

Message #55

I Corinthians 12:27-31

The strategy of divide them, isolate them and conquer them is not just one for physical warfare, but it is a key strategy of Satan in spiritual warfare. Satan is a crafty strategist. He has been combating and conquering people for thousands of years.

Satan realizes that if he can divide the church and get people to become isolated, he can conquer and defeat the church of God. Satan's goal for a true church of God is to destroy it.

In the case of the church of God at Corinth, he was doing a good job. The Corinthians were actually being divided over many things: 1) spirituality; 2) carnality; 3) morality 4) legality, 5) gray areas; and 6) spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts were a key weapon Satan was using in this church of Corinth. Satan had convinced some people that everyone should have the same gift. Satan had convinced some people that if they didn't have a certain gift, they weren't important. Satan had convinced some people that if they did have a certain gift they were the only ones who were important. Satan was having a field day dividing the church over the issue of spiritual gifts. He was in the process of attacking and conquering this church to the point that it was no longer functioning as a God-honoring unit, to the point that this church could not even be fed solid meals from the Word of God (I Cor. 3:2).

EVERY BELIEVER IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF CHRIST'S BODY AND EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE DIFFERENT RANKED GIFTS, EACH INDIVIDUAL PART IS NECESSARY TO THE BODY.

CONCEPT #1 – We are the body of Christ. **12:27a**

When God wants to accomplish something Christological, He will use His church to do it. The absence of an article before the noun “body” indicates that we are the character and quality of the body of Jesus Christ. This is a reality that exists positionally and is to exist practically.

Christianity is not only about you and me; it is about Jesus Christ. We are making some kind of statement for Him and we are making some type of statement for this His body.

CONCEPT #2 – We are individual parts of the whole. **12:27b**

The word “members,” as we have already discussed in previous studies, refers to a limb or part of the body. However, the word “individually” is a word that refers to a portion or a part of the whole (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 284-285).

The emphasis of this phrase is that each part is a particular part of the whole. It is the whole that the part is out of. The part is not determined by its individuality; it is determined by its corporate identity. In the mind of God, the body part is determined by the whole.

It is only as the part functions with the rest of the body that it is significant in the mind of God.

CONCEPT #3 – Our specific part has been determined by God. **12:28**

The specific gift we have, the specific part we are to play in God's church is a determined appointment of God. The verb "appointed" is a middle voice verb, meaning God has placed, put and fixed for Himself the various parts of Christ's body. God, not man, determines who receives a particular gift.

Each person and each gift is an appointed work of God and God has done the work Himself as it pleases Him. Time and time again Paul emphasizes this in this context: 12:6, 8, 11, 18, 24, 28. No person gets any gift because he wants it, begs for it, prays for it or pleads for it; every gift is determined and appointed by God!

Gift #1 - The gift of apostle.

This was the highest ranked gift that any could have in the church. It refers to those who had specifically been commissioned and sent by the resurrected Jesus Christ. They had been given miraculous abilities to demonstrate that they were apostles. Their assignment was to report and record N.T. revelation.

Gift #2 - The gift of a prophet.

This was the second highest ranked gift in the early days of the Church Age in which one received direct revelation from God and communicated those direct messages from God to people. This particular gift was both a foretelling and forth-telling gift.

Gift #3 - The gift of teacher.

This was the third highest ranked gift in the church. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he identifies this gift as being the gift of "pastor and teacher" (Eph. 4:11). This was a supernatural ability to teach God's truth and give insight and instruction based on God's truth. This is classified by Paul as a spiritual gift and is distinct from the office of elder (I Tim. 5:17). This is a gift of high accountability; in fact, James warns of the strict judgment that will come to one with this gift (James 3:1).

Gift #4 - The gift of miracles.

Notice that this is identified as a "then" gift. Notice carefully that according to God's rating system, teaching is a higher ranked gift than miracles.

Gift #5 - The gift of healing.

Notice carefully that the remaining gifts are classified as "then" gifts. All of these gifts are subordinate in rank to teaching the Word of God.

Gift #6 - The gift of helps.

This is a beautiful Greek word which presents the idea of helping someone by taking the burden off someone else and putting it on self. The burden is not specified, therefore helps is not limited. Notice that helping someone was higher ranked than tongues.

Gift #7 - The gift of administration.

The word “administration” refers to one who steers or pilots as a guide. This refers to one who directs.

Gift #8 - The gift of tongues.

This was the ability to speak in different foreign languages. Tongues was less significant than helps or administration because most people in the church spoke the same language. On God’s rating scale, tongues was lower ranked than helps or administration. It was lower ranked than teaching. So people who become infatuated with tongues more than with the other gifts are infatuated with a lesser gift. As we will see in our next chapter, tongues was a temporal gift (13:8), whereas some of these other gifts were abiding gifts that would continue through the Church Age.

CONCEPT #4 – All parts are not the same. **12:29-30**

No believer has been denied a spiritual gift, but every believer has been denied some spiritual gift. All parts are not the same. Paul grammatically asks questions in these two verses that all expect a “no” answer.

CONCEPT #5 – We are to think properly about spiritual gifts. **12:31a**

Here is a very tricky phrase, complicated by the fact that the verb “desire” may be either interpreted as an imperative, a command or an indicative statement of fact.

Way #1 - As an imperative, it could mean you are commanded to seek gifts that rank higher than the gift you presently have. In other words, don’t devote yourself to the lesser gift, in this context, tongues, but rather earnestly desire the greater gifts like helps and administration, or teaching. The problem with this interpretation is that it assumes that one’s earnest desire is a prerequisite for receiving the greater level of gift. The context is clear that God gives gifts as He will, not as we desire. Furthermore, James warned that not many should be teachers (James 3:1).

Way #2 - As an imperative, it could mean you are commanded to earnestly desire to use your gift in the greatest way, which is the way of love. Paul will discuss biblical love in the following context. Some believe he is challenging the believer to use his gift in the greatest way, in the context of love. The problem with this is that the text is not referring to the greatest use of the gift, but the greater gifts.

Way #3 - As an indicative, it could mean you are presently desiring the greatest gifts which, in your mind, is “tongues” and I am showing you a much more excellent way to think. Other gifts are more important and higher ranked and you need to think in these terms.

Way #4 - As an indicative, it could mean you are earnestly desiring the greater gifts instead of the one God gave you. In other words, you are in a continual state of not being content with the gift God has given you.

Paul is challenging the Corinthians to think properly about spiritual gifts and each other. He wanted the Corinthians to realize that each person and each gift was important to Christ’s body. The more each member develops and does his best, the more powerful the body becomes.

It is true that some jobs are more front line than others, but all jobs are important assignments from God and they are all done by important people. We should thank God for every person God puts in this church and we should not spend our time wanting their God-given responsibility. We should be working on our own so that together we may be a wonderful body of Jesus Christ.