire the greater gifts. In the later chapters, he makes it quite clear that the greater gifts are the ones that edify or build up the church.

We are allowed to pray and desire greater gifts, but we must submit the decision to the Holy Spirit's sovereignty. But even greater gifts is not the end game.

There is a still more excellent way beyond the greater gifts. Paul wrote, now I will show you a still more excellent way.

And with that, he launches into the greatest passage ever written on love. Come again next Sunday. Sunday. Sunday. Sunday. So, my brothers and sisters, now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.

[ 35 : 14 ] Do you feel that way about KEC? Do you feel that you are so closely linked, interdependent of one another in KEC?

To the one sitting next to you? Do you do you believe that you need one another to actually remain healthy as a Christian?

This pandemic has driven us apart physically. Have you also lost the emotional attachment to KEC as well? Is there something dividing you from the rest of the body or from someone in particular in the church?

Have you or I been looking down on another? This is something for us to seriously ponder on and ask God to help us put right.

And also consider this, you have been given a gift. None of you have been left out. Your gift is for you to use to serve God through the service in the church.

[ 36 : 28 ] take action today. Discover your gift if you are still not sure. There are many areas where you can serve in KEC.

There's a page on the KEC website just started to help you explore areas to serve. Do prayerfully consider them. If you have skills in accounting, auditing, administration and finance, buildings or even garden maintenance, audiovisual, IT, music, webpage management, do step up.

If you like to explore helping out in a youth group or Sunday school, do approach the leaders.

Remember, it was Jesus who said, the son of man came not to be served, but to serve.

and he gave his life. He gave his life as a ransom for many. And after his death, resurrection and ascension, he sends the Holy Spirit to be with us until he comes back again.

Until then, we, you and I, are the visible body of Christ on earth. We are, as it were, God's hands and feet.

[ 37 : 48 ] Hands and feet, empowered by gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit to serve, to do good works which God has prepared for us in advance to do.

Good works that benefit one another, benefit the church and ultimately the world. Let's pray. Lord, sometimes we feel that we are so weak.

and that sometimes we wonder what we can contribute to your kingdom. But Father, you have reminded us today that you have given us gifts and none of us are left out.

Just give us a willing spirit, a willing heart to say yes and to step up and to contribute to the health of KEC to the health of the community and the world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. His wife is and then has to