

Sermon Summary | Sunday 6th September 2026 | 1 Corinthians 12.1-11

What do we picture when someone is described as “spiritual”? Perhaps someone unusually prayerful, close to God, confident in faith, or obviously gifted. The Christians in Corinth were very interested in what looked spiritual. They valued dramatic gifts and striking experiences. But their ideas about spirituality were producing comparison, competition, pride, and disorder in the church. So Paul begins 1 Corinthians 12 by teaching them what the Spirit-filled life really looks like.

First, **Jesus is Lord**. Before Paul speaks about wisdom, knowledge, healing, miracles, prophecy, or tongues, he speaks about Jesus. Powerful experiences are not necessarily from God. Spiritual-sounding words are not automatically true. Impressive gifts are not necessarily being used rightly.

The decisive question is: what does this do with Jesus?

The Holy Spirit does not draw attention away from Jesus or make little of him. He brings us to confess, “Jesus is Lord.” That is more than saying the words. It means recognising who Jesus truly is and coming under his rule. Jesus is not merely an adviser, example, or helper in difficult times. He is Lord. He has the right to command, rule, and say what our lives are for.

Second, **God gives differently**. Paul says there are varieties of gifts, service, and activities, but the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God. Difference in the church is not a problem to overcome. It is part of God’s design. That challenges comparison. We may look at another Christian and think, “If only I could speak like them, lead like them, know as much as them, or serve as visibly as them.” But God has not failed because he has not made us identical to somebody else.

It also challenges pride. If the same Spirit gives the gifts, we cannot despise what he gives to someone else. And if they are gifts, we cannot boast about what he has given to us. The preacher, musician, organiser, welcomer, listener, encourager, practical servant, and quiet prayerful Christian all have nothing except what has been given by God.

Third, **gifts are for others**. Verse 7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” What God gives is not given merely for me. It is not given so that I can feel important, build an identity around being needed, or compare myself with other Christians. It is given for the good of others. So the right question is not only, “What has God given me?” It is, “Who is it for?” Who is encouraged, welcomed, comforted, strengthened, taught, served, or helped because of what God has entrusted to me?

This is not a call to anxious busyness. The church does not need everybody doing everything. Some are already carrying too much. Some are limited by health, age, grief, work, caring responsibilities, or a difficult season of life. And 1 Corinthians 13 will make clear that Christian activity without love is worth nothing. But neither can we say, “My time is mine. My abilities are mine. My experience is mine. My money is mine. My life is mine.” Not if Jesus is Lord. And not if what the Spirit gives is given for the common good.

The gospel is not that we serve in order to make ourselves valuable to Christ. Christ has already given himself for us. He used his power not to protect himself, but to save us. He went to the cross for proud, self-protective, competitive, passive sinners like us. He rose again. And he gives his Spirit not as wages for the impressive, but as grace to those who trust him.

The Christian life is not, “Jesus gave himself for me; now I must pay him back.” It is, “Jesus has given himself to me; therefore I no longer need to protect my life as though it were mine alone.” I belong to him. And because I belong to him, what he gives can be shared for good.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where am I tempted to want gifts, usefulness, or help from Jesus, while resisting his lordship over my life?
2. What has God given me — and who is presently benefiting from it?