

Session 6

July 17, 2022

UNITED THROUGH THE SPIRIT

1 Corinthians 12:4-14

Any auto mechanic, or carpenter, or contractor will tell you the same thing: you have to have the right tools for the job. Anyone who has ever tried to hang mini-blinds using a butter knife, or chisel concrete with a screwdriver, or hang a picture with duct tape understands just how important that principle is! It's the same way with organizing ministry through the local church. Have you ever had to endure a Sunday school teacher who couldn't teach? Or observed a children's worker who didn't like kids? Every pastor's nightmare is what to do with "square pegs" stuck in "round holes."

The good news is that God has equipped His church with spiritual gifts perfectly suited to carry out His ministry. The challenge is to understand how God operates in the dispensing and exercise of spiritual gifts and making sure that square pegs are placed in appropriately square holes.

Activity (vv. 4-7). Paul's explanation of the Spirit's activity begins with three parallel statements that say almost the same thing, but not quite. Notice that three times there is a "different" followed by "the same." Notice as well, that three aspects of giftedness are mentioned. The word *gifts* (v. 4) is related to the word *grace*. It means something given out of favor rather than obligation. In verse 5, there are differences in *ministries*. This word has the same root word as the term for deacon; it means *service*. In verse 6, there are differences in *activities*. The word here is better translated as *workings*. Hence there are different graces, different services, and different workings appointed among church members. But these are all superintended by the same Holy Spirit, who does so, so that the whole church may prosper (v. 7). For reflection: *Simple logic says that round pegs go in round holes. So why do some church members insist on squeezing into positions they are not cut out for?*

Diversity (vv. 8-11). There are two ways to look at this text. One way is to dissect the list of spiritual gifts, explain each one, and discern their uses in the local church context. This is helpful since the "lists" of spiritual gifts are very limited in the New Testament (see also Rom. 12:6-8). The first two stated here represent *mental acumen*. The *message of wisdom* indicates particular insight regarding the things of God, while the *message of knowledge* likely refers to sharp intellect and expertise in handling God's word (v. 8). The remaining gifts are *practical*: extraordinary faith, the gift of healing (v. 9), the working of miracles, speaking for God, discerning spiritual things, speaking in other languages and interpreting them (v. 10). While understanding the specific gifts is indeed helpful, the point of the passage is much broader. Paul's point is that with all the diversity of gifts, they still come from one divine source: God's Holy Spirit (v. 11). And since they are divinely dispensed, they reflect God's perfect will. In other words, He gives as He pleases. For reflection: *Do you think the lists of spiritual gifts given in the New Testament are exhaustive? Or could there be others left unmentioned? Why or why not?*

Unity (vv. 12-14). There's a big difference between *unity* and *uniformity*. Whereas uniformity means that everyone *looks alike*, unity means that everyone *works together*. The church at Corinth was fraught with division (see 1 Cor. 1:10 ff), and one of their issues seems to have been their fighting over spiritual giftedness. Paul used the illustration of the human body to make his point. The body as a whole can only function properly when the individual parts function properly. Once the congregation understood they were all parts of the same body, gifted by the same Spirit, pulling in the same direction, and seeking the good of His kingdom, perhaps they could put aside their differences and work together for His glory. For reflection: *What do you think Paul meant when he said, "we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body?" Why do you think he used those words?*