

1 Corinthians 12:1-13

Submitted by:

Joseph Moreland, Aaron White, Garret Lathan, and Dick Woods

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Context of 1 Corinthians 12:

The context for 1 Corinthians 12 is that Paul addresses the Corinthian church which is divided. There are factions in the church (i.e. 1:12). Some people are jealous of others gifts. Paul writes to reconcile the warring factions in the church. The problem of overrealized eschatology was also in the church at Corinth. Carson says of this “Corinthian eschatology was probably reinforced by some brand of Hellenistic dualism that took a dim view of present bodily existence while vastly misunderstanding the nature of spiritual vitality.”¹

1 Corinthians 12:1-3: What it Means to be Spiritual

1Cor. 12:1 Περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν, ἀδελφοί, οὐ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν. 2 Οἴδατε ὅτι ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε πρὸς τὰ εἰδῶλα τὰ ἄφωνα ὡς ἂν ἤγεσθε ἀπαγόμενοι. 3 διὸ γνωρίζω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ λαλῶν λέγει· Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς, καὶ οὐδεὶς δύναται εἰπεῖν· Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

Translation:

1. But concerning spiritual people, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. 2. You know that when you were unbelievers you were carried away to speechless idols however you were led astray. 3. Therefore, I made known to you that no one who speaks by the spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed and no one is able to say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

πνευματικός is the most important word to understand which occurs in verses 1-3. BDAG gives three different meanings for πνευματικός: (1) pertaining to the inner life of a person, spiritual, (2) having to do with the divine spirit, caused by or filled with the divine spirit, corresponding with the divine spirit, (3) it pertains to evil spirits. Within these uses BDAG notes that πνευματικός may be used of impersonal things, spiritual things/matters (i.e. spiritual gifts), people who possess the Spirit (i.e. a prophet, spirit-filled person, or spiritual person), and finally in 1 Corinthians 2:15 ὁ πνευματικὸς is contrasted with ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος in verse 14. Within 1 Corinthians BDAG cites πνευματικός as referring to spiritual things/matter 5 times and as

¹ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1987) 17.

those who possess the spirit 2 times with two more verses which possibly may be taken this way which is 1 Cor. 2:13 and 12:1. The Friberg Lexicon points out that πνευματικός is sometimes used as an opposite to σαρκικός and σάρκινος. Louw-Nida gives as a use of πνευματικὸς as pertaining to being derived from the Spirit and then cites the Greek text for 1 Corinthians 12:1 translating it as ‘spiritual gifts.’ Within Hellenistic literature Liddell-Scott gives as meanings for πνευματικός: (1) caused by wind, (2) the nature of wind, (3) inflated, distended, (4) causing flatulence, (5) the breathing or exhaling of scents, (6) spirit/spiritual, and (7) a school of physicians who referred all questions in regard to health to pneumatic agencies.

D.A. Carson points out that Paul always uses πνευματικός (with the sole exception of 14:37) to have positive spiritual overtones.² He also mentions that some people have argued that πνευματικός should be restricted only to prophecy and tongues and that this is an effort to make prophecy at Corinth ecstatic; but Paul’s aim is to replace the ecstatic with the broader category of a gracious gift which results in service.³ Witherington points out that πνευματικά stresses the spiritual nature or source of a gift or ability, in other words, the unmerited character of these functions or activities are stressed.⁴ πνευματικά was the favorite term of the people of Corinth while Paul prefers χαρισμάτα to stress the unmerited nature of the gifts and to humble the Corinthians pride.⁵ In verse 12:1 for Paul the use of πνευματικός is a way of combating the pride which was in the Corinthian church.

The most exegetically significant question in verse 1 is whether τῶν πνευματικῶν should be taken as masculine or neuter. If it is masculine then τῶν πνευματικῶν would be translated “spiritual people” and if it is neuter τῶν πνευματικῶν would be translated “spiritual gifts.” Carson argues that πνευματικά is conceptually parallel to χαρισμάτα and should

² D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1987) 23.

³ Ibid. 23-24.

⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: MI, 1995) 255.

⁵ Ibid. 255.

therefore be taken as neuter, since χαρισμάτα never refers to people.⁶ Some scholars though argue that τῶν πνευματικῶν should be taken as both masculine and neuter. Thiselton explaining this view says, "...if both the writer and the reader knew well that the ending included both genders (i.e., excluded neither), why should the meaning be construed in either-or terms at all? Hence Scarge notes that the masculine may embrace the Corinthians meaning, while the neuter reflects Paul's preference to substitute χαρισμάτα."⁷ Garland takes the meaning of τῶν πνευματικῶν to be "spiritual people." He gives two reasons: (1) it better captures the flow of Paul's argument and the rhetorical setting and because the understanding of τῶν πνευματικῶν should not be imposed onto Paul's announcement of the discussion because when Paul quotes the Corinthians letter he will reinterpret it meaning, (2) the translation "spiritual people" matches the use of the word that Paul concludes with in 14:37, where he refers to the Corinthian outlook of those who regard themselves as spiritual.⁸ After given consideration to these views, the historical context of the passage, and the rhetorical flow we think that τῶν πνευματικῶν should be translated as "spiritual people." The reasons are: (1) "spiritual people" fits well with the issues addressed to the Corinthian church. Paul calls the Corinthians "infants", they are fleshly rather spiritual and they do not act like Christians should because they are envious of one another's gifts. Therefore, the Corinthians needed to know what a spiritual person looks like, (2) "spiritual people" fits the flow of what Paul is saying better and is a simpler solution to the problem of trying to identify the flow of the argument than "spiritual gifts", and (3) Paul's use of πνευματικός matches 14:37 if it is referring to "spiritual people."

Scholars tend to detect pagan ecstasy in verse 2. Witherington suggests that Paul here may be referring to pagan ecstatic speech. He says, "Paul may be referring to the idea that demonic powers were the source of inspired speech in pagan temples and indicating that this sort

⁶ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1987) 22.

⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000) 910.

⁸ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 2003) 564.

of ecstatic speech leads one to curse Jesus.⁹ Carson on the other hand wants to avoid the need to see pagan ecstasy in verse 2. Carson's solution is to suggest that we do not need to take verse 3 in light of verse 2. Instead, we may take verse 3 in light of both verses 1 and 2. What makes this plausible is that Paul normally introduces a new subject with a ὅτι but for that one must turn to verse 3 where Paul uses γνωρίζω.¹⁰ διό then connects verse 3 with verses 1-2.¹¹ Therefore, Paul is saying, (1) you do not know certain Christian truths, (2) you know that when you were pagans you were carried away from these truths, (3) therefore I am making know these truths to you.

In verse 3 the main issue is the significance of ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς. Witherington suggests that no one was probably saying, "Jesus is accursed" in the Christian assembly, but that one could imagine some one doing that in an ecstatic pagan setting.¹² On this view some of Paul's audience thought ecstatic speech was proof of inspiration by the Holy Spirit and the point of 3b is then to point out that no one can possibly confess "Jesus is Lord" without the prompting of the Holy Spirit in the heart.¹³ Carson discusses the issue by giving an overview of the different interpretations that have been offered as solutions to the phrase ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς. The different solutions have been to: envisage verse 3 in a Jewish background in the synagogue, detect docetic Gnosticism in the background, suggest Paul is referring to Christian ecstatics who resist Spirit-given trances, and then finally all other views depend on the presupposition that Paul is giving a criterion to his hearers to be able to distinguish between true and false 'spiritual gifts.'¹⁴ In this verse we should conclude with Carson that "Paul's concern is quite simply to establish an essentially Christological focus to the question of who is spiritual, who has the Holy Spirit."¹⁵ Paul merely wants to draw a distinction between those who have the spirit (i.e. Christians) and

⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: MI, 1995) 256.

¹⁰D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1987) 26.

¹¹ Ibid 26.

¹² Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: MI, 1995) 256.

¹³ Ibid. 256-257

¹⁴ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1987) 28-31.

¹⁵ Ibid. 31.

those who do not (i.e. unbelievers).¹⁶ Therefore, there is no need to detect pagan ecstasy as the background of verse 3.

As we study this passage we may see how the church today needs this letter as well. Many people in church claiming to be Christian do not know central Christian truths. Many people today say that they are Christians, but how are we to know if they really are? What does it mean to be a spiritual person today? It means that if we are truly spiritual and confess Christ as Lord then we have the Holy Spirit working in us. What is meant is the subject of verse 4-11.

Verses 4:-11: Unity in Diversity

4 Διαιρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσὶν, τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα·

5 καὶ διαιρέσεις διακονιῶν εἰσιν, καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος·

6 καὶ

διαιρέσεις ἐνεργημάτων εἰσιν, ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς θεός, ὁ ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν

.

7 ἐκάστῳ¹⁷ δὲ δίδοται ἢ φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος¹⁸ πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον.

8 ᾧ μὲν γὰρ διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος δίδοται λόγος σοφίας, ἄλλῳ δὲ λόγος γνώσεως

κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα, 9 ἑτέρῳ πίστις ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ πνεύματι¹⁹, ἄλλῳ δὲ

χαρίσματα

ἰαμάτων ἐν τῷ ἐνὶ πνεύματι, 10 ἄλλῳ δὲ ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων, ἄλλῳ δὲ

προφητεία, ἄλλῳ δὲ διάκρισις πνευμάτων, ἑτέρῳ γένη γλωσσῶν, ἄλλῳ δὲ ἔρ

¹⁶ Ibid. 31.

¹⁷ Syntactical Function: Dative as Direct Object: Note that the rest of the datives relating to the verb δίδοται are datives of direct object. Wallace notes that, "...dative direct objects are usually related to verbs implying personal relation." This would imply that God has a vested self interest in giving a manifestation of the Spirit to his people and that perhaps the Corinthians have not understood this. Perhaps they have seen much of their relationship with God as impersonal and perhaps, Paul, in using the dative here is highlighting the sort of callousness that characterizes their understanding of who God is.

¹⁸ Syntactical Function: Objective Genitive. We take manifestation of the Spirit to mean not something which the Spirit gives but rather the gifts are the manifestation of the Spirit himself. This would fit nicely with the Dative as direct object sequence in these verses. The Spirit is giving himself.

¹⁹ Syntactical Function: Dative of Means

μηνεία γλωσσῶ· 11 πάντα δὲ ταῦτα ἐνεργεῖ τὸ ἔν καὶ τὸ
αὐτὸ πνεῦμα, διαιροῦν²⁰ ἰδίᾳ ἐκάστῳ καθὼς βούλεται.

Translation:

4 Now, there are distributions of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are distributions of service, and the same Lord. 6 And there are distributions of working, but the same God, the one who works all things in everyone. 7 And so each one is given a public manifestation²¹ of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to the one through the Spirit is given a word of wisdom, but to another a word of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, but to another a gift of healing in the one Spirit, 10 and to another abilities of power, and to another prophecy, and to another a discerning of spirits, to one a class of tongues, and to another a translation of tongues. 11 One and the same Spirit works all these things, by distributing to each one just as he wills.

Now that Paul has established his topic, namely, who Spiritual people are and has described what they do (confess Jesus as Lord by the Spirit²²), he moves on to describing the way in which God has manifested his Spirit amongst them: in a great diversity of ways. His point is that there are a great many sorts of Spiritual people. Why? Because they all have been gifted by the same Spirit in different ways and for different functions.²³ Why must Paul emphasize this? What is going on here in this context that is forcing Paul to say these things? Witherington explains, “Paul is still having to sort out a multitude of basics for the Corinthian Christians, whom he has not seen in some time and some of whom appear to think he is never coming back

²⁰ Syntactical Function: Participle of Means

²¹ *via* Thiselton (“...φανέρωσις ... In 2 Cor. 4:2 it means *open* or *public proclamation*, and the cognate adverbial form φανέρως means, *publicly, openly*)

²² “Throughout this section Paul stresses the agency of the Spirit of God over against the agency of the individual human who does the speaking.” Ben Witherington *Conflict and Community at Corinth* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans 1995) pg. 257

²³ Hence the language throughout the passage of diversity of gifts and individuals: Διαίρέσεις, τὰ πάντα, πᾶσιν, ἐκάστῳ, ἄλλῳ; and the language of Unity: τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα, τὸ ἔν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα, ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος, ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς θεός

to them.”²⁴ Witherington goes on to make a list of some of the problems (“basics”) Paul is addressing with his letter and there are two worth mentioning to contextualize vv.4-6. “partisan attachments to particular Christian teachers such as Paul and Apollos and rivalries growing out of such attachments...hubris on the part of some who are using certain spiritual gifts in ways that do not build up the community.”²⁵ Groups of people have aligned themselves against one another in the community thus factionalizing the group that should be marked by deep fellowship. The community is not a coherent unit because individuals insist on their individuality, especially over and against others. This is aggravated further in the way some are using the spiritual gifts God has given the community, specifically in regards to the public display of spiritual gifts (emphasis on the word public.) Paul’s words throughout seem to intimate that they, “...saw themselves in a very individualistic light as sufficient to themselves, especially in spiritual matters. Paul is disputing such notions.”²⁶ This is the problem at Corinth, individuals asserting themselves as paramount over the call of the Gospel and what it would demand (as a message and a mandate) of them in their specific context. Witherington again, “In 1 Corinthians Paul’s primary task was to reconcile members of a faction-ridden congregation to each other.”²⁷ This contextualizes Paul’s words so that we begin to see that vv.4-6, the thematic introduction which sets up his discussion of the varieties of *manifestations* of the Spirit, has an explicit purpose:

The one God who is himself characterized by diversity within unity has decreed the same for his church. Very likely this emphatic theological framework is part of the corrective. Had their emphasis on spirituality, manifested by tongues, become an end in itself, so that they were focusing more on these things than on God himself? In any case, the opening paragraph (vv.1-3) put the work of the Spirit into a proper christological perspective; this section put it into a proper theological one. Everything, absolutely

²⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: MI, 1995) 74.

²⁵ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: MI, 1995) 74

²⁶ Ibid. 260-261

²⁷ Ibid. 46

everything – gifts, persons, church – owes its origin to the one God who works all things in all of his people. (v.6)²⁸

Paul's aim is to remind the Corinthians that the qualms and quibbles they have and the hubris that is so endemic to their fellowship is contra the Gospel message they had already received.

I would now like to take a closer look at vv. 4-6 and show how they fit together to put the ensuing gift list into its context and to speak a countercultural word of truth to the Corinthians in their fractured situation. These verses are broken down into three sections each beginning with the word “Διαίρέσεις” and a modifying word (spiritual gifts, services²⁹, effectual workings or workings). The emphasis is meant to show that although there are a variety of Spiritual activities they all come from the same God who, as it happens, himself is variegated, yet still one God. The language itself stresses this theme of diversity in unity. It arises in the contrast between the words “Διαίρέσεις” and the word which modifies and explain it and is then connected to a person of the Godhead modified by an αὐτὸς or αὐτό, used here intensively and thus glossed, same. The intensive of the pronoun and the different diversities displays well Paul's desire for the Corinthians to stop factionalizing and puffing themselves up. “It all comes from the same Lord, who has no problem with diversity.” He seems to be saying. Carson says, “verses 4-6 do not so much suggest that the Spirit *gives* gifts, the Lord *gives* forms of service, and God *gives* “workings,” as that diversity of distributions of these “gifts,” for want of a more generic term, goes hand in glove with one Spirit, one Lord, one God...”³⁰

In verse 7 Paul continues, “To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for mutual benefit,” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Garland argues against Fee, who would limit application of “each one”; Fee wouldn't include every single member. Garland argues that “bodily members” in this chapter supports the inclusive reading: it *does* mean every single member. Indeed, this letter is written against claims of privileged status. The Spirit works, albeit differently, in *each* member

²⁸ Gordon Fee *New International Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans 1987) p. 586

²⁹ Fee prefers “ministries” *First Epistle to the Corinthians* p.587 footnote 17.

³⁰ D. A. Carson *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books 1987) p.33

through at least one of the following gifts. Further, all gifts are subsumed under “manifestation of the Spirit,” which means that no hierarchy should flow from different manifestations of the Spirit. The passive “is given” underscores the Spirit’s role and our dependence on the Spirit; not a source in our own talents; not a personal accomplishment. Therefore, we have no grounds to boast or show off.

Similarly, “for mutual benefit” establishes the purpose for which the gifts are given *and* sets parameters on the proper application of those gifts: a use *other* than for the mutual benefit and common advantage is render illegitimate. If the purpose is common advantage, then all gifts are given for the whole body and are, legitimately, to be exercised for the well-being of the whole. Those gifts aren’t given to raise the status or prestige of individuals or to downgrade other individual members of the body.

There are two further things worth noting here in verse 7 and give us a little more exegetical payoff. First, what does the word φανέρωσις mean? BDAG lists two options: disclosure, announcement³¹. However, as noted by Thiselton, its cognate adverb φανέρως means, openly, publicly, clearly, distinctly.³² Couple this with the fact that the context says the gifts are given for, the common good (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον) and so he translates the word as public manifestation. But what sort of public manifestation is it? What does the phrase τοῦ πνεύματος mean? Commentators go back and forth on this issue. It is either seen as a plenary genitive, can mean either a manifestation of the Spirit himself or the Spirit giving a manifestation of some sort of power.³³ Being plenary but leaning towards being objective in nature.³⁴ Or simply being objective (Spirit himself)³⁵. This word is only used twice in the NT if this context is difficult we ought to turn to the next. While this doesn’t settle the issue, it is

³¹ BDAG 3rd. Ed. p.1048

³² *Ibid.* p.1047

³³ Hans Conzelmann p.208-209

³⁴ Gordon Fee

³⁵ D.A. Carson *Showing the Spirit* p.34

clearly objective in its other iteration in 2 Corinthians 4:2.³⁶ Carson also adds that, "...nowhere do these chapters explicitly make the Spirit the giver of the spiritual gifts."³⁷ All of this connects to the final words, "πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον" The gifts of the Spirit are given as a public manifestation of Gods redemptive work in the lives of the Corinthians. They aren't given the gifts to bolster their public approval rating or to seem powerful in the eyes of other, instead the gifts are a manifestation of the Spirit himself which comes to witness to the power of the Gospel.

This leads back to the word Διαίρεσις. Now that we know what the substance of the gift is it would be helpful to look back and think about what Paul meant by "distributions" of this "public manifestation". This word appears only three times in the entire NT and each of them is in this specific section of this chapter, 12:4-6. It is used 12 times in the OT. A quick glance of these passages shows the word used mostly in reference to different groups of people in genealogies or military lists. Simply from the context here of listing off various distinct manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the individuals at the Corinthian assembly it is easy to see that the word connotes something akin to a substantival noun for the adjective "distinct". However, because of its presence near the word ἡ φανέρωσις in v7 (which is describing the nature of the spiritual gifts as public manifestations of the Spirit in people's lives) and because of its cognate verb, διαίρω³⁸ which appears as an adverbial participle in v. 11, the word would seem to connote the primary use BDAG advises of, *allotment* (distribution). The benefits of such an interpretation are many. In the midst of Corinthian pride and syncretism which assumes that the Spiritual things are substances and ideas they master and can use (perhaps, they think, are meant to be used) to bolster their own social status and lifestyle and if we take the word in question to mean *allotment* it fits nicely into the general theme of the whole letter: Paul's corrective instruction, showing the powerful working of God through the Cross of Christ as

³⁶ τῆ φανερώσει τῆς ἀληθείας – by the open statement of the truth

³⁷ D.A. Carson *Showing the Spirit* p.34 While it could be argued from context that vv.4-6 connect to the verb δίδοται, which runs like water through the passage, debunks this, the theme of those passages is that God as an entity is working all of these things. Add this to the dative as direct object uses that run through the next section and the fact that the use of Spirit is articular earlier and I think that a very good case can be made that the manifestation is of the Spirit himself.

³⁸ Used to show who, and by what means, the gifts just listed have come to the Corinthians: by the one and the same Spirit. Paul is always reminding the Corinthian Gentile Christians of who they are in Christ

creating a countercultural set of values, in other words creating a new world order. Carson likes this idea and modifies it,

Because the cognate verb in verse 11 unambiguously bears the latter sense [that of distributions or allotments] probably the noun here should be taken in the same way: there are *distributions* of gifts. Of course, that implies variety; but it does more...we are reminded that God himself is the one who apportions grace; the diversity of gifts is grounded in his distribution of gifts.³⁹

Conzelmann shares this conviction stating that, “Διαιρέσεις can mean “assignment” or “distinction.”...here v. 11 tells in favor of the former rendering.⁴⁰ Fee however, says that the better translation would be the word *variety*. BDAG also lists this as an option. Fee’s reasoning is that, “...the context rules in favor of the latter [variety].”⁴¹ Fee in general wants to highlight the nature of the diversity of God’s work at Corinth in order to plant Paul’s words, and the way they portray the work of God, within the divisive controversy going amongst the believers there.

While it might not seem that much is at stake here (and indeed either option has many benefits⁴²), Paul’s language here is very rich. The meaning of a single word *variety/distribution* is a countercultural word to Corinthians ears, injecting the true meaning of the Gospel into the prideful, shaped-by-the-world-and-its-wisdom context of Corinth.

What they have received isn’t about them so much as it is a distribution of the Spirit of God among them. And it has also come in a number of diverse forms, which accords with the nature of God himself. It is not just spiritual gifts, but also services and workings that God has called the people to. This is surely something the Corinthians have neglected for the more powerful looking gifts. Perhaps this is why, as an end result, division and pride characterizes their community.

³⁹ D. A. Carson *Showing the Spirit*, p.32

⁴⁰ Hans Conzelmann *Hermeneia: 1 Corinthians a Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press 1975) p.207

⁴¹ Gordon Fee *New International Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans 1987) p. 586

⁴² Is Paul meaning to emphasize that it is God who gives these many gifts, which is option 1 of allotment or distribution? Or is he meaning to emphasize the great variety of gifts to a people who want to favor one over the other which is option 2? **Obviously the answer is both.**

The Spirit himself has come to the Corinthians and yet they haven't really grasped the fullness of what all of that means. In fact in many ways they have themselves ignored the message of the Gospel and yet have still received the Lord's favor. We know from our own lives that this is a running theme. God is at work and we only slightly know it; we only slightly get it. Obviously this is not optimum, otherwise why would Paul have spilt all of this ink? However, seeing this as apparent in the lives of the Corinthians should do two things. First, it ought to make the Church constantly rethink whether or not it truly understands what its purpose is. Do we really understand what God is doing in our midst and other horizons out around the globe? Do we trust ourselves so much that we lack any self awareness as to the Christ shaping purpose of God in our lives? What ways are we able in our cultural context to take the ways God has manifested himself publicly in us and use them to bolster our cultural capital and self image? Are there duties God has called us to by His Spirit that we neglect or are there those who by the Spirit fulfill these more menial and servile roles and yet are overlooked or rejected in our communities? Second, in a strange way this passage should be comforting to us. If God was at work in this redemptive way amidst these difficult, God-dishonoring (horrendous sounds too self righteous) circumstances then it can be our hope that he is at work in our difficult, horrendous, God-dishonoring circumstances. In other words, if there is hope for the Corinthians then there is hope for us. Will we listen?

Coming to verse 8 we need to understand these gifts. Garland sets forth an intriguing table, comparing Paul's list in 12:8-10 with other lists in 12:28 and 12:29-30.⁴³ His conclusion from comparison of the lists is that Paul wasn't attempting in 12:8-10 to create a complete catalogue; rather, Paul's emphasis in this particular passage appears to stress every day gifts. The lists overlap and complement each other, but this list, in particular, seems directed to the situation at Corinth. That appears to indicate Paul's intent to equally value both spectacular and ordinary gifts. Further, Garland thinks it may be significant that the mention of wisdom, knowledge, and tongues is unique to this letter, suggesting that Paul was addressing the particular problem of elitism in Corinth.

⁴³ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 2003) 580.

Garland also points out a pattern indicated by the use of *a;llw|* (another of the same kind) and *e`te,rw|* (another of a different kind):

A to one a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge

B1 to another faith

B2 to another gifts of healings

B3 to another powers to effect miracles

B4 to another prophecy

B5 to another discernment of spirits

A' to another tongues, to another interpretation of tongues (paraphrasing Garland, p 579).

There is almost certainly some significance to Paul bracketing this list with the gifts which seem to be most highly prized by the Corinthians although the commentators take different positions on that significance. For example, Hays thinks it significant that that the first and last are related to public proclamation. Another possibility is that Paul simply wanted to emphasize inclusiveness of the other gifts *between* those known to be highly prized by the Corinthians. Paul's grammatical pattern would emphasize inclusion of gifts not related to public address and, therefore, tongues and prophesy aren't the only gifts which the Corinthians should value. Some commentators suggested significance in the listing of tongues in the last place, such as an intent to diminish their importance. However, such a reading contradicts Paul's own stated thesis, that *all* gifts, alike are given for the building up of the body.

Other insights about the list would be that the "message of wisdom," implying a message from God by means of the Spirit and/or the Word to build up others appears deliberately distinct from the Greek "persuasive art of wisdom". That should be of particular importance to us as future pastors.

"Faith" is listed as a separate gift, which could imply that faith isn't given – at least not in equal measures – to everyone. It's possible that it refers to a special endowment of faith not

given to all, such as the “faith to move mountains” in 1 Corinthians 13. Another reading would be that it really is the fundamental gift of the Spirit to all Christians and, while given to all, the witness of simple faith should humble those given relatively more demonstrative gifts. Indeed, childlike faith was praised by none other than Christ, Himself. The former reading presupposes that each member receives only one gift, but the letter was written by Paul who prophesied, argued Scripture, healed, and cast out demons. Clearly, Paul wasn’t asserting the exclusive position.

“Gifts of healings” is the only item on the list specifically identified as charisma, perhaps to set it apart from the medical arts. Might it be said that charismatic healings became, in the late twentieth century (by Oral Roberts and other faith healers) what speaking in tongues had become in Corinthian? Indirectly, Paul dealt with that elitism, too: Paul, himself, healed on occasion, but never considered himself to be a healer. He appears to have valued other gifts of the Spirit more.

Fee calls “tongues,” “the problem child” placed at the end of the list. Paul communicates in this passage that tongues are one of the manifestations of the Spirit. We probably ought to be on guard against reading Paul’s comments on tongues, elsewhere into our reading of this passage. Paul’s communicative intent, in this text, is about unity, not the grading of any one gift beneath others. If anything, the yoking of “tongues” with “interpretation of tongues” on this list would be a consistent theme for Paul. He considers interpretation of tongues to necessarily accompany the former.

Verses 12-13: The Body as a Metaphor of Unity in Diversity

Καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἓν ἐστὶν καὶ μέλη² πολλὰ ἔχει, πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος⁴⁴ πολλὰ ὄντα ἓν ἐστὶν σῶμα, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός· 13 καὶ γὰρ ἓν ἐνὶ

⁴⁴ *partative genitive*

πνεύματι⁴⁵ ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα⁴⁶ ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες, εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἐν πνεύμα⁴⁷ ἐποτίσθημεν. (see footnotes for syntax labels and issues).

Translation:

12 For even as the body is one and has many members, but all members of the body being many are one body, even so is Christ: **13** For by one spirit we are all likewise baptized into one body, whether Jew or Greek, whether slave or free, and we are all made to drink of one spirit.

Paul moves on now to the issue of unity. Through the last two sections (12:1-3; 4-11) Paul has emphasized *first*, who is the ‘spiritual’ person and what does it mean to be spiritual? (vv1-3), and *second*, the diversity of the body (vv.4-11). His main mode of illustrating unity is through the analogy of the body (σῶμα). Gordon Fee says, “In order to press the point made in the previous paragraph, the need for diversity within unity, Paul adopts a common analogy from antiquity and applies it to the Corinthian situation.” Fee further warns the modern reader about this analogy by saying, “since this one (ie. metaphor of the body) is so well known in the church, one must be especially careful to read the text with Paul’s concerns in view.”⁴⁸ As we’ll see Paul’s aim is not as a concession that the body is one even though it has many members, “thus arguing for their unity despite their diversity”. But rather his point is quite the opposite. He

⁴⁵ *dative of means*: Wallace (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 374,435) discusses at length the possibility of the spirit as being a dative of agency, which is the popular view he says of many commentators. Rather Wallace says dative of agency is actually very rare and will only be found in the case of a connection with a perfect passive verb. One semi-clear exception made to this is 1 Cor. 6:2, but even this is debated by Robertson-Plummer (*First Corinthians* [ICC], 112) who suggest it to be sphere/locality: “in your court” as opposed to “the world is to be judged by you”. Further Wallace denies that this use of means rather than agency takes away from the personality of the HS. The HS is Christ’s instrument in which he baptizes even though He is a person.

⁴⁶ *Double Acc. Person-thing/ specifically Acc. Of Retained Object-Passive with an Acc. Object*: In both cases of “ἐν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν” and “ἐν πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν” there is a rare *accusative of retained object* construction (or if focused on the verb it is called a *Passive with an Acc. Object*). This is a double-accusative/person-thing construction, where in the person becomes the subject of the passive verb and the thing is retained. If the verb had remained active in this section it would have read “he made all to drink of one spirit.” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 197,438,9)

⁴⁷ *Double Acc. Person-thing/ specifically Acc. Of Retained Object-Passive with an Acc. Object*.

⁴⁸ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 600-601.

wants to demonstrate that it is because of the Church's inherent diversity that it is ultimately unified as one.⁴⁹

Fee maps out Paul's argument by laying out an ABB'A' argument structure through his diagram below. The structure he lays out shows Paul's argument is redundant, but is a use of rhetoric to enforce his main thesis of unity because of diversity:

For just as	the body is <i>one</i>	A
yet	has <i>many</i> members	B
and	all the members, though <i>many</i>	B'
	are <i>one</i> body	A'
so also is	Christ.	

Through this we can see Paul's initial move towards his unity in diversity argument. AB are moving towards diversity whereas A'B' are exemplifying unity.⁵⁰

Paul's argument for unity in this section of 1 Corinthians is part of a larger periscope. This section is a member of many different discourse units through important commentaries and translations. The ESV translation places verses 12 and 13 in a larger section of vv.12-31 and focuses on the theme of unity in diversity within the body. Thus, this translation separates vv.12 and 13 from vv.1-11. The NIV and David Garland share this same perspective. Gordon Fee reduces the periscope to just vv.12-14 with the same focus on unity and diversity.⁵¹ Finally Anthony Thiselton takes the chapter as one discourse unit – less verse 31 which he labels as a separate transitional verse. This unit he labels 'The Image of the Body of Christ and Its Dual Rhetorical Function' (essentially agreeing with the NIV and Garland).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 601.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Fee divides the rest of the chapter into 2 sections: 15-26 focusing on the application of the body metaphor and 27-31 focus on the conclusion of the fact of diversity.

Fee is right in his periscope. This present section (vv.12-13) has significant connection with the previous section of the chapter (vv.1-11) but ties best with verses 12-26 in Paul's discussion of the necessity unity when there is diversity and his further fleshing out of the body (σῶμα) metaphor (pardon the pun). Agreeing with Fee, vv. 27-31a are especially bookends paired with vv.4-11, to his body (σῶμα) metaphor.

This section of verses 12-13 begins with γὰρ. Paul is using this word to reach back to the last discourse unit of 1-11. He is looking to affirm that diversity and 'true spirituality' and further his argument with the metaphor of the body (σῶμα). He will emphasize its oneness (εἷς) in the Spirit.

In verses 12 and 13 it is clear that εἷς is an important word of choice for Paul. Paul wants to cultivate an understanding as a community of many parts as being one in Christ. His use of εἷς warrants a closer look of its broad semantic range and use of this word through the New Testament and other periphery literature, including the LXX and classical uses.

With five occurrences in just two verses εἷς appears to have a central place in Paul's argument for unity in Corinth. BDAG has four applicable definitions for the word: **1)** a single person/thing with a focus on quantitative aspect, *one* (a) in contrast to more than one; (b) in contrast to the parts that make up the whole; **2)** a single entity, with focus on uniformity or quality, *one* (a) one and the same; (b) single, only one; (c) alone; **3)** an unspecified entity, *some/one*; **4)** marker of something that is first, *the first*.⁵²

Louw and Nida place εἷς under both domains of 'Number' and 'Whole, Unite, Part, Divide'. Under the domain of 'Number' the definition is – one, in contrast to more than one. Under 'Whole, Unite, etc...' – that which is united as one in contrast with being divided or consisting of separate parts.⁵³

⁵² BDAG, s.v. "εἷς".

⁵³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: UBS, 1989), 605, 614.

Stauffer says εἷς is rarely used in the NT as a digit. The normal meanings are those expressed above in BDAG and Louw and Nida. “NT thinking is neither individual nor collective, but organic. God’s will is directed neither to the isolated soul nor the mass as such, but always to the conditioned and conditioning member of a unit – the house, the people, the race, creation...The individual is not solitary before God. He stands in the name of the many, united with them...”⁵⁴

When one looks into the Classical Greek context versus The Septuagint a divergence of word meaning and use is found. Classical Greek shows a flat-nearly exclusive definition of numeric meaning or ‘oneness’ in the sense of single, alone and uniformity.⁵⁵ While the Septuagint shows similar meanings to Classical forms it also adds the definition of emphasis on oneness as against more than one, such as *all*. Gen. 2:24, “the two shall become one (εἷς) flesh”; or “two or three cities will come together (εἷς πολιν μίαν) as one city” (Zc. 14:9).⁵⁶

Paul’s use of εἷς in the context of 1 Corinthians 12:12,13 is two. In verse twelve he wants to emphasize the first definition in BDAG (definition 1b) showing the *quantity* of ‘one’ over and against the parts. In verse thirteen Paul’s sole emphasis is not on quantity but *quality*, finally exemplifying our ‘oneness’ in the Spirit and in the body of Christ.

The New Testament, and in an important way, Paul, by taking symbols of marriage for example and joining them to importantly the Body of Christ as the Church invented a whole new use of ‘one’ in the early church.⁵⁷ The ‘oneness’ found here in chapter 12 has an important role in a fractured community like Corinth where Paul is ultimately teaching the unique unity in

⁵⁴ Ethelbert Stauffer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 2:434-435.

⁵⁵ Liddell and Scott, s.v. “εἷς”.

⁵⁶ Muraoka, s.v. “εἷς”.

⁵⁷ Note: Fee and the NIV use ‘unit in place of ‘one’ for the Greek word εἷς. With a quick look at BDAG 3rd Ed. this definition is not apparent. This could probably be seen as a type of paraphrase or dynamic equivalence. In my view this could be a helpful translation for the effect of showing unity (=unit), or it could be risky when we lose the possible ‘oneness’ a reader could see in ‘one’ literally. It is a tough choice.

diversity found only in Christ. As David Garland says, when Paul is here speaking of one and pointing to Christ he “recalls his first question in the letter, ‘Is Christ divided?’...He pictures the church not as a body of Christians but as the body of Christ. There is unity in plurality, but not uniformity.”⁵⁸

As Garland and Fee have pointed out, thus far Paul’s use of ‘one’ to point towards unity in diversity has been in close connection with the idea of the body. The word *σῶμα*, as Fee says, has been used differently in Christian contexts than here in 1 Corinthians. Many commentators including Fee and D.A. Carson agree that the issue of what the body is meant here can be a rabbit trail that takes away from the main point of unity. The use of this analogy in Paul is due to, as stated above, its commonality in the ancient world and the fact that the Corinthians would have been familiar with its use. The uses of *σῶμα* are most notably found in Menenius Agrippa in Livy, Plato, Quintilian Curtius Rufus.⁵⁹ Fee points to Marcus Aurelius as the closest use to what Paul has here.⁶⁰

‘Christ’ in this context in verse 12 is used as a synonym for the *ekklēsia* because Paul wants us to see that we were baptized into His body. Fee says that the clear evidence for this can be found in v.27: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it,” and v.28 “And in the church God has appointed first of all the apostles...”⁶¹

The Greek word *ἐν* in this case can show an agency/means usage or a sphere usage. The NIV, NASB, RSV as major Bible translations use the agency/means mode; while the ESV uses the mode of sphere. Major commentators such as Conzelmann, and Garland agree with the ESV; many others, as noted (see translation note 1) lean towards the agency/means side (ie. Thiselton, Fee). Wallace points out that most of these uses found in commentaries (and so possibly in

⁵⁸ David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 590.

⁵⁹ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*. This use found here though is a political use showing the kingdom as the body, the ruler as the head, and the provinces as the members. This is not the use of the body Paul is using here, though it can be found to be used in this way in Paul elsewhere (cf. Eph. 1:22,23; 5:22-33; Col. 1:18).

⁶⁰ “All that you behold, that which comprises both god and man, is one—we are parts of one great body.” Aurelius is concerned that the parts are mutually independent.

⁶¹ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 603.

translations also) are not a dative of means but of agency - in the view of persevering the personhood of the Holy Spirit. But Wallace says that this use of means rather than agency does not take away from the personality of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is Christ's instrument in which he baptizes even though He (the Spirit) is a person (see note 1 for more on the syntax). Since I feel that the use of source does not answer the question of how the Spirit is used or the Spirit's role in integrate diverse members into one body, the dative of means makes the most sense. Paul here uses of dative of means to show the Holy Spirit's mode of operation as used by Christ, that by the Sprits means we are integrated into the body of Christ.

Paul ends out this section pointing out that even though we are one but many in gifts this also applies to every other part of our lives; our race, and life situation. Paul uses 'all' (πάντες) and 'one' (εἷς) many times to 'constitute a direct onslaught against categorization or elitism within the church'⁶², hence giving us the real implications of the discussion above on 'ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι'.

Garland says it best, "The purpose of this experience of the Spirit is to form the Corinthians into one body. The 'εἷς ἐν σῶμα' represents the goal. Baptism washes away the ethnic and sociological barricades that previously separated and alienated them." Because, it was not only the gifts that were the main issue which separated them, it was also 'social stratification' and possibly racial prejudice'.⁶³ Paul says "we are all made to drink of one spirit" ('πάντες ἐν πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν'). By using this passive, as Fee points out, Paul is referring their common experience of conversion...the receiving of the Spirit'⁶⁴ The passive use of 'to drink' is to show the Spirit's activity and the Corinthian believer (and body or believers) passivity in this action. Whatever the specifics of Paul's analogy, the point is that the Spirit saturates the church body and that all Christians are imbued with the same Spirit."⁶⁵ So,

⁶² Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 998.

⁶³ David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 592.

⁶⁴ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 605.

⁶⁵ David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 591.

ultimately it is because Christ used the Spirit as a means to integrate the stratified body of Corinth together into His *one* body (or unit: Fee; NIV); thus making unity in diversity with the many gifts, ethnicities, cultures, and socio-economic statuses that made up the church.

Our present day society might be more similar than it is different as compared to the audience Paul is writing to in this letter. We can certainly come to the text with two wrong attitudes if we are not careful. One could be an attitude of what Tim Keller calls ‘chronological arrogance’; where we see ourselves as different – as in better- than those before us. We may think we are more cultured, more intellectual; we see the world in fuller ways and are not pinned down to silly religions and myths that drive our lives; or we could think, ‘those silly Corinthians, when will they learn their lesson’. These are extremes, but we can have degrees of these thoughts when we approach the text. Also, second, we can take the text in what has been called a ‘literal’ reading and forget the context socio-economically and biblically; thus maybe demanding our wives to wear head pieces for instance without knowing the broader context.

Having this in mind, if we come to the text with a full view of the Corinthian, and broader Greco-Roman culture, and an understanding of scripture broadly, we can learn a lot. In this section specifically we see unity; but only unity because there is diversity. Today there are black churches, white churches, ethnic, ‘missional’, suburb, inner city churches, churches for the artsy types, business oriented churches, etc. The church certainly should contextualize, but I see Paul saying that this looks like we are telling the arms to go to the church on that corner, and the eye to take a left on that street and go to that church, etc. We are dividing the body.

It is true that it would be hard (very hard!) work to get all these types of people to work as one. Is it was possible to do this? But after all our human reasoning we must realize that “we are all made to drink of one spirit”. It is ultimately Christ using His Spirit that will unify a diverse church; we *are* after all passive. Maybe ultimately it does not mean we are all worshipping under one roof, but it certainly seems to mean that we work together in meaningful ways and stop seeing the large amounts of segregation we have seen now and in the past.