SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



INDUCTIVE DEEP DIVE

1 Corinthians

Chapter Twelve · Verses 1–31

One Spirit, One Body, Many Members

NASB 1995 | OBSERVE · INTERPRET · APPLY | TWO VOICES

One passage, read inductively and heard through two teachers — **John MacArthur** and **David Guzik** — with the key verses marked in the Berean standard.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 12:1–31

Thirty-one verses · six movements

THE METHOD

Inductive

Observe · Interpret · Apply

WHAT'S INSIDE

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"But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." — 1 Corinthians 12:7

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 12:1–31

One Spirit, One Body, Many Members

† How to Read This Study

The inductive method asks three questions of every paragraph. **Observe** — what does the text actually say? Who, what, when, where, which words repeat, where are the commands and the contrasts? **Interpret** — what did it mean to Paul and the Corinthians, and why? **Apply** — what does it ask of me now? Each movement below walks those three steps. The teachers are heard at the interpretation step, where they belong; the observations come first, from the text alone.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Key verses carry the six Berean marks. Mark what the text says — a phrase, never a sentence, and never an interpretation.

▲ GOD ▭ COMMAND ⇄ REPEATED WORD ⚠ SIN / WARNING ★ PROMISE ◷ TIME / PLACE / CONTRAST

KEY VERSE

But ★ to each one is given ▲ the manifestation of the Spirit ▭ for the common good.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7 · NASB 1995

† Before the Passage

Chapter 12 opens the third of Paul's three gathered-church questions. Head coverings (11:2–16) and the Lord's Supper (11:17–34) were about order and love at the assembly; now the Corinthians have written to ask about *spiritual gifts* ("now concerning," 12:1 — the same formula as 7:1 and 8:1). Chapters 12–14 answer as one unit: chapter 12 lays the foundation (one Spirit, one body), chapter 13 gives the governing principle (love), and chapter 14 applies both to tongues and prophecy in the meeting.

Corinth had turned gifts into a status system. The city prized ecstatic religion — the pagan cults the converts came out of (v.2) valued frenzy and spectacle — and the church carried that taste inside: the showier the gift, the more spiritual the man. Tongues sat at the top, and the believer with a quiet gift wondered whether he belonged at all (vv.15–16). Paul's answer is a doctrine of the Trinity (vv.4–6) and a doctrine of the body (vv.12–27), and he will not let either be separated from the other.

† The Text, Marked · KJV

The whole passage in the King James text with every Berean mark applied — the same marks the import file carries, so what you see here is what Berean will show.

▲ GOD ▭ COMMAND ⇄ REPEATED WORD ⚠ SIN / WARNING ★ PROMISE ◷ TIME / PLACE / CONTRAST

1 Now concerning ⇄ spiritual gifts, brethren, ▭ I would not have you ignorant.

2 Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these ⚠ dumb idols, ◷ even as ye were led.

3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God ⚠ calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that ▲ Jesus is the Lord, ▲ but by the Holy Ghost.

4 Now there are ⇄ diversities of gifts, but ▲ the same Spirit.

5 And there are differences of administrations, but ▲ the same Lord.

6 And there are ⇄ diversities of operations, but it is ▲ the same God which worketh all in all.

7 But ▲ the manifestation of the Spirit is ★ given to every man ▭ to profit withal.

8 For to one is given ▲ by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another ⇄ discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

11 But all these worketh ▲ that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally ▲ as he will.

12 For as the body is one, and hath many ⇄ members, and all the ⇄ members of that one body, being many, are one body: ▲ so also is Christ.

13 For ★ by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, ◷ whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all ★ made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is ◷ not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, ⚠ I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, ⚠ I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the ⇄ members every one of them in the body, ▲ as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20 But now are they many ⇄ members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, ⚠ I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, ⚠ I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those ⇄ members of the body, which seem to be ◷ more feeble, are necessary:

23 And those ⇄ members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow ★ more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

24 For our comely parts have no need: but ▲ God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

25 That there should be ▭ no schism in the body; but that the ⇄ members should have ▭ the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the ⇄ members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the ⇄ members rejoice with it.

27 Now ★ ye are the body of Christ, and ⇄ members in particular.

28 And ▲ God hath set some in the church, ◷ first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, ⇄ diversities of tongues.

29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

31 But ▭ covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you ★ a more excellent way.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:2-34 · KING JAMES VERSION · 43 MARKS

I
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3

The Test of the Spirit

Before any gift is named, the Spirit's confession is

> 1 *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.* 2 *You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.* 3 *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "⚠ Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "▲ Jesus is Lord," ▲ except by the Holy Spirit.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- **"Now concerning"** (v.1) — Paul is answering a question they wrote to him (see 7:1; 8:1).
- A statement of purpose: **I do not want you to be unaware.** Ignorance about the Spirit is the first problem.
- A reminder of their past (v.2): **pagans**, **led astray**, **mute idols** — idols that cannot speak, and people who were led wherever.
- **"Therefore"** (v.3) draws a test with two sides: no one *by the Spirit* curses Jesus; no one confesses **Jesus is Lord** *except by* the Spirit.
- Contrast: mute idols (v.2) versus a Spirit who speaks — and what He speaks is the lordship of Jesus.

I INTERPRET · what it means

Paul starts a chapter on gifts with no gift at all, but with the Giver. The Corinthians knew what spiritual excitement felt like — they had felt it in the idol temples, where the gods could not speak and the worshipers were carried along by whatever moved them. So the first lesson is a test, and it is Christological. The Holy Spirit's signature is not intensity; it is the confession that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9). Any "spiritual" utterance that diminishes Christ is not from the Spirit, and no one has ever truly said "Jesus is Lord" without Him. The Spirit's whole work is to glorify Jesus (John 16:14); that is how you know He is in the room.

Who would ever say "Jesus is accursed" in a church? Teachers suggest an ecstatic speaker carried away as in the old cults, or a synagogue formula pronounced against believers; Paul does not say, because the test does not depend on it. John gives the same test from the other side: "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1), and the Spirit of God confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). Before Corinth can rank its gifts, it has to learn to recognize the Giver — and He always points away from Himself to the Son.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur reads v.2 as Paul's diagnosis: the Corinthians' instincts about the supernatural were formed in pagan ecstasy, where being "carried away" was the mark of a god's presence. Counterfeit spiritual experience is real and was already in the church. Verse 3 supplies the doctrinal test — the content of what is said, not the experience of saying it. The Spirit of God never demeans Christ, and the confession "Jesus is Lord" — meaning His full deity and sovereignty — is impossible apart from the Spirit's regenerating work. Before gifts can be sorted, the source must be identified.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that "gifts" is supplied by the translators; Paul literally says "spirituals," and the Corinthians' idea of spirituals had been shaped by superstition and showmanship in their pagan past. Verse 3 is the test he keeps returning to: a supposed gift that does not glorify Jesus is suspect, because the Spirit testifies to Christ and glorifies Him (John 15–16). He adds that even the demons will say Jesus is accursed; the Spirit alone produces a heart that bows to Him as Lord.

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *Before I ask whether something is powerful, I ask whether it makes Jesus Lord. That is the Spirit's signature.*
- *The confession I made at conversion was itself the Spirit's work — I did not get to Jesus on my own, and I will not get past gift-envy on my own either.*

II
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11

One Source, Many Gifts

Trinity at work: varieties from the same Spirit, Lord, and God

> [4] *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.* [5] *And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.* [6] *There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.* [7] *But ★ to each one is given ▲ the manifestation of the Spirit ▭ for the common good.* [8] *For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;* [9] *to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,* [10] *and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.* [11] *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- Three parallel sentences (vv.4–6): **varieties** of gifts / ministries / effects — **the same** Spirit / Lord / God.
- **"Same"** appears five times in vv.4–9; **"one"** and **"one and the same"** close the paragraph (v.11). Unity is the drumbeat.
- **To each one** (v.7, v.11) — no believer is left out. The purpose: **for the common good**.
- Nine gifts in vv.8–10, each introduced by **"to another"**, and each tied to **the Spirit**.
- The distributor is the Spirit alone: **just as He wills** (v.11).

I INTERPRET · what it means

Three sentences, three Persons, one church. Gifts come from the Spirit, ministries are assigned by the Lord Jesus, and the effects are worked by God the Father — which means variety in the church is not a defect to be smoothed out but a reflection of God Himself. Verse 7 is the hinge of the whole chapter: every believer has a manifestation of the Spirit, and every manifestation is for the common good. That one phrase disarms both the proud (your gift was given, and not for you) and the discouraged (you were not skipped). The list in vv.8–10 is a sample, not a catalogue — Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 give different samples — and v.11 ends where v.3 began: the Spirit is sovereign. He gave what He chose.

The nine gifts fall naturally into groups: gifts of *speaking* (the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge), gifts of *power* (faith, healings, miracles), gifts of *discernment* (prophecy, distinguishing of spirits) and gifts of *tongues* (tongues, interpretation). Notice where tongues and interpretation sit — at the end of the list, as they will again in v.28 and v.30. Put the New Testament lists side by side (Romans 12:6–8; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10–11) and roughly twenty different gifts appear, from prophecy to giving, from apostles to showing mercy with cheerfulness. No list is complete, and no believer is left off all of them.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur presses the Trinitarian structure of vv.4–6 as the foundation for everything about gifts: diversity flows from the one God, so no gift can be a basis for division. He distinguishes the terms — *charismata* are grace-gifts, *diakoniai* are the ministries in which they are used, *energēmata* the results God alone produces. Verse 7 settles the purpose: edification of the body, never self-display. He treats several gifts in vv.8–10 (miracles, healings, tongues) as sign gifts belonging to the apostolic age, while the gifts of speaking and serving continue; and he insists on v.11 — the Spirit assigns sovereignly, so a gift is a stewardship, never an achievement.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik hears the Trinity in vv.4–6 and takes the three words as broad endowments (gifts), standing offices (ministries, cf. Ephesians 4), and miraculous workings (*energēmata*, related to "energy"). The "manifestation" of v.7 is the Spirit becoming apparent, not more present — and apparent for the church's profit. He walks the nine gifts one by one (wisdom for the critical moment, knowledge revealed, extraordinary faith, healings, miracles, prophecy consistent with Scripture, discernment, tongues, interpretation) and holds that the gifts continue today. His weight falls on "as He wills": giftedness is not maturity, which is why Scripture bases leadership on character, not spectacle.

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *I have a manifestation of the Spirit. The question is not whether I am gifted but whether I am using it for the common good.*
- *The gift I envy in another was given as He wills. Envy argues with the Giver.*

III
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-14

Baptized Into One Body

The illustration announced — and already fulfilled in every believer

> 12 *For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.* 13 *For by ▲ one Spirit ★ we were all baptized into one body, ◷ whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.* 14 *For the body is not one member, but many.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-14 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- **"For even as"** (v.12) opens an analogy: a body, one yet many members, many yet one body — **so also is Christ**.
- Not "so also is the church" — **so also is Christ**. The body is identified with Him.
- Verse 13: **one Spirit**, **one body**, **one Spirit** — three "ones" around two "alls": **we were all baptized**, **we were all made to drink**.
- Two pairs of opposites erased: **Jews or Greeks**, **slaves or free**.
- Verse 14 restates the principle in seven words: **not one member, but many**.

I INTERPRET · what it means

The body is Paul's great picture of the church, and he introduces it with a surprise: "so also is Christ." The church is not merely like a body; it is Christ's own body, so that to divide it is to tear Him. Verse 13 tells how anyone came to be in it — not by choosing, not by merit, but by a baptism the Spirit performed on every believer at conversion, Jew and Greek, slave and free alike. The verb is passive and past: it was done to us, all of us, once. And then a second picture, drinking: we were all made to drink of one Spirit, the same life flowing in every member. Unity is not a goal the church reaches; it is a fact the church must stop contradicting.

"So also is Christ" is not a figure of speech to Paul; it is how he met Jesus. On the Damascus road the risen Lord did not say, "Why are you persecuting My people?" but "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Christ identifies Himself with His body. The man who wounds a brother in the church has laid his hand on Christ — and the man who serves the least of them has served Him.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur treats v.13 as the definitive statement on the baptism of the Spirit: it is not a second experience for some believers but the act by which *all* believers were placed into the body of Christ at salvation — "we were all baptized." No Christian lacks it, and no Christian has more of it. The social walls of the first century (Jew/Greek, slave/free) fell at that moment, which is why the Corinthians' gift-ranking is an assault on something God already finished. "So also is Christ" identifies the church with her Head so completely that her unity is His own.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads "baptized into one body" as Spirit baptism — the believer immersed into Christ — not water baptism as a rite of entry, and he objects to using the verse to defend infant baptism. The point of vv.12–14 is a unity that already exists whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free; the many are one because they share one Spirit. The illustration that follows will press the two errors the Corinthians were making: feeling excluded because one's gift is less visible, and excluding others because theirs is.

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *I did not join the body; I was baptized into it. The believer I find hardest to love was placed beside me by the same Spirit.*
- *What distinctions — background, income, giftedness — am I quietly keeping alive that v.13 has already erased?*

IV
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 12:15-20

The Foot and the Ear

The member who feels left out — and the God who placed him

15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now ▲ God has placed the members, ⇄ each one of them, in the body, ▲ just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:15-20 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- Two speeches by body parts (vv.15–16): the **foot** and the **ear**, each saying **"Because I am not… I am not a part of the body."**
- Paul's answer, twice, word for word: **it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body**.
- Two absurd questions (v.17): a body that is all eye, all hearing.
- **"But now"** (v.18): **God has placed** the members, **each one**, **just as He desired**.
- A third question (v.19) and a conclusion (v.20): **many members, but one body**.

I INTERPRET · what it means

The first error is the quiet one: the believer with the unspectacular gift concluding that he does not really belong. Paul lets the foot and the ear speak, and their logic is the Corinthian logic — I am not a hand, I am not an eye, so I am not part of this. He does not argue; he states the fact. Wishing you were another member does not make you less a member. Then he shows the absurdity of a church that is all one thing — a body that is one giant eye cannot hear — and lands on the sentence that heals the foot: God placed you. Not the pastor, not your own choosing, not your usefulness as others measure it. Each one of them, just as He desired. The man who believes v.18 stops apologizing for his gift.

The foot's mistake is comparison. It never says "I am useless"; it says "I am not a hand." It measures itself against someone else's gift, finds itself different, and concludes it does not belong. That is the quiet sin of the overlooked member — it looks humble, but it is still about self, and it still argues with God's placing. The cure is not to become a hand. It is to believe v.18, and to remember that the One who placed you also made you — "fearfully and wonderfully" (Psalm 139:14).

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur hears in the foot and the ear the voice of the believer with a "lesser" gift who, in Corinth's climate, felt second-class — and he notes that Paul will not permit the feeling to become a theology. Every believer is indispensable because God sovereignly placed him (v.18, echoing "as He wills" in v.11). The absurd questions of v.17 are the reductio of gift-envy: a church of only the showiest gift would be a monster, not a body. Unity (v.20) depends on diversity, not uniformity.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik names both errors in the passage: those who feel excluded because their gift seems less prominent, and those who would exclude them — both are wrong, because the body needs its varied parts and God arranged them "just as He pleased." He observes that the foot's complaint is really a complaint against God's design, and that a believer who cannot accept his place in the body has not yet accepted the One who placed him.

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *Where have I said "because I am not ___, I am not really part of this"? God placed me, just as He desired. I will stop auditioning for a different place.*
- *Who in my church is a foot or an ear that needs to hear v.18 from me this week?*

V
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 12:21-26

The Eye and the Hand

The member who thinks he needs no one — and the honor God gives the overlooked

21 *And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the*
feet, "I have no need of you." 22 *On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the*
body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 *and those members of the body which we*
deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable
members become much more presentable, 24 *whereas our more presentable members have*
no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that
member which lacked, 25 *so that there may be no division in the body, but that the mem-*
bers may have the same care for one another. 26 *And* ▭ *if one member suffers, all the mem-*
bers suffer with it; if one member is honored, ▭ *all the members rejoice with it.*

1 CORINTHIANS 12:21-26 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- Now the prominent parts speak (v.21): the **eye** to the hand, the **head** to the feet — **"I have no need of you."**
- **"On the contrary"** (v.22): the **weaker** members are **necessary**; the **less honorable** receive **more abundant honor** (v.23).
- **God has so composed the body** (v.24), giving more honor to the member that lacked — the same "God placed" of v.18.
- A purpose clause (v.25): **so that there may be no division**, but **the same care for one another**.
- Two pictures of one life (v.26): one suffers, **all suffer**; one honored, **all rejoice**.

I INTERPRET · what it means

The second error is the loud one: the gifted member who looks at the plain ones and says, I have no need of you. Paul turns the body against him. The organs you never show are the ones you cannot live without; the parts you cover are the parts you clothe with the most care. And this, he says, is not accident but design: God composed the body so that the member who lacked would receive the greater honor. Why? Verse 25 gives the reason the whole chapter has been building toward — that there be no schism, and that every member care for every other. Verse 26 describes what that looks like when it is real: a body does not have a toothache in one place and a party in another. When one suffers, all suffer. That is not sentiment; it is anatomy.

Hold this paragraph beside chapter 11. At the Lord's Supper the wealthy ate first and "shamed those who have nothing" (11:22). Now Paul says that God composed the body to give *more* honor to the member that lacked. The poor brother who arrived late and hungry is the one God has chosen to honor; "God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong" (1:27). And notice the verb in v.26: "rejoice with" is *synchairei* — the very word Paul will use in 13:6, love "rejoices with the truth." Chapter 12 is already building toward chapter 13.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur reads v.21 as the pride of the prominent, and vv.22–24 as God's deliberate reversal of it: the inconspicuous members are necessary, the less honorable are given more honor, and God Himself has arranged it so. The purpose (v.25) is the elimination of schism — the very sin Paul has fought since 1:10 — and its replacement with mutual care. He takes v.26 as the mark of a true church: shared suffering and shared joy, with no member insulated from the rest. A believer who feels nothing when a brother suffers has forgotten what he is a member of.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that the eye cannot dismiss the hand, that the "feeble" parts are the vital ones, and that God gives the uncomely parts greater honor — so the goal of the passage is to end schism and produce care. His sharpest line is practical: a member of a body that serves only itself is what we call cancer. Suffering and rejoicing together (v.26) is simply what a healthy body does; the Corinthians, feasting while brothers went hungry (11:21), had shown what a sick one does.

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *Whom have I treated as unnecessary — the quiet, the unimpressive, the one whose gift never gets a platform? God gives that member the greater honor.*
- *When a brother suffers this week, will I suffer with him, or send a text and move on? The body feels its members.*

VI
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-31

You Are Christ's Body

The illustration becomes an identity; gifts ranked by God, and a way beyond them

> 27 *Now ★ you are Christ's body, and individually ⇄ members of it.* 28 *And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.* 29 *All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?* 30 *All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?* 31 *But ▭ earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you ★ a still more excellent way.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-31 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- **"Now you are"** (v.27): the picture becomes a declaration — **Christ's body**, **individually members**.
- **God has appointed** (v.28) — third time God is the placer (vv.18, 24, 28). An ordered list: **first… second… third… then… then**.
- Seven rhetorical questions (vv.29–30), all expecting **no**: not all are apostles, prophets, teachers… not all speak with tongues.
- A command (v.31a): **earnestly desire the greater gifts**. A promise (v.31b): **a still more excellent way**.
- Tongues is listed last (v.28) and asked about last (v.30).

I INTERPRET · what it means

Paul closes by turning the analogy into an address: you are Christ's body. The whole chapter was about them. Then he gives the gifts an order — first apostles, second prophets, third teachers — and the order is instructive: the gifts that build the church on the Word come first, and the gift the Corinthians prized most comes last. The seven questions make the point no one in Corinth wanted to hear: not everyone has every gift, and in particular not everyone speaks with tongues, so tongues cannot be the badge of the Spirit. Yet Paul does not tell them to stop desiring; he tells them to desire the *greater* gifts, the ones that edify. And then the door opens onto chapter 13: there is a way more excellent than any gift, and without it every gift is noise.

Two words in v.28 deserve a second look. *Helps* (*antilēmpseis*) are those who take hold of a load alongside someone else — the unseen people who make everything else possible. *Administrations* (*kybernēseis*) is the word for a ship's pilot, the one who steers. Both appear only here in the New Testament, and both are listed above tongues. And notice the verb that frames the whole list: God *has appointed* (*etheto*) — the same verb as "God has placed" in v.18. No one in the church appointed himself.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur stresses the ranking in v.28: apostles and prophets were foundational (Ephesians 2:20), teachers carry the Word forward, and the miraculous and tongues come at the end of the list — the reverse of Corinth's scale. The questions of vv.29–30 are grammatically built to be answered "no," which settles that tongues were never for every believer. "Earnestly desire the greater gifts" he takes as addressed to the church as a whole — seek the gifts that edify most — and v.31b as the transition to love, the way that outlasts every gift.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that apostles and prophets had a foundational role not repeated, and that anyone claiming to prophesy today is held to the biblical standard of accuracy. He enjoys "helps" — the unglamorous people who make everything else possible. On v.31, desiring gifts is right when it is submitted to God's plan; tongues are not for everyone. And he points through the door Paul opens: chapter 13 is the substance, and the gifts are only containers, valuable when they are filled with love.

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *I am a member of Christ's body — not a spectator, not a customer. What would change this week if I lived like a limb instead of an audience?*
- *I will desire the gifts that build others up, and I will measure every gift by the more excellent way: does it love?*

† Word Studies

Twenty-six words carry the weight of the chapter — every gift named in vv.8–10 and v.28, and the words for the body that holds them. Each card gives the Greek, the NASB rendering, and why it matters here.

πνευματικά **pneumatika**

SPIRITUAL GIFTS · 1 COR 12:1

Literally "spirituals" — "gifts" is supplied by translators. The word can mean spiritual things or spiritual people; Paul answers both: what the Spirit gives, and who the Spirit-people really are.

χαρίσματα **charismata**

GIFTS · 1 COR 12:4

From *charis*, grace. A gift is grace made concrete — not earned, not a mark of rank. Paul uses the same word for salvation itself in Romans 6:23.

διακονίαι **diakoniai**

MINISTRIES · 1 COR 12:5

Services. The word for a table-waiter (Acts 6:2) and for the apostolic office (Acts 1:25) alike — every gift is for serving, assigned by the same Lord.

ἐνεργήματα **energēmata**

EFFECTS · 1 COR 12:6

Workings, energies — the results God produces. Verses 4–6 give gifts to the Spirit, ministries to the Lord, and effects to God: the Trinity at work in one church.

φανέρωσις **phanerōsis**

MANIFESTATION · 1 COR 12:7

A making-visible. The Spirit who is always present becomes apparent through a gift — and the showing is "for the common good," never for the one who shows.

συμφέρον **sympheron**

THE COMMON GOOD · 1 COR 12:7

What profits, what is advantageous. The test of any gift is not how it feels to the one using it but what it does for the body.

βούλεται **bouletai**

JUST AS HE WILLS · 1 COR 12:11

The Spirit's sovereign choice. No one earns a gift, selects one, or can look down on another for lacking it; the Giver decided.

ἐβαπτίσθημεν **ebaptisthēmen**

WE WERE BAPTIZED · 1 COR 12:13

The aorist passive — done to us, once. Every believer, Jew or Greek, slave or free, was placed into one body by one Spirit at conversion.

μέλος **melos**

MEMBER · 1 COR 12:12–27

A limb, an organ — seventeen times in the NASB of vv. 12–27. Not a name on a roll but a living part that the body cannot do without.

συνεκέρασεν **synekerasen**

COMPOSED · 1 COR 12:24

Mixed together, blended — God "tempered" the body (KJV), deliberately giving the overlooked member the greater honor.

σχίσμα **schisma**

DIVISION · 1 COR 12:25

A tear in the body — the same word as 1:10 and 11:18. The whole body-illustration exists so that there may be *no* schism.

ζηλοῦτε **zēloute**

EARNESTLY DESIRE · 1 COR 12:31

Be zealous for. The verb that opens chapter 14 as well (14:1). Desire is commanded — but aimed at the gifts that build up, and governed by the "more excellent way."

ἀνάθεμα **anathema**

ACCURSED · 1 COR 12:3

Something devoted to destruction, placed under God's curse. The one thing the Spirit of God will never say about Jesus.

Κύριος **Kyrios**

LORD · 1 COR 12:3

The word the Greek Old Testament uses for the divine name. To say "Jesus is Lord" is to confess His deity — the earliest Christian creed (Romans 10:9).

λόγος σοφίας · λόγος γνώσεως **logos sophias · logos gnōseōs**

WORD OF WISDOM · WORD OF KNOWLEDGE · 1 COR 12:8

Gifts of speaking: wisdom applied in the moment that needs it, and knowledge given to understand. Both are a *word* — spoken for others.

πίστις **pistis**

FAITH · 1 COR 12:9

Not saving faith, which every believer has, but an extraordinary trust for a particular work — the mountain-moving faith Paul names in 13:2.

ἰάματα **iamata**

GIFTS OF HEALING · 1 COR 12:9, 28

Plural both times — "healings." Not a permanent power held by one man, but gifts given in the moment, case by case.

ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων **energēmata dynameōn**

EFFECTING OF MIRACLES · 1 COR 12:10

Workings of powers — the same *energēmata* as v.6. God is the one who works them.

προφητεία **prophēteia**

PROPHECY · 1 COR 12:10

Speaking forth what God has revealed. Ranked second in v.28 and the gift Paul most wants for the church (14:1), because it builds others up.

διακρίσεις πνευμάτων **diakriseis pneumatōn**

DISTINGUISHING OF SPIRITS · 1 COR 12:10

Judging between spirits — the same root as "judge the body rightly" (11:29). The gift that protects the church from counterfeits (1 John 4:1).

γένη γλωσσῶν · ἑρμηνεία **genē glōssōn · hermēneia**

KINDS OF TONGUES · INTERPRETATION · 1 COR 12:10

Listed last here and last in v.28, and always paired: tongues in the meeting need interpretation so the body can be built up (14:26–28).

σῶμα **sōma**

BODY · 1 COR 12:12–27

Eighteen times in vv.12–27. Paul's great picture of the church — not an organization with members on a roll, but a living organism with Christ as its head (Colossians 1:18).

ἔθετο **etheto**

HAS PLACED · HAS APPOINTED · 1 COR 12:18, 28

The same verb both times: God set each member where He wanted it, and God appointed the gifts in the church. No one appointed himself.

ἀντιλήμψεις **antilēmpseis**

HELPS · 1 COR 12:28

Only here in the New Testament — taking hold of a load alongside another. The unseen servants who make every other ministry possible.

κυβερνήσεις **kybernēseis**

ADMINISTRATIONS · 1 COR 12:28

Only here in the New Testament — the art of the ship's pilot (*kybernētēs*, Acts 27:11). Steering, not ruling.

συμπάσχει · συγχαίρει **sympaschei · synchairei**

SUFFER WITH · REJOICE WITH · 1 COR 12:26

Both verbs carry *syn*, "with." *Synchairei* returns in 13:6 — love "rejoices with the truth." The body feels together because it lives together.

† Why Every Member Matters

Chapter 12 is Paul's answer to two kinds of church member — the one who thinks he does not belong and the one who thinks he does not need anyone. Eight reasons from the text, and from the rest of Scripture, why both are wrong.

1 **God placed you.**

Three times Paul says it: God has placed the members, each one of them, just as He desired (v.18); God has so composed the body (v.24); God has appointed in the church (v.28). Your place in the body is not an accident of personality or a decision of the pastor. It is a decision of God. To say "I don't belong" is to say God misplaced you.

2 **The Spirit gave to you.**

"To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit" (v.7); He distributes "to each one individually just as He wills" (v.11). No believer was skipped. Peter says the same: "As each one has received a special gift" (1 Peter 4:10). The question is never whether you are gifted, only whether you are using it.

3 **The body is Christ.**

"So also is Christ" (v.12). Jesus said to the man persecuting the church, "Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). To dismiss a member is to dismiss a part of Him; to serve a member is to serve Him. Division in the church is not a disagreement among friends. It is a wound in His body.

4 **Variety reflects God.**

Gifts from the same Spirit, ministries from the same Lord, effects from the same God (vv.4–6). Diversity in the church is not a problem to be managed toward sameness. It is a reflection of the Trinity — one God in three Persons, one body in many members.

5 **The weak are necessary.**

"The members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary" (v.22). This is the gospel's pattern: "God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong" (1:27). The church that honors only its visible members has turned God's order upside down.

6 **Your gift is someone else's need.**

Every manifestation is "for the common good" (v.7). Your gift was not given to you; it was given through you, to someone who needs it. When you withhold it, a brother goes without. That is why Paul can say the body grows only "by what every joint supplies" (Ephesians 4:16).

7 **The body feels together.**

"If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (v.26). No member is insulated. That is why we weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), and remember the prisoners as though in prison with them (Hebrews 13:3). A body that cannot feel its members is not healthy; it is numb.

8 **The world is watching.**

Jesus prayed that His people would be one "so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21). The unity of the body is not an internal matter. It is evidence. A church that ranks and divides tells the world a different story about Christ than the one it preaches.

† Reading the Chapter Whole

The three movements, the word studies and the cross-references pulled into one reading — what the chapter is doing, and the threads that tie it to the rest of the letter and to the gospel.

1 **One argument, four steps.**

Read whole, the chapter moves from the *Giver* (vv.1–3: the Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord), to the *gifts* (vv.4–11: many gifts, one source, all for the common good), to the *body* (vv.12–27: many members, one body, God's placing), to the *order and the way beyond it* (vv.28–31: ranked gifts, and a more excellent way). Each step answers a Corinthian mistake.

2 **Corinth's questions and Paul's answers.**

Which gift proves the Spirit? None does; the confession "Jesus is Lord" does. **Who is most spiritual?** Everyone has a manifestation, given as He wills. **Who belongs?** Everyone the Spirit baptized. **Who matters most?** God gives the greater honor to the member that lacked.

3 **Two errors, one root.**

The foot says "I don't belong" (vv.15–16). The eye says "I don't need you" (v.21). One looks like humility and the other like confidence, but both are comparison, both are about self, and both argue with God's placing. The cure for both is the same verse: God has placed the members, just as He desired.

4 **The sovereignty thread.**

"As He wills" (v.11). "Just as He desired" (v.18). "God has so composed" (v.24). "God has appointed" (v.28). Four times in one chapter Paul takes the decision out of human hands. Envy and contempt both assume we should have been consulted.

5 **The count: same, one, each.**

"Same" six times in vv.4–11; "one" again and again in vv.11–20; "each one" in vv.7, 11 and 18. Paul is holding two truths together at once — one body, and every member individually — and Corinth kept dropping one of them.

6 **The bridge to chapter 13.**

Two verbs carry the reader across. "Earnestly desire" (12:31, *zēloute*) is the same verb as "is not jealous" in 13:4. "Rejoice with" (12:26, *synchairei*) is the same verb as "rejoices with the truth" in 13:6. The body of chapter 12 only works with the love of chapter 13.

7 **Chapter 11 answered.**

At the Supper the rich ate first and shamed the poor (11:21–22). Chapter 12 says God composed the body to give the greater honor to the member that lacked (12:24). The poor brother left hungry at the table is the one God chose to honor. Chapters 11 and 12 are one argument about the gathered church.

† The Passage in the Whole Bible

Scripture interprets Scripture. These passages stand behind Paul's argument or carry it forward — the Spirit, the gifts, the body, and the unity Christ prayed for.

1 Corinthians 1:7

"so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

Corinth had every gift — and the letter shows it was not enough.

1 Corinthians 1:12

"Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ.""

The first division in the letter; chapter 12 answers it with one body.

1 Corinthians 1:27

"but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,"

The principle behind 12:22–24 — God honors the weak.

1 Corinthians 3:3

"for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"

Jealousy and strife — the gift-envy of 12:15–21 had a name already.

Romans 10:9

"that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;"

The confession of 12:3 is the confession of salvation — and only the Spirit produces it.

John 16:14

"He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you."

The Spirit's work is to glorify Jesus; that is the test of 12:3.

1 John 4:1

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

The test of spirits — the gift of 12:10 and the duty of every believer.

1 John 4:2

"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;"

John's version of 12:3 — the Spirit confesses Christ.

Romans 12:5

“so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

Paul’s parallel body-passage — members not only of Christ but of one another.

Romans 12:6

“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;”

Gifts that differ, all of grace — and every one to be used.

Romans 12:8

“or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Another list: giving, leading and mercy are gifts too.

Ephesians 4:3

“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Unity is preserved, not produced — the Spirit already made it (12:13).

Ephesians 4:11

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,”

Another sample of gifts, ordered like 12:28 — the Word-gifts first.

Ephesians 4:12

“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;”

Why the Word-gifts come first: to equip everyone else to serve.

Ephesians 4:16

“from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

The body grows only when each part does its work — in love.

1 Peter 4:10

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

“Each one has received” — Peter’s echo of 12:7; a gift is a stewardship.

1 Peter 4:11

“Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Speaking gifts and serving gifts — and one aim for both: God glorified.

Hebrews 2:4

“God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

“According to His own will” — the same sovereignty as 12:11.

Galatians 3:28

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The walls of 12:13 fallen — one in Christ.

Acts 9:4

"and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?""

"So also is Christ" — Jesus calls the persecution of His church persecution of Himself.

John 17:21

"that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."

Jesus' prayer for the body — unity as evidence to the world.

Romans 12:15

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."

12:26 as a command.

Galatians 6:2

"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

What "the same care for one another" (12:25) looks like.

Hebrews 13:3

"Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body."

One member suffers — all suffer; even when the member is in chains.

Psalm 139:14

"I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well."

The answer to the foot's complaint: the One who placed you also made you.

Matthew 7:22

"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'"

Gifts are not proof of salvation — the warning behind 12:3 and 13:1–3.

Mark 10:45

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Every gift is a ministry, a *diakonia* — modeled on the Lord who served.

1 Corinthians 13:1

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

The "more excellent way" of 12:31 opens here: a gift without love is noise.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Six movements, three questions

The inductive walk in one table: what the text says, what it means, what it asks.

THE MOVEMENT	OBSERVE	INTERPRET	APPLY
The test (12:1–3)	"Now concerning"; mute idols; two-sided test	The Spirit's signature is the lordship of Jesus, not intensity	Judge the supernatural by whether it makes Jesus Lord
One source (12:4–11)	Varieties / same ×3; "to each one"; "as He wills"	Trinity gives diversity; every gift is for the common good	Use my gift for others; stop envying the Giver's choice
One body (12:12–14)	"So also is Christ"; all baptized; all made to drink	Unity is a finished fact, done to every believer by the Spirit	Stop contradicting what God already made one
Foot & ear (12:15–20)	Two complaints; absurd questions; "God has placed"	The overlooked member belongs because God placed him	Stop apologizing for my gift
Eye & hand (12:21–26)	"No need of you"; weaker = necessary; suffer / rejoice together	God honors the lacking member to end schism	Need the unimpressive; feel what my brother feels
Christ's body (12:27–31)	"You are"; ordered list; seven "no"s; desire; a better way	Word-gifts first, tongues last; love above all	Live like a limb; desire what builds; love

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31 · AN INDUCTIVE READING

† Teaching Outline for the Table

Forty-five minutes, five parts. Built so the men do the reading and the chapter does the work.

PART	WHAT TO DO
Open (5 min)	Read 12:1–3. Ask: how do you tell whether something is really from the Spirit? Land on the test — does it make Jesus Lord?
The gifts (10 min)	Read vv.4–11. Have each man name one gift he has seen in another man at the table. Point out v.7: to each one, for the common good.
The body (10 min)	Read vv.12–20. Ask who in the room has ever felt like the foot — "I don't belong here." Read v. 18 slowly, twice.
The honor (10 min)	Read vv.21–26. Ask who in the church is easiest to overlook. Who would you never say "I have no need of you" to out loud — but act as though you would?
Close (10 min)	Read vv.27–31 and 13:1. Each man names the gift he believes God gave him and one person it is for this week.

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The chapter begins with the Giver, not the gifts.** Verse 3 is a test of content — Jesus is Lord — before anything about power or feeling.
- **Variety is Trinitarian.** Gifts from the Spirit, ministries from the Lord, effects from God (vv.4–6). Diversity in the church reflects God, not a lapse in it.
- **Verse 7 disarms both the proud and the discouraged.** To each one — no one skipped. For the common good — no one's showcase.
- **"As He wills" ends the argument.** Gifts are assigned by the Spirit (v.11) and members placed by God (vv.18, 24, 28). Envy and contempt both quarrel with Him.
- **"So also is Christ."** Paul does not say the church is like a body; he says the body is Christ. Division tears Him.
- **Spirit baptism is universal and past.** "We were all baptized into one body" (v.13) — every believer, once, at conversion. Not a second blessing for some.
- **The weak are necessary; the lacking are honored.** God composed the body to reverse Corinth's scale (vv.22–24) so that there would be no schism.

- **God placed you.** Four times — vv.11, 18, 24, 28 — Paul takes the decision out of human hands. Envy and contempt both assume we should have been consulted.

- **Chapter 12 answers chapter 11.** The poor brother shamed at the Supper (11:22) is the member God composed the body to honor (12:24).

- **Tongues is last on the list and not for all.** Verses 28 and 30 settle it — which is why the gift Corinth prized could never be the badge of the Spirit.

† Questions for the Table

1 **Why does a chapter about gifts open with a test about what people say of Jesus?**

Because the Spirit's mark is the lordship of Christ, not spiritual intensity.

1 COR 12:3; JOHN 16:14

2 **What do verses 4–6 teach about why the church is so varied?**

Variety comes from the one God — Spirit, Lord, and Father — so it is design, not disorder.

1 COR 12:4-6

3 **Who has a manifestation of the Spirit, and what is it for?**

Every believer; for the common good of the body.

1 COR 12:7

4 **What does "we were all baptized into one body" say about the unity of the church?**

It is a finished fact the Spirit performed on every believer; we can only confirm or contradict it.

1 COR 12:13

5 **What is the foot's mistake, and what is the eye's?**

The foot thinks it doesn't belong; the eye thinks it doesn't need anyone. Both argue with God's placing.

1 COR 12:15-21

6 **Why does God give the "less honorable" member more honor?**

So that there is no division and every member cares for every other.

1 COR 12:24-25

7 **What do the seven questions of vv.29–30 settle about tongues?**

Not everyone has it, so it cannot be the required sign of the Spirit.

1 COR 12:29-30

8 **Who in our church is easiest to overlook, and what would it look like to give that member "more abundant honor"?**

God composed the body to honor the member that lacked — the church imitates Him.

1 COR 12:23-24

9 **Which have you been more often — the foot or the eye? What does v.18 say to each?**

Both argue with God's placing; God placed every member just as He desired.

1 COR 12:15-21

10 **What is the "still more excellent way," and why does Paul end the chapter there?**

Love — because a gift without it is noise, and love outlasts every gift.

1 COR 12:31; 13:1

❖

Paul ends where he began: with the Spirit. He gave the gifts as He willed, He baptized every believer into one body, and God placed each member just as He desired. The church that believes this stops ranking, stops envying, and stops saying "I have no need of you." And then it is ready for the next chapter — the way more excellent than any gift.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

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