

**THE UNITY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS**  
**1 Corinthians 12:12-31a**  
**April 2, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

We continue our study this morning in Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. Thus far we have seen the test for spiritual giftedness in verses 1-3. Some in the church at Corinth were concerned about those who were fanatical. Their concern was that they could tell no difference between their past displays of paganism and these claims of spiritual gifts in the church. Paul reminded the Corinthians that just because someone claimed to have spiritual gifts did not mean they were in the Spirit at all.

Then we saw the diversity of spiritual gifts in verses 4-11. While this is not an exhaustive list, it serves to show that God, through the Holy Spirit, gives different gifts to different people to be used for the common good of the body of Christ. I shared my belief that the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 ceased to exist *in the form they were given and displayed in Paul's day*. This does not mean that some of these gifts are not manifest in some form today in a different way than miraculously or for verification. But regardless of your view of whether these gifts exist today or not, you must be careful not to take Paul's teaching on these gifts out of context. There were some at Corinth, perhaps most, who were excessive in their view and practice of speaking in tongues. We will return to that issue in a few weeks. But we must remember this excessiveness as we look at our text today, where Paul stresses that *while there is diversity in spiritual gifts, this diversity should not cause disunity in the body*. There should be unity through diversity as it relates to spiritual gifts.

**I. An Example of the Spiritual Body (12:12-13)**

Paul is concerned about the disunity caused by some at Corinth who abused their spiritual gifts. The church was not functioning properly because some were using their gifts for their own benefit, not for the common good of the entire church. In the previous verses Paul showed them that while there exists a diversity of spiritual gifts, given by the Holy Spirit, these gifts were to be exercised in unity with each other with the good of the whole in mind. Here he offers the spiritual body, the church, as a prime example of the unity of spiritual gifts.

**1. The corporateness of the body (v. 12)**

**“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.”** Paul reminds the Corinthians that the church is one. While it consists of many members from all walks of life from all generations living in all parts of the world, speaking different languages and having different cultural interests, worshiping in different styles and forming numerous denominations, the church still exists as one body of Christ.

Have you ever noticed how the barriers immediately come down when two believers from entirely different cultural or social backgrounds meet for the first time? I have experienced this every time I have gone on a mission trip. I will never forget my first mission out of the country to Kiev, Ukraine. I was struggling mightily with the language barrier, frustrated at not being able to communicate. And I had only just arrived at the airport. Then, as we were departing the customs checkpoint, two lines of people further disrupted my spirit. On my left was a line of young, scantily clad girls waiting on the American and European men arriving on these flights.

On my right was a line of taxi drivers waiting to make a quick buck from these same travelers. Then, just as I was thinking that perhaps this was going to be the worst week of my life, a young Ukrainian girl standing at a distance, not in the line of girls, looked right at our group and yelled, “Christos!” I did not know any Ukrainian, but I understood the universal name for Christ. Suddenly, my spirits were lifted. I got to spend a lot of time that week with that girl. She was the secretary at the seminary we were there to serve and she had come with another man to pick us up. I was also thankful that she knew much more English than I knew Ukrainian.

I could share many stories like this and I am sure you could as well. There is something about the corporateness, the unity, the oneness of the body of Christ that the world simply cannot understand. However, we struggle with this corporate identity in the Western church much like those at Corinth did because we do not understand this corporateness in its fullness. In our culture, the church has become a place we go to on Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night for worship. The church in America is defined by a building, not an organism. I mention this to remind you that the body of Christ, of which you are a part if you know Christ savingly, exists not just when we meet together in worship but every hour of every day in every place. You are part of the body corporately everywhere you go. Your spiritual giftedness is not given to you to be exercised only when we come together, but at all times throughout the week. You are to have this communal mentality at all times, for the common good.

Paul reinforces this unity by adding the phrase, “**so also is Christ.**” We can no more separate the members of the body of Christ than we can separate Christ from the church. He is the Head. And just as the Head cannot be separated from the body, neither can you as a believer. And as Christ has a specific function in the body, so does each individual member. John MacArthur wrote, “It is for this reason that the New Testament speaks of our being in Christ and Christ’s being in us. He is more than simply *with* His church; He is in His church and His church is in Him. They are totally identified. The church is an organic whole, the living manifestation of Jesus Christ that pulses with the eternal life of God... The church is ‘**one body**’ because ‘**so also is Christ**’” [*1 Corinthians*, 310-311].

## **2. The entrance into the body (v. 13a)**

**“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free.”** Our entrance into the body of Christ, our being placed “**into one body,**” Paul says occurs when we were baptized “**by one Spirit.**” What does Paul mean?

The phrase “baptized in the Holy Spirit” has caused much controversy in the church today. There are only seven passages in the New Testament where we read of someone being baptized in the Holy Spirit. The first four are parallel passages in the gospels where John the Baptist speaks of the baptism of the Holy Spirit by Christ (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Mark’s account (1:8) summarizes the content of these passages where John the Baptist stated, “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” It is difficult to know what baptism of the Holy Spirit means from these passages. We learn nothing more than Jesus will baptize his followers in the Spirit.

The next two passages refer to the time of Pentecost. In Acts 1:5 Jesus said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Then, in Acts 11:16, Peter refers to this statement of Christ, “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” From these passages, whatever we don’t know about the baptism of the Holy Spirit to this point,

we know this baptism occurred on the day of Pentecost and, as we saw briefly a few weeks ago, it was marked by speaking in tongues.

The final passage that speaks of this baptism is in our text, **“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”** You might have noticed that the first six passages, in every English translation, have “baptized *with* the Holy Spirit.” Here, in 1 Corinthians, some translations, like the NAS, have it “*by* one Spirit.” Most that translate it in this way have a marginal rendering of “with” or “in.” This prepositional translation has served as the source of the controversy regarding the baptism of the Spirit.

The Pentecostal builds their entire theological view on this preposition. Going with the English translation “by” they contend that the baptism that Paul refers to in our text is a different baptism than that of the first six passages. In those passages, Jesus is the one who baptizes and the Holy Spirit is the “element” much like water is the element in physical baptism. However, according to the Pentecostal, in 1 Corinthians the Holy Spirit does the baptizing, it is “by one Spirit.” So they would say that these are two different baptisms.

You can see how important this preposition is to the Pentecostals viewpoint. However, when we look at the Greek, Paul uses almost the exact same phrasing as the first six occurrences. While the Greek preposition *en* can be translated “in,” “by,” or “with” there is no reason to translate it differently here than in the prior six instances, especially in light of the result of the baptism of which Paul speaks. The result of this baptism was that the Corinthians became part of the body of Christ. So this baptism must refer to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit at conversion. It speaks of the same baptism as the prior occurrences.

The importance of this cannot be stressed enough. The Pentecostal looks at 1 Corinthians 12:13 as a different baptism that occurs at some time after conversion. They point to the passages in Acts where the Holy Spirit came upon those at some time subsequent to their conversion. And this did occur. However, the Pentecostal misses the uniqueness of the times in which these things occurred. Those in Acts lived in the transitional time from the Old to the New Covenant. They had not received the power of the Holy in its New Covenant fullness. While the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Covenant, he was active in a different way. While we have evidence that the Holy Spirit was involved in the lives of some individuals in the Old Covenant, these in Acts had not seen the work of the Spirit as they did in these subsequent occasions.

The point for us is that we are two thousand years removed from that transitional period. The transitional period had ended when Paul wrote these words. Paul states that **“all”** who know Christ are baptized by one Spirit. **“All”** means “all.” If this occurrence of baptism occurs at conversion, as we have stated, then the Pentecostal has no theological leg to stand on in “praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit” or in telling others that they have not experienced this baptism if they do not speak in tongues like those in Acts. Further, we are not to pray for some second blessing or baptism that comes after conversion. The book of Acts is not a pattern that we are to imitate in all things do to the unique time they live in redemption history. Acts is descriptive, not prescriptive.

### **3. The indwelling of the body (v. 13b)**

Paul then states, **“and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”** The conjunction **“and”** is important here. Whatever drinking of the Spirit is, it is not the exactly the same as the baptism in the Holy Spirit. **“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”** By our baptism in the Spirit we are placed into His body, we are

immersed in Him. In drinking of the Spirit, His Spirit is placed in us. We have been saturated with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells the believer and is ever present in them.

This indwelling presence in the believer is different than being filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul told the Ephesians, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (5:18). Being filled with the Spirit is part of our sanctification. When we sin, we “quench the Spirit” or “grieve the Spirit.” Therefore, Paul’s imperative is to get filled up again. The difference in indwelling and filling is two-fold. First, the indwelling of the Spirit is a one-time occurrence at conversion. Filling may be, and should be, repeated. In other words, you can lose the filling because of sin, but you cannot lose the indwelling.

The second difference between indwelling and filling is that the indwelling is an unexpected work of the Holy Spirit. We did not wake up one day as an unbeliever and suddenly decide to pray for the indwelling. It is an unexpected work of the Spirit at our conversion. It is not pursued. Filling, on the other hand, is to be sought after. We should long to be filled to overflowing with the Spirit. When we are grieved in our spirit because of sin it is because we have grieved the Spirit, and we are to seek to regain that spiritual vitality that only the Holy Spirit can give as He fills us.

## **II. An Illustration of the Human Body (12:14-26)**

The human body is one of the most astonishing of all of God’s creations. Materialistic attempts to account for how the human body functions as it does, based on a belief that the human body is formed from a blob, serve no purpose other than nauseating reading. The child of God knows better. God created the human body with every part having a particular function that allows us to live and breathe and have our being. A study of the body’s organs alone is enough for us to stand in awe. When we look at each of the body’s systems and how they function together in just the right way we see the handiwork of a personal Creator. When we venture into studies on DNA and genetic coding we certainly see God’s fingerprint on the human body. Paul understood the magnificence of our earthly tent and he uses it to illustrate the unity of the body.

### **1. The importance of each part (vv. 14-19)**

Paul compares different parts of the body that serve similar functions to illustrate the importance of each part of the human body. There are no insignificant parts in our body. Each part exists for the whole. In particular reference to the Corinthians, Paul is demonstrating that there are no inferior or superior parts in the body. One of the sources of dissension in this church were those who held their giftedness up as being more superior, demonstrating in their minds that they had more of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, some in the body were envious of the gifts of others.

Of interest here is that Paul does not hold up the vital organs of the human body that are required for life. He does not speak of the brain or the heart or the lungs. He uses parts that, while important for a fuller life, are not necessary for survival. We might call them lesser members of the body. We can live without our hands and our feet. We can survive without being able to see and hear. However, these parts, the hand, the foot, the eye, and the ear make the body complete. And each of these parts is important to serve the purpose for which they are created in the body. Hence we have Paul’s hypothetical discussion between the parts of the body. **“If the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.** <sup>16</sup> **And if the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye,**

**I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?"**

Do you see what Paul is doing? He is simply demonstrating the importance of each member fulfilling their purpose in the body. Just as there are no inferior parts in the body, there are no inferior parts in the spiritual body. Just as God has designed each part of the body to serve a particular purpose, so has he gifted each member of the body of Christ to serve in a particular way. The believer is to use those gifts for the glory of God and not envy those of others.

There are a couple of things we glean from the importance of each part of the body. First, you may be here this morning and feel that you are not as useful to the body as someone else. Paul says this is simply not the case. While there may be those that have a greater function in the body for its well-being, myself for instance, every member is important. The body can only function as God would have it to function when each member exercises his spiritual gift in the way God provided it. Hear Paul's question in v. 19, **"If they were all one member, where would the body be?"**

A second application for us to see is that there is simply no place for a believer to sit and soak. This is one of the great dangers in the mega church today. A person can join a church of ten thousand members and simply hide. But what does this text say to them? If they are a member of the body of Christ, then they are to serve body with their gifts. If you ask some people today in these church settings how they are utilizing their spiritual giftedness in service to the body, they look at you like a deer in headlights.

So the question is, "Do you recognize your importance to the body and are you exercising your spiritual gifts for the fullness of the body?"

## **2. The interdependence of each part (vv. 20-26)**

After reiterating unity through diversity in v. 20, **"there are many members, but one body,"** Paul shows that no part of the body is self-sufficient. **"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; <sup>23</sup> and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, <sup>24</sup> whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked."**

Here we see the interdependence of each part of the body. As in the body the eye and the hands need the feet, so in the church the more highly gifted members, who Paul calls the **"more presentable members,"** are as dependent on those **"less honorable"** and **"less presentable"** as the latter are on the former. Again, you might feel you are relatively insignificant in the grand scheme of things. But you are significant! I appreciate Mike's reminder to the body last week of how your pastor needs all of you. He made a statement that it is easy to look at the pastor, the one who is more presentable, the one who is out there in front of everyone else, the one who is supposed to be the most spiritual in the church, and fail to pray for him, somehow thinking he does not need it. He reminded you that all of you are to pray for me. I, and this church, depend on it. But I want to take that a step further. God has perhaps gifted some of you with the gift of prayer. You are a prayer warrior. I want you to understand how important your "behind the scenes" ministry is to this church.

Paul continues showing the interdependence of the body by showing what happens when people fail to recognize this dependence. When this dependence upon one another is realized, there is unity. When it is not, there is division, v. 25. That is what was happening at Corinth. Some had become spiritual Lone Rangers, thinking they had no need for the body. Therefore the church was divided. By contrast, when the church is united spiritually, when one suffers, all suffer, and when one is honored, all rejoice, v. 26. This defines unity. You might have heard it said about true love, “You cry when they cry and you laugh when they laugh.” That is what Paul is saying. There is no place for spiritual Lone Rangers in the church. We need each other!

### **III. The Structure in the Spiritual Body (12:27-31a)**

Paul again stresses unity through diversity in v. 27, “**Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.**” We are part of one body yet retain our individuality, our diversity. This entire chapter emphasizes the unity that should be apparent in the body of Christ, but was missing at Corinth. Having shown by illustration how the human body functions in this way each part contributing to the whole, he brings the illustration over into the reality of the spiritual body, the church, by showing how there is a definite structure in the church as appointed by God.

He begins by showing the offices that God established in the body of Christ, specifically gifted men who God appointed to form and carry on the work of the church. The first office mentioned is that of “**apostles.**” These men were commissioned by Christ and given the specific role of receiving revelation directly from God as it pertained to the gospel of Jesus Christ and His church. The truth they received is the very truth upon which the church was established and serves as the pillar of our faith.

The second office, that of “**prophets,**” likewise were primarily instruments of divine revelation. They received words directly from God and spoke those words to the people of God. They always spoke, “Thus saith the Lord.” Given the nature of their purposes, that of receiving revelation directly from God, both of these offices ceased when God completed His revelation in the Scriptures. These offices have now been assumed by the office of elder, though not in a revelatory way.

The third gifted person that Paul gives is that of “**teachers.**” In Paul’s context, the teacher was to give instruction in the Old Testament and the teachings of Christ. The teacher was not to give new revelations of God, but was to impress upon the minds of the people the truths of God’s Word. “**Teachers**” today serve the same role. The teacher is to mine the depths of God’s Word and present it to the people in a way that will exhort, correct, guide, and rebuke. The pastor also fulfills this role today, though a teacher must not necessarily be a pastor. All pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are pastors.

Paul then moves from specially gifted men in the church and returns to gifts themselves. We have already commented on the gifts of miracles, healings, and tongues noting that these were verification gifts of the apostles and ceased with them. The gifts of “**helps**” and “**administrations**” are rather self-explanatory. “**Helps**” refers to those specially gifted to serve others in need. They are able to recognize a need and quickly formulate a plan of action. “**Administrations**” refers to leadership, one who is able to organize well and direct the day-to-day affairs of the church.

Paul closes this section again reminding them that not all people are spiritually gifted for service in the same way. His series of questions are rhetorical. Just as the parts of the physical body are given to function in a particular capacity, so God’s church is structured in a way that He

appoints certain people and equips them with certain gifts to carry on the work of the church. His exhortation in this matter, **“But earnestly desire the greater gifts.”**

You might say, “Wait a minute, Pastor Todd. I thought you said earlier that we are to be content with the gifts that God has equipped us with and not seek the gifts of others. Does Paul here refute that?” The answer is no. While this verse is difficult to interpret, context helps us. The entire context of this discussion surrounds the abuse of spiritual gifts, the gift of tongues in particular. If you notice, Paul always mentions tongues last in his lists. The Corinthians had made the gift of tongues one of the greater gifts, one that all believers should seek to have. While Paul does not discount the gift of tongues, as we will see in chapter 14, he calls tongues a lesser gift. He here exhorts the Corinthians to be zealous for other gifts that are more useful to the body as a whole, again, for the common good. Again, it is another form of rebuke to those who had placed a greater spirituality on tongues than they should have.