

# THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

First Corinthians 12:12-31

## Introduction

When Jesus was on the earth in the first century, He was in a human body. He remained fully God; but He was also fully human. We call it the *incarnation* – God come in human flesh.

Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven in His resurrected and glorified body. He is not on the earth today; He is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

How does Jesus accomplish His work since He is not on the earth today? *Those who believe in Him **are** on the earth today and **they** function as His “body.”*

The Church is to be regarded as the *body* of Jesus on the earth today. Paul uses the word “body” eighteen times in fourteen verses in this chapter. He intends for you to fully grasp the awesome truth that Jesus considers **you** His body on the earth today.

It’s a great metaphor because you already understand how your own physical body should operate. Your head directs your movements and activities so that there is a cooperation and a coordination between all of the various individual members that comprise your one body.

The same ought to be true of you as the body of Jesus on the earth today. Jesus is the head, and we are the body. In the book of Ephesians you read,

Ephesians 1:22 “[Jesus is]...head over all things to the church,  
Ephesians 1:23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

The direction and movement of the individual members of the body of Christ on earth is accomplished by the Holy Spirit and His gifts. When Jesus directs us by the Spirit we move and act according to His will and Jesus is revealed in the world through us.

There are times, however, when our movement as a body is neither cooperative nor coordinated! We have disagreements that cripple our activities; we have divisions that sever our members. The problem can't be with the Head, or with the Spirit by which He makes His will known to us. The problem must be with us - *the body!*

And the problem often is precisely that we fail to understand that each of us is an *individual* member of a *unified* body! Our own unique, individual functions are vital, but they must remain subordinate to the overall direction and movement of the whole body.

Paul looks at the body of Jesus on earth today from these two perspectives - your *unity* and your *individuality*. In verses twelve through nineteen he stresses the unity of the body, saying "the body is **one** and has many members." In verses twenty through thirty-one he stresses the individuality of the members, saying "now indeed there are **many members**, yet one body." His desire is that you realize that your own unique, individual functions are vital but must remain subordinate to the overall direction and movement of the whole body.

## #1 You Are Jesus' One Body That Has Many Members (v12-19)

The unity of the body is the starting point:

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

Look at your own physical body. It is one body. It is comprised of many members - cells, tissues, organs, and systems - but it is one, unified body. The same is true of the body of Jesus on the earth today. It is comprised of many individual members, but it is one, unified body.

How can we who are individual and many really be one body? **We are one body because of the work of the Holy Spirit in us.**

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

We are one body because of the indwelling Holy Spirit Who unites us one with another. Our individual *physical* differences - ethnic, cultural, social, religious, gender, or otherwise - no longer separate us. We are all connected *spiritually* as we all have the same Holy Spirit indwelling us, connecting us to the Head, Jesus Christ.

I have to pause for a moment to let you know that this verse has caused a great deal of difficulty and disagreement among believers. The problem is with the phrase, "by one Spirit we were all **baptized** into one body." This is not referring to water baptism. It is referring to a baptism that the Holy Spirit performs.

Regarding this Spirit baptism, some believers say that there is only one "baptism" that you can have with the Holy Spirit, and that it occurs at the moment of salvation. But other believers speak of a further experience or experiences with the Holy Spirit and call it "the baptism with the Holy Spirit." Which is it?

In this verse Paul is describing the **indwelling** of the Holy Spirit. The moment you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That is the sense in which you are baptized. Greek scholar Gordon Fee points out that verse thirteen is what is called a parallelism. There are two phrases that parallel each other; two phrases that both mean exactly the same thing. The two phrases are "we were all baptized into one body," and, "[we] have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

What happens when you take a drink of water? The water comes *inside* you. When Paul says "[we] have all been made to drink into one Spirit," he means that, when you were saved, the Holy Spirit came *inside* you; you were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That is how he intends us to understand his use of the word "baptized" in this same verse! He is simply saying that, when you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit came *in* you.

He is **not** saying, however, that there can be no further experience of the Holy Spirit coming **upon you** to empower you for service! We believe and teach that there *is* a valid and Scriptural experience that can be called the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is a separate experience from salvation, when the Spirit indwells you. It is an

experience with the Holy Spirit that empowers you for service. We teach that the Holy Spirit comes *in* you at salvation, then *upon* you for service.

In verse thirteen, the Holy Spirit baptizes you into the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the baptizer; the body of Christ is what you are baptized into; the issue is salvation. When we speak of the Holy Spirit coming "upon" you, then it is **Jesus** Who baptizes you **with** the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the baptizer; the power of the Holy Spirit is what you are baptized into, the issue is service. The baptism *by* the Spirit referred to in verse thirteen is very different from the baptism *with* the Spirit Jesus promises you. One is unto *salvation*; the other is unto *service*. In one, the Spirit comes *in* you; in the other, the Spirit comes *upon* you. They are two different experiences.

Paul's point here is that we are all connected *spiritually* because we all have the same Holy Spirit indwelling us. He makes this important point to correct an error in your thinking, described in verse fourteen through seventeen:

1 Corinthians 12:14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

1 Corinthians 12:15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

1 Corinthians 12:16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

1 Corinthians 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

You have a tendency to minimize your individual contributions to the body of Jesus because you perceive your gifts to be insignificant. You think that the Church can do without you. That is a terrible error in your thinking! The one body is made up of **all** its members properly functioning together to perform the will of the Head. When you truly understand the unity of the body of Jesus, you see your individual contribution in its proper perspective.

1 Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

1 Corinthians 12:19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

God makes no mistakes. His design for the body of Jesus on earth today is perfect. He gave you your unique talents and abilities; He gives you His gifts as He sees fit and as it pleases Him. Together we

form a coordinated, cooperating body - one body with its many members.

I can't stress enough that you are a necessary and vital member of the body of Jesus on the earth. That's what Jesus says of you through Paul's writings. If you think otherwise, **you are wrong!**

Not everyone thinks that the Church can do without them; some think that they can do without others in the Church! You *are* a unique individual, but you cannot function on your own. Paul addresses this error in the remaining verses by taking a proper look at your individuality.

#2 You Are The Many  
Members Of Jesus' One Body  
(v20-31)

Your individuality can only truly be understood in the context of your connection with others in the one body. As Paul says in verse twenty,

1 Corinthians 12:20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

Many Christians are out of regular fellowship with their local church. It is almost epidemic. It is simply unScriptural. Look at it this way: Can a member of your physical body survive if it is detached from the rest of your body? It can possibly be preserved; but it cannot be living and functioning properly, and the body it is detached from suffers its loss. A Christian who detaches him or her self from fellowship in a local church can possibly be preserved; but they cannot be living and functioning properly, and the body they are detached from suffers from their loss.

If you are in regular fellowship, another problem can arise from your individuality. At Corinth the problem wasn't so much that the believers were out of fellowship as it was that, while they were together fellowshiping, some of the members had feelings of superiority because of their particular gift or gifts. Their gift or gifts seemed more important.

Are some gifts more important than others? I am tempted to say "Yes," until I read Paul's next comments:

1 Corinthians 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

Is your hand more important than your eye? You can still see without a hand; but the loss or lack of a hand is a nevertheless a handicap that affects the whole body. It is immature to think of some part of Jesus Christ's body as less important than another.

Paul takes his comments a step further. He divides the human body into four parts: the weaker parts, the less honorable parts, the unrepresentable parts, and the representable parts:

1 Corinthians 12:22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

1 Corinthians 12:23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty,

1 Corinthians 12:24 but our representable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,

The "weaker" parts of your body are the vital internal organs that have to be protected by the skeleton. The "less honorable" parts of our body refer to the torso. Our "unrepresentable parts" refer to our unrepresentable parts!!

Our "representable parts" are our head, arms, hands, legs, and feet.

We normally think of our representable parts as superior to the rest of our body. Yet in a sense we treat the rest of our body as if it were *superior* to our representable parts! Our representable parts are left exposed and largely unprotected, but the other parts we clothe and protect. That's because we know that the rest of our body is vital and necessary to the function of our head, arms, hands, legs, and feet.

This should be your attitude in the body of Jesus, too. The "representable parts" would be those who minister in the more obvious ways. We normally think of them as superior; but we ought to realize that the rest of the body is vital and necessary to their function. If there are weaker, less honorable, or more unrepresentable ministries, we should never think them inferior.

This proper perspective on individuality promotes cooperation and coordination in the body of Jesus on earth:

1 Corinthians 12:25 ...there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

1 Corinthians 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

We are one body, even though many individual members. We care for one another; we suffer together; we rejoice together.

How does it all come together? Paul gives us a look at a coordinated, cooperating body of believers:

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

There is one body, comprised of many individual members, who are given gifts as the Holy Spirit determines. Jesus is revealed on the earth through this supernaturally gifted "body" of believers.

There is an order to Paul's list of these particular gifts:

1. First, gifted men establish the Church - men like the "apostles" and "prophets."
2. Next, a gifted man or men equip the Church - men who are "teachers."
3. Then, gifts edify the life of the Church. The list includes sign gifts, serving gifts, and speaking gifts that are available to you as individual believers.

This is still the pattern today. A local church is *established*, by the leading of God; a gifted man or men are given to the church to *equip* the believers; the believers are given gifts to *edify* one another.

Again I must strongly point out that all of this absolutely assumes each and every believer will be involved in a local fellowship. That's not a rebuke to most of you; you are here, you are involved. But increasingly more and more believers feel that fellowship in a local church is unimportant or unnecessary. **They are wrong!** They are

individuals, yes; but only in the sense that an arm is an individual member of the body which gives it life and which it is intended to serve.

What gift or gifts does the Holy Spirit bestow? All those that He sees fit to:

1 Corinthians 12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

1 Corinthians 12:30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

These questions demand a "No" answer. "Are all apostles?" **"No."** "Are all prophets?" **"No."** "Are all teachers?" **"No."** "Are all workers of miracles?" **"No."** "Do all have gifts of healings?" **"No."** "Do all speak with tongues?" **"No."** "Do all interpret?" **"No."**

God is the one who determines the movements and activities of the local church. He does it by distributing those gifts that He sees are best in that congregation, for that city.

## Conclusion

In order to accomplish His work on the earth in the first century, Jesus had a body of flesh and blood.

In order to accomplish His work on the earth today, Jesus has another "body" - the Church, living human believers, *you and I* - "the body of Christ, and members individually."