

1 Cor 12:4-11 Bible Study

1. What is the difference between “unity” and “conformity”? What would each look like in a church? Discuss.
2. Read 12:4-6. Is it possible that the Corinthians actually thought there were different Spirits, Lords, Gods? Why does Paul repeat three times that there is “the same...” Spirit / Lord / God?

They would have said they believed in One God, One Lord, One Spirit – but their behaviour and understanding ‘concerning spiritual gifts’, was inconsistent with that. To discuss this issue, Paul must go over the foundation of their beliefs, to frame the discussion in its right context.

3. Read John 15:26, 16:12-15. How should we view the work of the Spirit?

The three Persons of the Trinity are distinct Persons and carry on different roles, but they are not separated from each other in their roles and work together for the same goal – the glory of God! “Spiritual gifts” for the Corinthians bore no relation to the Father or the Son, to the gospel of grace, and the glorifying of God’s name. It might have passed for “spiritual” in a worldly sense, but not the Spirit of the Triune God.

4. What is the significance of there being different kinds of “gifts” and (lit) “services” and (lit) “workings”? ?

God works in a variety of ways, not just in giving gifts. The Corinthians wanted uniformity (of gifts) where there should be unity – of faith in one Triune God. Such unity affords great diversity in the members.

Review: Reading between the lines, the Corinthians had an issue over what they called “spiritual gifts”. Paul writes to address it. But before getting to their question, he has to remind them that the work of the Spirit will be about Jesus – glorifying him as Lord (v3), that the work of the Spirit is not to be understood in isolation from the Father and the Son, and that there are many ways the Spirit works, not just in giving gifts.

5. Read 12:7-11. What do verses 7 & 11 say to anyone who feels superior to other Christians because they have a particular ‘spiritual gift’ (eg speaking in tongues)?

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each Christian – no one misses out. The particular way the Spirit manifests himself is by his own decision and therefore nothing to boast in. cf Paul’s word for gift in v.4, literally “grace-gift”, and also reread 4:7.

6. The phrase “for the common good” has appeared twice before in the letter. Read 6:12 & 10:23. Are there any similarities in contexts? What does this teach us about the nature of church?

Each time Paul needs to correct their selfish attitudes and behaviours- they are thinking of themselves and not others. But God works among his people that they will serve the needs of each other.

7. A message of wisdom & A message of knowledge – wise words to encourage others.
Faith – that God will do something specific (cf 13:2a) or faith in extreme circumstances
Gifts of healings, workings of powers – perhaps single event giftings
Prophecy – see ch 14, probably application of the gospel to specific situations
Distinguishing between spirits – cf 1 Jn 4:1ff.
Tongues & interpretation – unintelligible words of prayer or praise and their interpretation

Do you think this list is exhaustive of the gifts, services and workings of God? Why / why not?
What can you say about this list? Is there any significance in the order?

See 1 Cor 12:28, Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:11 for other NT lists. This list seems to be a sampling of other manifestations of the Spirit, probably all in Corinth, and possibly chosen for their (humanly speaking) ‘impressive’ nature. Paul seems to show that tongues is not the only such working (and here it is listed last!) NB the ‘collection for the saints’ mentioned in 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12-13; Rom 15:31 is described as a “service” – same word in 12:5. It too is a manifestation of the Spirit – we need to beware judging what is “impressive” or “spiritual” just be worldly standards.

8. Do you need to know the precise way the manifestation of the Spirit has been given for you in order to benefit others at church? What should be your attitude and behaviour in response to this reality? Pray about this.