

## Chapter Twelve

### THE PROBLEM OF MAINTAINING UNITY IN THE MIDST OF DIVERSITY

(Miraculous Gifts)

(12:1-31)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why couldn't a person without Christ's Spirit in him utter the words, "Jesus is Lord"?
2. Why does Paul say God "inspired" the various workings of the Spirit?
3. How are we all "baptized" by one Spirit into the body of Christ?
4. Why did God adjust the human body to give greater honor to the inferior part?
5. If Christians are to "earnestly desire the higher gifts," what are they?

#### SECTION 1

##### **Sovereign of Diversity (12:1-3)**

**12** Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup>You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved. <sup>3</sup>Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

**12:1 Purpose of Chapter:** Although the chapter begins, "Now concerning spiritual gifts . . ." its main purpose is not to discuss the nature of miraculous gifts. Nor is its primary purpose the discussion of the place or purpose of miraculous gifts. If their purpose is mentioned in this chapter at all it is only because their purpose may have some bearing on the main problem. The main topic is the *correction of faulty attitudes* these Christians had toward miraculous gifts. This chapter (and the two chapters following) is as relevant as today's church affairs. Christians are still, today, expressing attitudes toward *alleged* miraculous gifts that disrupt the unity of Christ's church.

Actually, the word "gifts" is not even in the first verse. The Greek text has only the word *pneumatikon* which should be translated, "spiritual things, or matters." Translators have supplied the word "gifts" in this first verse. It might very well have been translated, "Now concerning the spiritual attitude you have toward spiritual gifts," since that is clearly the main point of this whole chapter.

A brief consideration of the purpose of miraculous gifts will help us understand this chapter. The *primary* purpose of miraculous gifts was *evidential*. Miraculous gifts were to confirm the deity of Jesus and to validate the message of the apostles as that of the Holy Spirit. Miracles were not granted to transform, convert or indicate the worker of such miracles had reached a higher phase of sanctification. In the infancy of the Church, when congregations everywhere were compelled to depend upon the oral instruction of the apostles and other evangelists, God saw fit to confirm the heavenly origin of their message with miracles (see Heb. 2:3-4; II Cor. 12:12; John 3:2; 10:37-38; 14:11; Acts 1:8; I Cor. 14:22, etc.). When the Church was still a child, it spake as a child (dependent upon confirmation of its message by the Father); but when the Church became a grown, integrated man, it put away childish things. When the body of Christ was fully formed and permanently established (incorporating both Jew and Gentile) with elders, deacons and evangelists, and when the Truth was fully revealed and propositionalized in the New Covenant scriptures, then the miraculous support by which it was sustained in its infancy was no longer needed and, therefore, passed away. This was according to the pre-ordained plan of God (see I Cor. 13:8-13). Most certainly, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were not given to the primitive church to be used as toys for amusement and entertainment. The possession of a miraculous gift was *not* a signal from God that the possessor was to be elevated in importance above any other Christian brother, gifted or non-gifted. For expanded treatment of the purpose of miraculous gifts and their cessation see Special Studies at the end of this chapter.

There must have been wholesale discrimination and division going on in the Corinthian church over possession and non-possession of miraculous gifts from the Holy Spirit. Those few who had been given these gifts felt they were spiritually superior to those who had not received miraculous gifts. The "gifted" were even discriminating among themselves as to which "gifts" were more important and which ones were of very little value. Some of the "gifted" were even declaring that those without miraculous gifts to exercise could not prove

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they had the Holy Spirit dwelling in them! Paul's response to these egotistical Corinthians is certainly relevant for the twentieth century.

In verse 2 Paul reminds the Corinthians how they were led astray to dumb idols by pagan priests who pretended to have miraculous gifts and divine revelations from "the gods." Archaeologists have found in the ancient city of Pompeii in the ruins of a pagan temple, a secret stair by which the priest mounted to the back of the statue of Isis; the head of the statue shows the *tube* which went from the back of the head to the parted lips. Through this tube the priest concealed behind the statue spoke the "answers" of Isis. These pagan priests usually tried to prove that only they had the "spirits of the gods" in them by ecstatic trances, pseudo communication with the "gods" by uttering unintelligible mutterings; by pretended "prophecies"; and by attempting to communicate with the dead. These pagan priests often contradicted themselves and represented the "gods" as cursing what they had once blessed. Heathen priests also promoted hatred, revenge, envy and immorality as part of the religion of the "gods."

The Corinthian Christians were having difficulty determining whether pagan priests possessed the Spirit of God and spoke divine revelations or not. And, further, they were being confused by the self-appointed "spiritual elite" within the church as to whether the non-gifted Christian had the Holy Spirit or not. Paul sets out to clear up the confusion. He takes three chapters (12-13-14) to do so. He begins by stating that "no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus be cursed." All heathen religions would say that of Jesus. But the Holy Spirit would *never* contradict himself, and curse the Son of God. The Corinthians may know assuredly that no pagan priest speaks by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

Contrariwise, any person who says Jesus is Lord, and exhibits a life surrendered to the lordship of Jesus, does so in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Any person agreeing to be ruled by Christ *has* the Holy Spirit. One does not have to receive the miraculous gifts of the Spirit to have him within them. It is only through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit that any person is able to confess Jesus as Lord. The lordship of Jesus is revealed by the Father through the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 11:25-30; 16:17; John 14:1—16:33; Romans 8:1-17; I John 4:1-6), and the Holy Spirit *documents* the lordship of Jesus through the written word. The lordship of Jesus is not something which men may discover for themselves—it is something which God, in his grace, revealed to the world.

The primary purpose for miraculous gifts of the Spirit was to give the infant church an infallible guide by which to determine whether a preacher or teacher was speaking under the auspices of God and his Spirit or not. Before the New Testament scriptures were completed, and God's revelation to man was finalized, these miraculous powers were necessary. The spiritual gifts enabled the Corinthians to recognize pretenders in their day; the truth of the Bible enables the church to do the same today.

Part of the difficulty we have in understanding the problem in Corinth over miraculous gifts of the Spirit is due to the fact that such phenomena no longer exist. The pseudo "miraculous gifts" of modern Christendom are, at best, psycho-somatic, but for the most part, hoaxes. The gifts Paul discusses were unquestionably miraculous and unique. They were also transitory (see I Cor. 13:8-13). John Chrysostom (345-407 A.D.) wrote that Paul's discussion of miraculous gifts was obscure, even to the church of his day, because of the fact that such phenomena no longer took place.

So, the proper attitude toward miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit is to acknowledge that the real test of the Spirit's presence is the total commitment of life to the lordship of Jesus. A person might have been given the power to do miracles and not have had the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit within. Judas Iscariot was empowered to work miracles right along with the rest of the apostles (see Matt. 10:1-8) and it is clear that he did not have the Holy Spirit in his heart for he was a thief from the beginning (John 12:6). It is apparent that some of these Corinthian Christians, while having power to do miracles, were dangerously close (if not at the point) to rejecting the lordship of Christ and doing despite unto the Holy Spirit by their proud and arrogant misuse of the "gifts."

Paul wants these "saints" to know that now that they are Christians they must allow Christ to exercise total lordship in their lives. They must speak and act according to the Spirit of Christ whose revelation for life comes through the apostolic word. If they have enthroned Christ as the Lord of their hearts, they are not going to envy another's "gift." They will be glad for every service that glorifies Christ. They are not going to call another Christian inferior because he has no *miraculous* gift.

There are no more miraculous gifts exercised in the church. They are no longer needed. They served their purpose. But there are *functional* "gifts" within the church today. *Every* Christian has some functional

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gift (see Special Study: *Gifts and Miracles*). So the principles of Paul's correction about attitudes toward "gifts" applies to the church for all time. Wrong attitudes, or worldly-mindedness, toward the gifts or abilities or circumstances with which God has blessed every Christian will lead to the same consequence in the church today as it did two thousand years ago—division and eventual destruction. There is great diversity and individuality in the gifts of God's grace—but there must be *unity* in Christian's minds and hearts!

### SECTION 2

#### Source of Diversity (12:4-11)

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

**12:4-7 Provenance:** The word *inspires* in verse 6 is a translation of the Greek word *energon* which actually means, "energizing, working, or operating." Paul emphasizes over and over that it was the "same God" or "same Spirit" who *energized* or *operated* the miraculous gifts through those who were given them. These special gifts all came from God and were, therefore, to be used to *edify* (build up) the church, not to divide and destroy its oneness. These gifts all had their source in the power of One Divine Person, so, there was *one purpose* (God's) for their use. If it was the same God who was the Source of all the gifts, then they were all given for the *common good* (Gr. *sumpheron*, literally, "together-profit"). They were not given to promote the superiority of those possessing them—they were to serve every member, one way or another, in the body of Christ. No gift of God to man, whether miraculous or non-miraculous, is ever given to

be used selfishly for the promotion of human pride or superiority. Gifts are given for service. It may not have been Paul's intention to teach the doctrine of the Trinity, but the oneness of the threefold personage of the Godhead is certainly delineated when he states, ". . . the same Spirit . . . the same Lord . . . the same God."

**12:8-10 Particularity:** In verse 4 the apostle indicated there were *varieties* of gifts given to the Corinthians. The Greek word translated *varieties* is *diarseis* and means literally, "to take apart," or, "in many parts," hence, "differences" or "distinctions." The Corinthian church probably had a full complement of all the gifts God intended the first century church to have. Verse 4 also contains three significant Greek words explaining the purpose of the variety. The Greek word translated *gifts* is *charismaton*; literally, "things of grace." The Greek word translated *service* is *diakonion*; literally, "deaconries." The Greek word translated *working* is *energmaton*; literally, "operatings." God purposely gave great variety of miraculous gifts in order that the whole church might have a miraculously sustained ministry, so necessary for the extremely crucial infant years (approximately 30-100 A.D.) of its existence. The emphasis is definitely on variety for the purpose of service and ministry.

Nine supernatural gifts are listed. Each had a particular function to perform in sustaining and maturing the church. When we read that these gifts were supernatural we must not forget the trials, temptations, doubts and fears those first century Christians endured. The New Testament (Acts, Hebrews, I Peter, Galatians, Thessalonians, Revelation) documents for us a fearsome record of their sufferings. They needed divine demonstrations to nourish courage, faith and endurance. Christians of that century did not have Bibles of their very own. Precious and few were the manuscripts or copies and those were circulated from one church to another. The infant church also needed direct, divine guidance in discerning the truth from all the deceptive falsehoods of paganism and the Judaizers.

The "gifts" as Paul lists them are:

- a. "the utterance of wisdom" (Gr. *logos sophias*); probably supernatural power to reveal Christian *principles* of thought and behavior; revealed applications of gospel facts.
- b. "the utterance of knowledge" (Gr. *logos gnoseos*); probably supernatural guidance in knowing the *facts* of the gospel so they might confirm "prophecies"; the importance of this is evident from I Corinthians chapter 15.

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- c. "faith" (Gr. *pistis*); probably the faith to "move mountains" (I Cor. 13:2; Matt. 17:20) or do miraculous works; J. W. McGarvey said that no amount of personal faith ever enabled one to perform a miracle to whom such power had not been given. We must be careful to distinguish between the use of "faith" in connection with spiritual gifts and the personal faith that saves. Jesus gave Judas "faith" to perform miracles (Matt. 10:1-8) but Judas did not, evidently, possess faith of his own in Christ sufficient to acknowledge him as his savior.
- d. "healings" (Gr. *iamaton*); undoubtedly supernatural power was given to certain individuals to cure illnesses and diseases; perhaps some could heal certain diseases and others different diseases; it is not stated that anyone had power to heal all diseases.
- e. "the working of miracles" (G. *energemata dunameon*, operations of powers); probably has to do with miracles other than healings; perhaps supernatural power to bring the judgment of God upon persons opposing God (Ananias and Sapphira, Elymas) or powers over nature and things.
- f. "prophecy" (Gr. *propheteia*); probably supernatural endowment to proclaim (and predict when necessary) and preach the gospel inerrantly, and directly without having been eyewitnesses as the apostles were; the word "prophecy" may be used for non-miraculous preaching (see Rom. 12:6).
- g. "ability to distinguish between spirits" (Gr. *diakriseis pneumataton*); literally, "critiquing of spirits"; probably supernatural endowment of the ability to judge between true and false teachers and doctrines with immediacy. In the infant church (without a proliferation of written scriptures) there was no objective test available to determine correct teaching versus false so supernaturally endowed gifts to make such distinctions were necessary. Now, with the Bible complete, in thousands of human languages, the supernatural gifts are no longer necessary. Doctrine and teachers are to be measured according to the written apostolic word (see I John 4:1-6; II Thess. 3:6-15; II Tim. 3:16-17).
- h. "various kinds of tongues" (Gr. *gene glosson*); probably supernatural endowment to speak in a human (foreign) language unknown, except by miraculous endowment, to the speaker

and often unknown to the listeners requiring an interpreter. These “tongues” (languages) were human languages. They were not totally “unknown” (as the KJV implies) (see Acts 2:8ff.) (see comments on I Cor. 14:1ff.).

- i. “interpretation of tongues” (Gr. *hermenia glosson*). The word *hermenia* is the word from which we get the English word *hermeneutics*, “the science of interpretation and explanation.” When a Christian, under supernatural power of God’s Spirit, spoke in a language foreign to himself and his hearers, it required someone supernaturally endowed with the gift of understanding the unknown language to *translate* the message in the language known to the hearers. The main purpose of the phenomena of speaking in a language unknown to the speaker was the manifestation of a miracle (see I Cor. 14:22). At the same time, however, getting the message of the “unknown” tongue to the audience was so important, Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian church was, “if there is no one to interpret, let each of them (tongues speakers) keep silent in the church.” Those with the gift of foreign-language-speaking could control their utterings. (See John 1:41-42 for two examples of the Greek word *hermenia* being used to mean “translate.”)

**12:11-Partitioning:** Miraculous gifts were apportioned according to the sovereign *will* and *choice* of the Holy Spirit. It was *not the desire of the recipient* that determines the gift. Modern, pseudo, charismatic gifts are allegedly given on the basis of the recipient’s faith and desire. The Bible clearly documents the fact that supernatural endowments of the Holy Spirit of God were given exclusively according to God’s purpose. Paul makes it plain in three of his other epistles (Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:7; Heb. 2:4) that all “gifts,” supernatural and natural, are distributed entirely according to the purpose of God.

In his parable Jesus taught that all “talents” and “pounds” were distributed according to the “owner’s” will. Servants all received different measures and were responsible only for the measure they had received—not for what another had received. There is no room for pride or jealousy when we acknowledge the truth that everything we have is from the “same God” and “according to his omniscient will.”

The RSV is not as accurate as it could be in verse 11 had it been a more literal translation. The Greek text reads: *panta de tauta energei*

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*to en kai to auto pneuma, diairoun idia hekasto kathos bouletai.* A more literal translation would read: *And all these things the same Spirit operates, distributing separately to each one as he purposes.*

Christians, of all people, must recognize and admit that human beings have *absolutely nothing at all* (miraculous gifts, functional gifts, material gifts) unless received from God, to be used as he purposes in his revealed will, the Bible. He is the source of all we have so that no man might boast in the presence of God (cf. I Cor. 1:30).

### SECTION 3

#### **Sagaciousness of Diversity (12:12-26)**

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single organ, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need for you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, 25 that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

**12:12-13 The Organism:** The "body" of Christ (the church) is an *organism*, not an *organization* (see Special Study, "Is the Church An Organization or an Organism?"). On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff.) when the apostles began to carry out the command of their Lord, the resurrected Christ in heaven was united, as the Head, to the spiritual body (the church) being formed on earth in order that the work of redemption, attained by Christ in his physical body, might be practiced and proclaimed and increased in Christians (the body) until he comes. Of course, the church (Christians) can never add a word, a thought, or a deed to the finished work of Christ's vicarious death and the Holy Spirit's revelation of the New Testament scriptures. Jesus completed all that forever. But the Lord in that human body was not ending something, he was beginning a great program which he himself, in the limitations of a human body could never complete (the task of world-wide proclamation of redemption, see Col. 1:24-27). When Jesus was here in his physical body there was no part of human life that his *holy* nature did not penetrate with the redemptive purpose of God; his incarnation was an invasion of holiness on all fronts and in every aspect of human need. He penetrated every level of life with righteousness: social, political, ecclesiastical, moral, educational and familial. That is the work his body (the church) is commissioned now to do.

The definition of *organism* is: "Any highly complex thing or structure with parts so integrated that their relation to one another is governed by their relation to the whole." An *organism* is something living where the whole exists for the parts, and each part for the whole and for all other parts. That is precisely what Paul is saying to the Corinthians in these verses about the church. Plummer says: "The Church is neither a dead mass of similar particles, like a heap of sand, nor a living swarm of antagonistic individuals, like a cage of wild beasts; it has the unity of a living organism, in which no two parts are exactly alike, but all discharge different functions for the good of the whole. All men are not equal, and no individual can be independent of the rest; everywhere there is subordination and dependence."

Paul is saying that every individual has some function to discharge, and all must work (see Eph. 4:15-16) together for the common good. The all-important operation of an organism is unity in loving service. The Church is an organic body of which all the parts are moved by a spirit of common interest and mutual affection.

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Christ's "body" (the church) is one. Any member contributing to the destruction of this oneness, either by refusing to function (as it has been gifted) or by hindering another member from using its gifts (through jealousy or pride), is in danger of being cut off (see Matt. 5:29-30; John 15:1-11). The *oneness* of mind, love and purpose in his disciples was what Jesus prayed for on the night before his death (John 17:1ff.). He knew the world would never believe God sent him if his disciples could not function as many different members in one whole, living, organism. Just as a human body must have all its "members" (parts) functioning properly in order for one body to be whole and serving its purpose, so it is with "Christ," says the apostle. Paul is using "Christ" in verse 12 as a metonymy for the church. All members in a physical body cannot have the same function, but the fulfillment of the body's purpose demands that each member function according to its part. The body cannot be whole and cannot reach its fullest potential when one of its members does not function properly.

Paul wrote verse 13 in Greek thus: *dai gar en heni pneumati hemeis pantes eis hen soma ebaptisthemen . . .*, literally, "for indeed by one Spirit we all into one body were immersed. . . ." The emphasis is, of course, on the *oneness* of the instrumentality of the Corinthian's immersion (see Acts 18:8). The Greek preposition *en* used with the dative case *pneumati* should be translated causally (see examples of *en* translated causally at Luke 24:49; II Thess. 2:13; I Peter 1:2) when the context demands it. The Corinthians were not initially immersed *in* the Spirit but *by* the revealed will and command of the Spirit. Their initial immersion was in water in obedience to apostolic preaching. Some of the Corinthians later received the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. But the possession of miraculous gifts did not *necessitate* the "immersion of the Holy Spirit." The immersion (baptism) of the Holy Spirit was administered only by direct endowment of Christ (see Matt. 3:11-12; Luke 24:48-49; John 1:33; 20:22-23; Acts 2:1-21; 10:44-11:18). Miraculous gifts of the Spirit were incidentally imparted to those (the apostles and Cornelius' family) who received the "immersion (baptism) of the Spirit." All other Christians, except the foregoing, who received supernatural endowments, received them by the laying on of the hands of an apostle. Therefore, when Paul says *en heni pneumati*, "by one Spirit," he is indicating that all the Corinthians, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, were immersed in water in obedience to the revealed will of the *same* Spirit of God. His argument is that since they were all obedient to the will of the same Spirit,

they are all members of the same body. Any person immersed in water in obedience to the revealed will of the Holy Spirit as preached and written by the apostles is a member of Christ's body and equally important. Such a person is then personally responsible to the Head (Christ) of the body to use with humility and gratitude any and all endowments (gifts) he may have for the edification and increase of the whole "body of Christ." All who have been immersed into Christ's body by the *instrumentality* of the Holy Spirit were made to drink of one and the same Spirit of God (see John 7:37-39; Isa. 44:3; 55:1; 58:11; John 4:10, 13; 6:35; Rev. 21:6; 22:17). All Christians of all ages *drink* of the Holy Spirit without receiving the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." The New Testament plainly teaches that drinking of the Holy Spirit is the same as "partaking of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 6:4) or the same as "partaking of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4) or the same as having the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:23; I John 2:24; 3:24, etc.).

**12:14-20 The Organs:** Paul uses the human body, the physical body, to illustrate the wisdom of diversity. Every organism or body consists of more than one member or organ. And no *one* member or organ can supply every need the whole body must have to function as a whole; proper functioning in order to bring about the common good of the whole body requires the contribution of what each member has. Picture what a human body would look like, and how it might function, if it were all ear or all eye! Not only would it be a monstrous looking thing, it would be a malfunctioning thing, perhaps even a dying thing. God made unity, but not uniformity; he did not reduce all human beings down to sameness. Every member cannot have the same function, and, while it may *appear* that some members have more important functions than others, it is not so.

Because one member of the church in Corinth did not have the popular miraculous gift of speaking in a foreign tongue (or had no miraculous gift at all) he was not to be considered unimportant or unnecessary. If the Corinthian church had received only the miraculous gift of "tongues" what a useless body it would have been!

Furthermore, since God arranged the organs in that body (the Corinthian church) as *he* chose, for Christians to rearrange the priorities and functions of the members was rebellion against God. Whatever gifts God gives (miraculous or non-miraculous) he gives not to please men but to fulfill his redemptive purposes for the world. God certainly did not create diversity of functions in the members

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of the human body to *destroy* the body. Neither did Christ's Spirit give diversity of miraculous and non-miraculous gifts to *destroy* his church. A body has to have many members to function properly. All members cannot have the same function. But the fulfillment of the body's purpose must have each member functioning according to its part. The body cannot do without one of its members. The Corinthian church was dividing and destroying itself over the use and abuse of the different miraculous gifts, thinking some were important and some were not needed.

**12:21-26 The Operation:** The very fact of diversity should preclude the possibility of discord. Diversity is given by God in order that the members may care for one another. What one lacks another supplies. Where one cannot function, another functions. This text teaches that Christians ought to: (a) realize they need each other; (b) respect each other; (c) sympathize with one another.

In the human body God has *adjusted* (Gr. *sunekerasen*, literally, "blended" or "mingled together") all the organs and parts of the body in such a way that no organ can be considered inferior or useless or not needed. Those parts of the human body which seem to be weaker we find to be indispensable. One need only to lose the use of an arm, an eye, or even a finger to learn how indispensable each member is. Those parts of the human body we think are *less honorable* (Gr. *atimotera*), such as the sexual organs, God invests with greater honor. The sexual organs which some think dishonorable and uncomely have the function of procreation. Thus greater honor is given to those members of the body which men tend to think of as inferior.

These same principles are true in Christ's spiritual body, the church. Some, in the church at Corinth, were categorizing the miraculous gifts in degrees of greater importance, lesser importance and no importance. In chapter 14 we shall learn that the one gift they thought "superior" was tongues and the "inferior" gift was prophecy. God revealed through Paul that the divine categorization of gifts was exactly *opposite* from that of men. It is true in the body of Christ today (universally, or locally). Every member has at least one non-miraculous gift. That gift comes by the grace of the same God to all. The body as a whole cannot get along without that gift. Some gifts are not as flamboyant as others. But the non-flamboyant may be more important. The less sensational gifts are certainly not to be considered "inferior"; they may, in fact, be superior!

There can be no such thing as isolation in the church. In the body there is no question of relative importance. If any limb or organ ceases to function the whole body is thrown out of order. This is even more true in the spiritual body (the church). When church members begin to think about their own superiority over one another, the possibility of the church functioning properly is destroyed. If any one member of the body suffers abuse, misuse or nonuse, all the other members together suffer some malfunction or loss. If any one member of the body seems to have a more honored (*Gr. doxazetai*, glorified) function or gift, the whole body should rejoice together that this member is making his God-given contribution to the common good of the whole body, realizing that from God's perspective his *glorious* function is of no more significance than someone else's *non-glorious* function. It is not easy for human beings to have the divine perspective. It requires faith! It requires setting the human mind on the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5-17)! It requires the control of the love of Christ over our thoughts until we no longer regard anyone from a human point of view (II Cor. 5:14-21). Men tend to want to categorize, make themselves superior and others inferior, and lord it over one another—but it shall *not* be so among Christians! (Matt. 20:20-28). The devil will always make the divine perspective concerning gifts, talents, abilities and functions to be impractical and unfair. So the Christian must surrender his evaluations and priorities totally to the direction of the Spirit of God in his word, the Bible. The Christian's only option is to perceive and classify gifts as the Bible does.

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#### Singleness in Diversity (12:27-31)

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

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**12:27-30 The Reality:** Paul says, "Now you *are* the body of Christ and individually members of it." Whether men like it or not, understand it or not, God has *appointed* (Gr. *etheto*, placed, set, deposited, constituted, ordained) in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, etc.

The way in which God created the human body and how it is to function is a fact that has to be accepted. The same holds true in the spiritual body of Christ, the church. The appointments and gifts God gives to the various members of the church are to be accepted. God ordained the varieties of functions in the church to produce singleness (unity) of purpose and practice. There *is* one body. But there is still individuality. And the oneness of the body is sustained only when there is surrender of the members to Christ's revealed will concerning variety and individuality. We dare not try to fit all members of the body into one mold of functioning. Sameness is not necessary—in fact, it is unhealthy. Sameness in miraculous gifts would never have produced a strong, growing body of Christ in the first century. Sameness in non-miraculous functioning will not produce spiritual increase and development. It is not sameness of function which produces unity in the body. Unity comes by obedience to the Head!

**12:31 The Route:** Singleness in diversity is attainable! There is a way for a multi-talented church in any cultural, social, economic, educational and political circumstance to be one body of Christ. That way is agape-love!

Paul has not yet discussed the idea that some supernatural gifts were "greater" than others. He went to great lengths (12:1-31) to demonstrate that each *member* (gifted or not) is as important to the body as any other. But, in chapter 14, he categorizes the usefulness of miraculous gifts, declaring that the gifts which edified and gave a steadying influence on the whole congregation (such as prophecy) were the "greater" gifts. The Corinthians apparently had a mania for the more spectacular, exhibitionist gifts such as "speaking in tongues." In chapter 14, Paul reprimands that attitude. He may be rebuking it here in 12:31.

. . . in I Cor. 12:31 perhaps we should read a mild rebuke. It could just as accurately be translated, "But you are zealously seeking the greater gifts." In the second person plural of the present tense, indicative and imperative forms (in Greek) look alike. The context and line of thought must indicate which it

is. In view of the overall teaching of I Cor. 12-14, rebuking pride in some gifts, and expressing the same divine source for all different gifts, and teaching "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good*" (I Cor. 12:7 RSV), is it not more likely that Paul is disapproving of their desire for the greater gifts?

It seems clear that in these chapters he is teaching against both selfish pride in some gifts as greater and failure to use the gifts for others.

*Learning From Jesus*, by Seth Wilson, pub. College Press Publishing Company, pp. 471-472.

Paul's main concern was that the whole church be edified (see I Cor. 14:18, 19, 26). All supernatural gifts were to be practiced solely to that end. And some gifts were more apt to produce edification of the body than others.

Prompted by the Spirit of Christ the apostle declares "there is yet a more excellent way I will show you" to produce unity in the body. That, of course, is the way of *agape-love*. Paul elucidates on the superiority of love over supernatural gifts in chapter 13. *Agape-love* is a virtue every Christian must have. To have a supernatural gift and not have *agape-love* makes the supernatural gift less than useless. Supernatural gifts were temporary. They were endowed by God for a specific time and place in the infancy of the Church. They were destined to become obsolete and vanish. Not so with *agape-love*. The completed New Testament scriptures and Christians practicing *agape-love* is all the church now, in its manhood, needs. Love is far superior to miraculous gifts. Love is able to overcome, to produce, and to sustain where miraculous gifts alone never could. Love alone will produce oneness in the body of Christ whether there is ever a miraculous gift or not. Supernatural gifts alone will not produce oneness. Indeed, gifts alone will produce pride, jealousy and division.

The doctrine Paul introduces here (and amplifies in chapter 13) applies at all times, in every circumstance, for the body of Christ. It matters not in a congregation how erudite the preacher, how rich and influential the members, oneness is the consequence of *agape-love*. *The body of Christ must have oneness!* It is not his body if it doesn't!

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

### APPLICATIONS:

1. Have you ever thought about the fact that you would never have been able to call Jesus "Lord" without the work of the Holy Spirit?
2. Does that help you know that *you have* the Holy Spirit?
3. What is your attitude toward the "gifts" of God? (both miraculous and non-miraculous)?
4. Do you think the church has a responsibility to inform Christians as to the attitude Christ wants concerning "gifts"? What about your church?
5. Although you cannot expect a miraculous gift today, you still have many non-miraculous gifts from God—are you functioning as an integral part of the body of Christ with your gifts?
6. Would you serve the church more if you were more talented or "gifted"?
7. Have you been immersed into the body of Christ by the revealed will of the one Spirit of God?
8. What does it do for your understanding of the functioning of the church in the world today to think of it in comparison to the human body?
9. Try to think of as many non-miraculous "gifts" as you can to which God may give "the greater honor" today! Make a list. (Compare Rom. 12:1ff.)
10. Does the whole church where you attend suffer when one member is not functioning according to his "gift"? Does the whole church rejoice when one is honored? Which is easier for the church to do?

### APPREHENSIONS:

1. Why is one's attitude toward a gift (miraculous or non-miraculous) more important than the gift itself?
2. Are those claiming today to have miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (and claiming Jesus as "Lord") while rejecting other apostolic doctrines, really letting Jesus be Lord?
3. Why, when the New Testament is so plain to say that miraculous gifts are distributed according to the will of God, do so many clamor for miraculous gifts today as if such gifts are available because they desire them?
4. Would it help the unity of the church if Christians were reminded more often that they have absolutely nothing except it has been

- given them by God? Are we guilty sometimes of thinking, "I worked hard for that and I deserve it"?
5. Is the church actually the "body of Christ" in the world today? Why is it a body? What is the difference between an organism and an organization?
  6. How does man mix himself up about the significance of certain parts of the "body" (both physical and spiritual bodies)?
  7. What would happen to the body if there were no diversity in its members?
  8. Why is it unhealthy to try to fit all Christians into one emotional, cultural, functional mold and do away with individuality?
  9. Why must we see the functioning of the members of the church through the perspective of God?
  10. Is there a way to have unity through diversity? What is that way?