

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 The Big Attitude: Oneness in Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 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. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

- The Corinthian Christians had a problem of divisiveness and Paul aimed to deal with it in ways that they could relate to. When becoming a Christian, we tend to hang onto our more independent nature that we had prior. We are apt to focus on our own identity first and then the group. That is not the attitude we are to have.
 - We live a life that reflects well on the church (Mt 5:16).
 - We pray for our needs through the church (Mt 6:11-13).
 - We share our struggles and victories together as a church (James 5:13-14).
 - We are to seek out the needs of others in the church (Phil 2:3-4).
- To communicate this to the Corinthians, Paul uses the human body as an example. Since all of them have a body, they likely will be able to relate to this. Just as the human body is made up of hundreds of body parts, they still refer to it as one body. The same is true for the body of Christ.
- At what point did they cease to be individuals and start becoming the one body in Christ? It was at the point of baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit according to verse 13. The Spirit's involvement in the life of the Christian should not be surprising.
 - Mt 28:19 informs us at baptism we become disciples through the work of the Spirit.
 - Acts 2:38 says we gain the promise of the Spirit at the same point of baptism.
 - Titus 3:5 confirms at baptism we were completely renewed by the Spirit.
 - Is it any wonder that Paul would have reminded them that they all partook of the same Spirit through their baptism?
- Interestingly, Paul was making a parallel from the OT when the Israelites were "*baptized into Moses*" (10:2) and "*drank the same spiritual drink*" (10:4). If they understood the previous point, then they would also understand this one. All Christians of all times share this moment, for it was eluded to in Jesus' own words long before the church began.
 - John 7:37-39 Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' " ³⁹ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
- Anyone whom declares that a believer's immersion into water (Mark 16:15-16) does not involve the workings of the Holy Spirit will have much explaining to do on that Day of Judgment. To downplay such a connection demeans the promise of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:14-19 For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the

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hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

- To best understand the text here, it is important to know of the sanctuaries of healing. The pagan world had a history of making and offering models of individual body parts that were ailing on the worshipper.
 - "One of the most famous sanctuaries of the god was at Epidauros in the Argolid, some forty kilometers (twenty-five miles) southeast of Corinth. Corinth itself had a sanctuary of Asklepios, called the Asklepieion. It is perhaps not coincidental that Paul links the body parts to gifts of healing." Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3: Romans to Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- There have been many hundreds of these models recovered in this archeological area of the world, including those in the picture to the right.
- It is intriguing that the pagan perception focused on the individual parts of the body and not the body as a whole. Paul points out the futility of this type of thinking by arranging a series of rhetorical questions that sound rather silly.



Lesson #1) We in the church are to respect each other.

- Sometimes we treat others in the church, not as valuable members of the whole, but more like prosthetics. We must always have a genuine respect for each other like we do for each and every part of our fleshly body. We might be very different, but when the covenant of Christ begins and the blood of Christ cleanses our souls, we are all part of the body of Christ. We share the greatest, the most powerful connection ever afforded mankind. We must show genuine respect for one another.
- What do we call it when our body starts fighting itself? We call it a virus, a disease or an unhealthy condition. What should we call it when we fail to properly show respect for one another? A virus, a disease and an unhealthy condition. Therefore respect one another.

1 Corinthians 12:19-26 If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹ And 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." ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ 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, ²⁴ 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, ²⁵ so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

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- There are two thoughts developing in this section of scripture.
 1. There were weaker parts of the body.
 - There is a natural tendency of each person to recognize their strengths and weaknesses of the body. Never is it more apparent than with a trip to the gymnasium. We choose our workout based on strengths and weaknesses. We want to work out those biceps while others might focus on the abs. We look in the mirror at the parts that we like and don't like, yet we often do not see it as a whole body. We have the strong and weak parts of our bodies, just like them.
 2. There were more honorable members of the body.
 - In the Roman culture, which was the Empire in charge at the time, nakedness was not as prevalent. They often would show modesty for the more "honorable parts" by covering them. What was covered was considered in the Roman culture as the most valuable.
 - In the Greek culture, nakedness was quite common. The Olympic games were all carried out with naked athletes. The statues were often displayed with nakedness. It was not a rare thing to have large public bath houses for naked people to hang out with. The Greeks proudly displayed all of the human body and in this forum would have viewed the body as a whole, with nothing more honorable than another.
- Simply put, all the parts of the body were dependent on each other, just as God designed it.

Lesson #2) We in the church need each other.

- Each and every part of our body is physiologically linked together. If our eyes fail to function, the whole body might walk into danger. If our ears do not work, then we will not hear the warnings of danger and could jeopardize the whole body. If our foot is broken, then we will likely walk on crutches, requiring the use of our hands. If the hand is damaged, then tying our shoes become very difficult. Each and every part on our body, from the little finger to the brain, is designed by God to function dependent of each other.
 - When one of our members is suffering, we come to their comfort, for when one suffers the whole body suffers.
 - When one of our members is rejoicing, we can share in the joy because we are in it together.
 - When a brother or sister is in need, we fight to meet that need.
 - When we start straying away, we are our brother's keeper.
 - When one is weak, then we need to be strong.
- WE NEED EACH OTHER IN THE CHURCH FAMILY!

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.²⁸ And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.²⁹ All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?³¹ But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

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- The list follows the natural progression of evangelism in the ancient church. The apostles were the first missionaries, confronting the world in their sins and teaching the truth in Christ. They assembled other teams to do the same, laying hands on them to empower them with miracles and unleashing their passions to carry out the work of the church. By the end of the first century, nearly a quarter of the entire Empire was converted to Christianity.
- Did everyone receive the same gifts? Was everyone in the same place? Did everyone go through the exact same persecutions, live in the exact same culture or face the exact same situations? Of course not, but they did strive for the same goal and the results were amazing!

Lesson #3) We in the church must all work together.

- Even though we are not able to pull off the miracles of the first-century, we still have ministerial passions, great talents and the entire word of God in our hand. If we will just work together as the body of Christ, there is no limit to what our Lord can accomplish in us. We can be the body of Christ that He has called us to be if we will follow the pattern that He has set forth. We must all work together as a body.

What does it take to be successful as the body of Christ?

1. We in the church are to respect each other.
2. We in the church need each other.
3. We in the church must all work together.