

## Session 4

November 3, 2019

### GOD'S WILL AND THE CHURCH

#### 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

When my brothers and I were small, my mother would often take us to the Woolworth's in Hanover PA one-at-a-time to buy Christmas gifts for each other. Low and behold, we were often led to the same toy bin where mom assisted us in picking out the perfect presents for the siblings. Most of the time, the items were identical. When we were older, my mother explained that she often coerced us to select the same gifts for each other to keep us from bickering about who got the best one. Looking back, I think Santa Claus must have used the same logic!

The church at Corinth was a great example of bickering brothers. What should have unified them in fellowship and purpose ultimately became that which divided them. Through his instruction, the apostle Paul slowly and methodically pulled the warring factions apart and urged them toward unity. Central to bringing them together was the Holy Spirit they all shared. It was He who indwelt them all, sealed them all, gifted them all, and empowered them all. Three activities of the unifying Spirit are presented.

**The Holy Spirit affirms (vv. 1-3).** After handling a variety of other church issues, Paul turned his attention to their confusion regarding spiritual gifts. The reason they needed instruction is given in verse 2: they were used to worshipping “dumb idols;” that is, gods who did not communicate back to them. But our God is a living God! He hears our prayers, is moved by our pleas, and speaks back to us through His Word and through His Holy Spirit. The evidence that you are a Christ-follower is found in the fact that the Holy Spirit communicates with you and reveals that Jesus is indeed Lord. In fact, apart from the Spirit's influence, no one can claim Him as such. And vice-versa: no one who is truly regenerated by God's Holy Spirit could ever curse Him. The Holy Spirit—who is actively at work in the life of the believer—won't allow that to happen.

**The Holy Spirit unites (vv. 4-6).** These verses describe the oft-stated concept of “unity in diversity.” Three times the word “different” is used, and three times the word “same.” First, there are different *spiritual gifts*, which are explained more fully in verses 7-11. Then there are different *ministries*. These are demonstrations of service for the Lord carried out in His church. Third, there are different *activities*. The word here could be translated “energies,” and may refer to specific miraculous gifts in that day. While all of these depict different out-workings in the church, they all proceed from the same unified source. Notice the full Godhead Paul mentions: the Spirit dispenses the gifts; the Lord Jesus, as the head of the church, oversees the ministries within the church; and the power and energy flowing through the church is activated by God the Father. As one commentator put it, “There are a variety of streams, but all flow from the same fountain.”

**The Holy Spirit equips (vv. 7-11).** This marvelous text accomplishes several objectives at once. First, verse 7 reminds us *why* the gifts are given: so that each person can produce something good and useful (that is “beneficial”) for the church. Then verses 8-10 specify *what* gifts are given. While the list is not exhaustive, it is sufficiently rich and varied to demonstrate God's thorough equipping of the church to carry out His ministry (for more examples, see also Rom.

12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:28-30; and Eph. 4:11). Finally, Paul explains *who* gives the gifts: God's one and only Holy Spirit (v. 11). While these three explanations are evident (and significant), the emphasis of the passage is not on the variety of gifts, but on the singularity of their source.