

You Are The Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:1-31a

Key Verse: 12:27

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

In chapters 12-14, Paul talks about the work of the Holy Spirit in giving spiritual gifts to the Christian church. In chapter 12 Paul explains the general principles in regards to the gifts of the Spirit. In chapter 13 he teaches the way of love, which should motivate the exercise of spiritual gifts. In chapter 14 he deals with the gifts of prophecy and tongues which were especially problematic. In fact, in the Corinthian church, the use of spiritual gifts had become chaotic. Some people were proud of their gifts and wanted to show off and boast. Other people did not use their gifts at all; they sat silently in the back, and then crept out of church as the final hymn was sung. Most of the Corinthians did not know why they had received gifts or how to use them properly. So Paul instructs them. As we study together, we should realize that God has given us spiritual gifts. We should discover them and learn how to use them fruitfully. When we do so, we can be really useful to God; we can be a blessing to others, and we can be happy.

I. The basis of receiving the Holy Spirit (1-3)

Look at verses 1-2. "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols." Before knowing Christ, the Corinthians had been idol worshipers. Idols are nothing--they are mute; they cannot speak. However, behind idols there are demons who invade and torment idol worshipers, making them evil and stupid. So the Corinthians were miserable. But God, in his great grace, sent the Holy Spirit to deliver them. The Spirit of God drove out demons and opened their eyes to the living God. The Spirit of God led them to Christ crucified who forgave their sins, and to the Risen Christ who gave them victory over death and living hope in the kingdom of God. The Spirit of God set them free to worship and serve God in holiness and righteousness. Now, the Corinthians proclaimed, "Jesus is Lord!" Those who confess "Jesus is Lord" are Christians (Ro 10:9-10; Mt 16:18). The Holy Spirit works in them and gives them gifts to bless others according to Jesus' leading. We may not understand how it happens. We may not experience some kind of spiritual ecstasy. But when we confess "Jesus is Lord" from our hearts, God gives us the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, there were soothsayers and idol priests who confronted the Corinthians each day. The Corinthians could be confused. They needed to

You Are The Body of Christ

differentiate work of the Holy Spirit from sneaky demons. Experience alone was not enough; they needed some kind of criteria. Paul tells them that the basic test of spiritual origin is how one sees Jesus. Those who speak ill of Jesus belong to the devil. Those who confess "Jesus is Lord" from their hearts are children of God and instruments of the Holy Spirit.

II. The same Spirit; different gifts (4-11)

Look at verses 4-6. "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." God's salvation work is rooted in who God is. He is the Triune God, rich in diversity, yet one in identity and purpose. The Holy Spirit gives gifts. The Lord Jesus serves and teaches his people to serve. The Almighty God works to create, sustain and redeem. Though there are different kinds of gifts, service and work, the same God works all of them in all men for his own purpose.

We can find a progression in these verses. Those who confess Jesus is Lord receive the Holy Spirit and a spiritual gift. They are to use their gift or gifts to serve others as Jesus did. Then God weaves together the ministries of service to accomplish his own purpose of world salvation. UBF focuses on campus mission through evangelism and discipleship. We pray to raise men and women of God from among college students who can be a blessing to the world. However, there are many other works of God, such as ministries of street evangelism, providing clean drinking water in poor countries, achieving social justice, and so on. The same God is working in all of them through his people who confess that Jesus is Lord. We should broaden our hearts and minds to embrace the great diversity in the work of God. We should also hold firmly to the God-given purpose of our own unique ministry.

Look at verse 7. "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." The words "to each one" are important (11). Each person who confesses Jesus as Lord receives a gift from the Holy Spirit. This is not just natural talent, which may be common to most human beings-things like intellectual power, artistic sense, or athletic ability. No, these gifts are different. They are spiritual gifts that come from the Holy Spirit. Only God's children have these gifts. For example, Kristen Weed has a natural talent in singing. She has had this from birth. But this is not what moves our hearts. We are moved because she has a spiritual quality to her singing that only a child of God can have. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to make each person a blessing to the body of Christ. It is for the common good.

You Are The Body of Christ

Therefore when we come together as a church, we should have an attitude of giving and of serving. We should be ready to be a blessing to others.

In verses 8-10, Paul describes some gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are more than these, as passages like Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11-12 make clear. There are at least 18 specific gifts of the Holy Spirit described in the New Testament. However, Paul mentions only nine here. Let's read verse 8. "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit...." The message of knowledge teaches us who God truly is, based on the Scriptures. The message of knowledge corrects our wrong ideas about God and roots us in the truth about God. The message of wisdom teaches us how to apply this knowledge to lead us to salvation and God's blessing. Through the message we can understand the deep meaning of the gospel. UBF has traditionally been strong in the message gifts, due to the disciplined practice of writing and sharing Bible testimonies every week. Many UBF members have struggled hard to have "one word of God" in their hearts as the basis for whatever they do. Those who have trained themselves in this way for ten years can deliver messages better than many seminary graduates. We should continue to develop our message gifts through faithful testimony writing. We should share God's message in small groups, and even one to one. Then we can experience spiritual victory and heavenly joy.

The next gift is that of faith. Look at verse 9a. "...to another faith by the same Spirit...." Of course, all believers have saving faith which is a gift from God. But the gift of faith mentioned here is special; it produces miracles. In giving this faith, God makes history through people. Last week we thought about people of faith: Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Jephthah and so on. God began great works of deliverance through them, even though they were weak in many ways. Faith in God made them strong enough to conquer fierce enemies. One person's faith is very important in the sight of God. We should continue to fight the registration battle on our campuses by faith. If we can bring one soul to Jesus by faith, it is a great miracle of God.

Look at verses 9b-10. "...to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues." Clearly the Holy Spirit empowers some people to heal others, both physically and spiritually. The Holy Spirit enables some to work miracles, such as driving out demons. There are gifts of prophecy and distinguishing between spirits. The last two gifts are related to tongues-speaking

You Are The Body of Christ

and interpreting. We will deal with these gifts more in detail in chapter 14. Here, let's recognize that some gifts are intended to be used together. Without an interpreter no one can understand one who speaks in tongues. This teaches us that the Holy Spirit wants us to work together. For example, one who evangelizes well through outreach ministry should work together with one who disciples well, and vice versa. Then they can raise many disciples of Christ for the glory of God.

In verses 8-10 the words "to another," or, "to still another," are repeated eight times. The Holy Spirit does not give all of the gifts to one person. The Holy Spirit spreads out the gifts among the believers so that each one will have something to contribute. This challenges the members of the body to respect one another and use their gifts for the common good.

Look at verse 11. "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one just as he determines." Though the gifts and service and works of God are so diverse, he gives them with a common purpose. We may not always understand the depth of his wisdom in doing so. But we must recognize God's sovereignty in giving spiritual gifts. We do not choose our own gifts. The Holy Spirit gives us our gift, or gifts, as he determines. We must discover what these gifts are. To do this, we must pray and we must learn to see things from God's point of view. We should be willing to step out in faith according to the need to find out how God will use us. I had no idea to be a Bible messenger. But Dr. Samuel Lee experimented with me and found my gift in this area. Then he gave me many chances to speak in order to develop this gift. And he himself spent many hours training me to refine and sharpen the use of this gift. In the course of struggling to exercise this gift, I forgot most of my sinful desires and could grow in inner character. But it has not been easy to bear this blessing. It has meant sacrifice for me and my family. Yet, I can only thank God for his grace and goodness and mercy to give me such a precious gift. We can trust God that he knows what is best for each of us. God knows how to build us up and how to make us useful in his work. May God help each of us to discover our gift from God, thank God for it, and use it for his glory and the common good.

III. Unity and diversity in the body of Christ (12-31)

In these verses Paul explains the work of the Holy Spirit in the church by using the metaphor of the human body. The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts. These parts have different functions, but they are interrelated. The parts cannot function by themselves and they cannot function outside the body; they need each other. So it is with Christ.

You Are The Body of Christ

Look at verse 13. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Here, to be "baptized" means to be regenerated or born again by the work of the Holy Spirit. Though we come from many different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, we have the same spiritual Father. We have the same Lord. We drink daily from the same Holy Spirit. So we are one body joined together by the one Holy Spirit. Sometimes we feel distant from Christ and our dear brothers and sisters. We don't know what to do. But when we drink deeply of the Holy Spirit, unity is restored in our hearts. We are one with God and with our dear family members. We can drink of the Holy Spirit when we confess our sins and accept Jesus' grace.

In verses 14-20 Paul develops his body metaphor to deal with the problems of inferiority feelings that easily creep into our hearts. First, he tells us that feet should not despair because they are not hands. The feet are very important. With our feet we can walk and dance and defeat assailants by kick boxing. But if the feet compare themselves with the hands, they can feel inferior. After all, the hands can play the piano, write poetry, draw pictures, and wave a greeting: "hello." If the feet begin to envy the hands, they can be discouraged and say, "I am not part of the body." Still, however, they are part of the body. Their words only harm themselves and the body. Paul also compared the eye and the ear. People usually value their eyes most. If necessary, they buy glasses and make their ears bear the weight of the frames. So the ears may feel inferior. But without ears we cannot communicate. We lose our balance. This damages the whole body. The point is that the body has many parts. It cannot be all one part, like the giant eyeball in "Monsters, Inc." It is made up of diverse parts and each part must accept its place in the body. Look at verse 18. "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." We must accept our God-given place in the body of Christ.

In verses 21-26, Paul deals with the problem of despising others in the body of Christ. For example, the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" They are absolutely interrelated and interdependent. So it is with the body of Christ. However, some people try to do everything by themselves. This is suicidal. We absolutely need one another. So we must learn to honor one another. Those who seem weaker are really indispensable. We must treat them with special honor. When we honor one another properly, we can develop an atmosphere of mutual respect and love. Then we can exercise our spiritual gifts fruitfully for the sake of mutual encouragement. Interestingly, some

You Are The Body of Christ

parts of the body are unpresentable and need to be treated with special modesty. There are people who should not be exposed to public scrutiny. Still, they can be very useful to God, working quietly behind the scenes. Some devoted missionaries have worked diligently like hands and feet in the Chicago UBF church. They were always there when there were guests to serve, errands to run, repairs to be made, and so on. Without them, Chicago UBF could not function. But I will not mention their names.

Verse 25b says, "...but that its parts should have equal concern for each other." The members of the body must put aside position, such as elder, pastor or deacon and show equal concern for each other. Look at verse 26. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." When Missionary John Lee of Paraguay was shot and wounded, UBF members around the world felt the pain and contributed generously for his recovery. By the same token, when Dr. Alan Wolff obtained his Ph.D. from Northwestern, we all rejoiced with him. As members of the body of Christ, we are very closely related to each other. So we should have a sense of unity and respect and love one another.

Look at verse 27. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." No one who calls Jesus Lord is outside the body of Christ. Someone may think, "I don't belong. I am not important." But it is not true. We are the body of Christ and each of us is a part of it.

Look at verses 28-30. There is a progression here. The church begins with apostles, ones who are sent to plant the word of God. The church grows as prophets provide spiritual vision and direction, and teachers patiently instruct with the word of God. Then the Holy Spirit raises up a body of believers and gives them enough spiritual gifts to transform their community or even their nation. It is God who appoints his servants and gifts them according to his purpose and plan. It is not church leaders, but God himself who does this. If you confess Jesus is Lord you have been appointed by God with a gift and to be part of a ministry.

Look at verse 31a. "But eagerly desire the greater gifts." Though Paul has emphasized God's sovereignty in giving gifts to his people, we should not be fatalistic about this. If we really want a greater spiritual gift, we should ask God for it. God is pleased when we have a burning desire to serve the body of Christ in a way that builds it up.

Today's teaching that we are the body of Christ challenges our selfishness and American individualism to the core. But let's accept Paul's teaching with

You Are The Body of Christ

repentance. Let's discover our gifts and use them for the glory of God and the good of others. Then we will be really happy.