

1 Cor 12:1-3 Bible Study

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word “spirituality”? What do people today associate with this word?

2. 12:1 introduces the next 3 chapters “about spiritual gifts”. Read through 1 Cor 12-14. List the major issues here.

If time is a concern, just read through these chapters without comment.

3. Does 12:1-3 seem like a natural introduction to these chapters? Discuss.

Paul's introduction seems 'off topic' at first glance. He mentions their concern ie “spiritual gifts”, but then immediately talks about what people might say about Jesus; and it's not until ch14 that he deals directly with speaking in tongues. Clearly to deal properly with this issue, it must be put in it's proper context, hence 12:1 “I do not want you to be ignorant”.

4. The phrase translated “spiritual gifts” in the NIV means literally “spiritual things”. Elsewhere in the letter it means ‘spiritual persons’ (eg 3:1) but here it's probably referring to things of the Spirit, namely gifts, hence the NIV. Paul is most likely quoting them in their letter when he uses this word. But from now he will use a different word to refer to this. It appears in v4 as “gifts” but is literally “grace-gifts” (*charismata*, as in 1:7). What might this change of vocabulary tell us?

*The Corinthians were a very 'spiritual' church and emphasised this, even prided themselves in it. These chapters are a correction of their thinking. They are looking far too much at the **recipient** and not enough at the **Giver**. The word 'grace-gift' emphasises that these are **gifts** – undeserved, but given out of God's sheer goodness, and not a source of pride or boasting for the Corinthians, cf 4:7.*

5. Do you think verse 2 is a true description of all unbelievers? Discuss.

*No one is truly 'autonomous' – as unbelievers we are influenced by 'the world, the flesh and the devil' and all lead us away from Christ. The outworking of this is that we are led **to** something else – something lifeless and incapable of saving us or even ruling us for our good.*

6. It is difficult to know with certainty why Paul wrote v3a; possibly this was said in pagan worship, possibly a Christian had uttered it in one of their gatherings. But it's perhaps better to see this another example of unbelievers being led away from Jesus – this example referring to Jews who would have considered Jesus as cursed because he was hung on a tree (Dt 21:23, Gal 3:13). Thus, the spirit at work in the synagogue in Corinth is not the Spirit of God, despite the history of the Jews, and their having the OT.

7. What is the significance of the statement “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit”? What does that suggest about the topic of “spiritual gifts” (and spirituality in general)?

The work of the Spirit is to glorify Jesus – to direct us to him, convict of sin and our need for forgiveness, to bring the life of the Triune God into us that we would know and follow Jesus and have life in him. See for example Jn 16:13-14, Matt 16:17. Anything “spiritual” that is not part of this, is not spiritual in the sense of “of the Holy Spirit”. The Corinthians were getting their understanding of spirituality from the world around them and not from God's Word.

8. What does it mean to you to say, “Jesus is Lord”? How does it make you feel knowing that your ability to even say this is because the Holy Spirit is living and at work within you?

To say Jesus is Lord is to have the absolute conviction that Jesus is God. It can be a source of great comfort in times when we are struggling as a Christian, and an important reminder to keep us humble when things are going well.

9. How does this passage help you to pray for unconverted people you know? *Finish with praying for them.*

It is not by our power to persuade or their power to work it out – belief comes by hearing the word and the Spirit working to enable that faith.