

Youth Teaching Resources

January 16, 2022



Season after Christmas

Psalm 147:1-20—"A Good Beginning"

In Christ We Have ...

Season of Epiphany

Acts 8:4-17 (RCL 8:14-17)—"Amazing Grace"

1 Corinthians 12:1-11—"Amazing Gifts"

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a—"Amazing Oneness"

1 Corinthians 13:1-13—"Amazing Love"

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“Amazing Gifts”

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Robert Tackett-Evans

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Gathering

Begin your time together by reflecting on the previous week’s challenge. Give students a chance to share any insights they had this past week or actions they took because of the challenge.

Opening Exercise

Today we are going to have a very brief talent show. Take time to go around the room, inviting each student to share a sample of some special talent/ability they possess. (*Students may sing a verse of a song, rub their head while patting their stomach at the same time, etc.*). After each person has had an opportunity to share, consider asking questions like the following:

- What stood out to you as we went around the room?
- How did you feel as you watched what others were able to do? Specifically, how did you feel if they did something you were not able to do yourself?
- Why might it be a good thing that everyone does not have the same talent?

Listening to the Scripture

As you approach the scripture, begin by reading 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 aloud. Invite students to share any initial thoughts, questions, or insights they have about the text by asking a question like the following:

- What details stand out to you in this reading? (*Students are invited to name details they find confusing, interesting, troubling etc.*) Why does this stand out to you?

As you continue the discussion on the biblical text, it will be helpful to highlight that the issue of spiritual gifts had caused division and conflict in the church in Corinth. In our scripture today, Paul is addressing this conflict.

- Can you hear hints of a conflict behind Paul’s words? If so, what are some of the clues within the text that make you aware of a possible conflict?
- Why do you think people having certain “spiritual gifts,” or “abilities” might have been a source of conflict among people?
- Have you ever felt jealous of a “gift” or “ability” someone else had that you didn’t possess? What was that “gift?” Did that person know how you felt? Did they rub it in?
- Do you have a “gift(s)” other people don’t have? Do you rub it in the faces of those who don’t possess that same “gift?”

Listening to the Scripture *continued*

- How do you think those in Corinth who did not have seemingly obvious “giftedness” felt?

*Paul addresses this conflict by describing the source and purpose of these special “gifts” from God.

- Paul says, “there are varieties of gifts...” (See v.4) What is the source of these spiritual gifts according to Paul? Why do you think that matters?
- According to Paul, what is the purpose of these varieties of spiritual gifts? (See. v.7)

*Spend some time reflecting on the various gifts that Paul names in this passage. See Tony’s commentary for help in defining the gifts Paul names.

- Have you ever thought much about what spiritual gifts you might have?
- Do any of the gifts Paul has named sound like something that may describe you? If so, which one(s)?

If the students would like to continue with this study, consider consulting Tony’s section titled *Digging Deeper*. You might consider asking questions like the following:

- In verses 4–6 Paul uses words like “gifts,” “activities/workings,” and “services” to describe the various manifestations he names. In doing so, what do you think Paul is truly placing the emphasis upon? The possessor of the gift, or the source from which the gift flows?
- Why do you think that is important?

If the group feels up for a challenge, consider discussing what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*.

- Who would ever want to say, “Let Jesus be accursed?”

Application

This week, challenge students to take some time to complete a spiritual gifts assessment. Below is link to a downloadable assessment that is geared specifically toward youth.

<https://www.fumcr.com/June 8 - Youth Spiritual GiftsTest.pdf>

You will want to have printed copies of this assessment made prior to your Sunday school session. Distribute the assessments to students, challenging them to complete the survey before next Sunday. Instruct students to tally their scores and come prepared to share what they have learned.

*Note: there are online versions of spiritual gifts assessments. Your group may choose to use an online version.

Close with prayer.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Corinthian lessons—This week’s lesson begins a series of six lessons from Paul’s Corinthian correspondence. A text from Psalm 138 will interrupt halfway through, because 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (the epistle for February 6) also typically shows up as an Easter text in the lectionary cycle—and we used it for our Easter lesson last April.

The church in Corinth—It may be helpful to remember some highlights (and lowlights) in Paul’s ongoing relationship with the church in Corinth.

Paul first visited the important city of Corinth and founded the church during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18, c. 50-51 C.E.). The letter we know as 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus during Paul’s third journey, but it presupposes an earlier letter dealing with immorality in the church (1 Cor. 5:9). Some scholars think a fragment of this earlier letter has been preserved as 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1, which deals with immorality and doesn’t really fit into its present context.

After sending the first letter, Paul heard from a group in the church he identifies as “Chloe’s people” (1:11) and also seems to have received a letter from Corinth (7:1). He responded with the letter we call 1 Corinthians, apparently dealing with the issues raised by Chloe’s people in chapters 1-6, and by the letter he had received in chapters 7-16 (cf. 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1).

The Corinthians responded to Paul’s letter with some hostility, requiring him to make a “painful visit” from Ephesus to the church (2 Cor. 2:1). After returning to Ephesus, he wrote a strongly worded letter and sent it by Titus (2 Cor. 2:3-9; 7:12). Parts of this “severe letter” may be preserved in 2 Cor. 10-13, which is harsher than the conciliatory tone of the surrounding text.

Paul was still burdened for the Corinthians when he left Ephesus. He hoped to meet Titus in Troas and learn how the letter was received, but he did not find Titus there, and restlessly moved on to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12). There he met Titus, who reported that the Corinthians had accepted the letter with grace and had been reconciled to Paul (2 Cor. 7:5-16). Paul then wrote 2 Corinthians to express his joy and to encourage the church at Corinth to raise a worthy offering for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 9). He later wintered in Greece, probably at Corinth (Acts 20:1-3) before proceeding to Jerusalem with the offering.

Gifts, or people?—The word *pneumatikōn* can be either neuter or masculine, and appears alone (there’s no word for “gifts” in the verse), so it could possibly be translated as “spiritual persons” as well as “spiritual things/gifts.” Since the context relates to expressions commonly associated with the concept of spiritual gifts, however, translators generally choose that option.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Spiritual words—While Paul introduced chapters 12-14 by raising the topic of “spiritual things” (*pneumatikōn*), his vocabulary leans to the use of other words, as Scott Nash points out in the *1 Corinthians* volume of the Smyth & Helwys Commentary series:

Rather than refer to manifestations of the Spirit as *pneumatika*, he calls them “services” (*diakonia*), “workings” (*energēmata*), and especially “gifts” (*charismata*). Whereas referring to such manifestations as “spiritual things” may place the emphasis on the possessor of those manifestations, his preference for “gifts” places the emphasis properly on the Spirit as the source. (*1 Corinthians*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary Series [Smyth & Helwys, 2009], p. 355)

In today’s world, those who emphasize spiritual gifts (especially on “speaking in tongues”) are commonly called “Charismatics” (from the Greek word for “grace gift”) or “Pentecostals” (from the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost). The fastest growing Christian movements in the world are mainly in the southern hemisphere, and they are largely charismatic in character. For this reason, if nothing else, we should give attention to Paul’s comments on the subject.

Tongues among the pagans—Tongues-speaking was a feature of some ancient cults or mystery religions, though it was more common among priests than worshipers. At the famed oracle at Delphi, a specially chosen priestess called “the Pythia” responded to questions by going into a trance and uttering unintelligible words, with attendants on hand to “interpret,” generally in cryptic fashion. The ancients believed that the message had been given by the god Apollo, but it is thought that methane or some other gas leaking from the earth into the Pythia’s closed chamber could have caused her trance and resulting hallucinations.

A Trinitarian reference?—Some readers believe Paul’s comments in vv. 4-7 may reflect an early Trinitarian understanding. To the *Spirit* Paul attributes varieties of gifts, while he says the *Lord* (Jesus) assigns the diverse “services” requiring these gifts (or “ministries”—the word is *diakonia*), and *God* distributes the power to perform them (“activates” is from the Greek *energēmata*: one could translate it as “energize”).

We should be careful not to read the Council of Nicea back into 1 Corinthians, however. Paul can talk about one God in different terms, and about the various ways that God works among us, but his point is that the one God gifts and calls all believers to one purpose. There is no “one” gift above all others or prerequisite to others: all believers are gifted, and all are to use their gifts for the good of the whole.

A gift, or not?—It may be significant that, while Paul speaks of tongues as being activated by the Spirit, he does not use the terminology of “gifts” when talking about them. Scott Nash has noted: “Not to be overlooked as well is the fact that Paul never directly refers to tongues or their interpretation as a *charisma* (‘gift’), which is ironic in light of what has come to be emphasized among ‘charismatic’ Christians” (Nash, p. 360).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Who would ever want to say “Let Jesus be accursed”?

Paul’s statement that no one speaking by the Spirit of God could ever say “Let Jesus be cursed” is difficult to translate, in part because the phrase has no verb: *anathema Iēsous* literally means “accursed Jesus,” so translators typically add a verb of being “accursed be Jesus,” or “let Jesus be accursed.” It’s not unusual to see a Greek phrase in which the verb of being is understood.

Bruce Winter has argued that Paul’s reference might have been to the possibility of someone pronouncing a curse on someone, and doing it in the name of Jesus. If so, Paul could have been saying that anyone inspired by the Spirit could not pronounce a “Jesus curse” on anyone (*After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* [Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2001], 164–83; cited by Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary Series [Smyth & Helwys, 2009], p. 358).

Many ancient peoples held to a strong belief in the power of the spoken word, imagining that the very speaking of a blessing or a curse might set the process in motion, especially when endorsed by a god. In Greek and Roman culture, curses could be inscribed on pottery, engraved on tombs, or written in other ways. Four lead tablets found in the ruins of the temple of Demeter and Kore in ancient Corinth were inscribed with curses invoking pagan gods, as were four other lead tablets from the nearby “Cave of the Lamps.”

Christians may have occasionally pronounced formal curses, as well. Although the text is incomplete, a lamp found in the same cave was inscribed “I invoke you by the great God Sabbaoth, by Michael, by Gabriel, in order that you . . .” (Richard M. Rothaus, *Corinth: the First City of Greece, An Urban History of Late Antique Cult and Religion* [Leiden: Brill, 2000], p.130; also cited by Nash, p. 358).

The remainder of such curses generally called for someone to either do something or avoid something, to be cursed if they did not comply.

Winter’s proposal is intriguing, but if Paul had been referring to a “Jesus curse,” he could have said it much more clearly. It’s more likely that he was saying that if someone felt compelled or pressured to say “Jesus is cursed,” even under persecution, a Spirit-empowered person would not do so.