

1st-2nd Corinthians

The Spirit Creates One Body

Focal Verses: 1st Corinthians 12:14-31¹

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 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 noticed. 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 Michelle was not just able to carry a tune, she was a gifted singer! After 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 (1st Corinthians 12:20 NKJV)

¹ Excerpt From Precepts for Living® Dr. Vince L., Bantu

Lesson Text

1st Corinthians 12:14-31

14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

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

18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

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

20 But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body.

21 And 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."

22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

23 And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty,

24 but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it,

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

26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracle, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

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

30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show 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 1st Thessalonians 5:14, the phrase “*support the weak*” could refer to this ministry. 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 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 every member has an important function just like the parts of the body. Each 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 1st 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 God is the provider of all gifts, and 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 can provide a unified motivation for multiple manifestations (v. 11). The apostle had already advised the church 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 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 the members of the church into one body; thus, the diversity of gifts can profit the whole church. Paul says 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 their gifts are a part of the one body. This shows the diversity as well as the unity of the church.

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 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 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 it needs. In contrast, God has placed all the members of the church into one body; thus, the diversity of gifts can profit the whole church. Paul says 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 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 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 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 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 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, the responsibility is made bearable by support and care from the other members connected to us."

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 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.²

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.

Closing Prayer

² Excerpt From Precepts for Living® Dr. Vince L., Bantu

Week of 19 May 2024

Daily Bible Readings



Monday – Daniel: 7-9

Tuesday – Daniel: 10-12

Wednesday – Hosea:1-7

Thursday – Hosea:8-14

Friday – Joel

Saturday – Amos:1-5

Sunday – Amos:6-9