

# THE LOOKOUT

APRIL 2024

## Unit: 1 Corinthians (Part 2) Theme: The Powerful Church

**Overview:** If the living church had problems (which was last month's emphasis), then the powerful church had answers. Even churches with brokenness, like the Corinthian congregation, can provide knowledge and insight. Powerful churches learn to stress the right things (i.e., the big things of the book, the Bible). Powerful churches stress God's wisdom over the foolishness of this world. Powerful churches stress spiritual gifts that edify others over pandering to the pride of the user. Powerful churches stress love over self-centeredness. Powerful churches stress the resurrection over the hopelessness of the world.

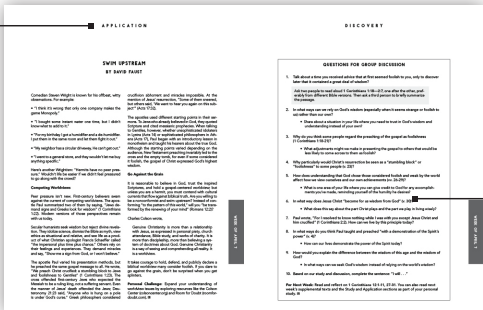
### HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF APRIL 14, 2024**

**LESSON AIM: Use whatever abilities and opportunities you have to serve the Lord and his kingdom, building up the body of Christ.**

**UNIT:** 1 Corinthians (Part 2)

**THEME:** The Powerful Church

**LESSON TEXT:** 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Romans 12:3-16; Ephesians 4:7-13

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS

BY MARK SCOTT

Every Christian is a charismatic. But that does not mean that every Christian speaks in tongues. That does not mean that every Christian displays outward evidence of miraculous signs or gifts. And that does not mean that every Christian is a member of a certain denomination. Instead, it means that every Christian has received grace (*charis*) and therefore has been given gifts (or charisma) from the Holy Spirit to be used in ministry in the body of Christ.

First, consider the context of this letter, 1 Corinthians. Paul was addressing issues about which the Corinthians had written (7:1). He addressed issues related to marriage, singleness, and calling (chapter 7). He addressed issues about eating meat offered to idols and handling Christian freedoms (chapters 8–10). He addressed issues about gender in worship and how to rightly participate in the Lord's Supper (chapter 11). In chapters 12–14 Paul addressed the subject of "spiritual things." The Greek text just says "spiritual." Translators have to supply a noun following "spiritual." In light of the context and the argument, it is best understood as "spiritual gifts."

Now, some context about the Corinthian people. As Richard Oster shared in his College Press commentary on 1 Corinthians, any effort to read pro- or anti-Pentecostal thinking back into these chapters would cause one to misread the text. Clearly these chapters were corrective to wrongheaded practices going on in the church of that time. But the background is different from what we see in "charismatic" churches today. The background then was the pagan influences of Delphi (north of Corinth). Prophetic oracles and ecstatic utterances were not uncommon in southern Greece in Paul's day.

### Spiritual Gifts Were Products of the Triune God

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

In Greek paganism, it was believed different gods gave different gifts. Therefore, to have a full quiver of gifts one needed to pander to different gods. Paul called that *uninformed*. He acknowledged that in their former "pagan" state they were *led astray to mute idols*. In contrast to the God of Scripture who spoke clearly, the pagan idols were *mute* (unable to give voice).

All three members of the Triune God are mentioned in this passage, which has caused some scholars to suggest that there is some kind of Triune formula that Paul

might be quoting. Whether Paul was quoting or creating matters little. Paul asserted that the Triune God was the originator of spiritual gifts. They are united—unlike the pagan gods and idols. The Holy Spirit would never say through someone that, "*Jesus be cursed.*" Rather Jesus' lordship would be affirmed by the Holy Spirit speaking through a believer. Theological solidarity exists with regard to spiritual gifts.

### Spiritual Gifts Were Given for Ministry

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

In contrast to how the Corinthians were using their spiritual gifts (i.e., some were using their gifts with great superiority and pride), Paul reminded the church that ministry was God's real goal in giving spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts were for service, not for show.

Gifts differ in nature and kind. Service for God can be accomplished in a plethora of ways. Workings of the Spirit are as varied as the colors in the rainbow. But the Lord is the giver and the "first cause" of all of them. These verses indicate that not all spiritual gifts are listed in the verses that follow. Not only do other passages list other gifts (Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11), but the ones mentioned in this chapter show that these were the talking points in Corinth (i.e., these gifts were the ones around which controversy swirled).

### Spiritual Gifts Were Distributed for the Common Good

1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 27-31

God is the giver of the gifts, ministry is the purpose of the gifts, and edification is the goal of the gifts. Each believer was given a gift (or gifts) *for the common good* so that the church can be built up. A good parallel text for verse 7 is Ephesians 4:7—they are almost identical.

Paul listed nine gifts in verses 8-10 and then listed eight gifts in verse 28. Some gifts are actually leaders (*apostles, prophets, and teachers*), some gifts seem miraculous, and some gifts seem rather plain (e.g., *helping*, which means something along the lines of remuneration). Paul insisted, by how he asked the questions, that all Christians do not have the same gifts (and therefore believers should not be made to feel inferior) and that these gifts should be used to help the church. Certain gifts seem best used in certain settings, but all gifts must be used in love. ■

## APPLICATION

### DON'T CELL OUT

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you realize that you own factories, warehouses, transport systems, and power plants? It's true! In fact, although you probably haven't given them a single thought before today, you would literally die without these valuable possessions.

I'm talking about the cells in your body. An adult human body contains as many as 100 trillion cells—microscopic building blocks that vary widely in size and function. *Medical News Today* describes cells as “tiny packages that contain minute factories, warehouses, transport systems, and power plants.” Cells connect and communicate with each other, forming vital tissues and organs that keep our bodies alive.

#### The Wondrous Physical Body

I believe our bodies are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) because God designed them that way. So, I'm not surprised when a scientist observes, “In terms of compressed complexity, cells are without peer in the material world. . . . And there is likely far more complexity still to uncover.”

Those words appear in *The Miracle of the Cell*, a book by Dr. Michael Denton, a medical doctor who also holds a PhD in biochemistry. He writes, “Where the cosmos feels infinitely large and the atomic realm infinitely small, the cell feels *infinitely complex*.” The extraordinary complexity of a living cell supports the concept of intelligent design. In biblical terms, “God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Romans 1:20).

#### The Wonder of the Body of Christ

The same powerful, purposeful God who created the universe joins individual believers together in his church.

The physical bodies we inhabit, and the spiritual body of Christ (his church) are both marvels of design and blessings to be appreciated. Both are vulnerable to injury and disease. Both need exercise and nourishment.

Just as cells in the physical body perform a variety of functions, individuals in Christ's church have a variety of roles to play and gifts to use.

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Spiritual gifts are God's to bestow and ours to deploy.

Every part of the body of Christ—even the smallest and least noticeable cell—has a valuable role to play. Yet, healthy cells don't exist for their own sake; their job is to contribute to the overall health of the body. In the church, it's tempting to “cell out” in one of two ways: (1) either we undervalue our gifts and wrongly assume they don't matter, or (2) we overvalue our gifts and act like they are all-important. The fact is, other Christians are our teammates, not our competitors. Their gifts are neither inferior nor superior to ours.

Robert Hooke, the scientist who used a microscope to discover cells in the 1600s, called them *cells* because he thought they resembled *cella*, the “small rooms” where monks lived in monasteries. God doesn't give us gifts so we can hide in our own small rooms, but so we can all do our parts to build up the body. Let's not “cell out” and act like our gifts are insignificant—or like they are the only thing that matters.

**Personal Challenge:** How will you use your spiritual gift(s) this week to build up the body of Christ? **L**

## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been part of a work or church group that made every member feel important and needed? Name a result or achievement that came from that group.

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Paul reminded the Corinthians about their former way of life, having been “influenced and led astray to mute idols” (1 Corinthians 12:2). How do you think reminding them of their past would help them appreciate their new life in the Spirit?
  - How might your past help you appreciate what you have today in Christ?
3. How do different spiritual gifts in the church work together to create unity?
  - What can you do to appreciate and support the different spiritual gifts of the people around you?
4. Why is it important for each member of a church to recognize their own role within the body of Christ?
  - How can you better understand and embrace your personal role in your church community?
5. What is the significance of Paul’s reference to the Trinity (Spirit, Lord, and God) as he wrote about the distribution of spiritual gifts in the church (vv. 4-6)?
  - What implications does this have for unity in the church?
6. Paul indicated that each believer’s spiritual gift (“the manifestation of the Spirit”) has been “given for the common good” (v. 7). What does that tell you about the gift you have been given?
7. Can you identify the spiritual gift you have been given to build up the body of Christ?
  - If so, share it with your group to seek confirmation.
  - If not, ask your group to suggest a gift they perceive you may have.
8. In this week’s lesson, Mark Scott wrote, “God is the giver of the gifts, ministry is the purpose of the gifts, and edification is the goal of the gifts.” What has been most edifying for you in coming to Christ or in your life as a Christian?
9. Paul concluded this section by encouraging believers to “eagerly desire the greater gifts” (v. 31). This will be the focus of next week’s study, but for now, what gifts do you think are greater than the gifts Paul has listed in chapter 12?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■