

1 Corinthians 12

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on 1 Corinthians 12 emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit's gifts, unity in the body of Christ, and the role of local assemblies in nurturing believers.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4

Topics: "Unity in the Body of Christ", "Spiritual Gifts"

Description

John Nelson Darby explores the themes of spiritual gifts and the manifestation of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, emphasizing the importance of unity within the body of Christ. He contrasts the gifts of the Spirit with demonic manifestations, highlighting that true prophecy serves to edify, exhort, and comfort the church. Darby explains that the baptism of the Spirit unites believers into one body, and stresses the necessity of mutual care among members of the church. He warns against divisions and emphasizes that the local assembly reflects the whole body of Christ, urging believers to seek gifts that build up the church. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the importance of each member's contribution.

Transcript

Turning to 1 Corinthians 12 we have both the manifestation of the Spirit and miraculous gifts. The apostle was speaking in contrast with demons, etc., but it is a manifestation of the Spirit in power: so in chapter 14, if all prophesied, they were convinced of all, and judged of all, and thus the secrets of his heart were made manifest, and so, falling down on his face, he worshipped God, and reported that God was in them of a truth. It is more the outward manifestation that is in his mind here. It applies in principle to what remains now. There is the word of wisdom, etc. Speaking by "two or three, and that by course," applies now. I never did speak, if three had spoken. Simply reading a chapter is not speaking. Ordinarily we call prophecy the foretelling future events, but this is not the meaning of the word. It is "forth-telling," not "foretelling." We have this prophecy spoken of in verse 10, for edification, exhortation, and comfort, but not as inspiration of some new revelation. The word is used both in a general way, and as a direct gift. We have not it in the special way.

275 The baptism of the Spirit (v. 13) was on the day of Pentecost, and when an individual believes, he is sealed and anointed. "In [or by] one Spirit" is "in the power of." A person says by one Spirit he was baptised, instead of saying in the power of one Spirit: it may become equivocal. You have been baptised by the Holy Ghost coming. By the coming and power of the Holy Ghost we have all been made one body,

and if I have the Holy Ghost, I am brought in, and am united by it. By being sealed, I am joined to the Lord. God puts a testimony of salvation on a man, and we cannot really say what he is until then, even though I may feel sure he is being wrought in by God. Yet he has not his place along with Christ in this world until then. We cannot say a person is saved until God has put His seal upon him. It is baptism into one body, and drinking of one Spirit. They are shades of thought. It reads, "For by one Spirit," and "for as the body" (v. 12, 13); but the word "for," in more than half the cases, is not a connection with what has gone immediately before, but rather a reference back to some great principle.

The body (v. 12) is for eternity, though a person when he dies passes out of the body, as manifested in time; he ceases to be part of that which was formed of God, by the Holy Ghost down here, but in result the whole will be Christ's body. If a person dies, he is like any one on furlough, and forms no actual part of the regiment in active service. We must recollect that the Holy Ghost has come down to earth. Christ, as God, created everything, but that was not His actual existence as when He came, but still He had been working, and had created everything. And so as to the Holy Ghost Christ said, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come." Now, every direct action of God on the creature is by the Spirit: yet He came on the day of Pentecost. Our Lord says, "When he is come," and so on. Of course, when He forms the body, He forms it where He is; but as God He does not give up the person that dies, neither his body, for He has got it all in His hands, and under His eye, to be raised. Even the body is not given up, but it ceases to be in that corporation which the Holy Ghost has formed on earth. If one die, he belongs to the body, and is held to belong to Christ. His body is in the dust, and his spirit is with Christ.

276 When you get to the "nots" and the "onlys," it is a dangerous thing. If you say, "He is not of the body," naturally you conclude that he did not belong to it at all. If you say, "belongs only down here," you exclude the body for Christ in eternity. If I say, That is in Scripture, I bring my text, and there it is: if I say, "not," then I must know the whole of the scripture to say so. In our knowledge, negatives are universals, and affirmatives only are particular.

In Ephesians 1, we may notice, Christ is head in title, and not yet: in God's counsels the church is Christ's body, neither present, future, nor past, for it is all in counsel; but here, in Corinthians, it is the actual thing in accomplishment, distinct quite from Ephesians, which is purpose and counsel. And here, too, it is the nature of the thing. Then we have the dependence of the members down here; and it is important to see that all this is down here, because when I read, "He set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets," and so on (v. 28-30), then all this is not in heaven. The apostle says, "in the assembly" (v. 28), so not "in the body," because it is a matter of historical fact. The body is a figure; and he is stating the fact of the realisation of this in the assembly; so that it would not suit so well to say, "He set some in the body."

Verse 25 - "The members should have the same care" - proves that all the saints ought to have a care one for another; and that would include every member of the body on earth. "The same care," he says: it is not simply his taking a care for them, but I ought to care for you in the sense of love, and interest and heart being there; it is not "taking care of," but a different idea. We are all one body: my hand is interested in my eye, and my eye in my hand. All are dependent one on another, in spite of themselves, though it ought to be in love.

"Now ye are the body of Christ," v. 27. The local assembly stands as a whole body. You cannot say that the assembly in Corinth was the whole body of Christ, but it was its local expression. You could say the same of any place. It is all that expresses the truth of the assembly there. A wise masterbuilder would not know what to do with a ruined house. So, if Paul came down, I do not know to whom he would write now.

There is a danger of losing, in a local assembly, the truth of the whole body, and so of having only the representation instead of the reality. I fully recognise that in the principle of meeting this is the only thing that God owns; but in our owning the local thing, I dread losing the whole thing. At Corinth the one answers to the other.

277 We get an exact list of gifts. The apostle's object was to give the manifestations in the church. Barnabas was an apostle too beside Paul and the twelve. There are different words rendered "gift," and they have shades of meaning. "Gifts" (charisma) (v. 4) is the giving when there is need strictly, and "gift" (dorea) (Eph. 4:7) is the freedom of the gift, and so on. We should look for such gifts as will edify, and desire them. Here they were vain of their tongues; but if you were to talk Chinese, nobody would understand you. You had better seek what will edify; if you prophesy, you will help others. So, if a man desire the office of a bishop, it is a good work.

In our chapter it is power by the Holy Ghost come down; in Ephesians 4 we have Christ as the Head coming for His body. There Christ gives from on high. Here the Holy Ghost comes down, and is distributing. There is capacity as well as gift. In the parable in Matthew 25 our Lord gives to every man according to his several ability. God had formed the vessel for the purpose. In Luke a great deal more is thrown on man's responsibility; in the talents it is more God's grace. In Luke, therefore, you find ten cities and five cities in reward; while in Matthew both are alike, and here "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." It is responsibility, and reward according to labour, in Luke.

Some of these gifts have been called sign-gifts, because it is said they were a sign to unbelievers. They were for the inauguration of Christianity, but there is no intimation of their continuance. The church continues, if you take the secret wisdom of God; if you take the revealed statement of God, there is no intimation of remaining here. You will never find the church contemplated as remaining, so as to put off the coming of the Lord. In the parables with reference to it, though we have "After a long time," yet the servants to whom the talents were entrusted are the same as those who are judged; the virgins who slept are they who are roused and so on. So with the seven churches, all was existing then, and yet it has been all going on.

278 As to the signs, we read, "confirming the word with signs following," as a promise. Moses wrought miracles, and Elijah too, in the midst of apostate Israel. But not so the other prophets. Isaiah and Jeremiah worked no miracles, nor John Baptist. When God is introducing something new, you have them - wherever the thing was to be made good in testimony for our poor hearts to sanction the truth. I see no restoration of miracles, or of anything indeed. There will be miracles at the end on the devil's part: power, and signs, and lying wonders. There was no statement to the church that it must lose them at a certain time, nor that they must go on for a certain time. Some ask as to the continuance of apostles and elders. This was what they said to me in Switzerland: "How can you think of God setting up a church with elders and apostles, and yet making no provision for their continuance?" I said, It is so, because God did not mean the church to continue. We see this to be the way God used miracles. Of course, He could work a miracle at any time.

It is to be noticed, that, in verse 26, the apostle does not say (though it would be right to say it) that if one member suffer, all the members do suffer with it. God has tempered the body, that it should be so; and I trust it is in measure the case. The realisation of it is diminished by divisions and distances, and all that kind of thing; but do you suppose that, if there is a great work of blessing going on in India or Canada, there is not a blessing, too, in Ireland? Of course there is, as far as living energy goes. The thing is true, though spoiled in a measure. In an assembly where a brother is not walking in the Lord, if the gathering is

spiritual, they will feel it, and there will be an immediate consciousness that something is grieving the Spirit. But if my soul is deadened, as you may sometimes see, of course it is not felt so distinctly. If a person cuts my hand, I do not merely say, "Why did you cut my hand?" but my whole body feels it. If an individual were chastened, the assembly feels it in a measure; if they were insensible to it, they would be all the more hardened. The suffering here is any kind of trial, but it applies to chastisement, because we have all one life. It is, by there being one Spirit in it all, that it is so, and it always has a certain effect, though the body may be so divided as to feel it but little. We can be awakened by the work of the Spirit and the word of prayer. If any can apply the word, let them apply it. When there is sin in an assembly, if they judge it, they prove themselves clear; but if they do not, things will get worse, or the Lord deal with them. "Leaven" would apply to both the sin and their refusing to judge it. The thing the apostle wants in 2 Corinthians is to bring them all into obedience: he says, "When your obedience is fulfilled." Our own condition is of first importance. We are never independent of the state we are in, or of the Lord's judgment of it.

279 "Now ye are body of Christ" (v. 27) is an important principle. The local assembly stands as the body of Christ, for it acts for the whole body, and is recognised as the whole body in a certain sense in its acting. If a person is put out at Belfast, he is put out from the whole body. Suffering affects the whole, though it takes place locally, and action is of the same character in that sense; and then, in verse 24, God hath done "this," that there should not be a schism in the body; that is, given such provision, though it is seen in individuals in various places. Verse 24 includes all persons who may be exceedingly valuable and yet not appear at all. It does not bring in a question of a schism. There could be no schism in the body itself; but, taking the whole thing, he says God may put honour on one person, and there may be another very quiet with a little gracious word of counsel to the rest, without outward honour put upon him.

In "covet earnestly the best gifts," the emphasis is on "best," gifts that edify. The desire should be in the individual and in the assembly. Suppose I felt the assembly wanted teaching, I might earnestly desire to be able to unfold Scripture to them. Gifts belong to the whole body of course, though they may be used locally. Take the highest gift, and apostle, he was not an apostle merely in a particular place. An evangelist is the servant of Christ, not of the assembly; but wherever he may be, he is of the church himself. If there is no assembly gathered where he is, then he is alone; but if there is an assembly, he is of it. And the first thing in him is to gather to Christ. Say that I go to Galatia, and the Lord converts fifty, they are gathered to Christ, not to the assembly I had come from. An evangelist would be for the edifying of the body of Christ, inasmuch as he brings the souls in and 'adds them. How could you build up a church without people, without bricks (or scripturally I should say, "stones")? I should in this connection be jealous of two things exceedingly: of a person separating himself in spirit from the saints; or of the assembly thinking his work was their affair. I think it is of great importance that the workman should be clearly Christ's servant; but if he works in any spirit of separation from the saints, I could not go with it. An evangelist may not necessarily gather to anything that was there but to Christ, with a full knowledge of redemption; and having Christ and a full knowledge of redemption, they could not go on with anything else.

280 Now-a-days the great thought commonly even among Christians is the conversion of souls to go to heaven; then (in Paul's time) there was no thought of anything but the church, and converts went in as a matter of course. One is thankful where there is now any better sense; one hears of souls converted all over England and small gatherings springing up. Bringing converts to a full knowledge of redemption does not always bring them unto the ground of Christ: anybody that has a pastor's heart and power should look

after such. Paul himself was more than an evangelist merely, but he gets Timotheus, Silas, etc., to go and visit these places where he had laboured, and see how they were going on. Paul wanted Apollos to go to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:12); but from a beautiful feeling Apollos would not go, for they were saying, "I of Paul, and I of Apollos." Paul had no jealousy, and wished him to go; but Apollos feared the effect of it, and would not. In the time of a revival I said to S. in Kingstown, What are you going to do with all these converts? He said, The Lord will take care of them. The result was that it all died out. I do not think this was the case with our brethren in France; when they were blessed, they stayed and gathered the converts to the table. The nearest local assembly may be a long way off. I think there is responsibility on all the church of God.

This does not really confound gifts with assemblies. The assembly would not act collectively merely, though it would have fellowship with labourers. When Paul laid hands on any to give him a gift, he was glad to have the testimony of the elders with his own. As to elders themselves, the apostles chose elders, but it is not said that hands were laid on them, yet I believe it was so. He says, "Lay hands suddenly on no man," but does not state that it refers to elders. Remember all this is very different from "gift."

281 I do not want to leave the thought as to the care of souls that are converted. If you look at a pastor, you see in his very expression a difference from an evangelist. An evangelist will say, "O Lord, look at these poor sinners"; and a true pastor will say, "O Lord, look at these poor sheep." There is this point too: the character of revival preaching does not tend so much to gather together perhaps, though having a measure of excitement in it; and souls so converted have no thought of being gathered, and it is very difficult in a revival work to bring souls into a condition to receive further teaching. I remember an expression of one who "wanted a sermon to pull him up." There is dear - whose preaching is exciting, but finds the converts who get a taste for worship go elsewhere, and those remain who want the exciting preaching. But there is a kind of looking after people that I should not give in to. You cannot follow into ways which cultivate a thing that is not according to God. It is an anxious thing when souls are brought in; an evangelist will not be careless about his converts, but then his special work occupies him. I believe there is many a gift that is not developed from want of devotedness.

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