

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor12C)

INTRODUCTION

In previous sessions, we have addressed Paul's opening remarks on this subject in chapter 12:1-11 in addition to some other material that I thought might be helpful in order to gain a more panoramic view of the issues at play in an interpretation of these chapters. In chapter 12:1-11, Paul explains the source of spiritual gifts to be the Holy Spirit. In addition, he also addresses the role of Jesus Christ and God the Father in relation to spiritual gifts. He explains that even though there were a variety of spiritual gifts, there should be a unity of purpose that is accomplished when they are exercised by believers. Exhortation in this regard was necessary due to the self-centered thinking and behavior that had manifested itself in Corinth and which had been addressed by Paul in the first chapters of his 1st letter to the church in Corinth.

- Sectarianism (chps. 1-4).
- Failure to protect the witness of the church by allowing sexual immorality or incest (chp. 5).
- Lawsuits in public court amongst believers (chp. 6).
- Ascetic practices involving the denial of sexual relations between husband and wife that promoted self-righteousness (chp. 7).
- Abuse of Christian liberty (chps. 8-10).
- Distraction through focus upon the individual in church services (chp. 11A).
- Abuse and neglect due to a party atmosphere at the Lord's memorial observance (chp. 11B).

As we have noted, chaos in the local assembly meetings had become the norm apparently. Evidently, false teachers were exacerbating the situation. No doubt these Jewish false teachers claimed to have their own revelation from God. So, in these verses, Paul provided a simple litmus test that would allow believers to determine who was a false teacher. One who proclaimed Jesus to be accursed was obviously not speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, one who proclaimed Jesus as Lord would have been doing so in this context through the Holy Spirit's influence in their life. As we noted, this is not a hard and fast rule in all contexts since some religious types who are really unbelievers can say the words Jesus is Lord – yet still be unbelievers. It was a test designed for the situation within the local church in Corinth, although it is still a good first pass test for believers today.

So, after addressing these points with regard to the source of spiritual gifts to include the items mentioned above, Paul turns to addressing the diversity that existed in the local church in Corinth.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE ONE BODY OF CHRIST (12:12-31)

12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are 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 we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense

of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. 29 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? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? 31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

Verses 12-13

12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are 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 we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

In these verses, Paul illustrates the diversity and unity of the spiritual gifts by the example of the human body. Even though the human body consists of many parts and all of them are important, the whole body functions as a unified whole. So it should be with the body of Christ – the church. Paul was most likely referencing the universal church and saw the local church at Corinth as a subset of the universal church. The same principles apply to both.

Paul sees the universal church as an organic whole. Every believer, regardless of prior racial, religious or social status (slave or freeman), has been united by the one Spirit into one spiritual body through baptism. Notice that this baptism mentioned by Paul is not a water baptism of the believer.

There are eight (or nine depending upon how far one distinction is taken) different baptisms spoken of in the Bible. A summary of these baptisms follows.

Non-Water Baptisms

- Baptism of Moses – identification with (acceptance of) Moses' commissioning by God (1 Cor 10:1-2)
- Baptism of the Cup – Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross (Matt 20:22; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24)
- Baptism of the Church Age believer by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ (Rom 6:3-4 implied; 1 Cor 12:13)
- Baptism of the believer (in the gospel of the kingdom) during the kingdom-proximate portion of the Age of Israel with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11; Lu 3:16)
- Baptism of Fire associated with the 2nd Advent (Matt 3:11; Lu 3:16)

Water Baptisms

- Baptism of John (Matt 3:6) – repentance in association with John’s proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom. Prior to the resurrection of Jesus. Very similar to the following baptism.
- Baptism to be practiced in association with the proclaiming of the gospel during the kingdom-proximate portion of the Age of Israel (Matt 28:19). Post-resurrection of Jesus.
- Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13-17)
- Baptism for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29) – not sanctioned, but mentioned in a negative sense.

Two of these baptisms involve the believer and the Holy Spirit.

Agent	Person Baptized	Medium (“Into” or “With”)	Passage
Jesus	Believer	Holy Spirit	Matt 3:11; Lu 3:16
HS	Believer	Jesus Christ	1 Cor 12:13; Rom. 6:3

Verses 14-20

14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body.

Paul’s emphasis in this section is upon diversity – not unity. In order for the human body to function properly, there needs to be diversity of parts. So, here, Paul emphasizes the necessity of having diversity within the Body of Christ. Each part (such as the eye or the ear) must be willing to perform its own function and not seek to function in a role for which it was not made. This requires humility on the part of the believer – a willingness to submit to the authority of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. You may recall that humility is one of the components of the divine power sphere which we have studied in the past.¹

The necessity for Paul’s teaching upon the subject of diversity has been highlighted in the introduction to this session as we reviewed the various examples of carnal, self-promoting type thinking and behavior that had manifested itself in Corinth and which Paul addressed in his opening chapters to the letter. A desire for approbation from man was in part motivating these Corinthian believers to seek the more visible and prominent gifts.

The logic of *verse 17* is clear. No human body can function as if it were all an eye, all hearing, or all smelling. So for the church to function properly, it must have different gifts and offices.

Principle: Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Christian Church, the possibility of effective Christian service is gone.

In *verses 18-20*, Paul reflects upon the sovereign purposes of God. God has a sovereign purpose in regards to this Gentile-centric dispensation that fits and reconciles with His overall

¹ The components are: #1 – yieldedness; #2 – objectivity; #3 – humility; #4 – momentum; #5 – personal love for God; #6 – impersonal (or agape) love for man; #7 – momentum testing; #8 – sharing the happiness of God.

purposes for human history. His desire is that the church universal (and local churches as subsets of that universal church) illustrate unity through the diversity of spiritual gifts.

Verses 21-26

21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

It is interesting that Paul used the head and the feet as examples in verse 21 – the head cannot say to the feet that the head doesn't need the feet. Paul was reminding those who felt superior that those whom they regarded as inferior were also necessary (cf. 11:17-34).

As the organs of the human body--such as the eye, hand, head, and feet--need each other, so the members of the church with their various functions need each other. Moreover, the least attractive and inconspicuous parts of the body are important and should be treated with respect (vv. 22, 23). So also the inconspicuous members of the local church are essential--those who pray, those who work with their hands.

In verses 23-24, Paul indicates that when we are addressing the needs of our human body, we give more honor to our less honorable parts by covering them up. This makes our unseemly members more seemly. Paul may have been referring to the sexual organs. On the other hand, the more honorable parts, such as our face, do not require special covering. The point is that we take special pains to honor our less esteemed physical members, and we should do the same in the church rather than neglecting or despising them.

As the more humble parts of the body are given special attention by covering them with appropriate clothing and, as in the case of the digestive organs, providing them with food, so the inconspicuous members of the church--the poor, the despised, the less prominent--are to be cherished and nurtured.

The conjunction *alla* ("but") in the middle of verse 24 returns to the subject of God's sovereign purposes. When Paul says that by *giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked* it, he is referring to such components as the face. A face is not necessary for the human body to function; however, we perceive the attractiveness of an individual through the symmetry of the face. So, God has given more honor to such components as the face – components of the human body that would have otherwise lacked honor. Paul is making a veiled allusion here to the more visible spiritual gifts such as tongues which were being so desired by many of the believers in Corinth.

Verses 27-31

27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. 29 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? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not

interpret, do they? 31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

Paul is again indicating that it is the sovereign God who dispenses offices and gifts to his church. The order of the gifts is interesting to say the least. The first three--*apostles, prophets, and teachers*--are in the same order as in Ephesians 4:11 (cf. Rom 12:6, 7). Since they are listed first, Paul seems to be indicating that they should be considered important – particularly in regards to the edification of the body and especially in contrast to the gift of tongues.

The next gifts are set off from the first three and range in order from miracles to the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues, which, being mentioned last, seem to be of least importance. The office of apostle was all-encompassing, including the gifts of prophecy, teaching, miracles, and the rest. But the prophetic gift (cf. Acts 11:24; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10) did not include apostolicity. The rest of the list includes gifts given various members of the church--gifts that, while of lesser significance, are yet important.

Having mentioned tongues and their interpretation, Paul urges Christians to seek the better gifts--not speaking in tongues, which the Corinthians apparently wanted to have more fully. The possession of specific gifts, according to Paul, is not so important as the way in which the gifts are exercised.