

**I CORINTHIANS**  
**Chapter 12:12-31**

**Verse 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."**

Here as well as other places in the New Testament the apostle Paul uses the analogy of the human body to illustrate the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and how the church, or body of Christ is to function.

Take note of the passages of Scripture in which the church is referred to as the body of Christ. It is of utmost importance that the Lord's church be understood as being more than a mere organization; it is the body of Christ. **I Corinthians 10:17, 12:12-31, Romans 12:4-5, Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:15.**

The believers of the universal and or the invisible church theory claim that this and similar passages of Scripture either support or prove their theory. The fact of the matter is that not one passage of Scripture in which the Lord's church is spoken of as a **"body"** supports the theory of a universal and or the invisible church.

These various gifts were given to individual members of the Corinthian church, not in order that they might show them before the church, but that they should be used for the edification of the church. With the particular spiritual gift bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit, each member was to be a functioning member, contributing to the spiritual growth and well-being of the church to which the Lord has added them.

**"So also is Christ."** - There is such oneness, such Divine union of Christ and His church, it being His body, He being its Head, that it is said - **"so also is Christ"**!

**Verse 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."**

Some hold that this passage refers to baptism in the Holy Spirit, but there is no scriptural ground for such a notion. This passage means that being led of the Holy Spirit we were all brought by the Lord to baptism, and thus were made members of the local church. Therefore, baptism is the ceremonial door into the church.

It is the same Holy Spirit who still leads God's children today to be baptized into the membership of one of the Lord's local churches. The Holy Spirit could and would never lead a believer into a religious organization that is not the same kind of church which He established while upon earth. To do so would mean a disagreement in the work of the Godhead which is totally impossible.

**"And have all been made to drink into one spirit."** - **"Drink into one Spirit,"** is more literally "drink of one Spirit." Now the same Holy Spirit who quickened us, who brought us to repentance toward God and faith in Christ, and who led us to be baptized into the Lord's church is the same Holy Spirit of which is said to have been - **"made to drink"**. Therefore, there is a unity of spirit among the members of that local church. When anyone is first saved, baptized, and added to the Lord's church, that person has a sense of closeness and oneness

with Christ and a sense of closeness and oneness with the church of which he or she has become a member.

**Verse 14 - "For the body is not one member, but many."**

The word **"for"** shows the connection with the **"we all"** in the preceding verse. This shows that **verses 12-13** are speaking of the local church.

In this section Paul wanted the Christians to recognize their functional diversity within the one body of Christ. Four principles are given in these verses.

In **verse 14** - We See the Body Performs Many Functions:

As each human body is made up of many members who perform various functions, so it is with a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. All members will not or can not be alike! Nor will there be any one of them that God has added to the body who will be useless or unnecessary. Thus, the mutual dependence of the members of a body of Christ is clearly seen.

One member does not constitute a body. By itself, an arm is not a body, neither are members divided from each other as body. Thus, all Christians should not expect to have the same gift.

**Verses 15-16** - We See Each Function Is Important:

{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?***

No member should belittle his importance just because they cannot do the task of other members. Neither can a foot be a hand, nor an ear be an eye. This inability does not remove its membership or functional necessity within the body. Thus, a member should not covet the role of another.

Each member who the Lord has added to the church will have at least one spiritual gift, talent, or ability that can be used for the glory of the Lord. This talent or talents will be of benefit to the body of Christ of which they are a member. Therefore there is no need for such a member to ever feel that he is - **"not of the body."**

It is one of the favorite works of Satan to make members feel they are not accomplishing anything for the Lord and for the good of His church. If the devil can convince you that you are useless, you will soon become useless.

**Verse 17** - We See Each Function Must Be Performed:

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

If all members performed only one function then other necessary functions would go undone. A body consisting of only an eye or an ear would be a monstrosity.

No member of a body of Christ should ever belittle the gift God has given him or her, to do so is to complain against God. Neither should any member covet a gift God has given to any other member. God gives gifts to enable the body of Christ, His local church to do a great work for Him as all members put their gifts and abilities to work for Him.

**Verse 18** - We See God Assigns Each Function:

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

God decides what each member will be, and when and where he will function. God framed the human body by giving it two eyes in the front of the head and two ears on each respective side. So it is with the true church. God sovereignly gave gifts to believers and assigned them special functions. They are not given these responsibilities because they are better than others, but because - ***as it hath pleased him***" to do it (normally translated as "willed"). Therefore, let us submit ourselves to His will and serve Him in the capacity which He has given us.

**Verse 19** - We See A Mutual Need of Members.

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

Paul repeated his basic premise: ***"one body"***, many members. To be a body it must have many members - **Verse 19**. To be members they must be physically related to the other members within the body. A Christian is wrong in feeling that he has ***"no need"*** of the ministries of other believers - **Verse 21**. The eye needs the hand, and the head can do nothing without the feet. Thus, a Christian should not think that he's independent, self-sufficient, or better than others.

What a mess it would be if you had a church where all the members had only the ability to sing, to play an instrument, or to preach, etc. Thank God for whatever talent God has given you; use that talent faithfully, cultivate it, develop it. Those members who faithfully use their God-given talents, no matter how small those talents, will have rewards just as great as those to whom God has given greater talents - **Matthew 10:41-42**.

**Verses 20-22:**

Up to this point, Paul had talked about the prominent members of the human body for his illustration of spiritual ministries: foot, hand, ear, eye, and nose. Paul now introduced those members which are not readily observed. In so doing, he set forth three major principles:

1. Importance is not based upon appearance - **verses 22-23**. The importance and honor of individual members should not be based upon outward appearance, a quick observation, or a superficial evaluation of their contributions to the body.

2. What a man calls - ***"feeble"*** is really necessary. The word translated ***"feeble"*** is *asthenestera*, which conveys the idea of weakness. Now these are the ones who in the sight of the other members - ***"seem to be more feeble"***. They are the ones who quietly go about

the business of serving the Lord. They are almost unnoticed because they do not have the gifts that put them in the public eye.

3. To man, some believers "seem to be weak" because they do not seem to bring strength or honor to the body; but to God (note **"much more"**) they are absolutely necessary. The little toe may seem to be insignificant, but try to walk or run without one. The liver and kidneys are not as impressive as brown eyes or bulging biceps, but try to live without them!

### **Verse 23:**

The - **"more abundant honor,"** - refers to the extra clothing we put upon the members of our bodies. In fact, man - **"bestows"** (peritithemen: literally, "places around") expensive clothing upon those parts of his body which he deems to be the unattractive. Thus, he covers up his ugly feet with stylish shoes and his poor physique with nice suits. In so doing, he draws attention away from his naturally attractive parts, such as his eyes or nose to his - **"uncomely parts"** which are now fashionably attired.

### **Verse 24:**

**"For our comely parts have no need:"** That is to say they have no need to be clothed or ornamented. In **verses 23** and **24** the members are divided into three sorts: (1) the **"less honorable,"** which are usually clothed; (2) the **"uncomely parts,"** which are to be always carefully clothed; (3) the **"comely parts,"** which have no need of clothing. The **"less honorable," "uncomely,"** and the **"comely"** are all necessary to a properly functioning healthy body.

Importance is equally distributed - **verses 24-25**. Through clothing and lack of clothing, a balance of honor and recognition is achieved. The eyes, nose, mouth, or teeth do not need to be covered since they have the quality of beauty and attraction within themselves. God made or **"tempered"** (synekeerasen: literally, "to mix together") **the body"** in this way so that all members would receive equality of recognition and honor.

### **Verse 25:**

Two reasons are given for this divine design: one negative and one positive. First, to prevent - **"schism"**, conflict of interest, or a superiority-inferiority complex, no member of the body (gifted believer) should be praised or neglected at the expense of the others. Second, to promote mutual care or concern for each other, believers should not compete against another, but should love and minister to each other - **Galatians 6:1-5**.

There will be no - **"schism"** in the body so long as - **"the members have the same care one for another."** Now this **"care"** arises not out of a benevolent or charitable "feeling: but out of the realization of their real need of one another, as shown in the preceding verses.

### **Verse 26:**

Importance belongs to the entire body. All members suffer when one member becomes injured or diseased. A broken wrist bone or a lung full of cancer affects the entire person not just that one part of the body. Where there is proper care among members -

**verse 25**) there will be this fellowship of suffering - (**Galatians 6:2**). The opposite is also true through the marvelous nervous system with which God has endowed the human body. When one member is healthy and strong the whole body rejoices because it is benefited by that members' well-being.

Then how is it that there are those who claim to be members of a New Testament church who have no real care for other members - **verse 25 "schism"**, nor feel any actual pain, burden, or concern for the other **"members"** of that same body; and who, consequently, cannot rejoice in the blessings of God upon other members, but rather are envious and jealous of them? There is something terribly wrong with such members. Either God has not placed them in the body - **verse 18**, or they are walking contrary to the revealed will of God. In either case, it is the God-given responsibility of the church, the body of Christ, to correct the situation.

**Verse 27 - "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."**

God is saying to the church at Corinth - **"ye are the body of Christ."** They were a complete body of Christ. Each local church is a complete body of Christ, designed, led, authorized, and strengthened of God for His glory and the good of His people. Being led by the Holy Spirit, each member is unique and specifically chosen by God to be a part of the body to make it complete in His work.

**Verse 28 - "And God hath set some in the church."**

The first words of this verse run parallel to what God said of the natural body in - **verse 18**. He has done the same thing in setting the members in each church - each body of Christ. According to Greek scholars, here the Greek means "God hath set for Himself (or 'for His own use') some in the church". It is to be noted that **"some"** is not used here in opposition to "all" for He placed every one of them as in **verse 18**. The meaning is He placed some in the church, apostles, some prophets, etc.

As the Lord's church grew it needed others with their various God given gifts in order for the church to be maintained in all its God appointed function and continued growth. For example, the very first church at Jerusalem only needed apostles when it first began. As the church grew it needed additional members and the Lord provided them as needed.

**"First apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers,"** - The **"teachers"** were the same ones who were pastors - **Ephesians 4:11, I Timothy 3:2, 2:7, 4:11, Acts 13:1, 11:26**. One of the greatest tragedies within the Lord's churches within the past forty-five years has been the lack of pastors who are teachers. Pastors who neglect the study of God's Word themselves, and therefore neglect their responsibility of teaching the people within the Lord's church.

**"After that miracles, then gifts of healing,"** - Having studied these in **verses 9-10**, it is only necessary to remember these were signs for a particular time, namely the apostolic period.

**"Helps, governments,"** - The Greek word here rendered - **"helps"** is found this one time only in the New Testament. It means to "lay hold of, so as to support," thus a ministering or rendering assistance, especially to the weak and needy. Probably it refers to the work of deacons - (**Acts 6:1-7**). However, it must be noted that the word itself does not

refer to any particular office or officer in the church. Therefore, it could include those who were of extraordinary help to the apostles and others in the early life of the churches - **Romans 16: 1-4, 9.**

**"Governments,"** - is from a Greek word used only this one time in the New Testament. It denotes "steering," thus to "govern," a "guiding the helm of affairs." The only ones appointed of God to so govern or guide the helm of affairs in New Testament Churches are the bishops, overseers or pastors of the churches - **Acts 20:28, I Thessalonians 5:12, I Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24.** It is to be emphasized that the pastors, bishops, or overseers are to **"rule"** the churches by teaching them the Word of God:

**"Diversities of tongues"** - This refers to the ones who had the gift of speaking in various languages. We will wait until the **14<sup>th</sup> chapter** to more fully study the subject of tongues.

**Verses 29-30 - "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?"**

The answer to all these questions is in the light of all that has been said in this chapter a most definite NO. Whether men liked, approved or not, it was and is a matter of fact that all the members of a body of Christ (of course, in this case the body of Christ at Corinth) are not equal in spiritual gifts and abilities; all are not qualified to fill the offices or take the places of other members whom God does qualify for certain work or functions in the body. If all were equal in spiritual gifts and abilities, if all were equally qualified, the whole body would therefore be **"an eye,"** etc. which cannot be - **verse 17.**

These questions and the negative answers demanded to each of them sum up all that has been stated in - **verses 12-28.** In fact, in the fullest sense they may be said to sum up all that has been set forth in the whole chapter. Their purpose is to check or put down any spirit of independence, rivalry, fleshly presumption, supposed self-sufficiency, jealousy, or any attempt at outright display or showiness done under the cover of spiritual liberty. Furthermore, they are designed to serve as a solemn warning of the danger of being attracted or tempted by mere prominence as well as the dangers of actually attempting to gain prominence.

**Verse 31 - "But covet earnestly the best gifts:"**

The word here translated **"covet"** is more literally "desire." And the word here translated **"best"** is more literally "greater." It is not the Spirit's meaning, as so many seem to affirm that all the members were to desire to be apostles, prophets, teachers, healers, or speak in tongues, etc., for that would contradict all that has been said in this chapter. It is the sovereign right of the Holy Spirit to give whatsoever gift to whomsoever He pleases, as we saw in - **verse 11.** The meaning then is that they were to desire the greater gifts in the sense that they were to desire earnestly those gifts that would most edify the body of Christ, and thereby glorify the Head of the body, Christ Jesus, as set forth in - **chapter 14.**

It is certain that we cannot all have the **"best"** gifts. But each member can earnestly desire to be used of God in the way that He in His infinite wisdom and grace is pleased to use him or her. Each member ought to be possessed of that spirit of humility which causes us to be thankful for salvation, membership into a body of Christ, and the God-given privilege and

opportunity to serve Him according to the gift of His grace to us - **Matthew 20:20-28, 23:1-12**.

**"And yet I shew unto you a more excellent way."** The **"more excellent way"** is set forth in great detail in - **chapter 13**. It has more to do with "being" than "doing." A member may have a great gift or talent from God, given him to be used in the Lord's service, and yet that member is not what God would have him be. If a member of a body of Christ does not have the love described in the following chapter, that member is "nothing," no matter how great his gift or talent, or how skilled he is in using it.

### **SUMMARY:**

Each member is given his own work for the Lord. The ear has a job to do what no other member of the body can do, so does the eye and nose. God has not given all of us the same job to do or else the church would not be a functioning body, but as stated earlier, a monstrosity. All members are interrelated and interdependent. The eye and the head, two of the most important members of the body, cannot say to the hands or feet that they are less important, not needed, nor important to the well being of the body. Regardless of how good the eyes, if there are no feet or hands, the body is impaired.

Gifts are to be desired by all the members of the church. We should seek the gifts that would be most useful and beneficial to the church of our Lord. As soon as the church was recognized as being from God many of the gifts ceased. As soon as sufficient revelation was given there was no more need for such signs and wonders. When the apostles died there was no more giving of these miraculous gifts to men for the Holy Spirit gave these gifts to men through the apostles. The Corinthians had misused these gifts by putting their importance higher than they put faith, hope, and love.

**I CORINTHIANS 12:12-31**

## Study Guide

1. In this chapter the apostle Paul uses the analogy of the human body to illustrate the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ which is the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Give at least two verses that in which the church is referred to as the body of Christ. \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Not one passage of Scripture in which the Lord's church is spoken of as a **"body"** supports the theory of a \_\_\_\_\_ and or the \_\_\_\_\_ church.
4. Gifts were given to individual members of the Corinthian church to be used for the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What does **"baptized into one body"** mean? \_\_\_\_\_?
6. Would the Holy Spirit ever lead someone to join a church that was not the kind of church that Jesus started? Explain your answer.
7. All members \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ be alike!
8. Why should a member belittle his importance within the church? \_\_\_\_\_
9. No church member should ever belittle the gift God has given him or her, to do so is to \_\_\_\_\_ against \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The importance and honor of individual members should not be based upon \_\_\_\_\_.
11. What a man calls - **"feeble"** is really \_\_\_\_\_.
12. There will be no **"schism"** in the body so long as - **"the members have the \_\_\_\_\_"**
13. The church at Corinth was a \_\_\_\_\_ body of Christ.
14. What is the answer to the questions Paul asked in **verse 29** and **30**?
15. Are all members of the body of Christ equal in spiritual gifts and abilities? Why should members desire the "best" gifts?
16. Are you as a member of Richland using the God given gifts you have been given? Explain your answer and share what gifts you have and how you are using them. If you are not using those gifts, WHY NOT?