

As Paul moves to the subject of spiritual gifts, he lays the groundwork for his discussion by emphasizing that we, as members of the body of Christ, are each given different gifts and roles to use within the church. All members are equally important and God has placed each of us where He wants us and given us the gifts that He wants us to have to utilize for the benefit of the church.

Verses 1-11: Paul introduces the subject of spiritual gifts as a topic that he did not want the Corinthians to misunderstand and he makes the point that these gifts are unified by the fact that they are all given and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Although there are many gifts operating in various ways, they all come from God and are distributed by Him according to His will.

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

Paul uses the illustration of our human bodies to help us understand our relationship with our fellow believers within the church (the body of Christ). Our bodies have many parts (arms, legs, eyes, lungs, heart, head, etc.) and yet together they form a functioning body. Paul will show us that the unity of our body parts working together for the benefit of the entire body is an example of the way that the members of Christ's body (the church) should all work together and care for one another for the benefit of the whole.

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many.

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized [to be immersed; overwhelmed] into one body” – Paul is not referring to water baptism but to an immersion in and by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation that places us in the body (church) of Jesus Christ. All who experience the new birth have been placed into the church by the same Holy Spirit.

“whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free” – It does not matter who you are, your background or your social status. For the Gentiles to be placed on the same spiritual level as the Jews was something that the Jews had a hard time accepting (Acts 11:1-18), but Paul makes it clear that Jews and Gentiles get saved the same way: through faith in Jesus Christ.

“and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” – All who have been saved experience the same new birth through the same Spirit of God. We may come from different backgrounds but we are bound together by the same Holy Spirit.

“For the body is not one member, but many” – The church is made up of many members from various ethnic groups, nationalities, cultures, locations, etc. Yet, the same Holy Spirit operates in them all to make up a single body of believers that belong to Jesus Christ.

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?

The foot may lack the dexterity and capabilities of the hand but does that mean that it is not a part of the body? Perhaps the ear cannot see and does not move like the eye does, but does that mean the ear is not a part of the body? Pride was one of the characteristics exhibited by many Corinthians and this pride may have intimidated those who did not have the same natural abilities as the proud. Paul emphasizes that these less gifted people have no reason to feel inferior or that they have no part in the church.

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?

“If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” – Each part of the body has a purpose and a function that can only be fulfilled by that part. If your body was made up of only eyes, you wouldn't be able to hear. If the whole body was made up of ears, how could you smell?

“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” – Each part of our bodies has a purpose and has been set in its place by God according to His wisdom and will. The same is true of the body of Christ (the church). Each of us has our function and purpose and God has placed us where He wants us to be so that we benefit the rest of the body.

“And if they were all one member, where were the body?” – In case we might think that Paul is only making his point about ears, eyes and noses, he extends it to cover the entire body. No body part can be a proper substitute for all of the other body parts. If all of our body parts were the same and had the same purpose, then our body would cease to function properly. In fact, we wouldn't have a body – just an amalgamation of duplicate body parts.

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.

“But now are they many members, yet but one body” – Instead, we have a unified, full-functioning body that is made up of many different parts, each contributing to the welfare of the body by fulfilling their purpose and function.

“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” – No body part can do without any other body part because then the body would be incomplete. We have a word for people with missing body parts: an amputee. We consider it unnatural for a body to be missing parts.

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:

“Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble [weak], are necessary” – Perhaps the feet might seem to be weaker than the hands because we wear shoes to protect our feet, and yet our feet are necessary parts of our body and we would miss them if we were to lose them. The same is true of other parts of the body that we take special care to protect. God saw that we would need these parts and He designed our bodies to have and benefit from them.

“And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable [have less esteem], upon these we bestow [to place around; to put on a garment] more abundant honour” – Paul seems to be referring to “less honorable” parts of our bodies as the parts that we keep covered by clothing. The Greek word translated “bestow” can carry the idea of putting on a garment. We give more abundant honor to certain parts of our body by covering and protecting them with clothing. Often the clothing we cover them with is beautiful to enhance the looks of what they are covering.

“and our uncomely [indecent] *parts* have more abundant comeliness [beauty; dignity; respectability]” – Most of us look better with our clothes on rather than off. We show more honor to the parts of our body that we hide for the sake of modesty by covering them up with nice clothes.

“For our comely [respectable; presentable] *parts* have no need” – The more presentable parts of our bodies, such as our face and hands, do not need such assistance. Modesty does not compel us to cover them since we have no reason to be ashamed to let them be seen unadorned.

“but God hath tempered [to combine or unite] the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked” – God has put our bodies together in this way so that we feel the need to “honor” (clothe) the parts of our bodies which lack the presentability of the other parts.

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.

“That there should be no schism [division] in the body” – The body, while composed of many members, should be a united and undivided whole. It would be considered an injury when any part of your body were to be separated from the rest of the body.

“but *that* the members should have the same care one for another” – We care if one part of our body is suffering. If you bash your finger with a hammer, the other hand immediately comes to its aid. This should also be true of the church. We should have no divisions between us and each member should care for the needs of the others equally.

“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it” – Just as we are concerned if any part of our body is suffering, we should be concerned whenever any of the other members of the church are suffering.

“or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” – We ought to rejoice when something good happens to one of our church members. Too often we can become jealous (a sign we are following our flesh) instead of showing love for our brother or sister in Christ.

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

Paul has been describing a human body, but he again applies the analogy to the church – the body of Christ. We are one body, united in and by Jesus Christ, and yet we are composed of many members, each with unique gifts and abilities given to us by God for the benefit of each other.

Verses 28-31: God has placed a variety of people in the church with a variety of spiritual gifts to be exercised for the edification of the church. Obviously, the church is not composed purely of people with the same role and gifts, because, much like the body, there are many functions needed for a body to operate properly (vs. 17-19). Paul does say that the Corinthians should desire to have the “best” (useful) gifts, but having the best gifts should not be the ultimate goal. Paul says “yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.” That statement leads into the next chapter where Paul will show us that love for one another is superior to any spiritual gift that we could ever possess.