

First Corinthians

June 29, 2025
Chapter 12

The Matters of the Spiritual Part 4

“Manifest Grace of the Holy Spirit”
Chapter 12:10e - 21

13. The Holy Spirit’s Interpretation (12:10e)

Finally, Paul concludes with the manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s interpretation. Verse 10e.
10e and to another the interpretation of tongues.

You might think that this manifestation of the Holy Spirit aligns with my earlier story about our church mail clerk, but there is a difference, as we will see. The “*interpretation of tongues*” refers to the ability to understand what is spoken in a different language so the congregation can grasp the message. Without interpretation, a testimony delivered during a church service in a public setting could create confusion; however, with interpretation, it becomes clear and edifies the church.

Let’s start with an example of the “*interpretation of tongues*” where the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is absent. Then, we will provide an example of how the manifestation of the Holy Spirit with tongues is applied.

Here is a contemporary application of Paul’s scenario regarding the need for the “*interpretation of tongues*” (or languages), which Paul will also discuss in Chapter 14:6-18 later in this letter.

Imagine you speak German and one day decide to attend a Korean church. You are an outgoing German evangelist eager to share what the LORD has done for you, but you don’t speak Korean. According to Paul, you may only address the Korean congregation if someone is available to translate into Korean, allowing them to understand your testimony. This way, the sound of your voice in your language will be clear and comprehensible. Additionally, limit the speakers to no more than two during the same service, as illustrated by this German example. If there are two speakers, an interpreter must translate both testimonies into Korean. The term “*barbarian*” refers to someone who speaks a different language. Therefore, if a German attends the Korean church to share his testimony, he should pray that someone who understands German is present to translate it into Korean. If no one is available to translate and you proceed with your testimony anyway, you will not have offered a gift through your testimony. You will have failed to communicate your message effectively to the audience. You can pray in the language you feel most comfortable with, but when you preach (or prophesy) your testimony, ensure it is conveyed in the listeners’ language. Moreover, it is far better to bless others with five words they understand than with 10,000 they do not. This illustrates how people can use their native dual languages to uplift the Church saints when someone speaking a foreign language arrives and wishes to share his glorious testimony about the LORD’s work in his life.

Here is an example of how the Holy Spirit manifests in the lives of saints through the “*interpretation of languages*.” Learning a language quickly, like my friend, is one thing; however, learning to write a new language using its alphabet—complete with the various nuances of word meanings—and translating the Bible into these unfamiliar languages is quite another. The Greek word for “*interpretation*” is *hermēneia*, which means conveying the *gist* of a message rather than providing a strict *translation*, focusing on *equivalent meanings* rather than a “word-for-word”

rendering. This indicates that the “*interpretation of languages*” is not meant to be a direct correlation, such as “this word in English is this word in another language.” Instead, it seeks to convey that “this word in English represents this concept in a different language.” The Wycliffe Bible Translators exemplify how saints can operate within this manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

This manifestation of the Holy Spirit remains vibrant in the lives of the saints whom the Holy Spirit has chosen to employ.

14. The Holy Spirit’s Unity (12:11)

¹¹ *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*

“*One and the same Spirit works all these things.*” Paul emphasizes that despite the variety of spiritual manifestations, they all originate from one and the same Spirit—the Holy Spirit. This same Holy Spirit operates within all believers, providing different manifestations while consistently working toward the same goal: the edification of the Church and the glory of God.

The Holy Spirit will use every member of the Church at some point to reveal Himself to both the lost and the saved.

“*Just as He wills.*” The Holy Spirit decides whom He uses and when. Therefore, His spiritual manifestations are not granted based on a saint’s personal desires. Instead, they are bestowed according to the divine wisdom of the Holy Spirit. He knows what is best and distributes manifestations to achieve God’s purposes. *However*, we must also remember that His manifestations are not permanent. The Holy Spirit does not use the same saint in every circumstance to bring glory to God. He provides the manifestation as needed for a specific purpose and time to honor God.

G. The Baptism Matters

Paul turns to address the significance of baptism.

1. The Body as an Analogy (12:12)

¹² *For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

“*For just as the body is one and yet has many members.*” Paul compares the Church to the human body. Just as the human body consists of various parts (hands, feet, eyes, etc.), it operates as a single unit; similarly, the Church is composed of many diverse individuals while remaining a unified body.

“*All the members of the body, though many, are one body.*” Paul emphasizes that despite the diversity of its members, they remain united as one body. This analogy illustrates how the Church, while differing in spiritual gifts and individual roles, functions together as a cohesive whole.

“*So is Christ as well.*” Paul likens Christ to the body of believers (the Church). This illustrates that the unity and diversity within the Church reflect the nature of Christ’s body, where all members belong to Him and are united in Him.

2. Baptism by the Holy Spirit (12:13)

¹³ *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

“*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.*” Paul explains that the Holy Spirit unites all believers into the body of Christ. The phrase “baptized into one body” denotes the spiritual baptism that occurs when a person becomes a believer. This is different from water baptism, as it

refers to the inward, spiritual reality in which the Holy Spirit places the believer into the body of Christ at the moment of salvation.

This spiritual baptism is a work of the Holy Spirit that unites believers with Christ and with one another. It applies to all believers, not just a select few. Through this baptism, all Christians become members of the same body, regardless of their backgrounds.

“Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free,” Paul emphasizes the inclusivity of the body of Christ. In the first-century world, stark divisions existed between Jews and non-Jews (Greeks) and between slaves and free citizens. Paul underscores that these divisions hold no relevance within the Church, as the Holy Spirit unites all believers. The same Spirit baptizes everyone into one body, dissolving social, ethnic, and cultural barriers.

In Christ, earthly distinctions such as race, ethnicity, and social status no longer act as dividing factors. Everyone is equally part of Christ’s body, and no group holds superiority or inferiority over another.

“And we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” This phrase emphasizes the believers’ ongoing experience of the Holy Spirit’s presence and work in their lives. *“Drinking of one Spirit”* suggests that the Holy Spirit continually nourishes and sustains believers. It alludes to the close and continuous relationship between the believer and the Holy Spirit, who empowers and supports the body of Christ.

Paul’s reference to Jews, Greeks, slaves, and free individuals serves as a powerful reminder that in Christ, all believers are equal. There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. This equality transcends cultural, ethnic, and social distinctions. Unity in the Spirit fosters a community where everyone is valued equally, and no one is marginalized based on worldly divisions. Since all believers are part of the same body, Christians should strive to maintain unity and avoid divisions within the Church.

3. Many Members in One Body (12:14)

“For the body is not one member, but many.”

“For the body is not one member.” In the context of the Church, this phrase signifies that no single saint defines the Church. *“But many.”* Just as multiple parts make up a human body, the Church has *“many members”* as well.

a) Examples of the Different Members of the Human Body (12:15)

(1) The Foot and the Hand (12:15)

Paul acknowledges the importance of providing examples of different members of the human body, starting with the foot and hand. Verse 15.

“If the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body.’”

Although the foot may seem less important than the hand due to its visibility, and despite feelings of inferiority, it remains an essential part of the body.

This highlights individuals in the Church who may feel less significant than others. Paul emphasizes that even if someone feels unimportant, they remain an essential part of the Church as saints. Just because one part of the body is less prominent than another does not diminish its importance.

(2) The Ear and the Eye (12:16)

Paul now mentions the ear and the eye in verse 16.

¹⁶ *And if the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.*

“If the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body.’” Next, Paul envisions the ear feeling less significant than the eye. Although the eye may appear more important due to its ability to see, the ear is equally essential for hearing. Both serve distinct roles that are crucial for the body to function properly.

Paul illustrates the absurdity of one part of the body dismissing its value simply because it differs from another. Similarly, within the Church, no saint should feel inferior due to the differences in their roles.

(3) The Whole Body as an Eye (12:17)

Recognizing his need to elaborate, Paul discusses the absurdity of the entire body being an eye. Verse 17.

¹⁷ *If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?*

If the entire body were an eye, it would lose its ability to hear, smell, and perform other functions. In other words, the body cannot operate effectively if all its parts are identical.

(4) God’s Sovereign Design (12:18)

Ah, but the Almighty has played a role in everything, as we observe in God’s sovereign design. Verse 18.

¹⁸ *But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.*

“God has placed.” Paul emphasizes that the Church exists by God’s design. “God has placed” each saint in the Church with a specific role and function, just as He intended. This suggests that each saint’s position is both purposeful and divinely appointed.

(5) The Importance of Diversity (12:19-20)

Being purposely and divinely appointed, Paul emphasizes the importance of diversity. Verse 19.

¹⁹ *If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body.*

“If they were all one member, where would the body be?” Paul emphasizes that if all the members were identical, there would be no body at all. “But now there are many members, yet one body.” The body, by its nature, consists of various distinct parts, each contributing something unique and essential. A body made up of only one type of part would not function properly.

(6) The Eye and the Hand (12:21)

Paul now addresses the absurdity of one part of the body dismissing another in verse 12.

²¹ *And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’*

“And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’” How absurd is it for one part of the body to dismiss the importance of another? The eye cannot claim independence from the hand, nor can the head assert independence from the feet. Paul emphasizes the significance of mutual dependency among the saints of the Church. No saint can function independently; every saint relies on the others.