

Challenges Christians Face

One Body, Many Parts

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

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One Body, Many Parts

Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of spiritual gifts. Let's learn about more about that in a message I am calling, "One Body, Many Parts."

Let's read 1 Corinthians 12:12-30:

¹²For 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. ¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If 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. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

²²On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one

member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

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 miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and 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? (1 Corinthians 12:12-30)

Introduction

Last week I began a series of messages on the issue of spiritual gifts. I would like to adopt Wayne Grudem's definition of spiritual gifts: *A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.*¹

This definition is intentionally broad. It includes both gifts that are related to natural abilities (such as teaching, helping, or administration) and gifts that seem to be related to more "supernatural" abilities (such as miracles, healing, or tongues). The reason for this is that when Paul lists spiritual gifts, for example, in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30, and Ephesians 4:11, he does not distinguish between both kinds of gifts because both kinds of gifts were still operative at the time that Paul wrote.

Yet not every natural ability that people have is included, because Paul is clear that all spiritual gifts must be empowered "by one and the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:11), that they are given "for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7), and that they are all to be used "for building up" the church (1 Corinthians 14:26).

One question that some may have is this: how are natural abilities different from spiritual gifts? When natural abilities (such as teaching, helping, or administration) are empowered by the Holy Spirit, they will generally show increased effectiveness and power in their use. Paul said that the Corinthians were "enriched"

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 1016.

in all speech and all knowledge as they received spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:5-7). Any pastor who has preached for a time knows the difference between preaching in his own “natural” ability and preaching the same sermon under the anointing or empowering of the Holy Spirit.²

In today’s text Paul pointed out the importance of each spiritual gift in the church by means of an extensive analogy. He likened the church—the body of Christ—to the physical human body.

Lesson

In our lesson today, we learn that there is unity and diversity in the church—the body of Christ.

I. The Church Is a Unit Made Up of Many Parts (12:12-14)

First, notice that the church is a unit made up of many parts.

Paul conveyed three ideas in setting up his analogy of likening the church to the human body.

First, the human body is a unit. **The body is one**, even though it **has many members** (12:12a; 12:14).

Second, just as the human body has many members, **so it is with** the body of Christ (12:12c). Paul was not referring to the local church here; he was referring to the universal church. He often called the church “the body of Christ” (cf. Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 12:27; Ephesians 4:12).

And third, Paul explained how Christ’s body resembles the human body. To emphasize the diversity within the church, he mentioned the religious and social diversity first: **Jews or Greeks, slaves or free** (12:13b) all contribute to the healthy functioning of the church. No matter what had previously separated these people, they have now all been joined together into **one body** by means of the **one Spirit** (12:13a).

² See footnote in Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Publishing House, 1994).

Paul then mentioned two experiences of the Holy Spirit that all believers share and that bring unity among believers: (1) **in**—or by—**one Spirit** all believers are **baptized into one body** (12:13a), and (2) all believers are **made to drink of one Spirit** (12:13c). Paul is referring to conversion here. Every believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. This is not an experience subsequent to conversion. There is some confusion about this. It is helpful to remember that there is one baptism by the Spirit and many subsequent fillings. The Bible never exhorts believers to be “baptized by the Spirit.” That is because there is only one baptism, and that happens to every believer at conversion. However, believers are exhorted to be “filled with the Spirit” (cf. Ephesians 5:18).

Note the way Paul presented his argument in these verses. Paul argued that in the church of Jesus Christ there is both unity and diversity. Because the church is united in Jesus Christ all believers are one in him. Nevertheless, the believers in the church are never called to uniformity. No, there is a diversity of spiritual gifts in the church that make up the beauty and glory of the church of Jesus Christ. The church’s fullness and ability to function properly depend upon the diverse manifestations of the gifts the Spirit.

Paul then turned to the human body to illustrate the importance of proper regard for all parts of the body of Christ. Paul presented two scenarios that conveyed his outlook on the problems in the Corinthian church.

II. No One Should Think Too Lowly of Himself (12:15-20)

Next, we see that no one should think too lowly of himself.

Paul said in verses 15-16: **“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. 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.”**

Paul meant that Christians are not cut off from the body of Christ because they think they have no importance or place of ser-

vice. Each part of the body of Christ makes unique contributions to the whole. How foolish it would be if the whole body was only one part. That's why Paul asked in verse 17, **"If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?"**

Do you know what is so interesting about this section? One might have expected Paul to be critical of those who value themselves too highly rather than addressing those who had low opinions of themselves. Perhaps he wanted to warn those who were devaluing the gifts of others, and also to encourage those who had low opinions of themselves.

The point is that every spiritual gift is given by God for the building up of the body of Christ. Your gift may not be very visible, but it is extremely important to building up the body of Christ.

And so Paul said again in verse 18, **"But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."** Once again, we see the sovereign work of God arranging each member of the body to serve as he directs.

Paul asked the question again in verse 19, **"If all were a single member—all eyes, all ears, all feet—where would the body be?"** Clearly, there would be no body. There would just be single organ—ineffective and useless to do anything.

So, to drive home his point, Paul repeated the theme of this section in verse 20, **"As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."** Each part is important in its own right.

So, in the one scenario Paul said that no one should think too lowly of himself.

III. No One Should Think Too Highly of Himself (12:21-26)

Ironically, in the next scenario, Paul said that no one should think too highly of himself.

Paul said in verse 21: **"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"**

Every part of a normal, healthy body needs every other part. And so Paul said in verse 22, **“On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.”**

Furthermore, Paul said, **“. . . and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor”** (12:23a). What **parts of the body** would be considered **less honorable**? One commentator says, “They may be the hands, feet, and limbs.” Another commentator says, “They may be the arms, throat, legs, or belly.” Yet another commentator says, “They may be the torso, thighs, or paunch.” And yet another says, “They would be a part that we normally cover, but if uncovered it would not be considered indecent.”³

In addition, Paul said, **“. . . and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require”** (12:23b-24a). Our **unpresentable parts** would be our private parts, and our **more presentable parts** would be our faces.

Paul’s point is that we should go out of our way to recognize and honor those who serve in our church body who are less visible. So, we affirm the gifts and contribution of those who serve behind the scenes. We thank God that all of us together are making Christ known in and through our church.

In fact, according to Paul, **“God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another”** (12:24b-25).

This interdependence of all parts of the body of Christ signifies God’s masterful design. He has designed the body of Christ so that every part is needed. In fact, **“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together”** (12:26).

Every Christian is important in the body of Christ. And every Christian is important to every other Christian. I need you, and you

³ Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 10-16*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 149.

need me.

That is why a healthy body works together for the common good. A healthy church has every member active in ministry. And each ministry is needed and appreciated.

As you know, one of the purposes in our Mission Statement is *Ministry*. If you are a member of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church, you need to be active in some ministry of our church. It is good for your health as a Christian to be active in ministry, and it is good for the health of our church for you to be active in ministry. So, if you are not yet active in ministry, get involved today. Go to any one of the ministry leaders and ask how you can participate.

IV. The Church Is the Body of Christ (12:27-31)

And fourth, note that the church is the body of Christ.

Paul said in verse 27: **“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”**

Paul used this metaphor for the church many times (cf. Romans 12:5; Ephesians 3:6). Here he focused on the diversity and honor of the various members of Christ’s body, starting with a general assertion and then pointing to each person in the church. Without exception every person who has been united to Christ by faith in him receives a place in **the body of Christ**.

Paul then listed certain gifted men and then certain spiritual gifts, beginning in verse 28. Paul began verse 28 by saying, **“And God has appointed. . . .”** The term **appointed** means “to assign someone to a particular task, function, or role.”⁴ The term is often used to indicate an official appointment to a particular office (cf. John 15:16; Acts 20:28; 2 Timothy 1:11). So, **“God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers. . . .”** The other divinely appointed offices in the church are those of evangelist and pastor, also known as shepherd (cf. Ephesians 4:11).

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996), 482.

The first two offices mentioned in verse 28, those of **apostle** and **prophet**, had three basic responsibilities:

1. to lay the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20);
2. to receive and declare the revelation of God's Word (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11; Ephesians 3:5); and
3. to give confirmation of that Word through "signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Corinthians 12:12; cf. Acts 8:6-7; Hebrews 2:3-4).

The **first** of the gifted men in the New Testament church were the **apostles**, of whom Jesus Christ is foremost (Hebrews 3:1). The basic meaning of **apostle** (*apostolos*) is "messenger, he that is sent."⁵ In its primary and technical sense **apostle** is used in the New Testament of the twelve apostles, including Matthias, who replaced Judas (Acts 1:26), and of Paul, who was uniquely called as an apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-17; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:7-9; 2 Corinthians 11:5). The two qualifications for that apostleship were:

1. having been chosen directly by Christ (Mark 3:13); and
2. having seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22-24).

Paul was the last to meet those two qualifications (Acts 9:3-6, 15; Romans 1:1; etc.). It is not possible, therefore, as some claim, for there to be apostles in the church today.

The term **apostle** was also used in a more general sense of other men in the New Testament, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:4), Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:6), and a few other outstanding leaders (Romans 16:7; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25). These **apostles** were known as "messengers of the churches" (2 Corinthians 8:23), whereas the thirteen were apostles of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1).

Apostles in both groups were authenticated by "signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Corinthians 12:12), but neither group was self-perpetuating. In neither sense is the term **apostle** used in the book of Acts after 16:4. Nor is there any record in the

⁵ James Strong, S.T.D., LL.D., vol. 1, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), 15.

New Testament of an **apostle** in either group being replaced after he died.

Prophets were also appointed by God as specially gifted men. This gift differs from those who have the gift of prophecy (12:10). Those who had the gift of prophecy were not necessarily called **prophets**. It seems that the office of **prophet** was exclusively for work within a local congregation, whereas that of apostleship was a much broader ministry, not confined to a local area. Paul, for example, was referred to as a prophet when he ministered locally in the Antioch church (Acts 13:1), but elsewhere he is always called an apostle.

Prophets sometimes spoke revelation from God (Acts 11:21-28) and sometimes expounded upon the revelation already given (as implied in Acts 13:1). **Prophets** always spoke for God but did not always give newly revealed messages from God.

Like the apostles, the office of **prophet** ceased with the completion of the New Testament, just as the Old Testament office of prophet disappeared when that testament was completed, some 400 years before Christ's first advent. The church was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20). Once the foundation was laid, the work of the apostles and prophets was finished.

The work of interpreting and proclaiming the now-written Word was taken over by "the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). John MacArthur notes that "the purpose of apostles and prophets was to equip the church with right doctrine; the purpose of evangelists, shepherds, and teachers is to equip the church for effective ministry."⁶

The **third** office Paul listed was that of **teacher**. The teacher not only has the gift of teaching but also God's call to teach. He is called and gifted for the ministry of studying and interpreting and teaching the Word of God to the church. All who have the office of teaching also have the gift of teaching, but not everyone who has

⁶ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 324.

the gift of teaching has the office of teaching.

The second half of verse 28 lists five representative spiritual gifts, both temporary and permanent. The temporary sign gifts of **miracles, gifts of healing, and various kinds of tongues** will be discussed more fully when we get to chapter 14.

The gift of **helping** is a gift for service in the broadest sense of helping and supporting others, often in unnoticed ways. The Greek word for **helping** (*antilempseis*) is a beautiful word, meaning “to take the burden off someone else and place it on oneself.”⁷ The gift of **helping** is likely the most widely distributed of all the spiritual gifts. It is immeasurably important in supporting those who minister with other spiritual gifts.

Finally, Paul talked about the gift of **administrating** in verse 28. The Greek word for **administrating** (*kuberneseis*) means “to steer a ship, to guide.”⁸ It expresses the idea of a leader or guide. Thus, it is the gift of leadership.

Paul then issued a series of rhetorical questions to which he expected a negative response to each question in verses 29-30: **“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?”**

No single gift is possessed by any one person in the church. God gives to each church believers who have the right combination of gifts for the common good of that local church.

Conclusion

May God help us to express both our unity and diversity in the church through the proper use of spiritual gifts. Amen.

⁷ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 324.

⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996), 465.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Challenges Christians Face

PRAAYER:

O Triune God, you have given spiritual gifts to your church. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. Help each one of us to use the spiritual gift you have given to us for the common good of building up the church of Jesus Christ.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and use the spiritual gifts that God has given you for the common good!