

# The Spirit Creates One Body

Printed Text · 1 Corinthians 12:14-31

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: ANALYZE how each member of the body supports the other members; VALUE the different gifts operating within the church; and DECIDE to use spiritual gifts in cooperation with others for building up the body of Christ.

## In Focus

For many years Michelle had been a member of the church. Like clockwork she attended every Sunday service and was always on time. She attended special programs and was faithful in her tithes and offerings. Yet, Michelle came to church, sat quietly, smiled, shook hands, and went on her way without becoming notable. While discussing church affairs one day, several members began to discuss members and their various activities. When Michelle's name came up, everyone mentioned how faithful her attendance was, but nobody seemed to really know her. Shortly thereafter, one evening she appeared at choir rehearsal. The music director attempted to stifle his shock, but the members could not contain their excitement. As she settled into her section and the music began, it was immediately clear that Michelle was not just able to carry a tune, she was actually gifted at singing! After the rehearsal was over, several members surrounded her, asking why she had kept her gifts secret for so long. She replied, "Well, nobody ever asked me to join, so I decided to give it a try. I hope you let me stay."

*If we are to be unified in our faith, we cannot overlook the value of our Christian family. We must never forget that we all have a part to play in the body of Christ.*

## Keep In Mind

"But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Corinthians 12:20, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

A. **Tempered** (1 Corinthians 2:24) sugkerannumi (Gk.) – Mixed together, commingled, united one thing to another.

B. **Schism** (v. 25) schisma (Gk.) – A rent, division, or dissension.

## Say It Correctly

**Schism.** SKIH-zim

**Feeble.** FEE-bul

## KJV

**1 Corinthians 12:14** For the body is not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

## NLT

**1 Corinthians 12:14** Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part.

15 If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body.

16 And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

18 But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it.

19 How strange a body would be if it had only one part!

20 Yes, there are many parts, but only one body.

21 The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

22 In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary.

23 And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen,

24 while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity.

25 This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other.

26 If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

27 All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

28 Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages.

29 Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles?

30 Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not!

31 So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Helps.** This is the special ability to aid, assist, and support others. It is closely related to the gift of mercy, which is caring for those who are distressed and disadvantaged. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 the phrase “support the weak” could refer to this ministry in particular. The men who were selected to feed the poor widows in Jerusalem could have possessed this gift (Acts 6:1–7). This gift could also be used in an unofficial capacity as those who gave alms and fed the poor without an official role or title.

**Governments.** This word is related to the word for a captain or pilot of a ship. It is the special ability to organize and make decisions that lead to the church operating efficiently and effectively. It is the ability to administrate people and details in order to accomplish goals. Those with this gift usually have an eye for detail and an ability to problem solve.

## Background

Paul likened the church to a human body. He emphasized that every member has an important function just like the parts of the body. Each and every member contributes to the health and functioning of the whole body. This makes every believer a necessary part of the body of Christ. Paul began 1 Corinthians 12 with an explanation of spiritual gifts. He reminded the church that they were not to take their relatively new Christian faith and make it equal to the other religions, cults, and practices in the Corinthian community. He reminded them that God is the provider of all gifts, and that the Holy Spirit is the source (1 Corinthians 12:2–5). Moreover, he helped the church understand that due to the indivisibility of God, He is able to provide a unified motivation for multiple manifestations (v. 11). The apostle had already advised the church that their individual bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19). As a balance, he illustrated the similarity of the human body to the body of Christ (12:13). By breaking down the importance of each member, he made it clear that the church’s body cannot afford to be divided for any reason, whether from outside influence or internal disagreement. Even as the various parts serve differing functions, they have a common source and a common goal and cannot operate separately from one another. God has placed all of the members of the church into one body; thus the diversity of gifts can profit the whole church. Paul says that these many members are a part of one body. These many members are necessary for the whole body to function; without them, the body would be incapacitated. All the members with all of their gifts are a part of the one body. This shows the diversity as well as the unity of the church.

## At-A-Glance

1. The Purpose of the Parts (1 Corinthians 12:14–20)
  2. The Danger of Division (vv. 21–26)
  3. The Mission of Membership (vv. 27–31)

## In Depth

### 1. The Purpose of the Parts (1 Corinthians 12:14–20)

Paul begins his analogy of the body of Christ by using very common language regarding the human body. He blends humor and a hint of irony to describe the rather silly way that people can treat each other. Paul uses rhetorical questions to state the fact that the church is one body. The eye cannot be considered separate from the hand because it is not the hand; they are both a part of the body. Likewise, the ear cannot be considered a separate member from the body. Next Paul asks, what if the whole body was one body part? He further explains that if this were the

case, then we would miss out on many important body functions. In the same way, if the church is made up of only one member or one spiritual gift, then it would miss out on some important things that it needs. In contrast, God has placed all of the members of the church into one body; thus the diversity of gifts can profit the whole church. Paul says that these many members are a part of one body. These many members are necessary for the whole body to function; without them, the body would be incapacitated. All the members with all of their gifts are a part of the one body. This shows the diversity as well as the unity of the church.

## **2. The Danger of Division (vv. 21–26)**

Paul continues his conversation about the body parts by shedding light on very common attitudes. He supposes the eye and hand suffer a disagreement in which they attempt to cast each other off (v. 21). While it is quite possible for a body to survive an amputation of an eye or hand (or foot or arm, etc.), the point is that a seeing eye still has nothing with which to grasp. Likewise, a hand without an eye to guide it will do more stumbling and destruction rather than productive handiwork. Far too often, arguments arise in the church wherein members work harder to find fault in each other than they do to find alternate solutions to a common problem. More serious is the idea of “schism” (Gk. schisma, SKHEES-mah). This word describes a division or dissension. More seriously, it represents a tear or a rip, as in a garment. Whenever we look upon our brothers and sisters as being less valuable – either to God or mankind – we are forgetting our own personal need for salvation. After the argument between the eye and the hand, the head and feet erupt into an outright dismissal of one another. As ludicrous as it would be for one body part to dismiss another, we are quick to seek separation from other Christians, regardless of our common call to life in Christ. Paul acknowledges that there are those among us who may have less favorable attributes (vv. 23–24), yet we have no right to dismiss them or devalue their presence within the body. Schism represents a painful rip among humans, and also rips us from God’s will.

## **3. The Mission of Membership (vv. 27–31)**

As Paul concludes this portion of his letter, he calls the discorporate body parts into a unified vision of hope. He addresses them directly, saying, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (v. 27). As such he outlines that rather than lowly feet or eye or hand, the members of the church are actually far more vital. Naming gifts like prophecy, teaching, healing, preaching, and administration, he makes it clear that there is no person or gift that is without value in God’s eyes (vv. 27–31). More than a simple call to mend fences, Paul is actually empowering individuals to know their place in the body of Christ so that their individual gifts may be put to their best use for God, rather than personal or individual gain. To be a member of the body of Christ is a serious responsibility, but that responsibility is made bearable by support and care from the other members connected to us.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. What is the reason that God set the members in one body (1 Corinthians 12:18)?
2. What is the reason Paul gives for honoring less honorable members in the body of Christ (vv. 24–25)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. How can we show honor to those church members who serve behind the scenes?
2. What makes believers worship Christian celebrities? Is this the proper way to view other brothers and sisters and their spiritual gifts?

## **Liberating Lesson**

Often people separate from a church after a negative experience. Sometimes people can be put off by a well-intentioned but poorly placed comment. The news is unfortunately replete with accounts of people suffering tragic abuse at the hands of church leaders. Our natural reaction may be to say how much better we are than a particular denomination. We may go so far as to speak negatively about that particular group's theology based on human failures. Our task in striving for unity is not to condone or cover misdeeds done in or around the church. Instead, we should hold each other up via upholding standards and accountability. While it is hard to subject ourselves to each other, it is best that we determine that we will submit together to the will of God.

## **Application For Activation**

In some church cultures, the idea of spiritual gifts is only understood to be evident by certain worship activities. In the African American culture, it is no secret that exuberant singing, shouting, dancing, or displays of emotion may indeed reflect the power of the Holy Spirit upon someone's life and physical body. Still, Paul's letter makes certain that our gifts are not simply to be seen or heard within the assembly. Seek out those people in your church body who contribute behind the scenes. Make a point to show them appreciation through words of encouragement, a card, or a gift.

## **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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## **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## **More Light on the Text**

### **1 Corinthians 12:14–31**

#### **14 For the body is not one member, but many.**

The body metaphor was widely used in the ancient world. Many politicians used it to create peace and harmony between the different social classes. The argument was usually that the lower parts needed to be subordinated under the more superior or noble parts. In other words, the poor and working classes must submit to the rich and noble classes. This was not the case with Paul. The metaphor of the body is used in a more egalitarian way for Paul to show what true Christian community looks like. It can be safe to infer that for Paul, the idea of the church as the body of Christ was more than a metaphor but an actual reality.

Here Paul uses the body metaphor to highlight the necessity of diversity. Everyone cannot have the same gift if the body of Christ is to operate effectively. The body must consist of many members

with diverse gifts. The oneness of the body does not take away from the diversity of its members.

**15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?**

**16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?**

In many cultures, the foot is regarded as being very lowly. To touch another person with the foot would be considered disrespectful, if not insulting. But the touching of hands is considered a gesture of friendship. Thus, if the foot did not wish to belong to the body because it did not have the status of a hand, that would not change that it is still a vital part of the body in reality.

The ear and the eye both occupy a position upon the head, so there is not as great a difference in status as the foot and the hand. However, the difference lies in function. These two organs have distinct purposes, neither of which the body would gladly do without.

**17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?**

The argument for diversity continues. The body of Christ cannot function properly with prophecy only, but also healing, hospitality, teaching, etc. Paul's point is that if the whole consisted of only one thing, the body would lose many functions, if not its very existence. The body is not meant to just pursue one function. Paul argues that a diversity of gifts is needed for the church to do all the work it is meant to do.

**18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.**

**19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?**

**20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.**

Paul credits God with having arranged each member of the body by plan. The body is organized for God's purpose. There would not be a body if He had not planned it, if all the members were the same. Diversity is necessary. According to God's purpose, many diverse members work together for the good of the whole body.

**21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.**

One member or body part does not equal a body. Paul ties the existence of the body to the diversity of its members such that the Corinthian church could not protest his argument for diversity and interdependence. The many members make up the one body. Since the existence of the body is wrapped up in its diversity, then interdependence becomes necessary. None of the parts can exist alone; they all need each other to function as one body.

**22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:**

**23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.**

Here Paul overturns the Corinthians' attitude of pride and boasting. The parts of the body that seem feeble (Gk. *asthenes*, AS-theynays), or weak and least powerful, are the most necessary. The parts with less honor and dignity are also the ones given the most care. They are the parts that have more abundant comeliness (Gk. *euschemosune*, ewskay-mo-SOO-nay) which means "elegance of figure", gracefulness, and attractiveness. Those that are weakest are those we clothe with the greatest care. The parts that are stronger do not receive the same kind of care and attention.

For the Corinthian church, this means that those members they deem less dignified and lacking in knowledge are the ones to be treated with honor. The ones they despise for being weaker and an embarrassment were actually placed there by God to receive greater honor and care. This profound statement is rooted in the design of the body and therefore a part of God's plan.

**24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.**

**25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.**

Continuing with the theme of interdependence and unity, Paul says that God has tempered (Gk. sygkerranyimi, sun-kair-RA-noome) or mixed the body together and given more honor to the parts that naturally lack it so that there would not be a schism in the body. The opposite of division is that the different members would provide the same care for one another. There would be no member who is isolated and does not receive the same care as the others. That would be detrimental for the health of the body and contrary to their existence as the body of Christ.

**26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.**

With our physical bodies, an injury to any part is felt throughout the body. So it is with the body of Christ. The word to suffer (pascho, pahs-SKO) is to experience something in a positive or negative sense. Whatever one person in the body experiences everyone else experiences it as well. Similarly, if one member exercises his or her gifts for the glory of the Lord, the whole of the church is edified. We see this edification in how the presence of a single member in a church can make an enormous difference in the quality of worship, in the feeling of hospitality visitors receive, even in the effectiveness of the church's administrative functions.

**27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.**

Paul underlines what he has been teaching throughout this passage. The members of the Corinthian church are the body of Christ. As individuals, they are members or parts of that body. Their existence as the body of Christ is based on their unity and interdependence. It is not an either/or proposition, but a both/and proposition. As individual body parts, Paul highlights their diversity of function. As the corporate body of Christ, their interdependence and unity is highlighted. Paul says that this is what it means to be the church; it is a diversity in unity that exists through the interdependence of all the members functioning in their gifts.

**28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.**

**29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?**

**30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?**

Now Paul goes back to the beginning of his argument in verse 12. There are many members but one body. He states that God has set some in the church with different gifts. Four gifts are mentioned here that are not mentioned in the beginning of the chapter: apostles, prophets, teachers, and governments. All four are stated as roles or leadership positions with the final one potentially encompassing a number of types of leadership including administration. Paul includes them all here as spiritual gifts.

To be an apostle (Gk. apostolos, ah-POstole-ose) is literally to be "one who is sent." This applies to the twelve apostles who traveled with Jesus during His earthly ministry, as well as others, including

Paul, who came after Jesus, who have been specially commissioned by Him to be His witnesses and lay the foundation for the church. The other three gifts Paul mentions here have similarly important roles in spreading the Gospel. The prophet is one who hears from and speaks for God. Teachers regularly educate the members of the emerging church. "Governments" can be defined as the gift of administration or organizing.

He next asks some rhetorical questions. All of them can be answered with an emphatic "No!" The main point he is making is that not everyone can be every gift. He is continuing his argument for the diversity of gifts within the church. Everyone should not have the same gifts, or the church would cease to be a functioning body. This is the practical application of Paul's earlier statements about the whole body being an ear or an eye; there would be a loss of function. Paul is now making it plain that we do not all have, and should not all seek to have, the same gifts.

### **31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.**

The word for covet earnestly (Gk. zeloo, zeh-LO-oh) means to burn with zeal. Here Paul says to seek after the best gifts with intense passion. We can see that Paul wants to encourage spiritual gifts actively functioning in the church. He says to covet earnestly the best gifts. From this text, we cannot see what the best gifts are. It could be a way to appeal to the Corinthians' fascination with the more ecstatic supernatural gifts, or linked to his preference of prophecy as the best gift (cf. 14:1).

Paul adds a qualifier to his encouragement to seek out the best gifts. He says that he will show them a more excellent (Gk. hyperbole, hoo-pair-bow-LAY) way. Literally, this Greek word means "throwing beyond." Metaphorically it is an adjective describing something beyond measure. Paul is now about to show them a way that is beyond all measure of goodness. This is a transition into Paul's famous passage about love. It is clear from this transition that Paul's chapter on the qualities and the importance of love are set in the context of the spiritual gifts and his teaching on the diversity and unity of the body of Christ.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Exodus 19:1-8

## **Tuesday**

Exodus 24:1-7

## **Wednesday**

2 Corinthians 11:1-5

## **Thursday**

Romans 15:1-7

## **Friday**

Philippians 1:21-30

## **Saturday**

Galatians 3:23-29

## **Sunday**

1 Corinthians 12:12-31