

body language

What does it mean to be truly “spiritual”? Opinions have varied through the ages. In the “monastic” era, true holy men locked themselves away from any human contact, or sat at the top of tall wooden poles. Maybe there’s a special “spiritual” tone of voice - or maybe it’s a matter of learning the right vocabulary. Perhaps there’s a certain expression that spiritual people put on their faces? Or a detachment from the concerns of normal living? Back in Corinth, there were some people in the church who thought they were more spiritual than the others. And that caused problems. Paul has raised the issue already, back in chapter 3, where he said this...

*¹Brothers, I could not address you as **spirituals** but as worldly--mere infants in Christ...You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?*

There may be some in Corinth who consider themselves especially “spiritual” - but the way the Apostle Paul measures it, they’re not really spiritual at all!

YOUR COMMENTS:

What do YOU think marks out a “spiritual person”?

Are there people who have somehow made you feel “spiritually inferior”?

FOR CAREFUL READERS

There’s a complication right at the start of chapter 12. In the original Greek, Paul’s words are simply, “Now, brothers, about **“the spirituals.”** He doesn’t actually include the word “gifts”, which some English translations add. More likely, he’s talking about the same “*spirituals*” we met in chapter 3... the people in Corinth who are claiming to be in a “special category” as Christians.

Now... about the “spirituals”...

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, replacing “spiritual gifts” in verse 1 with the more literal “*the spirituals*.”

1. In verses 1-3 Paul gives a very simple test of “true Spirituality.” What is it?

2. How did you go? Do you pass the test? Do you “speak by the Spirit of God?”

The problem is, in Corinth there are people who are saying some gifts are “more spiritual” than others. They’re specially fascinated by the gift they call “tongues”... which they say is “the language of angels.” (13:1). For them it’s the ultimate way of “speaking by the Spirit of God”! Keep this in mind as you read the next few chapters. Paul sees things a little differently!

3. According to verses 4 to 6, what does Paul set out as the *same* for all of us? What is *different*?

THE SAME:

DIFFERENT:

Take a wild guess... from the “Different” list, what are the gifts he’s talking about meant to be used for?



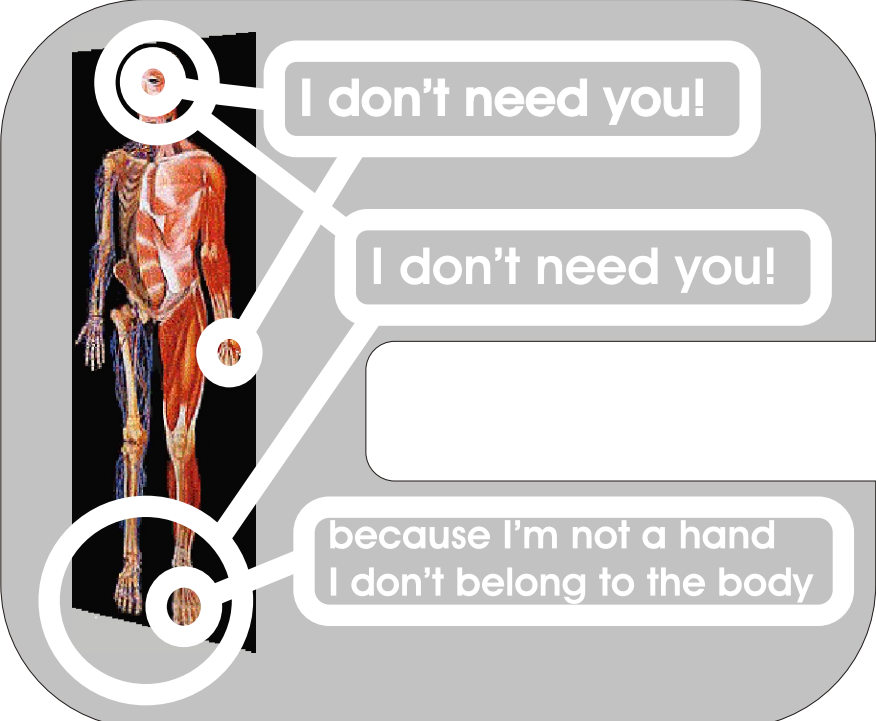
4. In verse 7, the purpose of spiritual gifts is clearly stated. *Who* are they for?

5. How can this simple statement serve as a guide for the use of your own “spiritual gifts”?

Some gifts seem glamorous and impressive - like healing, and performing miracles. Paul did these things regularly. (Read the Book of Acts if you want to see some examples!) Other gifts - like simple “faith” or “knowledge” or “wisdom” - are not quite so startling. Paul lists a number of gifts in verses 8 to 10, and others in verses 28 to 30.

6. Whatever the gift, where does it come from?

7. Why, according to verse 11, would this then make using your gifts as a “spiritual status symbol” seem ridiculous?



The diagram shows a human figure with three callout boxes connected by lines to specific parts of the body. The top callout box, connected to the head, says "I don't need you!". The middle callout box, connected to the chest, also says "I don't need you!". The bottom callout box, connected to the feet, says "because I'm not a hand I don't belong to the body".

Read verses 12 to 31. Paul's analogy between “the church” and a human body is brilliantly clear. Write what you think is the MAIN POINT in the space below...

8. What does the “body” analogy say to anyone who...

- a) feels inferior because of the gifts and abilities they have
- b) feels superior because of the gifts and abilities they have

9. What should our attitude be to each other (see verses 25-26)?

10. Is there such a thing as a Christian with no part to play in the church? Explain.

It's hard to get beyond the idea that “more spiritual” people will have more spectacular gifts... but Paul says, whatever your gift, however modest or impressive, is something the Spirit has given for the good of the body. So use it that way! Spend personal time in prayer and reflection this week, asking God for humility, courage and insight in the way you use the abilities he has given you to build up his church. Be generous in the way you use your time and abilities... not to “big note” yourself, but to serve. And put aside the idea that some people are “spiritual super-heroes” and you're not! If Jesus is your Lord, God's Spirit is at work!