

Chapter 12

Paul outlines in this chapter what it means to be a Spiritual Christian. Spirituality IS important, and it IS possible to be BOTH spiritual and religious. Paul begins by stating that no one can say, “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. This is in line with Luther’s teaching on the 3rd article of the creed in the small catechism, *“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.”* Beginning in verse 4, Paul states that the Holy Spirit manifests in the lives of individual Christians in a variety of ways (gifts, services, activities), but that God the Spirit is the source of all of our spiritual experience and expression.

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Vs. 7, our spiritual gifts are not our own to hoard, but always to be used in service to the common good. This is where the idea of being both spiritual and religious comes into play. Our God-given spirituality is fundamentally communal in nature, our spiritual gifts are for the service of the whole group, not just so that we ourselves can feel good and holy. The spiritual gifts Paul lists from vs. 8-10 is not an exhaustive list. There are a wide variety of spiritual gifts, not just “wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophetic speech, discernment of spirits (intuition), speaking in tongues (the ecstatic language of heaven), and the ability to interpret ecstatic speech. The source of all of these gifts is the same Spirit.

Paul uses the analogy of members of the body of Christ to describe the diversely gifted relationship that we Christians have to each other and to Christ. We are differently gifted and come from different backgrounds, but we are unified in the same body of Christ by nature of our baptism and receiving the same Spirit of the risen Christ together. No member of Christ’s body is more or less important than another, each have their own job to do to keep the whole body healthy and functioning according to

God's will. It's pretty hard to walk without a big toe, even the big toe in the body of Christ is important! We can't all be the brain or the heart or the head, but we all work together as essential members of one body. Paul writes like this to settle disputes among the Corinthian church regarding who had what gifts. Everyone wanted the "miraculous" visible gifts like speaking in tongues or miracle power or healing because those kinds of showy gifts brought more prestige and honor to the individuals. Paul is saying that that kind of thinking is nonsense because EVERYONE's gifts are to be valued and honored, and that we can't and shouldn't all have the same gift or strive for the same gift. We also shouldn't leave the church because we haven't received the spiritual gift we were hoping for. Be proud of the gifts you have and use them to the fullest for the benefit of the common good! *"If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."* Vs 26. This is what it means to be the church. Beginning in Vs. 27, Paul expands on his earlier list of spiritual gifts, listing specific roles as well as gifts. Again this is not an exhaustive list of what's possible, just some examples for the functioning of the church: Apostles (missionaries or "sent ones"), Prophets, Teachers, Deeds of Power, Gifts of Healing, Forms of Assistance, Forms of Leadership, Various Kinds of Tongues. Strive for the greater gifts, means those with less cultural prestige. The WAY Paul is talking about is love, which leads into chapter 13. All of our spiritual gifts are useless unless they flow from a life rooted in love.

Chapter 13

Paul reveals to the contentious Corinthian church what real love looks like. He was not writing this chapter so that everyone could have something to read on their wedding day, but rather for a group of Christians who had forgotten what it looked like to love one another and to live in healthy community. Certainly what Paul says is true of romantic love, but he is speaking here of agape love –the self-less love of Christ. Romantic partners do well to root their relationship in agape love, but this is the kind of love that ALL Christians are called pattern their lives after. This is the only WAY that our spiritual gifts will work effectively and according to God's vision for us and the world, if we use them out of self-giving LOVE.

Speaking in the tongues of angels (speaking in tongues) for selfish reasons (rather than out of self-giving love) does nothing to serve the common good. Having all of the prophetic powers and wisdom and knowledge and faith (notice, these are all the examples Paul uses in chapter 12) and

showing all of that off to build up one's own honor, rather than to serve the community, leads to nothing. Giving out of selfish reasons rather than selfless love, again leads to nothing.

Vs. 4-7 is Paul's concise description of exactly what love looks like, for a group of people who had forgotten how to love one another.

Love is the active ingredient in our spiritual lives. Without it, our attempts at living a spiritual life yield nothing.

Chapter 14

Paul continues his argument on the value and limitation of certain spiritual gifts. Paul himself can speak in tongues (more than anyone else, according to vs. 18) so he is speaking on this topic as an insider with authority. He says that if your ecstatic speech does not have an interpreter (either you or someone else), then it's better to pray or sing with your mind so that everyone else can understand what's happening and as a result be built up, than for no one to understand anything and for only you yourself to be built up. Remember, spiritual gifts are meant for the common good, if they are only serving you then they are not being used faithfully.

Paul raises the issue of insiders vs. outsiders. Speaking in tongues either looks miraculous or insane to those on the outside looking in. If the purpose is for building up the congregation's faith and for drawing outsiders into the community, then prophecy is a much better gift than speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues was even in the early church met with skepticism by those outside of the church. As a result, Paul gives strict instructions for the way the worship service should flow, only 2 (at the most) people should be allowed to stand up and offer a moment of speaking in tongues, and ONLY if there is someone there to interpret that speech. If there is no interpreter present, then those who can speak in tongues should remain silent in church because their gift does not build up the whole body but only themselves. Paul paints an incredible view of worship in the early church, *"Let two or three prophets speak, and let others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to someone sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be encouraged."* Preaching and teaching happened through all of those gathered for the encouragement and upbuilding of the whole church, not just through the words of the pastor.

Vs. 34-36, Paul's words on women being silent in the church do not agree with his earlier words in chapter 11 where women pray and prophesy alongside men. Many scholars doubt that these words were actually written by Paul and date them later than the rest of this letter. Paul worked alongside MANY women in the early church whom he viewed as co-laborers for Christ, apostles, prophets. It wasn't until after Paul's time that the church began trying to reign in and restrict women within the church. This was a change that diminished some of the church's original countercultural expression, rather than anything that was passed down from Jesus or Paul himself. The only writings that speak negatively of women's voices in church are pieces like this one that seem to be later additions (putting words in Paul's mouth so to speak that were not originally there), or in later writings (such Timothy).