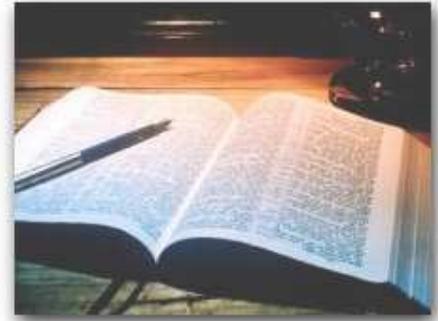


High Peaks Bible Fellowship

The Illustration of the Body of Christ 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Introduction

- In the first part of this chapter the apostle Paul had explained that even though there is a wide variety of spiritual gifts and ministries and effects, all of these come from the one Holy Spirit, are energized by Him, and are given only as He determines. The Corinthians were focusing on a few of the more spectacular or showy gifts, and they were looking down on believers who did not manifest what they considered to be the greater gifts. In the last section of this chapter, the apostle Paul is going to illustrate the importance of the unity of the members of the church by giving an analogy comparing a healthy church to a properly functioning human body.

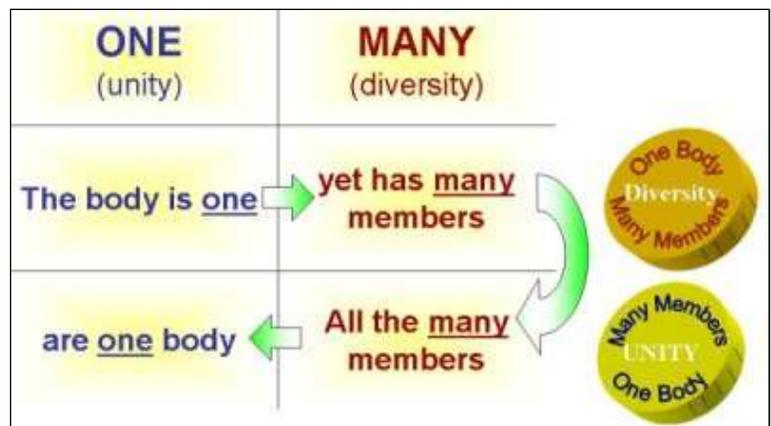


Where did the analogy of the body come from?

- The first place in this letter that we see a body referred to in this way was 1 Cor 10:16-17, where the apostle Paul was discussing the Lord's Supper. He said, "We who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). It seems that Paul had more to say about this idea of becoming part of the body of Christ, so in this chapter he proceeded to expand on this illustration.

The Unity & Diversity of the Body

- "Even as the body is one and yet has many members" = The apostle Paul had been explaining that the diverse manifestations in the Corinthian church were all the result of the working of the one Holy Spirit. Here he is saying that this is similar to the way a human body is a single organism but is composed of many different parts. Even in a single unified body, a diversity of members is required for it to function properly.
- "And all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body" = Here Paul states the same truth in the reverse. Even though there is a diversity of members, they all must work together for the proper functioning of the one body. These phrases give us a mini-summary of this entire section of chapter twelve -- they show the flow and movement of thought that Paul is going to follow in this concluding section of the chapter.



- "So also is Christ" = We would almost expect Paul to have said: "...so also is the church." After all, that is the organization that Paul wants to apply these truth to ultimately. But instead of identifying the church here, Paul actually opens up an additional set of truths that can also be applied. Individuals become part of the Church only because they first have been placed in Christ.

The Formation of the Body

- "For" = This provides additional explanation for how these diverse members came to be part of one body, the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), the Church (1 Cor 12:28).
- "By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (aorist passive) = This phrase describes the formation of the one body. Anyone who puts his trust in Jesus Christ becomes a full-fledged member of Christ's body at the moment he is saved. There are no partial Christians or partial members of His body. This miraculous event is accomplished by the one Holy Spirit through a special *baptizing* ministry that was been given to Him during the church age.
- "Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free" = Here Paul explained the meaning of the word *all* in the previous

phrase: All means every believer, and believers come from every nationality, every cultural background, every social class, and every economic status. The church as an organism consists of believers from a wide diversity or cross-section of society.

- "And we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (aorist passive) = The previous phrase explained the formation of the body, and now this phrase describes the life principle that fills the one body. Just as there are no partially saved Christians, there are no partially indwelt Christians. At the moment he believes, a person is baptized by the Spirit into full membership in the body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit also comes to live inside the believer.

The Problem of Inferiority

- "For the body is not one member, but many." (1 Cor 12:14)
This verse is a restatement of the first side of the coin presented in verse twelve, and it puts the emphasis in this section on the fact that diversity is needed within the body.
- In this part of the illustration, the foot and the ear are comparing themselves to the hand and the eye, and in their own estimation they view their own gifts as being of less value -- or being of no value at all -- in comparison to the gifts of the others. One member is looking down on or devaluing or denying his own gift. But notice that just because one member thinks this and expresses this thought, that does not make it true. It is not what we think that maintains our status as part of the body, it is the one-time action of God the Holy Spirit that makes us part of the body.
- The truth which was expressed in verse fourteen actually provides the *antidote* to inferiority -- diversity is *required* in order for the body to function properly. You may see yourself as insignificant, but the truth is that you are just as necessary to the proper functioning of the body as one of the more showy parts. We may not understand exactly why this is so, but we must believe that this is true because God's Word tells us it is true!
- "If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?" (1 Cor 12:17)
The very existence of the body as a viable organism depends on the union and cooperation of individual members that each carry out different functions. The body could not possibly function if it consisted only of one specific part. A body that had only one part would not even be a body. Paul will return to this idea in verse nineteen.
- "God has placed the members" (*tithemi*) = God carefully placed, arranged, and connected the members -- the verb *tithemi* means to set into a specific location. The truth is that it requires the power and activity of God in order to have a living body. God is at work, and even though we do not realize it, He is the one that causes the body to operate.
- "Just as He desired" (*thelo*) = This word for the will of God is a stronger word than the one used previously in 1 Cor 12:11. It involves forethought, intention, and resolve. To think little of your own gift or your place within the body of Christ is to think little of God and His work in placing you exactly where He wanted you. When we express it this way, it is obviously a very serious matter to trust that God has gifted you and placed you in the right place so as to have the effect He desired in His body.
- "If they were all one member, where would the body be?" = Here Paul returns to the idea he expressed in 1 Cor 12:17. A solitary eyeball would be completely useless because it requires the support of the eye socket within the skull, it requires the connecting nerve fibers to relay its information to the brain, and it even requires the eye lid and tear ducts to provide moisture and protection. The eyeball cannot perform its intended function in isolation -- it must have the support of the other members of the body in order to be valuable. And even the eyeball itself is actually composed of smaller parts that were formed to make a single organ.



The Problem of Superiority

- "But now there are many members, but one body." (1 Cor 12:20)
This verse marks the second section in this passage, and it is a restatement of the second side of the coin presented in verse twelve. It puts the emphasis on the unity of the parts of the body -- the fact that they cannot do without each other.
- The eye and the head are comparing themselves to the hand or the feet, and in their own estimation they view their own gifts as being of greater value in comparison to the gifts of the others. The problem being addressed here is the issue of superiority. One member is looking down on or devaluing or denying the gifts of others.
- The truth expressed in verse twenty -- that the parts of the body form a unity and they cannot do without each other -- is actually the *antidote* to superiority. It seems that a few of the prominent charismatic members were acting as if they were self-sufficient and did not need other believers who had what they saw as inferior gifts.
- "Seem to be weaker" = the parts of the body that seem to be more susceptible to being injured, such as the vital soft tissues and the internal organs. The brain, the lungs, and the heart are examples of relatively *weak* organs that need the protection of stronger body parts so they will not be exposed to injury.
"Necessary" (*anangkaios*) = This term means "something that you cannot do without." A person can live if he loses an



arm or a leg, but not if the brain, lungs, or heart are removed!

- "We deem less honorable" (*atimos*) = literally, "not honored." These are parts of the body which we do not allow to be seen or displayed in public. We keep these body parts well covered.
"We bestow" (*peritithemi*) = literally, "to place around." This verb was used to describe wrapping or covering something, such as putting on clothing or enclosing something with a privacy fence. It suggests the possibility of feeling ashamed without a proper covering.
"Less presentable members" (*aschemon*) = This term means shameful, indecent, or unpresentable, and it refers to those parts of the body that are considered private and to be covered or clothed. It is not those body parts themselves that are shameful, but it is the act of displaying them that is indecent. Therefore we use an external covering to preserve decency and modesty.
- "More presentable members" (*euschemon*) = This term means "of elegant figure, shapely, graceful, beautiful." These members do not require any extra attention.
- "God ... gives more abundant honor to members which lack" = Here again we see the activity of God working in the body. Previously we saw that God deliberately placed each member exactly where He wanted it (1 Cor 12:18), and now we see that God is the one who gives more abundant honor to those members who lacked it. Even though men do not give honor to inferior things, God does bestow honor on things that man sees as inferior.
- This is a very encouraging truth, and one which the Corinthians did not understand. They failed to appreciate their members who lacked the spectacular or showy gifts (such as prophecy, tongues, and miracles). The members with less noticeable ministries were devalued and neglected in favor of the dramatic members, and they did not understand that God does not behave this way. He especially honors the lowly.
- "So that" = This expresses the purpose for God's divine composition and activity within the body.
"That there may be no division in the body" = God desires to eliminate divisions and schisms in the body.
"But that the members may have the same care for one another" = The contrast word shows that this is what should happen *instead* of having divisions in the body. God desires to create mutual care and concern throughout the body.
"Same care" (*merimnao*) = to care for, look out for someone, to seek to promote the interests of another, to provide for someone. This word expresses the nourishing and cherishing activity that should characterize the members of the body of Christ.
- "If one member suffers, all suffer" = to feel pain or suffer evils, troubles, or persecutions together.
"If one member is honored, all rejoice" = literally, if one member receives glory, then all the other members should congratulate or rejoice with him; they should take part in the other member's joy. Paul is now talking directly to the church about their behavior.

Directly Applying the Illustration

- "Now you are Christ's body" = Here we learn what the body in this illustration actually represents: it is Christ's body, and in the next verse we see that Christ's body is equivalent to the Church. The case ending on the word *Christ* is the genitive of possession, so this is not the body which is Christ and not the body of which Christ consists, but the body that belongs to Christ and over which He has authority.
- "And individually members of it" = This verse repeats the idea of the one body with many members. The one body is Christ's body, and the individual believers are the members.

The Ranking of the Gifts

- "God has appointed in the church" (*tithemi*) = This is the same term used earlier, and here it continues the thought of setting or placing, but adds the idea of establishing and ordaining. It is God that has appointed these people to have these gifts for the benefit of the church as a whole.
- In the first three gifts Paul refers specifically to the individual people who are characterized by each gift, but later in the list he names the gifts themselves. So instead of "apostleship, prophecy, and teaching" Paul began the list with "apostles, prophets, and teachers" -- specific people who had been given these gifts.
- "First, apostles" = The first two gifts were the main ones in operation at that time for laying the foundation of the church (see Eph 2:20). One of their primary functions was to receive the new revelation of God's Word, and God often gave confirmation of His Word through "signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Cor 12:12). The apostles were men specifically chosen by Christ to have a unique ministry in establishing this new entity called the Church.
- Here in this list by referring to the men themselves who had been given the gift of apostleship, Paul is clearly limiting the operation of this gift to the lifetime of those individuals who had the personal qualifications for being apostles. Apostleship was a gift based on personal contact with the Lord Jesus Christ, and it was not a self-perpetuating gift. God used the apostles to provide the leadership, inspiration, and direction for getting the church started, and he often used them as channels for His new revelation for the church age.
- "Second, prophets" = In Paul's earlier list of spiritual gifts, he had classified prophecy with the other sign-oriented gifts being used to confirm that the new revelation was indeed from God. Here in this list, the apostle Paul seems to be emphasizing the informational and revelatory aspects of the gift of prophecy -- so here it is classified with the gifts that

present new information. In a similar way to apostles, the prophets often served as channels of God's new revelation, while at other times they simply explained the revelation that had already been given.

- Since this spiritual gift served to lay the foundation for the church, it seems best to limit its operation to the early years of church history. Just as the Old Testament prophets disappeared after the completion of the Old Testament scriptures, the New Testament prophets were no longer needed after the New Testament was completed.
- "Third, teachers" (*didaskalos*) = This is the common word for a teacher, one who instructs others. These first three gifts were specifically numbered to indicate their order of importance at that time in church history. The first two gifts were special gifts for communicating God's new revelation that was being recorded in the New Testament, and they were no longer needed after the first century when the Scriptures were complete. Of these first three gifts, teaching is the only one that is meant to function in the church today.
- The fourth and fifth gifts are introduced by the word *then*, and the final gifts have no introductory word at all. This seems to indicate that the end of this list contains a more miscellaneous listing that is not necessarily in order of importance, with the exception of the gift of tongues which comes last of all.
- "Then, miracles" (*dunamis*) = literally, "effects of power." Paul has shifted his focus from the *person* possessing a gift, to the *gift* itself. This is the same gift mentioned in 1 Cor 12:10, and it is listed there as one of the confirmatory gifts. The gift of miracles verified that God was giving His stamp of authenticity to the new revelation that was coming to the early church. This gift was consistently used in conjunction with the preaching of the Word (1 Cor 2:4; 4:20; 2 Cor 6:7; 1 Thess 1:5).
- "Then, gifts of healings" = This is the same gift that was mentioned in 1 Cor 12:9 where it was listed as a gift that drew attention to God's involvement in the life of the early church.
- "Helps" (*antilepsis*) = This is a word that literally means, "to lay hold of something," but it had the connotation of taking a burden off of someone else and placing it on one's self. In general, this gift functioned to relieve other believers who were struggling under a burden of any kind. In contrast to the speaking gifts for communicating information to the mind, this gift had to do with ministering in the background to the physical needs of other believers. This person was a *burden carrier*, and even though it was a very valuable gift, it was not considered to be as attractive or desirable by the Corinthians.
- "Administrations" (*kubernesis*) = This word came from the verb *kuberno* = to steer. A related word was *kubernatas* = shipmaster or steersman (see Acts 27:11; Rev 18:17). The gift of administration was the ability to direct or steer a straight course for the church -- to provide leadership, guidance, and government -- to organize the resources of the church to accomplish its goals in the most efficient and effective way. Though this person may not be the captain of the ship, he certainly knows how to turn the rudder in order to steer a straight course for the church's activities.
- "Kinds of tongues" = This is the same gift what was listed previously in 1 Cor 12:10. It is the ability to communicate to others in their native language, even though the gifted person had not previously learned that language. As we discussed earlier, this gift might have been a very useful gift in the city of Corinth, but it was one of the main gifts that were being misused by the showy Corinthian believers.

Comparing This List with Other Lists

<u>1 Cor 12:8-10</u>	<u>1 Cor 12:28-30</u>	<u>Romans 12:6-8</u>	<u>Ephesians 4:11</u>
1. Word of Wisdom	1. Apostles	1. Prophecy	1. Apostles
2. Word of Knowledge	2. Prophets	2. Service	2. Prophets
3. Faith	3. Teachers	3. Teaching	3. Evangelist
4. Healings	4. Miracles	4. Exhortation	4. Pastor-Teacher
5. Miracles	5. Healings	5. Giving	
6. Prophecy	6. Helps	6. Leadership	
7. Discerning Spirits	7. Administration	7. Mercy	
8. Tongues	8. Tongues		
9. Interpreting Tongues	9. Interpreting Tongues		

- Sometimes the gifts are enablements; sometimes they are persons. Sometimes they are official; sometimes they are personal. Sometimes they are very specific; sometimes very general. Sometimes they are clearly defined; sometimes they are hard to define. Some are temporary; others are permanent. Apostles, prophets, and the confirmatory sign gifts were for the first century, while evangelists, pastor-teachers, exhorting, giving, administration, etc., continue to function throughout the Church age. No two lists are alike, and only one gift is on all of the lists. This would suggest that the Spirit's gifts differ at different times and at different places according to the needs of the church.
- "All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?" = The Greek word "mn" is used to introduce each of these questions, and this indicates that a negative answer is expected. This tells us that no one individual can possess all of the gifts. God has designed the body so that different members each have parts of what is needed. There is no single individual that can do everything required by the body. All of the gifts are equally important because they are all necessary in some way to the proper functioning of the entire

body.

The Way to Use the Spiritual Gifts

- "But earnestly desire" (*zeloo*) = to burn with passion. This refers to a very strong emotional desire for something. "The greater gifts" (*megas*) = literally, these were the *mega*-gifts.
- What we need to do is determine whether this sentence should be taken in a positive or a negative sense. The Greek indicative and imperative verb forms are identical, so usually the context must determine whether the author intends it to be taken as a command or a simple statement.
 1. As a command: *Earnestly desire the greater gifts*
This is how most of the modern translations have rendered this sentence. In this case, Paul was commanding the Corinthians to have a passionate desire for the greater or more valuable gifts in the list he has just given. However, since possessing a specific gift is totally out of the believer's control, but instead is completely up to the Holy Spirit, Paul cannot be commanding them to desire possessing the greater gifts for *themselves*. This would be up to God, not up to the believer -- no matter how much he passionately desired it. With this translation we need to convert "desire" into something more like "esteem" -- that they were to highly value the more useful gifts at the top of Paul's list. This would be a true statement and an important thing for all of us to do, but it is not exactly what the verb *zeloo* typically means.
 2. As a statement: *You are eagerly coveting the showier gifts*
This translation seems to better fit the context of this passage. The Corinthians were indeed coveting the showier gifts, the ones they believed were the greater gifts. It would be silly for Paul to command them to do something wrong which they were already doing. In the previous verses Paul had actually commanded them to do the opposite -- to stop putting such a high value on the showier gifts and to remember that God is the one who determines who gets what gift.

But in the immediate context, 1 Cor 14:1 seems to favor the meaning of a command. This would not be a command to individual believers to seek out the greater gifts, but a command to the church as a whole to desire that the greater gifts be given priority in their church ministry.

- "I show you a still more excellent way" = literally, "I am going to show you a way beyond ways." It is as if Paul were telling them that, instead of seeking after spectacular manifestations, there is a better way of behaving that is available to every believer, no matter what gift they have been given. Paul is about to describe for them a way of living, a habitual rule of life, that should be followed by every Christian.

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