

Having declared that all believers are placed by Christ through the Spirit into the one Body of Christ (12:12-13), Paul uses the metaphor of the Body to address the abuse related to spiritual gifting in the Corinthian church. This beautiful picture touches the wrong emphases that arise from both individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

I. The body needs diversity to function normally (12:14-19). Paul states the principle in v 14 and then develops two thoughts that potentially reveal problems in Corinth.

1. A “lesser” function does not remove a part from the body (vv 15-16). Two functional pairings in the body, hand-foot and eye-ear, show by analogy how envy or “inferiority” does not excuse a part from functioning in the body. It implies a problem in Corinth that some viewed their gifting as “lesser” and hence in their minds unneeded.
2. Every function is needed for the body to be what it should be (vv 17-19). Reducing the body to the more spectacular function would create a monstrosity. Each and every function, exactly as God placed it, is necessary for the body to be what He created it to be.

It is obvious that every believer is hereby challenged to consider and value their function in the Body of Christ. Less obvious is the challenge from Paul rhetorical question: where would the body be? Believers should consider first their effects on the body before asking what they can get from the body.

II. The body is joined as one even though it is diverse (12:20-26). Although there is great diversity in the body, that diversity exists by design within the unity of one body. That unity creates interdependence.

1. A “greater” function does not remove dependence upon the rest of the body (v 21). A more complicated and prized function in the body does not mean it can act independent from the rest of the body. It implies that some in Corinth saw their role in the church as so important that other gifting was not needed.
2. The “lesser” functions have critical compensation (vv 22-24).
 - a. The weaker are indispensable. The reference is to an intended function of a body part and hence cannot refer to immature Christians. The weakness is only apparent and is probably the result of false evaluation. In contrast to the apparent weakness, these parts are actually indispensable.
 - b. The less honorable are treated with special honor and the unpresentable are treated with special modesty. The word translated “treat” means literally to wrap around and is also used of putting a robe on someone. Hence, the reference is probably to clothing and the way we clothe those parts of the body which we feel should not be shown (presented to others) or that in our minds need help in looking better. Similarly God honors those in the spiritual Body of Christ, whose humble place would not normally draw praise.
3. Interdependence avoids division and causes mutual concern (v 25-26). The perfect blending (the sense of “combine” in v 24) of all the parts results in all being affected by what happens to one part. It is God’s intent that by this believers have a mutual concern for one another and not be divided.

III. The church as the Body of Christ has the same divinely appointed diversity in unity (12:27-31a). Paul moves completely from the metaphor to application and a correction of the misunderstanding and abuse of spiritual gifting.

1. Each and every believer relates to the others in a body whose existence is in Christ (v 27). Each and every believer is like the member of a body. But that body is not just a group of believers. Its very existence, life, purpose and individual characteristics are defined by Jesus Christ. What is absolutely true of the universal church (all and only true believers since Pentecost) is true of the local church to the extent that it contains true believers.
2. The assignment of function is by divine appointment (v 28). This is a recurring theme showing its importance (cf. vv 11, 18, 24).
 - a. The first three in the list are enumerated which the others are not. They are also people, while the others are the gifts (literally, “then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues). This may mark them as the greater gifts (v 31) since by having the ministry of the word as their primary emphasis they contribute the most to the spiritual growth of the Body.
 - b. The exact meanings of “helps” and “administrations” are unknown, i.e., what manner of helping and what kind of direction or steering (the literal meaning of “administrations”) is meant. Significantly, tongues, which the Corinthians so honored, is last.
3. Diversity is maintained though a greater contribution can be desired (v 29-31a).
 - a. The rhetorical questions expect “no” for an answer. No one gift is possessed by all and therefore cannot be elevated above the others. Each person needs the others for what they do not have.
 - b. The Corinthians apparently were majoring on the minor gifts (e.g., tongues) and were encouraged to desire instead those gifts which would work more to building up the church. Although the distribution of gifts is a sovereign choice, God may respond to an earnest desire.

Our diversity as believers was intended by God to bring us together as we understand our dependence upon one another. We need one another to become what we should be individually and to function as we should corporately. None should feel unimportant nor consider others unimportant. As members of a body, we should be more concerned about our function together than what we can get from others. Proper attitudes and actions reveal Christ and bring Him glory.