

THE CHURCH – THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE GIFTS

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12–31

Introduction

This passage gives us one of the most meaningful descriptions of the church in all of Scripture. It is also one of the most meaningful messages on the church that can be preached. The purpose of the passage is to stress *the unity of the church*. The church is said to be a body, a body of many parts or members. It is compared to the human body throughout the whole passage.

- I. The human body is a picture of Christ and of His church (vv. 12-13).
- II. Point 1: some less gifted feel they are unimportant to the body (vv. 14-20).
- III. Point 2: some more gifted feel they are more important to the body (vv. 21-23).
- IV. Point 3: God has put both the presentable and unpresentable into one body (vv. 24-26).
- V. Point 4: each is a part, a member of the body of Christ and has his own place in it (vv. 27-30).
- VI. Point 5: each is to covet the very best gifts (v. 31).

I. *1 Corinthians 12:12–13 Church, The Body*

The human body is a picture of Christ and of His church. The picture is practical and descriptive: the human body is one organism, one person, one being, one life; yet it has many members or parts to it. However, despite its many parts, the body is still one organic whole. All the parts of the body are still *in the body* and actually form the body, enabling it to function.

“So it is with Christ.” Christ is One Organism, One Person, One Being, One Life; yet He too has many members or parts to His body. However, despite the many parts to His body, His body is still one organic whole. All the parts of His body actually give Him form and enable Him to function. The point is that the human body and the body of Christ picture what the Holy Spirit does.

1. The Holy Spirit baptizes believers into one body, that is, into Christ Himself. When we really believe *in Christ* (note the significant phrase “in Christ” which is so often found in Scripture. See *Believer, Position in Christ*, Rom. 6:3-5; *Believer, Position in Christ*, Rom 8:1.)...
 - the Holy Spirit immerses us into the death of Jesus Christ. God actually counts us as “*in Christ*,” as “in the body of Christ.” God sees us as having already died *in the body of Christ*. Therefore, having died *in Christ*, we never have to die (see *Justification*, Rom. 4:22; also see Rom 5:1).
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- the Holy Spirit immerses us into the resurrection of Christ. God counts and sees us as having already been raised from the dead *in the body of Christ*. Therefore, we already have the new life of Christ, both abundant and eternal life.
- the Holy Spirit immerses us into the purpose of Jesus Christ. God counts and sees us *in the body of Christ* working and carrying out the very same purpose as His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The point is powerful: we — all genuine believers — owe our very existence to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. All that we have received of God is due to one thing and to one thing only: the baptism of the Holy Spirit into the very body of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. God recognizes and acknowledges us...

- only if we have “*believed in*” the Lord Jesus Christ.
- *only if we have been* “baptized into” the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has to see us “*in Christ*” “*in the body of Christ*” in order to accept and approve us. Picture the scene: there is the body of Christ — *out there*. When God looks at the body of Christ, He sees us *in Christ*; then God accepts and approves us — no matter who we are. We may be Jew or Gentile, a slave or a free man — it does not matter. If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit takes us and baptizes us into the body of Christ. God sees and accepts, counts and credits us as *in Christ*, as *in the body of Christ*.

Thought 1. Note a significant fact. Paul has not mentioned the church. In fact, he does not mention the church until verse 28 when he begins to mention the spiritual gifts. Why? He does not say, but his thrust is the universal body of Christ: every individual believer around the world, no matter who or where he is, is a member of the body of Christ. And the individual believer is critical to the health of the whole body. The individual believer is desperately needed to make the body of Christ healthy.

Gen 15:6 *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness [acceptance].*

Acts 13:39 *Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

2. There is another significant fact in this verse as well. We “were all given the one Spirit to drink;” that is, the Spirit has entered our bodies. He dwells within the hearts and lives of all believers.

=> Believers are not only immersed “*into the body of Christ*” by the Holy Spirit...

=> but the Holy Spirit is immersed or placed into the lives and bodies of believers.

John 14:16-17 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

Rom 8:9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

1 Cor 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

1 Cor 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.

II. **1 Corinthians 12:14–20 Every Member is Called by God**

Some who are *less gifted* feel they are unimportant to the body of Christ. Some members in the Corinthian church were experiencing what so many believers experience, a sense of being...

- less gifted
- insignificant
- less able
- unimportant
- less capable
- inadequate
- less worthy
- ungifted

However, such feelings and thoughts are false, totally untrue. “The body is not made up of one [significant] part, but of many [parts, members].” Every person who truly belongs to the body of Christ (the church) is significant and important to God and has a gift and function in the body. Note four significant facts about the church, the body of Christ.

1. Each part or member is necessary. The foot may not be as gifted as the hand in handling things, but the foot is still part of the body. The ear may not be able to envision things like the eye can. but the ear is still part of the body.

2. Each part or member has an essential function. The eye, the ear and the nose — they all have their function.

=> None can do the function of the other. Each member has its function, and no other member can do the function of the other member.

=> If the whole body were only an eye, it would be a freak: inoperative, unfunctional and useless. It would be an atrocity.

Thought 1. Note three significant applications.

(1) The body of Christ, the church, can operate only if enough members function as they are gifted to do.

(2) The body, the church, becomes handicapped if some members do not function and do the work they are gifted to do.

(3) The ability of the body to operate is determined by the number and efficiency of its parts or members. The more the members of the body (church) function and function efficiently, the more the body (church) can do.

3. Each part or member is set “in the body” as God wills. The eye sees because God gave it the ability to see. The ear hears because God gave it the ability to hear. The same is true in the church. Note the words “every one of them” — every member has been set in the church by God and gifted by God. God has not just set the more prominent parts or members in the church. God has set “every one” of us in the church, and He has gifted us for an essential function. And note: what we are called and gifted to do is *God’s will*. We are who we are and have the gifts we have because God willed us to be as we are.

Thought 1. The implications of this point are forceful. Every believer...

- needs to thank God for who he is and for his gift.
- needs to use his gifts with all diligence and fervency.

4. Each part or member is distinct, but *together* there is only one body. If only one part or member existed, where would the body be? Of course, there would be no body. So it is with the church. If there is only one member in the church, he would be significant, the most important person around. But where would the church be? The point is clear: the church is not one significant and important person. The church is many members — all significant and important. But note: despite the diversity, the church is still one body.

Rom 12:6-8 *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

1 Cor 12:4-7 *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. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

III. **1 Corinthians 12:21–23 Gifted Members in the Church**

Some who are *more gifted* feel they are more important to the body. This point is a sharp rebuke to those who try to dominate or impose their will upon a church. A person’s own will and desires are never to be pushed forward and forced upon the church. Every member is important and significant and must be considered. Too often, there are some who feel they are more important than others in the church. They feel their gifts and contributions are more significant than that of others. The thrust of this point is that such feelings and thoughts are inaccurate, totally inaccurate. Even the lowest and least gifted

member (who is using his gift) is as important to the function of the church as the minister or the most gifted person. “The eye cannot say to the hand, I don’t need you.” “The head cannot say to the feet, I don’t need you.” All are important to God. In fact, note what Scripture says; the two points are real eye-openers, a shock to what most people think:

1. The weaker parts or members (less gifted) are actually more necessary. The word “weaker” (*asthenes*) means sick, sickly. It shows that in appearance the lesser parts or members may seem unimportant, but they are not; they are essential. In fact, they are actually more necessary. The average layman who serves as a personal worker, although he is never seen by the crowds, is much more essential to decisions for Christ than the evangelist who is in the centre of the scene. The dear saint who has become a *prayer warrior* is much more essential to the strength of the church than the most eloquent preacher who ever fills the pulpit.
2. The unpresentable parts of the body are treated with greater honour. The reference is to clothing. We take more pains to dress the unpresentable parts of our body, giving them a special nobility.

So it should be in the church. The less gifted should be recognized and treated with a very special nobility, for they are actually more necessary.

Thought 1. The point is well made: no believer or group of believers are to look down upon, snub or bypass the less gifted in the church. All are important; in fact, the less gifted who are using their gifts for Christ are actually more necessary. They are “where the rubber hits the road”; therefore, they should be treated with greater honour.

Luke 22:26 “But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”

Rom 12:3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

1 Cor 1:27-29 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

1 Cor 4:7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

1 Pet 5:5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

IV. 1 Corinthians 12:24–26 Church is One Body

God has put both the presentable and unpresentable into one body. The presentable parts of our body have no need for clothing; therefore, we do not clothe them (for example, the face and the hands). God has done the same thing in the church. God has combined the body together. The word “combined” (*sunekerasen*) means to mix, combine and blend together. God has arranged the church as it is: the gifted and less gifted mixed, combined, and blended together. And He has done it in such a manner that more honour really belongs to those who are not as gifted. The prayer warrior is much more essential than the soloist who is out before the people. The lay witness for Christ is more necessary than the preacher who stands in the pulpit. The person who ministers to the sick or elderly is more honourable than the committee chairman who leads the whole congregation in administrative matters.

All are important, but the more honourable are not necessarily those who stand before the church. Sometimes the more honourable are those who are never seen, those who go about their ministry for the Lord, using their gifts and functioning within the church as He has ordained.

1. God has combined or blended the members together to keep them from clashing. There should be no jealousy, pride or divisiveness within the church; for God has gifted every believer to complement the others. God has gifted all to function together in harmony.

1 Cor 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

2 Cor 13:11 Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Eph 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Phil 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

1 Pet 3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

2. God has combined or blended the members together to create a natural care for one another. Note the words “equal concern.” The very same care should be shown to one member as is shown to another member.

One member of the church is not more important than another member — not to God, and it should not be to us. There should be no favouritism or partiality shown to anyone. When a part or member of the human body suffers, the whole body suffers. When one member (for example, the feet in a race) is honoured, the whole body rejoices with the feet. So it is to be in the church. The church is one body; therefore, it is to suffer and

rejoice together. The body is to walk through the experience of life together — suffering and rejoicing with every member, looking after and caring for every member.

Mat 25:35-36 *‘For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’*

Acts 20:35 *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’*

Rom 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

1 Cor 9:22 *To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*

1 Th 5:14 *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

V. 1 Corinthians 12:27–30 Each Believer is Unique

Each believer is a part or member of the body of Christ and has his own place in it. This point is forceful and emphatic.

=> “You are the body of Christ”: collectively, we have the supreme privilege. We are the parts or members of Christ, of His body, of the body of God’s Son Himself.

=> “Each one of you is a part of it”: individually, each one of us is a part or member of Christ’s body. Not a single believer is excluded, and no person is more a part or member than any other believer.

Paul illustrates the point by listing some of the gifts. He says two significant things.

1. God has set and gifted each member in the church. For example, consider these eight gifts.
 - a. First, God has set apostles in the church (see *Apostle*, 1 Cor. 12:28).
 - b. Second, God has set prophets in the church (see *Gifts*, 1 Cor. 12:8-10).
 - c. Third, God has set teachers in the church. The gift of teaching is the gift to instruct believers in the truth of God and His Word. It is the gift to root and ground people in teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:16).
 - d. There was also the gift of miracles (see 1 Cor. 12:8-10).
 - e. There was the gift of healing (see 1 Cor. 12:8-10).
 - f. There was the gift of helps. This is the gift that does just what it says: helps people. We all know some persons who are always ready to jump to help people — always

available and ready to offer a helping hand. These are particularly directed to help the needy, for example, the widows or widowers, orphans, disabled, shut-ins and poor.

g. There was the gift of administration. The Greek word is descriptive (kuberneseis). It refers to the pilot of a ship, the person who steers the ship through the dangerous channels of the oceans. The church, of course, needs such persons who can give it direction as it moves along on its journey to reach the destination God has appointed for it.

h. There was the gift of different tongues (see 1 Cor. 12:8-10).

2. The point to note is that all members do not have the same gift.

=> Are all apostles?

=> Are all prophets?

=> Are all teachers?

=> Are all workers of miracles?

=> Do all have the gifts of healing?

=> Do all speak with tongues?

=> Do all interpret tongues?

The answer is obvious. No! God has not gifted all believers with the same gift.

Mat 25:15 “To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.”

1 Cor 12:11 All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Eph 4:12 [Gifts are given] to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

1 CORINTHIANS 12: 28 APOSTLE

Apostle means to send out. An apostle is a representative, an ambassador, a person who is sent out into one country to represent another country. Three things are true of the apostle.

=> He belongs to the One who has sent him out.

=> He is commissioned to be sent out.

=> He possesses all the authority and power of the One who sends him out.

The word “apostle” has both a narrow and a broad usage in the New Testament.

1. The narrow sense. It refers to the twelve apostles and to Paul as an apostle (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1). In this narrow sense there were at least two basic qualifications:

a. The apostle was a man chosen directly by the Lord Himself or by the Holy Spirit (cp. Mt.10:1-2; Mk. 3:13-14; Lk. 6:13; Acts 9:6, 15; 13:2; 22:10, 14-15; Rom. 1:1). He was a man who had either seen or been a companion of the Lord Jesus.

- b. The apostle was a man who had been an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1).
2. The broad sense. The word “apostle” refers to other men who preached the gospel. It is used of two missionaries, Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14, 17) and Silas (1 Th. 2:6); and two messengers, Titus (2 Cor. 8:23) and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25). There is also a possibility that James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:19) and Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7) are referred to as apostles.

In the narrow sense, the gift of an apostle was bound to die out because of the unique qualifications to receive the gift. But historically, in the broad sense, there is perhaps a sense in which the qualifications and gift itself are still given and used by the Lord. The Lord’s servant of any generation must *see* the Lord and know Him intimately. Similarly the servant must personally *see and experience* the power of the resurrection. Certainly there are some in every generation who have *seen* the Lord Jesus and who *know and experience* the power of the Lord’s resurrection. Perhaps the Lord Jesus endues them with the very special gift of an apostle to be used throughout His most precious domain — the church. □

VI. 1 Corinthians 12:31 Gifts

Each believer is to covet the best gifts. Note there is a legitimate covetousness. The believer is to eagerly desire or covet the “greater gifts” so he can more effectively serve his Lord. However, there is a more excellent way than gifts, something much higher, a quality that surpasses all the gifts combined. And it can be possessed by every believer, no matter who he is. What is the quality? What is it that is far greater and far more supreme than the greatest combination of gifts? That is the subject of the next outline. ■