



One Body with Many Members (1 Cor. 12:12-31)

The human body is one of the most marvellous of God's creations. God created our complex bodies so that we can enjoy the wonder of life. The body is an organism made up of many parts with all of the parts working together to make one unit. Separate from the body each part is lifeless and useless.

Each person has only one body which cannot be subdivided. For instance, our arms are wonderful tools, but if we were to remove an arm from our body, it would cease to function and would be useless. Furthermore, even though our body would continue to live, it would lose some of its function without the arm.

How many specific parts there are in the human body, I do not know. In fact, I suppose no one knows. Physicians study the human body for years, but still lack knowledge of exactly how every part functions. The more we learn about the body, the more we realise that there is much that we do not know.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul likens the church to a body. In fact, the church is not like a body. The church IS a body. The church is the body of Christ. In this body we find many members. Each member is useful and needed. Without any one, the body loses some of its function and becomes less able to work and do that for which it was designed.



When we read 1 Cor. 12:12-31 we are struck with the humour with which Paul writes as he describes talking hands and feet and eyes. Some of these members feel inferior, some feel superior, and they debate their necessity. While Paul may or may not have meant to be comical he did intend to stress the absurdity of any members feeling inferior or superior. There is great damage that can be done by holding these two opinions.

The entry point into this one body comes through baptism (vs 13). When one is baptised into Christ he becomes a part of the body of Christ whether he is a Jew or Greek, slave or free. Each one receives the indwelling of the same Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and the miraculous gifts that came to some in the New Testament through the laying on of the apostles' hands also came from the one Holy Spirit.

1. In light of the problems in the Corinthian church, why does Paul stress the oneness Christians have in Christ?

I. The Danger of Feeling Inferior

In the illustrations that Paul uses in verses 15 and 16, the foot feels inferior. The foot feels like it is not a part of the body because it is not the hand and the ear felt insignificant because it was not an eye.

In verses 17-19 Paul shows the foolishness of this thinking. If the whole body were an eye it wouldn't be able to hear, but if the whole body were an ear it would have no sense of smell. God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part there would not be a body. Each part of the body is important to the body.



2. Why might one Christian feel inferior to another?
3. Why is it foolish for one Christian to feel inferior to another Christian?
4. Who decided what gift any Christian would receive?
5. Explain the meaning of verses 19-20.

II. The Danger of Feeling Superior

Just as dangerous and perhaps as common is the feeling of superiority in the body and Paul addresses this problem in verses 20-26. Here the eye says to the hand that he has no need of the hand and the head says to the feet that he has no need of the feet.



It is extremely illogical to feel superiority in the body. The eye can do very little without the hand. The eye can see an object, but without the hand it cannot be picked up. The head may feel superior to the feet, but the head cannot get from one place to another without the feet. Likewise, in the body of Christ, no person should feel superior to another.

We note the arrogance of these members who say, "I have no need of you." It is very possible that this attitude of arrogance is what caused the other members to feel inferior. No Christian is superior because none can make up the body alone.

6. Why might one Christian feel superior to another?

In verse 22 Paul speaks of the parts of the body which seem to be weaker and calls them indispensable. We see our hands, feet, eyes, and ears, but inside our body are our heart, liver, and lungs. We can live without a hand, foot, eye, or ear, but we cannot live without some of the parts that work out of sight.

7. When had Paul previously spoken of weaker members and what is the connection?

In verse 23 Paul writes of the body's less honourable and unpresentable parts. These parts are treated with special modesty. We take more care of them by clothing them and preventing others from seeing them. Though they may be considered to be less honourable or unpresentable, in essence we give much greater attention to them.

8. Describe how some parts of the body of Christ (the church) are seen while others go unseen.

III. Interdependence Within the Body

It is God's desire that the less visible members of the body are given honour and that all parts of the body work together. Each member is to care for the other member (vs. 25). The members of the body are interdependent because together they make one body (vs. 27). In verse 26 Paul writes, ***"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together."***



When members of the church do not see the value of each other the church becomes divided. In verse 25 Paul speaks of the danger of division in the body. This is the third time that he has spoken of the problem of division in 1 Corinthians (1:10; 11:18; 12:25). The church is a body with interrelated members and each of these members must work together.

9. Describe how the whole body suffers when one member suffers and how the whole body rejoices when one member is honoured.

10. In verse 27, Paul does not say the members of the church are "like" a body. He says they _____ a body.

Within the church God appointed ***apostles***. These men were witnesses of the resurrected Lord and were empowered by God to aid in the establishment of the church and through the power of the Holy Spirit to pen the words of the New Testament. They were chosen by Christ (Luke 6:13; Galatians 1:1). ***Prophets*** served in the early church to receive direct revelation from God to pass on to the church. This was particularly important before the New Testament was written. The ***teachers*** were able to understand God's word and pass along that information to others.

Miracles were sometimes present in the first century church to further the work of the church. This gift (as other supernatural gifts) was given through the laying on of the hands of an apostle (Acts 8:18; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Acts 6:1-8; 19:1-7). ***Healings*** provided physical restoration of health to those with ailments.

The gift of ***helping*** and ***administrating*** may not have been supernatural, but they were still given by God. Perhaps here Paul has in mind deacons and elders in the church. ***Various kinds of tongues*** was a supernatural gift that allowed one to speak a language they did not know.

We cannot be sure why Paul enumerates these gifts as he does. Are they in chronological order or order of importance, or simply a listing? It is true that some parts of the body are more visible and perhaps even more vital to the life of the body. The apostles were instrumental in the foundation of the church, but that does not take away from the importance of other members. It is also significant that in this list tongues are listed last. Though they seem to have been coveted in Corinth, it is one of the least important gifts.



Just as within the human body there are many parts that make up one whole body, within the church not all members have the same gift. In the early church there were apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, those who spoke in tongues, and those who supernaturally interpreted tongues. Paul asks rhetorically if all possessed any one of these gifts. The obvious answer is no, since no one was given all gifts.

This is important to note because even today there are groups which claim that a person “must” have certain gifts including “speaking in tongues.” As we will see in a future lesson this gift seems to have passed away, but even in the first century church not every one spoke in tongues because they were not given the gift.

Paul urges the church to earnestly desire what he calls the higher gifts. And then promises to show a still more excellent way. Later he will teach that love is the superior gift. It should be the great hope of all Christians to use their various gifts to bring glory to God.

11. What are the most important lessons we can we learn from 1 Cor. 12:12-31?