

## Lesson 18: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

- I. <sup>12</sup> For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ.
- A. At the end of this verse, we would expect Paul to say, "Just as the body is one and has many members, so it is with the church," but he does not say that. Instead, he says "so it is with Christ."
1. Paul's reference to Christ in verse 12 is a shorthand reference to the church of Christ.
    - a) In verse 27, he will tell the Corinthians that they are the body of Christ.
    - b) In Ephesians 1:22-23, he wrote that Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. The church of Christ and the body of Christ are one and the same.
    - c) In order to accomplish his work on earth, Jesus had a body of flesh and blood. In order to accomplish his work today, Jesus has a body that consists of living human beings with flesh and blood.
  2. Paul revisits this theme from a different perspective in the book of Ephesians.
    - a) **Ephesians 5:25-30** Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.
    - b) The church of Christ is the body of Christ. The church of Christ is the bride of Christ. Christ died for the church. It would be impossible for us to understate Christ's love for his church and his closeness with his church. Here Paul identifies Christ with his church.
    - c) Jesus also made this identification. His question to Paul in Acts 9:4 after Paul had been persecuting the church was "Why do you persecute me?"
- B. The mention of Christ in this context recalls Paul's first question in the letter: "Is Christ divided?" (1:13)
1. In this section, Paul returns to and continues his argument against the Corinthians' factionalism and division. It seems that their spiritual gifts were a

major source of the division.

- C.** Some read Chapter 12 and see in it a call for unity in diversity. In a sense they are exactly correct, but in another sense they are exactly wrong.
1. Unity in the church is like a choir that sings, not in unison, but in harmony. But the choir is all singing the same song. If everyone were singing a different song then no one would think they were unified. Instead, they would be just a cacophonous babble, which is exactly what the religious world has become.
  2. If by diversity they mean that we can differ on matters of opinion, then we can most certainly have unity in diversity. But if by diversity they mean that we can differ on matters of faith, then we can most certainly not have unity in diversity.
  3. Paul has already described the type of unity he expects in the church:
    - a) (1:10) Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.
  4. Paul has not changed his mind when he gets to Chapter 12. Whatever he means here, he must still want the church to speak the same thing and be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. There are some things on which we cannot disagree. There are things about which we must sing in unison.
  5. Jesus left us a very high standard to follow in our quest for unity.
    - a) **John 17:20-21** "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."
- II.** <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.
- A.** We are ALL BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY. There are five critical words in that verse, and it is impossible to misunderstand those five words absent expert help.
1. The first word is ALL.
    - a) These people were in the body. How did they get there? They were baptized into the body. Was that true of all of them? Yes. They were ALL baptized into one body. None of them were voted into the body; none of

them entered the body by repeating the prayer of faith; none of them entered the body by accepting Jesus into their heart as their personal savior; none of them entered the body by making Jesus Lord of their life (as if they had any choice in that); and none of them entered the body by crowning Jesus king as we sometime sing (and again as if we had any power or need to do that).

**b)** They ALL entered the body by being baptized into the body.

**2.** The second word is BAPTIZED.

**a)** Is this water baptism or Holy Spirit baptism?

**(1)** This one is easy. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:5 that there is one baptism, and we know that water baptism was practiced then as it is now, so this baptism must be the one baptism (because there aren't two baptisms) and that one baptism must be water baptism.

**b)** As far as our salvation goes, there has ALWAYS been just one baptism.

**(1)** Holy Spirit baptism occurred twice in the New Testament and neither time was it related to salvation.

**(2)** The Apostles received Holy Spirit baptism on the Day of Pentecost (long after their salvation) to show their approval by God and to fulfill the prophecy of Joel.

**(3)** Cornelius received Holy Spirit baptism (prior to his salvation) to show Peter that the gospel had been extended to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

**(4)** In each case, the real target of the Holy Spirit baptism was the AUDIENCE rather than the recipient.

**(5)** Salvation has always been associated with water baptism --- both the water baptism of John (which Mark 1:4 tells us was for the remission of sins) and the water baptism of the Great Commission (which Acts 2:38 tells us is for the remission of sins).

**3.** The third word is INTO.

**a)** The preposition "into" denotes movement from the outside to the inside.

**b)** One commentator wrote: "For Paul to become a Christian and to become a member of the body of Christ are synonymous." (But that's not just "for Paul"!)

**c)** ALL of the people were BAPTIZED, and that baptism brought ALL of them from the outside of something to the inside of something. They were ALL

outside that something prior to their baptism, and they were ALL inside that something after their baptism. Their baptism was the dividing point that transformed them from outsiders to insiders.

**4. The fourth word is ONE.**

- a) Whatever that something is, there is just one of them. They were all placed into the same something because there was only one into which they could be placed.

**5. The fifth word is BODY.**

- a) In Colossians 1:18 and 1:24, Paul tells us plainly that the body is the church. The body of Christ is the church of Christ.

**6. If we put these five easy words together we find a profound truth that has been largely rejected by the religious world that surrounds us: There is one church and we enter into that church when we are baptized. Prior to our baptism, we were ALL outside the church. After our baptism, we were ALL inside the church. And there is but one church, and we were all baptized into that one church.**

**B. Baptism is the basis for our unity.**

- 1. Baptism washed away the ethnic and sociological barricades that previously separated and alienated the Corinthians.
- 2. "Racial prejudice and social stereotypes are supposed to be submerged and put to death in baptism, but all too frequently these evils survive the experience, dry themselves off, and form cankers on the body."

**C. Some have noted that the formula "male and female" is omitted from the list in verse 13, and have built elaborate theories to explain its absence.**

- 1. The most likely reason for its omission is simply that it was not the source of the divisions that Paul was addressing. The divisions in Corinth (as we saw in Chapter 11) were likely ethnic (Jew or Gentile) and sociological (bond or free).
- 2. What may polarize the world must never be allowed to divide the church. In small towns all over this country you can still find a "black church" and a "white church." What a disgrace!

**D. What does it mean to "drink into one Spirit?"**

- 1. Some see an allusion to the Lord's Supper that Paul considered in the previous chapter. But nowhere in the New Testament are we said to drink the

Holy Spirit at the Lord's Supper.

2. Another possibility is to look more closely at the Greek word translated "drink." It can also mean to water, and the phrase could be translated "we were all drenched or flooded in one Spirit." Paul's point would then be that we come into the one body (the church) at our (water) baptism, and that the Holy Spirit saturates that one church.
3. The parallel passage in Galatians 3 may help us understand the meaning of "drink" in verse 13.
  - a) **Galatians 3:27-28** For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.
  - b) Just as Christians are clothed with Christ, so are they saturated with the Spirit.
  - c) Jesus connects the Holy Spirit to the concept of living water flowing from the believer.
    - (1) **John 7:38-39** He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. 39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)
  - d) When this spiritual saturation occurs, the individual enjoys a bountiful harvest, namely, the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23)

**III.**<sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? <sup>16</sup> 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?

- A. Paul portrays the church in terms of the human body, which in itself is among the most marvelous of God's creations.
  1. And despite what the world tells us, the human body is the creation of God.
  2. In any other context, I am convinced that reasonable, thinking people would view evolution as laughable. But with regard to the origin of mankind it is accepted as fact and defended with religious devotion. Why? Because to the secular world, the only alternative is unthinkable.
  3. I am not a biologist, but I am a lawyer, an engineer, and a probabilist. As a lawyer, I am convinced that the evidence for evolution would not get the issue to a jury. As an engineer, I am convinced that what we perceive as design in

the human body is in fact design -- and design at a level that far exceeds that of man's inventions. And as a probabilist, I am convinced that even taking science's estimates of the age of universe, there is still not even close to enough time for the order we see around us to have appeared by random chance.

4. As I was preparing this lesson, I watched a television show about ancient structures that have been discovered off the coast of Japan. The scientists on the show were debating whether the structures were natural or man-made. One of the structures was a giant head-like mound with two large indented ovals where you would expect the eyes to be. (To see the giant head for yourself, go to <http://www.morien-institute.org/imk3.html#tategami-iwa>.) Several of the scientists said that those large ovals must have been carved by men and could not be the product of natural processes. **And yet these same scientists would, no doubt, quickly affirm that their own two eyes are the product of purely natural processes without any evidence of intelligent design! How ridiculous!** Despite what the media tells us, those who reject evolution in favor of an intelligent designer occupy the intellectual high ground in this battle!
  5. When I speak to people about evolution, I begin by telling them two things. First, I reject evolution because I am a Christian and to accept evolution would require me to reject God. Second, I tell them that I would like to think that even if I were an atheist I would have the intellectual honesty to reject evolution and say that I simply did not know how we arrived here -- but it could never have been by random mutation and spontaneous generation.
  6. The human body is the creation of God, and Paul uses it to describe another of God's wonderful creations, his church.
    - a) We are a new creation. **2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.
- B.** Temples to the Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, were widely scattered across the Mediterranean world.
1. Archaeologists have discovered in Corinth a huge number of terracotta offerings representing heads, hands, feet, arms, legs, eyes, and ears -- all afflicted bodily members that the god was entreated to heal.
  2. "Against this background Paul would have seen the dismembered limbs displayed in the Asclepion as symbols of everything that Christians should not be: dead, divided, unloving, and unloved." These disconnected body parts in clay were useless and dead apart from the body to which they belonged.
- C.** No matter what ears and feet might say if they could talk, they are integrally part

of the body.

1. Note that the ear does not say it wants to be an eye, and the foot does not say it wants to become a hand. Instead, both assume they are unimportant in comparison.
2. Ears that constantly hear someone say how beautiful the eyes are can easily get the idea that they are inconsequential, and the eyes can get the idea that they are all-important.
3. But both ears and feet have their assigned positions and duties in the body. There are no unimportant or inconsequential members of the body of Christ.
4. To function properly the body needs all of its members. Every member is important for the wholesome functioning of the entire body.

**IV.**<sup>17</sup> If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling?

**A.** What if the whole body were an eye?

1. That freakish body would have no sense of smell, no sense of hearing, no way to move except by rolling around, and no way to feed itself or digest the food. It would quickly die. A well-functioning body requires a multiplicity of members with a multiplicity of functions.
2. A church composed of nothing but tongue-speakers would be no less freakish. It would quickly shrivel up and die from the loss of its other senses and its lack of nourishment.

**B.** There is an extremely important point in this verse that we sometimes miss: We cannot all be an eye, but that does not mean that no one is an eye.

1. If we as a congregation have been blessed with an eye, then we should use that eye in every way that we can to bring glory to God. Instead, we sometimes ignore the eye, dilute the eye, or fail to use the eye. What a waste!
2. And if someone is truly an eye, then one should frankly admit their gift and start using it as God intended. Luther explained the situation well:
  - a) "The sun does not say that it is black. The tree does not say, 'I bear no apples, pears, or grapes.' That is not humility, but if you have gifts you should say, 'These gifts are from God; I did not confer them upon myself. One should not be puffed up on their account. If someone else does not have the gifts I have, then he has others. If I exalt my gifts and despise another's, that is pride.' The sun does not vaunt himself, though more fair

than the earth and the trees, but says, 'Although tree, you do not shine, I will not despise you, for you are green and I will help you to be green.'

- C.** Another lesson here is that the eye does not see for the eye's sake, but for the sake of the body. If you were nothing more than an eye, then what good would it do to see anything? Our gifts are designed to serve not ourself but the entire body.
- V.** <sup>18</sup> But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. <sup>19</sup> And if they were all one member, where *were* the body? <sup>20</sup> But now *are they* many members, yet but one body.
- A.** God is the subject of this verse because he is the Creator of the body. At creation, God made a human body that was free from any flaw or weakness.
1. By implication, God has also distributed His gifts according to His design. Intelligent design is at work in the human body and in the body of Christ.
- B.** God created the human body without consulting humans. The church is similarly not man-made. God created the church, and he distributes gifts in the church according to his purposes and his design.
1. Paul himself was a perfect example! He was an aristocratic Jew who was born a Roman citizen in a city steeped in Greek culture. For Christianity to spread throughout the world a unique person was needed, and Paul was that unique person. He was a man of two worlds. Although he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews he knew the Romans and the Greeks as few Jews knew them.
  2. Paul was designed by God to fulfill a special purpose, and when the time was right he was plucked out of his old life and given the commission to fulfill that special purpose for which he had been preparing all his life.
  3. "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him!"
- C.** God made the human body with its intricately connected parts so that it could perform at its optimum in the world. This diversity is not only necessary for the body to function; it is the will of God.
1. The conclusion is obvious that no single body part can be considered the only legitimate manifestation of the body's life.
  2. The application is equally clear: members of the body should accept humbly their gifts without pretentiously flaunting them, belittling another's, or envying another's.
  3. Just as not every member of the human body is expected to have the gift of



hearing, so not every member of the body of Christ is expected to have the gift of prophecy or the gift of teaching. And rather than trying to teach our ears how to see or our noses how to hear, we should let each use the gift that God designed them to use. Too often we in the church try to fit square pegs into round wholes when it comes to gifts and talents.

**D.** But no one in the church should ever be idle. Christianity is not a spectator sport.

1. Each one must use the talent God has given him or her for the edification of the body of Christ.
2. "Numerous congregations, especially the ones that have existed for many years, are coping with a measure of indolence. A few faithful saints appear to do all the work in the congregation: they serve as leaders, they teach Bible classes, they visit the sick and welcome new members, they prepare food, they are involved with the youth, they evangelize, etc. Most of the members, expect for attending the worship services, are idle. Even though they receive spiritual food, they are weak from lack of exercise. Every member of the church must realize that God has bypassed no one in the distribution of gifts. He or she may not bury these talents through idleness, for there will eventually be a day of reckoning when God demands an accounting."

**VI.** <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked:

**A.** "I have no need of thee."

1. That phrase was no doubt the exact attitude that some of the Corinthians had toward their fellow believers. The head and the eyes are transparent metaphors for the rich and the powerful, while the hands and the feet are metaphors for the laboring class and slaves.
2. You can almost hear them: "You mean they are complaining because they can't sit in the best places and eat the best food at our common meals? Who do they think they are? They are just slaves and bond servants! They may need us, but we certainly don't need them. They should just be happy with what they have."
3. A sense of superiority can breed a notion of self-sufficiency since those who think they are all-important can easily imagine that the minor players are superfluous and dispensable.
4. "Far too often people in the church become so engrossed in the bit of work

that they are doing and so convinced of its supreme importance that they neglect or even criticize others who have chosen to do other work."

- B.** Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that their arrogance was harming the unity of the church.
1. The head and the eye wanted to be independent of the other parts of the body. They did not want to admit that their existence was based on the interdependent relations with other members of the body.
  2. What would the eye achieve without use of the hand? What would the head achieve without the feet to move it about?
  3. The eye, the head, the hands, and the feet are nothing by themselves. Their only use is to serve the entire body and further its purposes and goals. Our relation to Christ and His church is no different.
  4. Augustine: "God is not greater if you reverence him, but you are greater if you serve him."
- C.** It is obvious in a body that no part is autonomous, but Paul uses the body analogy to turn self-centered vanity upside down.
1. It is, in fact, the unrepresentable parts of the body that are most necessary for the body to live, and they receive special treatment. A body can survive without eyes, ears, hands, and feet, but it cannot survive without the function of these unrepresentable parts. Their function is not public, and they are kept hidden, but they are essential to the body's survival.
  2. The church is not to be like its surrounding society, which always honors those who are already honored. It is to be counter-cultural and bestow the greatest honor on those who seem to be negligible.
- D.** What parts is Paul speaking about?
1. "Paul has no need to be specific, because every reader knows what he is trying to say."
  2. The Greek word translated "bestow" or "place" in verse 23 literally means to put or place around an article of clothing. In other words, it means to dress. We clothe the less honorable parts of the human body more carefully than the nobler parts.
  3. In the Greek, Paul uses a wordplay. He in effect says that our unrespectable parts are treated with even more respect.
  4. **Aside:** Decency and modesty should ever be striking characteristics of a

Christian community in a dissolute and immoral world. In the pagan culture of the first century, nudity was commonplace and perfectly acceptable, especially in the sports arena. We as Christians, Paul observes, must be clothed properly ---- and that proper choice of clothing may be very different from what our culture deems proper.

E. A person who is quiet by nature may be disregarded by those who are more aggressive and in the public eye. Yet that subdued person often proves to be mighty in prayer and a hero of faith.

1. **Example:** In Luke 2:37, Luke tells us that Anna "departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day."

2. We do not always know when people are idle. Perhaps we think they are idle simply because they are doing what we are doing or aren't doing what we think they should be doing. But perhaps that "idle" person is an Anna, who through his or her prayers and fastings is doing far more than we could ever imagine.

F. But there is another possibility: Perhaps there are others in the church whose gift is to give the others a concrete opportunity to practice love and patience!

VII. <sup>25</sup> That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. <sup>26</sup> And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

A. The attitude in Corinth was that some of the Christians could go missing with no great loss to the church.

1. The remedy for socioeconomic divisions in the body is to care for one another. If we think we have no need of someone and if we do not care for that person, then it is very easy to create a division that excludes that person. But when we care for that person and recognize the body's great need for that person, then excluding them by division becomes unthinkable. We would be just as likely to cut off our left hand because we don't use it as often as our right hand.

B. Verse 26 has been called "one of the most beautiful texts" in the entire letter.

1. It describes the effect genuine care can have on the members of the church. When love prevails, we see the church as a live physical body.

2. If we leave here today with nothing else, let's leave here with the following understanding: The church of Christ is not a society or a guild or an association. It is not a corporation or a partnership. It is not a club or a business. It is not a sports team or a book club. It is not a political action committee or a special interest group. **The church of Christ is a living**

**organism created by God.**

- C.** All have experienced how the whole physical body suffers when one member hurts.
1. And sometimes the member seems insignificant -- at least before it starts hurting! A paper cut, a tooth ache, or a hangnail can quickly get our attention.
  2. The same is true for the body of Christ. When one Christian suffers, we should all suffer.
- D.** The converse is also true: when one member is honored, we should all feel honored.
1. As Paul said in Romans 12:15, we should "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."
  2. Sadly, we sometimes weep with those who rejoice and rejoice with those who weep. Jealousy and envy can even cause some to rejoice more in other's sorrows than in their own blessings.
  3. Suffering and rejoicing together are a sign of unity in which one truly seeks the advantage of the other.

**VIII.** <sup>27</sup> Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

- A.** We often use the phrase "member of the church." Verse 27 is the basis for that phrase. Those added by God to the church become members of the church. If we are saved then we are a member of the church. If someone is not a member of the church then that person is lost -- by definition.
- B.** And Paul says "you" are the body of Christ, with reference to the Corinthians.
1. But these people quarreled, caused divisions, failed to expel an immoral brother, criticized the apostles, and did not properly observe the Lord's Supper. Could this group be the body of Christ? Yes, by the power and grace of God.
- C.** In the Greek, Paul does not say "a body" or "the body," but merely "body" to indicate that this is the one and only body of Christ, for there is no other.

**IX.** <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> *Are* all apostles? *are* all prophets? *are* all teachers? *are* all workers of miracles? <sup>30</sup> Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

- A.** Paul once again provides a list of gifts, some of which we have already

considered in Lesson 17.

1. Some, but not all of these gifts, are miraculous gifts. Miracles, gifts of healing, and tongues are miraculous gifts, but teachers, helps, and governments need not be.

**B.** Commentators are divided about what Paul meant by first, second, and third in verse 28.

1. Some say that Paul was listing the gifts in order of importance, but that would appear to conflict with his criticism of the Corinthians for elevating some gifts far out of proportion. Also, he numbers only the first three in the list. Perhaps, these first three are listed in order of importance to show that tongues are not high on the list.
2. Others say they are listed in order of time. Ephesians 2:20 says that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The apostles were present when the church was established and so they certainly came first, but it is not clear why prophets would come before teachers, particularly since the apostles themselves were certainly teachers and most likely prophets. Apollos, however, was a teacher and Paul described his work in 3:6 as following the planting by Paul.

**C.** These gifts all come from God.

1. **Ephesians 4:11** And he [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.
2. **Romans 12:5-8** So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; 7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; 8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

**D.** One of the gifts is the gift of teaching.

1. Paul was an apostle, but he was also a teacher.
  - a) **2 Timothy 1:11** Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.
2. One of the many requirements for an elder is that he be a teacher.
  - a) **1 Timothy 3:2** A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one

wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach...

3. But James tells us something important about this particular gift.
  - a) **James 3:1** My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.
  - b) Teaching is a tremendous responsibility. It takes time, it takes energy, it takes talent, and it takes resources. I pray every night, as I know all of our teachers do, that I will live up to that great responsibility.
4. "We have books in plenty nowadays, but it is still true that it is through people that a man really learns of Christ."
  - a) We sometimes have the attitude that our responsibility is somehow lessened because Bibles are so widely available today. Just give them a Bible and let them figure it out. Why do they need us?
  - b) That was not God's view in Acts 8 when he sent Philip to teach a man who had a Bible in his lap.
    - (1) **Acts 8:30-31** And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.
  - c) It is true that God's word is clear. But it is also true that people have never had any trouble misunderstanding clear words. They need our help to explain those words and teach them. We need people with the gift of teaching.
  - d) And teaching does not include just spoken instruction. It also includes written teaching such as books, tracts, and web pages. It also includes those who speak in front of large groups as well as those who speak to only one person, such as Philip did with the eunuch.

E. What are "helps" in verse 28?

1. "Helpful deeds" is a new addition to the list of gifts and appears only here in the New Testament.
2. Its verb form appears in Paul's speech to Ephesian elders in Acts 20:35 where it was specifically connected to helping the weak.
  - a) **Acts 20:35** I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how

he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

3. And what a beautiful gift this is! We can all think of people who are the very first people who are called when a helpful deed is needed. They make the food; they drive people to the doctor; they prepare the teaching supplies; they decorate the rooms; they clean up the building; they mow the lawn; they befriend the friendless; they visit the sick; they call the lonely; they encourage the depressed.
4. We can and do get along just fine without the gift of tongues -- but how could we function without the gift of helps? There are so many in the church who serve Christ in ways that win no publicity but without whose service the church could not go on.
5. We can all think of those we call first when we need a helpful deed. And the converse is also true: we can all think of those we would call last if we needed a helpful deed. Continuing with Paul's body part analogies, I am reminded of the following proverb:
  - a) **Proverbs 25:19** Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.
  - b) But that does mean we should stop asking them to help. They need our continued encouragement, and we need their help!
6. And what did James say?
  - a) **James 1:27** Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

F. What are "governments" in verse 28?

1. This word can be translated "acts of guidance," and it is also new to the lists of gifts and also occurs but once in the New Testament. It is a term used for piloting a ship, a very appropriate metaphor in a maritime community such as Corinth.
2. It refers to the gift of setting the direction and guiding a congregation so that it heads in the right direction and follows the correct course. Typically one would expect an eldership to have this gift, but sadly such is not always the case. Congregations all over the country are drifting without direction and without leadership because they have no one in a leadership position with the gift of governments.

X. <sup>31</sup> But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

- A. "The options for interpreting verse 31 are almost as diverse as the members in the body that Paul has just described."
- B. What does it mean to covet the best gifts?
1. Paul may be once again citing a Corinthian slogan. The phrase appears three times in the letter, but each time Paul qualifies it.
    - a) (12:31) But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.
    - b) (14:1) Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.
    - c) (14:39-40) Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. [but] Let all things be done decently and in order.
    - d) Thus, Paul could be saying "But 'earnestly desire the greater gifts," you say; well, I will show you a way far superior to that."
  2. A second possibility is that the verb is indicative, in which case Paul would be saying, "But you are seeking the so-called greater gifts. Rather I will show you a more excellent way."
    - a) This view is supported by 14:12 "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church."
  3. A third possibility is that the verb is imperative (as most translations render it). This view raises two additional questions: what does it mean to covet these greater gifts, and what are these greater gifts?
    - a) How is one to strive for or covet something that can only be given? Does Paul expect them to try to attain gifts that they do not have?
      - (1) Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8 eagerly desired spiritual gifts he did not have, even to the point of trying to buy them. Paul certainly was not encouraging that sort of behavior.
      - (2) The gifts of God's grace do not work automatically; they are not in a state of permanent activity. They can be neglected and they can be quenched.
        - (a) **1 Thessalonians 5:19** Quench not the Spirit.
        - (b) **2 Timothy 1:6** Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.
        - (c) **1 Timothy 4:14** Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee



by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

b) As for the identity of the greater gifts, commentators are all over the map.

(1) It could not mean the greater gifts in the list that Paul just gave (if we assume they are ordered by their importance) because the greatest gift on that list is that of being an apostle, and the Corinthians could not aspire to that position.

(2) I think a better view will become clear as we later move into Chapter 14. The better gifts could be the intelligible gifts that edify the church.

(a) **1 Corinthians 14:5** I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

(3) Under this view, Chapter 13 "interrupts" Paul's argument in order to put the entire discussion into a different framework. But note that love is not called a greater gift. Instead, Paul calls it an excellent way. Love is not a gift but is rather the necessary context for the gifts. (And, as we will see, Chapter 13 is hardly an interruption!)

## XI. Conclusion

A. Barclay described these verses we have studied as one of the most famous pictures of unity of the church ever written.

B. From this beautiful picture, we can draw several important lessons:

1. A body consists of many parts but there is in it an essential unity. As Plato noted, when we hurt our finger, we don't say "My finger has a pain" but we say "I have a pain." There is an I, a personality, that gives unity to the many and varying parts of the body. What the I is to the body, Christ is to the church. It is in Christ that all the diverse parts of the body find their unity.
2. A second lesson is that the church is the body of Christ. Jesus is no longer in the world in the body. Therefore if he wants a task done within the world he looks for a man to do it. He looks to his church, his body. The supreme glory of a Christian is that he or she is part of the body of Christ upon earth.
  - a) "He has no hands but our hands to do his work today; He has no feet but our feet to lead men in his way; He has no voice but our voice to tell men how he died; He has no help but our help to lead them to his side."
  - b) We are the body of Christ. We are the church of Christ. How can the body of Christ ever be idle? The body of Christ is idle when we are idle.