

Bible Studies for Life: July 17

Unity in the Spirit • 1 Corinthians 12:4-12

By Clay Anthony



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That is the issue facing the church at Corinth. Paul gets wind that there is much discussion concerning church order and sets it straight in chapter 11. Then he tackles the church's love for one another in chapter 13.

Yet in today's text we find that he is having to correct thinking on how the gifts of the Holy Spirit are to function in bringing unity to the local congregation.

These people were thinking they were strong enough to handle whatever task God put before them. They were certainly busy bodies, using their gifts in various ministries and activities (vv.5-6). We know that the word for service here is our English word for "deacon," and further know that activities are any service that has us up and moving.

Let not this truth escape us: busyness does not always equal productivity. It is possible to rock in a chair for an hour and not move an inch. Corinth was equating any movement as a

movement from God, yet nothing was really changing in them and their culture stayed the same. They were missing empowerment (v.6) from the Spirit.

They were also missing any form of direction. Paul lists certain gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit (vv.8-10) and while not an exhaustive list, no doubt these traits had been seen in the Corinthian church.

Gone unchecked, such giftings could lead to disunity in that some would feel slighted by having gifts that were viewed as secondary. Paul corrects this thinking by pointing out all gifts are equal and needed, for they come from the same source (v.11). With each gift comes a direction on how they are to be correctly used. Certain gifts may be more visible to others, yet without all the gifts being used in unison the church will indeed suffer.

The believers in Corinth also had a blind spot when it came to the help a church body provides. Did your church have Vacation Bible School this summer? Just consider how many hands it takes to put together a successful VBS. Kids need to be taught. Kids love to sing. We know they love to go out and play and of course kids must eat. That is not including decorating and cleaning up.

The Corinthian church seemed to be filled with many who felt their gift opposed those of others, and that made many feel as though they were the Lone Ranger. That attitude is not only wrong-headed, but it also cuts service to the body into many parts.

Just as no one person can do it all by themselves, neither can multiple people pulling in many opposing directions. Regardless of their background or status in life, (v.13) every believer has a vital part to play in building the kingdom.

This information should bring a few questions to our minds. First, what type of gift do you have? There are many spiritual

gift inventories that you can take that will give you an idea of your strengths.

At the same time, the Gifts of the Spirit (v.9) can often be seen in your life by other believers. When they affirm you in those areas, continue to serve by using that gift to the best of your ability.

Think as well of your fellow small group members. What are their gifts? Which ones work in concert with the others to accomplish the tasks before your group? Perhaps you should take a Sunday morning and as a group complete a spiritual gift inventory to discover where each member is strong.

Such inventories are meant to give you an idea of what your gifts are, so do not take them as definitive. Otherwise, you will be right back in Corinth squabbling over who has the better gift.

Here's the fun part. How do you plan on using these gifts? What needs are in your church and city? Gifts from the Spirit are never meant to be argued over or put on parade. They are the Spirit's empowerment to accomplish the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Get to work!

Anthony is director of the Collaborative Missionary Network, Oxford/Holly Springs.