

# ***“Spiritual Things”***

Robert M. Thompson, Pastor

**Corinth Reformed Church**  
150 Sixteenth Avenue NW  
Hickory, North Carolina 28601  
828.328.6196 [corinthtoday.org](http://corinthtoday.org)

*(© 2019 by Robert M. Thompson. Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures quoted are from The Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright 2011 by New York International Bible Society.)*

## **Confirmation Sunday 2019**

**1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

**June 9, 2019**

(Corinth sermons are available in audio and print forms at [corinthtoday.org/sermons](http://corinthtoday.org/sermons).)

### ***Invisible Sunday***

Today on the church calendar is Invisible Sunday. Today is a party to celebrate who and what you can't see. Do you realize that most of what happens in your world is invisible to you? Gravity, emotions, and dark matter. How clouds and rain happen, how your mind works with your body to kick a soccer ball or control an X-box, how radio waves connect you through the Internet or a smart phone or television.

A simple example is the church organ. You might notice that about a dozen large pipes disappeared, but behind them were about 2500 smaller pipes that were invisible to you. Now they've all gone away for a few months so we can refurbish and expand our organ – most of which will still be invisible to you when it returns.

If you are being confirmed this morning, you'd be amazed what Pastor Amy invested in you all year long, and especially in the last few days, to make today happen – including finalizing the Confirmation video during the last two days when I was supposed to find someone else to do it.

If you are being honored on Graduation Sunday, you'd be amazed to know how much time Linda Thompson and others invested in making sure the list of graduates was as accurate as possible, and that you had a gift picked out and wrapped just for you.

So much happens all day every day that is invisible to you, yet critical to your life. Today we remember that just because we can't see something, it doesn't mean it's not

real. We call today “Pentecost Sunday,” because we remember a day when the most important invisible reality became observable. I’m talking about the Holy Spirit.

We’ve been studying 1 Corinthians lately. We come today to chapter 12, which begins something like this in verse 1 in most translations: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I don’t want you to be ignorant.” I think a better translation is, “Now concerning spiritual things....” Spiritual things are usually invisible.

The church at Corinth had sent some questions to Paul. One must have sounded something like this: “Paul, some people in our group seem to think they’re more spiritual than the rest of us. They like being up front and in charge. They do miracles. They speak in other languages without studying them. Paul, tell us about spiritual things. How do you know who’s really spiritual?”

Paul’s answer in a sentence sounds like this: “You can’t understand ‘spiritual things’ without understanding the invisible God, whom we know as the Holy Spirit.” That’s why this passage is appropriate for Pentecost Sunday. We’re going to continue our studies in 1 Corinthians, but we’re going to focus on the third article of the Apostles’ Creed which begins, “I believe in the Holy Spirit....”

### ***Jesus is Lord (2-3)***

In Paul’s day, as in ours, there were lots of ideas on how to be “spiritual.” Today you’ll hear people say, “I’m a very spiritual person,” and they may not mean anything like what you mean. There’s a plus and minus, of course. What they mean is that they, too, believe in an invisible world – and world where what you can see and hear doesn’t explain everything. The unseen spiritual world is real, but not all of it will point you to God. Some of the unseen world will take you away from him.

Paul starts this section, “You know that when you were pagans, somehow you were influenced and led astray by mute idols” (2). Think about how absurd it is to worship a rock or piece of wood or even the sun or moon. Precisely because we like things we can see or touch, we’re often tempted to replace the invisible god with something more tangible. And the confusing part is that sometimes we think in doing so we’re connecting to the invisible world – we’re being “spiritual.”

So how do we know that what we’re connecting to is from God? Paul gives a rather simple test in verse 3: “Therefore, I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” We don’t really know if some people inside the Corinthian church were saying, “Jesus be cursed.” My guess is probably not – that this was “shock effect” for Paul.

What he’s really doing is emphasizing this: The most spiritual thing you can do is say that Jesus is Lord. In charge of everything, everywhere.

It means Jesus isn't in charge of heaven but the President is in charge of the country and the principal is in charge of the school and the pastor is in charge of the church. It means that Jesus is Lord, period. Lord of all.

It also means you don't have a "church life" and "the rest of life." He's Lord over every part of life. You can't "make Jesus Lord." He is Lord of all. You will go through various seasons of your life living that out. Your response doesn't make him Lord. But if you ever say anything other than that he is Lord, it doesn't come from the Holy Spirit.

The invisible Holy Spirit focuses attention on Jesus. Several years ago a pastor named Francis Chan wrote a book titled "The Forgotten God," speaking of the Holy Spirit. I really like the book; I don't like the title. It implies that the Holy Spirit is somehow disappointed we forgot about him. He's perfectly happy to be forgotten if you remember Jesus. The Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son.

### ***Holy Spirit (4-6)***

Now that Paul has made it clear that "spiritual things" are really about Jesus' Lordship, he mentions all three persons of the Trinity. You may know that the word "trinity" is not in the Bible. For the first couple of hundred years of Christian history, Christians struggled with the words to describe what seems like the indescribable. It's parallel to what scientists have been struggling with over the last few decades as they discovered the invisible world of dark matter and dark energy, which together make up about 95% of the universe. It's a new concept, and scientists are still working on how to understand and describe it.

1 Corinthians is one of several places in the New Testament where the authors say something about God that doesn't fit what people thought they already knew. It would take several centuries before they would call this new understanding "Trinity."

Notice the words "different" and "same."

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.*

Paul is getting ready to say that we are all different yet one. He starts out by saying God is different with himself, but he's the same. There's a Spirit, there is the Lord (Jesus), and there is God (Father) – all different, all the same. So what's he saying?

Remember that he started this section trying to help us grasp "spiritual things." He's making the point that you can't understand true spiritual things without the Holy Spirit.

Personally, I think we spend too much time trying to understand and explain the Trinity. It's like trying to explain quantum physics to a toddler, trying to explain how an iPhone works to Pastor Bob.

Here's a simple way to understand the Trinity. There's only one God, and there's a sense in which you can't separate out their roles. Whatever the Father does, the Son and Spirit do. Whatever the Son does, the Father and Spirit do. Whatever the Spirit does, the Father and Son do. Don't forget that – there's only one indivisible God. Still, it helps us to grasp not only God's unity but the difference within the Trinity.

There's only one God. God the Father created and made everything you see. When you have a hard time believing there's a God, look around you – gaze at stars, hold babies, smell flowers, listen to rain, taste ice cream. What you see is like one of those highway signs: Slow down: God working.

There's only one God. God the Father created everything. God the Son became one of us – lived the perfect life we couldn't live and died the death we deserved. He understands everything about what it means to be us. When you think God can't possibly get your struggles and pains, and therefore doesn't care, you remember Jesus. He is God made visible. We can hear him, touch him, see him, and ultimately we watch him dying on a cross because he loves us that much.

There's only one God. God the Father created everything. God the Son became one of us. God the Holy Spirit is in the invisible God. Without the Holy Spirit you might think you can figure God out. You can study the world and know what he's going to do. You can learn about Jesus and think you have him figured out. The Holy Spirit is going to be like Wind, like Fire, like Dark Energy, like an iPhone processor. You don't need to understand him. You just need to let him live out God's power in you.

The invisible Holy Spirit is the same as the Father who created everything and the Son who made God visible to us. But different too.

### ***Assignments***

Back to "spiritual things." What does all this have to do with the problems the Corinthians were experiencing, with some people insisting they were better than others – more "spiritual"? Everything.

The Holy Spirit also gives us visible evidence that he's real and working. We call them "spiritual gifts," but the term is misleading. Hardly anything in our world today is truly a gift. We usually give gifts as rewards. Many of you will receive gifts for graduation or Confirmation. That's not really a gift. That's a recognition of your faithfulness, of your hard work. Many of you graduates have those gold cords or some other recognition that you have given extra effort or just wouldn't give up. Your

Christmas or birthday presents are often exchanges – you give to someone else on their birthday or at Christmas. That’s not the way Paul is using the word.

What Paul means is that just because he wants to, this invisible Holy Spirit distributes special abilities to different ones who confess Jesus as Lord. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different but the same, the Body of Christ is all different but one body. The Holy Spirit assigns various roles and equips people to do them.

What you do well is a spiritual thing. Where you have been is a spiritual thing. The pain you’ve experienced is a spiritual thing.

It’s not always fair. When Paul says that the Holy Spirit gave assignments, he’s contradicting what our culture often says to young people: “You can do anything you want to do.” It’s not true and can be discouraging. Not everyone can grow up to make a million dollars or become President or play in the NFL.

The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts (11). You can be anything God calls you to be. One piece of good news is that he gives these gifts to “each one” (7). You haven’t been left out, and you won’t be.

The other good news is that God will take all the experiences ahead of you – some that you “choose” and some that are handed to you, both good and bad, and he will weave them into a story that allows him to develop and use those gifts he gives you. He will give you an assignment that enables him to use your gifts – not for yourself but for what Paul calls “the common good” (7).

Some of those gifts are very public and dramatic – those Paul names here as miraculous powers, prophecy, and speaking in tongues (10). Some are usually quieter, like wisdom, knowledge, and faith (8-9). If I could wish for a stronger gift that wasn’t given to me, it would probably be faith – the kind of faith that prays big, dreams big, and alters the course of history for a generation.

Paul’s focus in answer to the Corinthians’ question – his first answer in a series of answer about “spiritual things” is that the gifts of the Spirit are about the Invisible God working in often invisible ways that accomplish his purposes in the church and the world. That’s why we need Pentecost Sunday, aka Invisible Sunday, to help us all remember Who’s really in charge of the church.

### ***Why church***

At some point in your life you’re going to wonder, “Why church?” It’s going to seem like wasted time in a world where more and more will compete for your time. Why is this more important than spending another hour at work, or on your boat, or at the gym, or somewhere else where the visible and immediate rewards seem greater?

One answer is that what we do here is remind you that the longer, deeper meaning of life comes in what you can't see or touch. Digital marketers say most Americans will see or hear about 3-10,000 advertisements a day. Maybe you think that's high. For the sake of argument, let's take the lower number. That's still 21,000 times a week that someone is communicating to you that your life will have more meaning if you buy or do something very tangible.

What gives life significance is not more degrees or hobbies or money or achievement. Those things fade quickly. It's the intangible that gives life purpose – love, joy, peace, goodness. These are directly connected to your grasp of the Gospel – that God created you, loves you, knows you, and forgives you through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When you come to church, we unapologetically and incessantly remind you of Jesus, the God who came into our world to make God visible. We remind you of the Father, the God who created a world you can see all around you every day.

But we also remind you of the Holy Spirit who gives you gifts to serve him in this world and also works in you the fruit that truly makes life all your spirit craves. In Galatians 5 Paul says the gifts of love, joy, peace, and goodness are the fruit of the Spirit. This Invisible God is the One we honor today. Amen.