



SUNDAY SCHOOL JANUARY 19, 2025

Prayer:

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NEW TESTAMENT

1 Corinthians 12:1-7, 11

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

(Paul speaking in a letter to the Corinthians.)

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were gentiles, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.

Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

OVERVIEW

This passage focuses on the diversity of spiritual gifts within the Christian community and their unified purpose. Paul addresses the Corinthians' questions about spiritual gifts, emphasizing that they all originate from the same Spirit, are intended for the common good, and highlight the unity of the body of Christ. The passage introduces the theological foundation for spiritual gifts, describing their diversity and the Spirit's sovereignty in distributing them.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians addresses issues within a divided and diverse church in Corinth. Chapters 12-14 focus on spiritual gifts, their role in worship, and their proper use in building up the church. In 12:1-7, Paul begins by clarifying that spiritual gifts should be understood as a manifestation of the Spirit for the benefit of all. Verse 11 emphasizes that the Spirit distributes these gifts according to His will.

This passage serves as a precursor to Paul's metaphor of the body of Christ “the Church” (12:12-31), where he stresses unity amidst diversity. It is situated within a larger discussion on love (chapter 13) and orderly worship (chapter 14), underscoring that spiritual gifts must be exercised in love and for communal edification.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city with diverse cultural and religious influences. Many Corinthians were converted from pagan backgrounds where spiritual experiences and ecstatic expressions were associated with idolatry. This context led to confusion about the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts within the Christian church.

Paul's teaching aimed to correct misunderstandings about the hierarchy of gifts and to promote a Christ-centered perspective. In Greco-Roman culture, public displays of rhetorical or mystical ability were often celebrated as markers of status. Paul contrasts this by teaching that spiritual gifts are not for personal glory but for serving others.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Paul likely wrote 1 Corinthians around AD 53–55 during his stay in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. The Corinthian church was founded by Paul a few years earlier, around AD 50–51, during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). This letter addresses various issues that arose after Paul's departure, reflecting the challenges of establishing a Christian community in a diverse and often morally permissive urban setting.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL & MODERN-DAY INTERPRETATION

Scholars often view this passage as a model for understanding diversity within the Christian community. The metaphor of spiritual gifts can extend to natural talents, individual callings, and vocational roles in the modern church. The "common good" highlights the need for unity in purpose despite differences in background, skill, or status.

In a modern context, this passage challenges churches to embrace diversity while working toward common goals. It also serves as a corrective to individualism, reminding believers that gifts and talents are entrusted to them for the benefit of others. For example, a contemporary application might involve bridging generational or cultural gaps within a congregation to foster collaboration and mutual respect.

SUMMARY

Paul begins by clarifying that spiritual gifts are diverse but all originate from the same Spirit (v. 1-7). These gifts are manifestations of the Spirit given for the common good, ensuring that the focus remains on serving the community rather than elevating individuals. In verse 11, Paul underscores the Spirit's sovereign role in distributing gifts, emphasizing that they are not earned or self-generated but are divinely appointed.

The central message is that unity and diversity coexist in the body of Christ, with every member contributing uniquely to its growth and health. This passage calls the church to celebrate differences while maintaining a shared mission, fostering a spirit of cooperation and love.



NEW TESTAMENT (GOSPEL)

John 2:1-11

THE WEDDING AT CANA

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water."

And they filled them up to the brim.

He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet."

So, they took it. When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

OVERVIEW

John 2:1-11 narrates the story of Jesus performing His first public miracle: turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. When the wine runs out, Jesus' mother, Mary, informs Him, and He initially responds hesitantly, saying, "My hour has not yet come." Despite this, He instructs the servants to fill six stone water jars with water, which He miraculously transforms into wine. This act reveals His divine authority and power, and His disciples believe in Him.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Placement in the Gospel:**

- This passage is unique to the Gospel of John and serves as the first of seven "signs" that John uses to reveal Jesus' divine identity.

See separate document on "The Seven Signs."

- It follows the calling of the disciples in John 1 and precedes Jesus' cleansing of the temple in John 2:13-22.

- **Themes:**

- The abundance and joy of God's kingdom.
- The relationship between Jesus and Mary, emphasizing His divine mission.
- A glimpse into the nature of Jesus' ministry: transformative, gracious, and generous.



- **Symbolism:**
 - The stone water jars, used for Jewish purification, symbolize the old covenant.
 - The wine signifies the new covenant, overflowing with grace and joy.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Jewish Wedding Customs:** Weddings in first-century Jewish culture were major communal celebrations that could last several days. Running out of wine would be a social embarrassment for the host, indicating a failure to provide hospitality ... a serious cultural breach.
- **Significance of Wine:** Wine was a staple in Jewish culture, symbolizing joy, blessing, and celebration. The quality and abundance of wine were often associated with God's blessings (e.g., Psalm 104:15, Amos 9:13-14).
- **Stone Water Jars:** Used for ritual purification in accordance with Jewish law, their presence highlights the importance of ritual cleanliness in Jewish life.

See Addendums on "A Miracle to Believe", "Water Into Wine" and "The Use of the Word 'Drunk'"

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Setting:** The event likely occurred around the early 30s CE, near the start of Jesus' public ministry.
- **Location:** Cana was a small village in Galilee, not far from Nazareth. Its exact location is debated, but it was a humble, rural area.
- **Cultural Context:** The story reflects the transition from the Old Covenant (represented by Jewish purification rites) to the New Covenant (Jesus' ministry and the outpouring of grace).

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL & MODERN-DAY INTERPRETATION

- **Metaphorical Interpretation:**
 - The transformation of water into wine symbolizes the transformative power of Jesus. Just as He turns ordinary water into extraordinary wine, He transforms lives with His grace.
 - The abundance of wine points to the overflowing blessings of the Kingdom of God.
 - The jars, representative of the old covenant and rituals, are repurposed to bring about the new covenant, showing Jesus as the fulfillment of the law.
- **Modern-Day Context:**
 - This passage serves as a reminder that God works in unexpected ways and often transforms the ordinary into something extraordinary.
 - It highlights the importance of faith, as demonstrated by Mary's trust in Jesus and the servants' obedience.
 - For contemporary believers, the story emphasizes that Christ's presence brings joy and abundance, even in seemingly mundane or challenging situations.

SUMMARY

John 2:1-11 describes Jesus' first miracle at a wedding in Cana, where He transforms water into wine. The act demonstrates His divine authority and previews the joy and abundance of the



Kingdom of God. The miracle signifies the shift from the old covenant, represented by Jewish purification rituals, to the new covenant, represented by the superior wine of Christ's grace. This passage invites modern readers to trust in Jesus' transformative power and recognize His ability to bring divine abundance into everyday life.



ADDENDUM

A Miracle to Believe

Was there an underlying need for Jesus to perform a miracle in order for the disciples to "believe"?

This touches on an important theme in John 2:1-11. While the passage doesn't explicitly say that Jesus performed the miracle solely to help His disciples believe, there are strong indications that this was one of the outcomes, if not part of the purpose.

Evidence of the Disciples' Belief in the Passage

John 2:11 explicitly states: *"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."* This suggests that the miracle served as a revelation of Jesus' divine nature, prompting their faith to deepen.

The disciples had already started following Jesus (John 1), likely drawn by John the Baptist's testimony and their initial interactions with Jesus. However, their understanding of who He was would still have been developing. This miracle may have confirmed what they were beginning to suspect: that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Was There an Underlying Need?

1. **Strengthening Early Faith:** The disciples were in the early stages of their journey with Jesus. A visible manifestation of His power could help solidify their commitment and understanding of His divine mission. Faith often grows in response to experiences that reveal God's character, especially during the early stages of belief.
2. **Demonstrating His Glory:** The Gospel of John frequently emphasizes the theme of Jesus "manifesting His glory" (e.g., John 1:14, John 17:1). This first miracle was a means of introducing His divine identity in a way that could be comprehended by His followers.
3. **Foreshadowing Greater Belief:** Jesus often performed signs that pointed to a deeper spiritual reality, such as the coming of the Kingdom of God and His role as its inaugurator. This first miracle wasn't just about meeting an immediate need at the wedding ... it was a sign meant to invite deeper faith and point to His mission.

Why Might the Miracle Have Been Necessary?

- **Human Nature:** People often need tangible experiences to strengthen abstract beliefs. The disciples likely had hopes about who Jesus was, but witnessing this act may have moved them from intellectual curiosity to heartfelt belief.
- **A Gradual Revelation:** Jesus didn't immediately reveal Himself fully; His miracles and teachings progressively unfolded His identity. The miracle at Cana was a gentle yet profound introduction to His divine power and mission.

Modern Reflection

This dynamic mirrors how faith often develops today. Initial belief can be sparked by teachings or testimonies, but deeper conviction often comes through personal encounters with God's transformative work—whether through answered prayers, life changes, or moments of grace.



In conclusion, while Jesus didn't need to perform the miracle in an absolute sense, it served a key purpose: revealing His glory, deepening the disciples' belief, and setting the stage for His ministry. It was an act of grace that met both the immediate need at the wedding and the deeper spiritual need of His followers.

Did Jesus Change His Mind?

The question of why Jesus acted after saying, "*My hour has not yet come*" (John 2:4), is a thought-provoking one. It invites us to consider not only the text but also the relational and theological dynamics at play.

1. Jesus Did Not Change His Mind, but Clarified His Mission

"My Hour Has Not Yet Come": The phrase "my hour" in John's Gospel often refers to the culmination of Jesus' mission—His suffering, death, resurrection, and glorification (e.g., John 7:30; 12:23; 13:1). When Jesus said this, He may have been indicating that the full revelation of His purpose was not yet at hand.

The miracle at Cana was not about "His hour" in the ultimate sense, but it did serve as a foreshadowing of His mission to transform lives and bring joy through grace. Therefore, Jesus' statement might not indicate reluctance, but a distinction between His present action and His ultimate purpose.

2. Jesus Responded to Relationship and Trust

Mary's request highlights her trust in Jesus' ability to act, even if she didn't fully understand how or why He might do so.

Jesus' response to Mary reflects His willingness to honor the faith and trust of those close to Him. He often responded to people's faith throughout His ministry (e.g., the Syrophenician woman in Matthew 15:28, the centurion in Luke 7:9).

This suggests that Jesus wasn't "changing His mind" but demonstrating that His mission is relational and responsive. His actions show the value of human relationships in the unfolding of God's purposes.

3. Jesus' Actions Align with His Mission of Grace

While Jesus initially seemed to resist, His ultimate decision to act aligns with His mission to reveal God's abundant grace. The miracle itself is an act of generosity and joy, reflecting the character of God's kingdom.

The abundance of wine symbolizes the new covenant of grace. Jesus' willingness to act despite His initial words may illustrate that God's grace often exceeds human expectations.

4. A Theological Perspective on Timing

God's Timing vs. Human Timing: Jesus' statement may indicate that He was waiting for the right moment, but the request from Mary, combined with the circumstances, revealed that the moment had arrived. God's plans often unfold in ways that seem unexpected but are fully aligned with His purposes.

Jesus' actions might teach us that God's timing is not rigid but dynamic, capable of responding to human need and faith.



5. Mary's Role as a Catalyst

Mary's interaction with Jesus highlights her unique role in His ministry. Her statement to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), demonstrates her faith and encourages action.

This moment can be seen as a collaboration between human initiative and divine action. Mary's faith acted as a catalyst for the miracle, showing that human participation often plays a role in God's work.

Modern Reflection

This episode reminds us that God is not aloof or detached but deeply engaged with human lives and needs.

It teaches that faith, trust, and relationships can create spaces where God's power is revealed.

It also underscores the tension between waiting for God's timing and stepping out in faith when circumstances seem to call for action.

Conclusion

Jesus' initial response, "My hour has not yet come," does not indicate a rigid refusal but rather frames the context of His mission. By performing the miracle, He showed that God's grace often breaks into human situations in unexpected and transformative ways. It reflects a God who listens, responds, and acts in ways that reveal His glory and invite deeper faith.

Water Into Wine

Jesus turning water into wine for the host to avoid social embarrassment, seems a little mundane or even counter to what I see his teachings.

In order to understand the apparent contrast between the grandeur of Jesus' mission and the seemingly mundane nature of turning water into wine to save a host from social embarrassment, we may need to explore its deeper meaning and how it aligns with Jesus' teachings.

1. Jesus' Concern for Everyday Life

While it may seem mundane, this miracle reveals that Jesus cares deeply about human concerns, even those that might seem trivial in the grand scheme of things.

Hospitality was highly valued in Jewish culture, and running out of wine at a wedding would have been a significant social failure for the host. Jesus' act ensured the joy and harmony of the celebration continued without disgrace.

Lesson: Jesus' involvement demonstrates that God is not only concerned with grand spiritual truths but also with the details of daily life. This aligns with His teaching that even the "hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30).

2. A Foreshadowing of His Mission

The miracle may seem mundane at first glance, but its symbolism points to larger themes in Jesus' teachings:

- **Wine as a symbol:** In Scripture, wine often symbolizes joy, abundance, and the blessings of God's kingdom (e.g., Psalm 104:15, Isaiah 25:6).



- **The new covenant:** The water jars, used for Jewish purification rites, represent the old covenant. By turning water into wine, Jesus is pointing to the new covenant of grace, joy, and abundance that He brings.
- **Transformation:** The act mirrors Jesus' overall mission—to transform not just substances but lives, bringing joy and fullness where there is lack or emptiness.

Lesson: This miracle is a tangible demonstration of the kingdom of God breaking into the world, transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary.

3. The Hidden Nature of the Miracle

This miracle wasn't performed in a flashy, public way. Only a few people—the servants, Mary, and the disciples—knew what had happened.

This aligns with Jesus' teachings about humility and avoiding self-aggrandizement (e.g., Matthew 6:1-4). It shows that His miracles weren't about spectacle but about revealing God's glory to those with eyes to see.

Lesson: Jesus' actions emphasize God's work in humble, often unseen ways, inviting faith rather than demanding it through grandeur.

4. Celebrating Community and Joy

A wedding is a celebration of community, love, and covenant—a fitting setting for Jesus' first sign. By turning water into wine, He ensured the celebration continued, reflecting the abundant joy of God's kingdom.

Far from being counter to His teachings, this act is consistent with His message that the kingdom of God is like a wedding feast (e.g., Matthew 22:1-14). It reminds us that God values joy, community, and relationships.

Lesson: This miracle illustrates that joy and celebration are integral to the life of faith, countering any notion of a dour or somber spirituality.

5. A Lesson in Trust and Obedience

Mary's faith and the servants' obedience are central to the story. Despite Jesus' initial reluctance, Mary trusted Him, and the servants followed His instructions without question.

This reflects Jesus' teachings that faith and trust are the keys to experiencing God's work (e.g., Mark 11:22-24).

Lesson: The miracle teaches that faith, even in the face of uncertainty, can open the door to divine provision and blessing.

Modern Reflection

While the miracle may seem mundane at first glance, its layers of meaning reveal profound theological truths:

- God's care extends to every aspect of human life.
- Transformation is at the heart of Jesus' mission.
- Joy and community are central to God's kingdom.
- Faith and obedience invite us into the experience of God's abundance.



Rather than being counter to Jesus' teachings, the miracle encapsulates them in a deeply symbolic and accessible way. It serves as a reminder that no concern is too small for God's attention and that His grace transforms every aspect of life, from the mundane to the monumental.

Use of the word "Drunk"

The use of the word "drunk" in interpretations of John 2:1-11, particularly in verse 10 (*"Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now"*), can lead to confusion about whether it refers to inebriation.

Understanding the Term "Drunk"

The Greek word used in this passage means "to drink freely" or "to become intoxicated." However, its interpretation depends on the context.

1. **Literal Meaning:** The word can imply inebriation, as in the condition of being drunk. However, in this context, it likely refers more broadly to people having drunk enough wine to dull their ability to discern subtle differences in quality. It doesn't necessarily mean everyone at the wedding was intoxicated, but rather that after guests have had their fill, their appreciation for wine quality diminishes.
2. **Cultural Context:** In first-century Jewish culture, wine was a common part of meals and celebrations, often diluted with water to reduce its potency (usually 3:1 or 10:1, water to wine). While drunkenness was culturally frowned upon, it was not uncommon for wine to be consumed in large quantities during weddings, which could last for days.
3. **The Focus on Quality:** The steward's comment isn't meant to emphasize drunkenness but to highlight the surprising quality of the wine Jesus provided. It contrasts with the common practice of serving lesser wine later in a feast. The point of the statement is to underscore the unexpected generosity and excellence of Jesus' miracle, not to condone or criticize drunkenness.

Theological Perspective

1. **Wine and Joy:** Wine in the Bible often symbolizes joy and blessing (e.g., Psalm 104:15). The abundance and quality of the wine Jesus provided reflect the overflowing grace and joy of God's kingdom.
2. **Drunkenness in Scripture:** While wine is often portrayed positively, drunkenness is consistently discouraged in the Bible (e.g., Proverbs 20:1, Ephesians 5:18). Jesus' actions here do not endorse excessive drinking but rather celebrate the joy and provision of God in a communal setting.
3. **The Miracle's Focus:** The purpose of the miracle is to reveal Jesus' glory and signify the new covenant, not to comment on or promote inebriation.

Modern Interpretation

For readers today, it's important to understand that the term "drunk" in this passage likely reflects a cultural reality about feasting rather than a theological endorsement of inebriation. The focus is on the miraculous provision and its symbolic significance, not on the behavior of the guests. This underscores the surprising abundance and excellence of what Jesus provides, pointing to the joy and fullness of life in Him, without encouraging overindulgence.