

1-2 Corinthians

THE SPIRIT CREATES ONE BODY

Focal Verses • 1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-31

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: ANALYZE how each member of the body supports the other members; VALUE the different gifts operating within the church; and DECIDE to use spiritual gifts in cooperation with others for building up the body of Christ.

In Focus

For many years Michelle had been a member of the church. Like clockwork she attended every Sunday service and was always on time. She attended special programs and was faithful in her tithes and offerings. Yet, Michelle came to church, sat quietly, smiled, shook hands, and went on her way without becoming notable. While discussing church affairs one day, several members began to discuss members and their various activities. When Michelle's name came up, everyone mentioned how faithful her attendance was but nobody seemed to really know her. Shortly thereafter, one evening she appeared at choir rehearsal. The music director attempted to stifle his shock, but the members could not contain their excitement. As she settled into her section and the music began, it was immediately clear that Michelle was not just able to carry a tune, she was actually gifted at singing! After the rehearsal was over, several members surrounded her, asking why she had kept her gifts secret for so long. She replied, "Well, nobody ever asked me to join, so I decided to give it a try. I hope you let me stay."



If we are to be unified in our faith, we cannot overlook the value of our Christian family. We must never forget that we all have a part to play in the body of Christ.

Keep in Mind

"But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Corinthians 12:20, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV 1 Corinthians 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these

we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

The People, Places, and Times

Helps. This is the special ability to aid, assist, and support others. It is closely related to the gift of mercy, which is caring for those who are distressed and disadvantaged. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 the phrase “support the weak” could refer to this ministry in particular. The men who were selected to feed the poor widows in Jerusalem could have possessed this gift (Acts 6:1–7). This gift could also be used in an unofficial capacity as those who gave alms and fed the poor without an official role or title.

Governments. This word is related to the word for a captain or pilot of a ship. It is the special ability to organize and make decisions

that lead to the church operating efficiently and effectively. It is the ability to administrate people and details in order to accomplish goals. Those with this gift usually have an eye for detail and an ability to problem solve.

Background

Paul likened the church to a human body. He emphasized that every member has an important function just like the parts of the body. Each and every member contributes to the health and functioning of the whole body. This makes every believer a necessary part of the body of Christ. Paul began 1 Corinthians 12 with an explanation of spiritual gifts. He

reminded the church that they were not to take their relatively new Christian faith and make it equal to the other religions, cults, and practices in the Corinthian community. He reminded them that God is the provider of all gifts, and that the Holy Spirit is the source (1 Corinthians 12:2–5). Moreover, he helped the church understand that due to the indivisibility of God, He is able to provide a unified motivation for multiple manifestations (v. 11). The apostle had already advised the church that their individual bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19). As a balance, he illustrated the similarity of the human body to the body of Christ (12:13). By breaking down the importance of each member, he made it clear that the church's body cannot afford to be divided for any reason, whether from outside influence or internal disagreement. Even as the various parts serve differing functions, they have a common source and a common goal and cannot operate separately from one another. God has placed all of the members of the church into one body; thus the diversity of gifts can profit the whole church. Paul says that these many members are a part of one body. These many members are necessary for the whole body to function; without them, the body would be incapacitated. All the members with all of their gifts are a part of the one body. This shows the diversity as well as the unity of the church.

At-A-Glance

1. The Purpose of the Parts
(1 Corinthians 12:14–20)
2. The Danger of Division (vv. 21–26)
3. The Mission of Membership
(vv. 27–31)

In Depth

1. The Purpose of the Parts (1 Corinthians 12:14–20)

Paul begins his analogy of the body of Christ by using very common language regarding the human body. He blends humor and a hint of irony to describe the rather silly way that people can treat each other. Paul uses rhetorical questions to state the fact that the church is one body. The eye cannot be considered separate from the hand because it is not the hand; they are both a part of the body. Likewise, the ear cannot be considered a separate member from the body. Next Paul asks, what if the whole body was one body part? He further explains that if this were the case, then we would miss out on many important body functions. In the same way, if the church is made up of only one member or one spiritual gift, then it would miss out on some important things that it needs. In contrast, God has placed all of the members of the church into one body; thus the diversity of gifts can profit the whole church. Paul says that these many members are a part of one body. These many members are necessary for the whole body to function; without them, the body would be incapacitated. All the members with all of their gifts are a part of the one body. This shows the diversity as well as the unity of the church.

2. The Danger of Division (vv. 21–26)

Paul continues his conversation about the body parts by shedding light on very common attitudes. He supposes the eye and hand suffer a disagreement in which they attempt to cast each other off (v. 21). While it is quite possible for a body to survive an amputation of an eye or hand (or foot or arm, etc.), the point is that a seeing eye still has nothing with which to grasp. Likewise, a hand without an eye to guide it will do more stumbling and destruction rather than productive handiwork. Far too often, arguments

arise in the church wherein members work harder to find fault in each other than they do to find alternate solutions to a common problem. More serious is the idea of “schism” (Gk. *schisma*, SKHEES-mah). This word describes a division or dissension. More seriously, it represents a tear or a rip, as in a garment. Whenever we look upon our brothers and sisters as being less valuable—either to God or mankind—we are forgetting our own personal need for salvation. After the argument between the eye and the hand, the head and feet erupt into an outright dismissal of one another. As ludicrous as it would be for one body part to dismiss another, we are quick to seek separation from other Christians, regardless of our common call to life in Christ. Paul acknowledges that there are those among us who may have less favorable attributes (vv. 23–24), yet we have no right to dismiss them or devalue their presence within the body. Schism represents a painful rip among humans, and also rips us from God’s will.

3. The Mission of Membership (vv. 27–31)

As Paul concludes this portion of his letter, he calls the disincorporate body parts into a unified vision of hope. He addresses them directly, saying, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (v. 27). As such he outlines that rather than lowly feet or eye or hand, the members of the church are actually far more vital. Naming gifts like prophecy, teaching, healing, preaching, and administration, he makes it clear that there is no person or gift that is without value in God’s eyes (vv. 27–31). More than a simple call to mend fences, Paul is actually empowering individuals to know their place in the body of Christ so that their individual gifts may be put to their best use for God, rather than personal or individual gain. To be a member of the body of Christ is a serious responsibility, but that responsibility is made bearable by support and care from the other members connected to us.

Search the Scriptures

1. What is the reason that God set the members in one body (1 Corinthians 12:18)?
2. What is the reason Paul gives for honoring less honorable members in the body of Christ (vv. 24–25)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we show honor to those church members who serve behind the scenes?
2. What makes believers worship Christian celebrities? Is this the proper way to view other brothers and sisters and their spiritual gifts?

Liberating Lesson

Often people separate from a church after a negative experience. Sometimes people can be put off by a well-intentioned but poorly placed comment. The news is unfortunately replete with accounts of people suffering tragic abuse at the hands of church leaders. Our natural reaction may be to say how much better we are than a particular denomination. We may go so far as to speak negatively about that particular group’s theology based on human failures. Our task in striving for unity is not to condone or cover misdeeds done in or around the church. Instead, we should hold each other up via upholding standards and accountability. While it is hard to subject ourselves to each other, it is best that we determine that we will submit together to the will of God.

Application for Activation

In some church cultures, the idea of spiritual gifts is only understood to be evident by certain worship activities. In the African American culture, it is no secret that exuberant singing, shouting, dancing, or displays of emotion may indeed reflect the power of the Holy Spirit upon someone’s life and physical body. Still, Paul’s letter makes certain that our gifts are not simply to be seen or heard within the assembly.

Seek out those people in your church body who contribute behind the scenes. Make a point to show them appreciation through words of encouragement, a card, or a gift.

Uoley, Robert James. *Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians*. Study Guide Commentary Series, vol. 6. Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2002.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997.
Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
Prime, Derek. *Opening Up 1 Corinthians*. Opening Up Commentary. Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2005.

Say It Correctly

Schism. SKIH-zim.
Feeble. FEE-bul.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 260
Daniel 7-9

DAY 261
Daniel 10-12

DAY 262
Hosea 1-7

DAY 263
Hosea 8-14

DAY 264
Joel

DAY 265
Amos 1-5

DAY 266
Amos 6-9

Notes
