

“The Spirit's Role in Building Community” 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Introduction

- In the 2004 documentary *Super Size Me* director [Morgan Spurlock](#) ate McDonalds three times a day for thirty days straight. The only rules to his experiment were that he had to eat at least every item on the menu at least once and whenever he was asked to super size his meal he had to say yes. He consumed an average of 5,000 calories per day (the equivalent of 9.26 Big Macs) during the experiment. In thirty days his starting weight of 185 pounds ballooned to 210 pounds, a 13% increase in his body mass.
- Without realizing it Christians can slip into a McDonalds-like super size mentality when it comes to corporate worship. I think we have a tendency to fixate on a very narrow restricted diet of only a few select items that we think supercharge worship—and so we super size the importance of those things to the exclusion of most everything else—and the results aren't pretty. You fill in the blank. Because we each super size our favorite things. Some of us believe if we only sang more hymns that would make our corporate worship perfect. And so we super size hymns. 5,000 calories worth of hymns. Some of us wish for more prayer in the corporate worship setting so we super size prayer. 5,000 calories worth of prayer. Still others want to see visible, powerful works of the Spirit. So we super size the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. 5,000 calories worth of healing and miracles and speaking in tongues. Some want quiet and solitude. Super size quite reflection. 5,000 calories worth of silence and solitude during corporate worship. You get the idea.

Transition

As foolish as a McDonalds only diet is an imbalanced worship diet is equally foolish and equally dangerous to spiritual health and vitality. As I read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 the thing that impresses me the most is how diverse the work of the Holy Spirit is. As we continue to try to understand more about corporate worship in chapters 11 and 12 and 13 and 14 let me suggest to you that...

Proposition

- **Corporate worship without the diverse and balanced work of the Holy Spirit is a farce**
- Emphasis is on the words diverse and balanced. All of us would agree that worship without the Holy Spirit, apart from the Holy Spirit, however differently we might define that, isn't really worship. That's something there's 100% agreement on. You can't properly glorify God through a life of worship without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Nor can you glorify God in the context of corporate worship without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
- However, what that looks like, I think, is so diverse—far more diverse than the comfort level of most of us. Most of us, we refashion worship in our own image and our own personality based upon our tradition and experience so that what we expect from corporate worship is really a retooling of us. As the saying goes, “If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.”¹ The goal of corporate worship is not to self-expression. Or

¹ Abraham Maslow, *Leadership*, Vol. 1, no. 2.

even the expression of one or two gifts to the exclusion of other gifts. The goal in corporate worship is the expression of the diversity of ways in which the Holy Spirit brings glory to Christ.

Background/Setting

- The situation in the church in Corinth and the issues Paul speaks to in chapter 12 are not that different from some of the issues we face now as we think about how the gifts of the Holy Spirit express themselves in corporate worship. All scripture is relevant however the bridge from 1st century culture to ours isn't as wide on this issue.
- Apparently the Corinthians had some questions about what corporate worship was. They either wanted to know from Paul which gift was the best or some individuals in the church were flaunting their own spiritual gifts as the highest and the best—I think it was the latter. Because of this they were limiting the expression of the Spirit's gifts to a handful of spectacular gifts and they were honoring the individuals who expressed those gifts to the detriment of the body.² This valuing of one gifted individual over against another comes out in [verse 21](#). *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!"* The Corinthians apparently thought some gifts were at a minimum unimportant and at worse unneeded. *And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"* [22](#) *On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,* [23](#) *and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.* The Corinthians were super sizing certain gifts, specifically speaking in tongues, to the exclusion of others. They were honoring certain gifts and individuals above others and it was fracturing the body of Christ. Talk about worship wars. Have we learned anything in 2000 years?
- Before we dig into these verses let me say a few things about spiritual gifts for those of you who might be new in Christ. Jesus promised his followers that when he left he would leave another, the Holy Spirit, to continue his ministry in his place. The Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force, Luke, may the force be with you kind of thing. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and Christ the Son. John 16:13 tells us that the purpose of the Spirit's coming is guide Jesus' followers into truth. Truth about what? Truth about whom? Truth about who Jesus is. Wherever blinders are being removed as it relates to people discovering and learning and growing in their understanding of who Jesus is you can be sure the Holy Spirit is behind that.
- Then in John 16:14 Jesus gives what I believe is the key teaching on the Holy Spirit in the book of John. Starting in [verse 13](#). *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth . He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.* Now [verse 14](#). *He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.* The primary purpose of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life is to glorify Christ. The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to draw attention to Jesus—not to himself.
- So what happens when a person becomes a Christian? When a person becomes a Christian 2 Corinthians 1:22 says the Holy Spirit comes into that person's life, he indwells them, takes up residence in that person for the purpose of making them holy, doing heart surgery in cutting out the sin, making them like Christ. The Holy Spirit also not only empowers the

² Garland, p. 558-9.

Christian for a life of godliness, the Spirit also gives gifts to each Christian, Ephesians 4:7 and Hebrews 2:4. Those gifts are called spiritual gifts. “A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.”³ There’s an incredible diversity to the number and kind of gifts the Holy Spirit gives. There are numerous lists throughout the New Testament in Romans 12 and elsewhere. Those lists aren’t meant to be exhaustive. There are probably gifts that aren’t listed in Scripture. However, what’s clear is that every Christian has at least one gift, some more than one. No single Christian has every gift nor is there any one gift given to every Christian. 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 says *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?* Paul’s questions beg the answer no. There is no particular gift that is given to everyone.

- So what’s the purpose of spiritual gifts? “The purpose of [spiritual] gifts is to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns.”⁴ By means of the spiritual gifts you and I carry on Christ’s work in this world. Ephesians 4:12 says gifts are given *to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.* 1 Peter 4:10 adds that *each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.* Every Christian should be using their spiritual gift. If not, the body of Christ gets sick. Gifts may vary in strength depending upon the faith used to exercise them, Romans 12:6. They can be developed and grow stronger through use or atrophy if left unused.
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is one of the most amazing things about the Christian life. Are you using your gift or gifts? What are you waiting for? Is it permission? You’ve got it. Use your gifts. If on the other hand, you don’t know what your spiritual gift is what are you going to do about it? If you don’t know your gift finding out is your top priority in life—period. You’re doing the body of Christ a great disservice by not using the gift or gifts the Holy Spirit has given you.

Transition

So what can we learn from 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and the mistakes of the church in Corinth? Two things.

Organizational Sentence

- **Two indicators of healthy Holy Spirit empowered corporate worship**

Transition

How do you know if corporate worship in a particular body of Christ is healthy? **First indicator. Healthy corporate worship exalts Jesus as Lord.** Listen to **verses 1-3.** *Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. 2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*

Main Points

³ Grudem, p. 1016.

⁴ Grudem, p. 1018.

- Most times when we come to 1 Corinthians 12 to learn about spiritual gifts we skip over verses 1-3. But the first three verses of this chapter are pivotal for understanding this section. Basically Paul's point in verses 1-3 is that the ultimate criterion for the work of the Spirit is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord.⁵ **Healthy corporate worship exalts Jesus as Lord.** The more corporate worship exalts Jesus as Lord the healthier that corporate worship is. Let me see if I can explain.
- Paul starts out this whole section making it clear that every single person who makes the saving confession *Jesus is Lord* is in fact led by the Spirit and qualifies as a spiritual person.⁶ He's reminding them to do away with their spiritual elitism that led them to say some were more spiritual than others. That's what they thought, right? Some were supersized spiritual giants because of the kind of gift they had. Paul says no.
- He's trying to level the playing field in this church that was full of spiritual prima donnas. For the Gentiles in the crowd, he reminds them of when they were pagan and followed dumb, mute idols. For the Jews in the crowd he reminds them how in the synagogue they were taught to anathematize, curse the name of Jesus. But, he says, as Christians, all of you, every single one of you, regardless of your background, once you've made the confession of *Jesus as Lord* then you are spiritual. Period. You have the Holy Spirit—he's come into your life and you are full of the Spirit.
- The Corinthians mistakenly believed that the really spiritual person was the person who engaged in inspired speech, prophecy and speaking in tongues. Paul in these verses is not dealing with the criteria for how to judge inspired speech. He's trying to explain to the Corinthians who really qualifies as spiritual. And his answer is that everyone, all who call on the name of Jesus, all who call him their Lord, and not just mouth the words but live it, and follow him, that's the truly spiritual person.⁷ *And no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* All Christians who make this confession, not just the tongue speaking few are 'spiritual.'⁸
- What does this mean for us? As a church, let's not slip into the trap of thinking that by doing certain things, by expressing ourselves in certain ways, or even by the presence of certain gifts our worship of God can become more spiritual. That's the Corinthian error all over again. What matters is that Jesus is exalted as Lord—in every way through every gift. The goal of our corporate worship is that those present come away with a clearer understanding of Jesus, what it means to follow him, how he changes lives, what he's done for us, what he wants to do for us—that's spiritual Spirit filled worship. That's the role of the Holy Spirit, right? John 16. He glorifies Christ. Truly spiritual worship honors Christ. **Healthy corporate worship exalts Jesus as Lord.**

Transition

For the sake of time we need to move on to the **second indicator** of healthy Spirit empowered worship. Look at **verses 4-11**. Listen. *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit*

⁵ Fee, p. 582.

⁶ Garland, p. 570.

⁷ Garland, p. 572.

⁸ Garland, p. 573.

is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. What is the second indicator? **Healthy corporate worship expresses the diversity of the Holy Spirit's work.**

- What I want you to see from these verses more than anything else is the diverse nature of the Holy Spirit's work. That diversity is meant to be a strength. Uniformity—at least when it comes to spiritual gifts in the body of Christ—is not a good thing. When the full breadth of spiritual gifts are active, when there is a diversity of gifts operating it is an indication of the presence of God the Holy Spirit in the church.⁹ It's a sign of vitality and health.
- Let's start backwards. God sovereignly distributes spiritual gifts as he sees fit. They are grace gifts. Results of his grace. Spiritual gifts are not a badge of spirituality but a mark of grace.¹⁰ *He gives them to each one, just as he determines. Verse 11.* And so whatever fruit might come from the use of those spiritual gifts, ultimately the credit belongs to God. But more than that, "verse 11 provides a crucial caution against the natural human tendency to want or expect everyone else to be gifted in the ways we are."¹¹ It's unrealistic to expect other people to be as passionate about your gift as you are. You see it all the time in churches. For example, a person with the gift of evangelism filters everything through that lens and expects everybody and everything to be about evangelism. Don't get upset that others don't see things your way. Instead, praise God that he sovereignly distributed different gifts and praise him for the different ways in which he's gifted people.
- Another thing we can take away. No person has all the gifts. In [verses 8-10](#) we read of nine different gifts. By the way, for those of you who are hoping for a detailed analysis of the different gifts especially prophecy and tongues—hang tight, we'll get there but not this week.
- The language of *to the one...to another* implies that no one person has all the gifts—and that includes the pastor. I don't have every spiritual gift nor am I even the most gifted person in this congregation. You know what? Fine by me. I'm more than okay with that. The health of a church should not be dependent on one individual. In fact churches that revolve around one personality are not healthy churches. It takes a body with a diversity of gifts in use for there to be corporate health. Guard against the temptation to think you're God's gift to the church. None of us, including me, are indispensable. A diversity of people with a diversity of gifts are needed.
- [Verse 7](#) highlights this diversity. *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* The stress in these verses is on the variety of gifts essential for health in a particular body of believers—for the common good, for ministry, serving others not indulgence. In the Corinthian church certain gifts were valued more than others so that the common good turned into corporate cancer. If there is to be common good—corporate health—there has to be a diversity of gifts.

⁹ Grudem, p. 639.

¹⁰ Garland, p. 576.

¹¹ Blomberg, p 251.

- The reason the diversity of gifts is because of the diverse nature of God himself. Look at [verses 4-6](#). *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.* Spirit. Lord. God. Father. Son. Spirit. Diversity in the godhead therefore a diversity of gifts.
- One of my concerns for us as a church right now is how to involve more people in the work of the ministry—especially all the newcomers we have. As I said earlier, “The purpose of [spiritual] gifts is to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns.”¹² We have no good mechanism in place right now that releases people to serve and use their gifts so that the entire body is strengthened. At this point, I’m pretty sure that the best way for this to happen is through some type of small group structure. Be praying about that, will you? The last thing we want is a Sunday only church full of “sit and soak” Christians who aren’t using their spiritual gifts for the common good. That’s not healthy.

Conclusion

- How do you know if something’s healthy?

¹² Grudem, p. 1018.