

The Body of Christ Has Many Members

1 Corinthians 12:12- 31

1 Corinthians 12:12-31: *“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”*

Background Notes

In 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 the apostle Paul addressed the subject of the proper use of spiritual gifts. The first part of the chapter teaches that there are many different spiritual gifts given by God, and all the gifts are given for the edification of all believers, not for self-gratification and not for self-glory. Verse 7: *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.”*

In addition, we don't choose our own spiritual gift or gifts - God does! Verse 11: *“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”* All believers have at least one spiritual gift. Our spiritual gifts have been pre-determined, and they are given by God's sovereign will on an individual basis. God didn't drop all the spiritual gifts out of Heaven and let each of us catch what gifts we wanted in a mad scramble. In His sovereignty, He chose and delivered your spiritual gift (or gifts) to you individually and personally.

We received our spiritual gift(s) at the time of our salvation. You were born with your natural talents, and they should be dedicated to the Lord when you become a believer. But your spiritual gift/gifts were *given* to you. Spiritual gifts need to be developed or used, but we believe they are given at salvation - even if you were saved as a child.

Also at salvation, you were baptized into the body of Christ: *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit”*(v13). This verse is not speaking of Christian baptism after salvation. It is speaking of spiritual baptism into the one body of Christ that takes place at the time of salvation.

Notice that **all** the Corinthian Christians - even the carnal or unspiritual believers mentioned in chapter 3 - had been baptized into the one body. So it seems that the idea of “baptism of the Holy Spirit” or “baptism in the Holy Spirit” at some time *after* salvation is not the teaching of scripture. Your baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ occurs at the time of your salvation, and that’s when your spiritual gift or gifts are given.

There is no exhortation here to these Corinthians, including the unspiritual ones, to seek the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” as some groups teach today. Ephesians 5:1 exhorts us to be *continually* filled with the Spirit. That should be the norm for every believer. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit for each believer takes place at salvation. *“Now all believers drink of one Spirit”* (v13). All believers have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and receive His blessings.

In the second half of 1 Corinthians 12 a great truth is taught: the Church, as the body of Christ, is composed of many members with different functions. We are exhorted to recognize this great truth.

Doctrinal Points

1. There is one body with many members.

Verses 14-27: *“For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”*

In these verses the human body is used as an illustration of the Church as the body of Christ. A number of truths about the body of Christ are brought out in this illustration.

The point of verses 14-16 is that there are many members in the body, and every believer is a member with a function that's already been predetermined. For example, a foot in a human body doesn't decide it wants to be a foot, and it can't decide to change to be a hand, and it can't opt out of the body! In the same way, each one of us is to function in the body of Christ as we were **assigned and designed** to do.

The main point of verses 17-19 is that if the body were just one member, it would be dysfunctional and helpless. Think of a body that was all eye, for example. What a useless monstrosity it would be, as it rolled along!

Verses 20-22 teach that every member of the body is needed - even those parts that appear to be "weak" or unattractive! Your hand, for example, can't tell your heart or your liver that they're not needed because they're hidden, or unattractive, or weak. In the same way, all parts of the body of Christ are valuable and needed - including you!

Mutual care and respect of the members is the teaching in verses 23-27. Some members of our human bodies are not as attractive or as efficient as others, so the other "members" of the body help in whatever ways they can, to make the body as efficient as possible.

Sometimes a member of our body gets hurt or injured. The rest of the body doesn't ignore the injury or pretend it is okay. The whole body becomes more attentive to that member. The entire body tries to compensate to help that injured body part to hurt less and to heal. So should it be in the body of Christ. Don't laugh or look down on that brother or sister who makes mistakes. Come alongside them and help them!

Right now I have a bruised thumb. Every time I grab something the wrong way, it hurts - and my whole body reacts. The rest of my body does what it can do to help and relieve the pain. So should it be in the body of Christ. There is one body with many members.

2. There is one body with many gifts.

Verses 28-31: *"And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way."*

Some of the spiritual gifts in the body are listed in verses 8-10 of this chapter. Here we have another list, including more spiritual gifts - but still not all of the spiritual gifts. The fact that apostles, prophets and teachers are listed as first, second, and third and then miracles and healings follow is an indication that apostles, prophets and teachers were foundational gifts that benefitted the entire Church. Some gifts that are greater than others - greater in the sense that they are more

beneficial for the *whole body* than some of the other gifts. That's why verse 31 exhorts us to desire the *best* or *greater* gifts – not greater in display or power but *greater in benefit for the edification of the whole body*.

Notice what Paul puts last on his list here: *tongues and interpretation of tongues*. These were the very gifts that the Corinthian believers thought were the most important! Some charismatic Christians today need to see the obvious teaching of the Bible in verse 30: "*Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*" This verse certainly refutes the idea that *every* Christian should speak in tongues, or that speaking in tongues is a sign that you're a spiritual believer. That teaching is unbiblical.

In the first half of this chapter we mentioned that certain "sign" gifts were given in the early Church to confirm the word of the apostles before the New Testament was completed. What about the gifts of apostles and prophets (v28)? Are these gifts still available in the Church today? Yes, in the general sense that missionaries and church planters are "apostles," and preachers and teachers are "prophets."

However, in the apostolic age of the early Church, revelation was still being given to the New Testament apostles and prophets, and this kind of "apostles and prophets" gift is not available today. Ephesians 2:20 says that the Church is built on the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets. So we believe that there were certain "sign" gifts and certain "foundational" gifts that were given to the early Church, but are not as available today as they were then. But many valuable gifts are available today - and God can certainly give certain "sign" gifts today if He so desires. There is one body with many gifts.

Practical Application

Don't infect your church with hand, foot, and mouth disease!

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is not the same as the "foot and mouth" or "hoof and mouth" disease that affects animals. "Hand, foot, and mouth disease" is a human disease, and it affects children more often than mature adults.

Do you see the point of illustration? When members of the body of Christ are jealous of another member's gifts, and they try to function in the body in a capacity that was not intended for them, it could be called a "hand, foot, and mouth disease" in the Church! It generally starts with immature believers - but it can quickly spread!

Be careful! Don't infect your church with hand, foot, and mouth disease!