



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 12:11-30

Topic

The apostle Paul instructs the church at Corinth regarding their unity as individual members of the one body of Jesus Christ on the earth

Title

“Solid Unibody Instruction”

Introduction

I get excited when I hear an unsaved person or a backslidden believer is coming to church. I pray that God would meet that person right where they are at and either draw them to Him or back to Him.

It was counterproductive to bring a visitor to church in first century Corinth. In chapter fourteen we get a synopsis of their services.

1 Corinthians 14:23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, **will they not say that you are out of your mind?**

Visitors left thinking the believers were “out of [their] mind[s].” Their “speak[ing] with tongues” was turning people off from meeting and following Jesus.

It would be easy for the apostle Paul to simply tell them to stop emphasizing speaking with tongues over the other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

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But then they would just make the same mistake again and emphasize some other gift. So he gave them a refresher course on their relationship with God the Holy Spirit.

He told them two things in verse thirteen:

1. First, that they'd been "baptized into one body" by the Holy Spirit, and
2. Second, that they "have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

Those two experiences, both of which occur at the moment a person is saved, need to be understood to keep us from abusing any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You've Been Immersed Into Something Greater Than Yourself, and #2 You're Being Indwelt By Someone Greater Than Yourself.

#1 You've Been Immersed Into Something Greater Than Yourself (v11-26)

We've spent the last several weeks looking at individual gifts of the Holy Spirit. We did it to establish context, so that when the gifts are mentioned we will know what we're talking about.

We dive back into our text at verse eleven.

1 Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

These supernatural manifestations, these "gifts," are given by God the Holy Spirit to Christians "as He wills." It begs the question, "What is the Holy Spirit's overall will for the church?"

It is to glorify the Lord, Jesus Christ, on the earth. But how do we do that - since Jesus is physically in Heaven? Paul used an illustration.

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.

We are introduced to the illustration that believers on the earth are individual members of the one body of Jesus Christ on the earth. Paul used the word "body" eighteen times in fourteen verses in this chapter. He intended for you to fully grasp the awesome truth that Jesus considers you His body on the earth today.

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.

After dying on the Cross for the sins of the world 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.

Those who believe in Him *are* on the earth today and they function as His “body.”

It’s a great illustration 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.

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

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.

Two complimentary truths are taught simultaneously in this verse:

1. Every believer is “baptized into one body” by the Spirit.
2. Every believer has “been made to drink into one Spirit.”

What does it mean “to drink into one Spirit?” That will be our second point as we see the Holy Spirit indwelling us individually.

“Baptized” simply means *immersed*. We have to get over thinking of the ritual of water baptism every time we read the word “baptized.” This is not water baptism that follows your getting saved. This particular baptism is something that occurs the moment you believe. It is a spiritual baptism into the body of Jesus Christ on the earth. This baptism is your spiritual immersion into the body of Jesus at the moment of your conversion.

You receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and you are immediately spiritually connected to every other believer by the Holy Spirit.

We are thus one spiritual body on the earth. Our individual physical differences - ethnic, cultural, social, religious, gender, or otherwise - no longer separate us. We are all connected spiritually.

Paul applied the illustration to the particular problem at Corinth of over-emphasizing the gift of speaking with tongues. Since we are to be a body, we need to function like a body.

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?

This was Paul being funny. Ascribing consciousness to individual body parts and having them talk is humorous. Think of all the TV ads for allergy products that grab your attention because they represent you as a giant talking nose. Then you take the meds and return to your normal state as a person with all the proper body parts in place.

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?

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In Corinth they were all-about the gift of speaking with tongues. We will see in a moment that tongues is *not* a gift for every believer. For them to elevate tongues, to emphasize tongues, was to cause the believers to desire to have and to be something God had not gifted them to have or to be. It was like your foot wanting to be a hand, or your ear wanting to be an eye, because they were made to feel not part of the body.

We need to work hard at not making believers feel that their gifts are inferior. Some gifts, some ministries, are more obvious. But everyone's contribution is essential.

While some of the believers, who did not really have the gift of speaking with tongues, were made to feel inferior, others obviously felt superior on account of the emphasis.

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

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."

In the sense that your physical body is fearfully and wonderfully made and all functions together, there are no superior parts. In a similar way, we should never think certain gifts of the Holy Spirit are superior to others.

Think of it this way. If you need a healing, do you want everyone speaking with tongues? If you've come to hear the Word taught, do you want everyone speaking with tongues? I think you get the idea.

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

Like your toes! Ever kick a bedpost barefoot? Ingrown nail? All of a sudden life is about your toes!

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 presentable parts have no need...

We normally clothe the parts of our bodies that we'd consider unpresentable in polite company. Think of all the money you spend just on shoes! This is just an illustration to show that we consider our human body to be one body functioning together.

1 Corinthians 12:24 ... But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,

1 Corinthians 12:25 that 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.

With regard to the body of believers we are to understand that God also bestows honor on those parts which we might think less honorable. In other words, a person in Corinth with the gift of showing mercy was just as important to God as the person speaking with tongues.

Emphasizing certain gifts as more honorable, or we would say more 'spiritual,' will cause "schism" among God's people. Instead we ought to "care" for one another equally as members of the earthly body of Jesus.

Do you think certain gifts or giftings are more spiritual than others? Truth is, all of us probably do in some way or another. But since we all are gifted by the same Holy Spirit, **then all gifts and giftings are equally spiritual.**

The moment you become a Christian you are immersed into something greater than yourself. You are immediately a member of Jesus Christ's body on the earth.

You and I need to discover what part, what member, we are. We do it as we fellowship with one another and see how God uses us to reveal Jesus to one another.

#2 You're Being Indwelt By Someone Greater Than Yourself

(v27-30)

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Back in verse thirteen we saw two things. The first was that we are all baptized, or immersed, into the body of Jesus on the earth at the moment of our conversion.

The second - also at the moment of our conversion to Jesus - was that we “have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

What happens when you drink? What you are drinking goes in you, to refresh you and fill you. We are talking about the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit in every believer.

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

You might say that as the body we are in the Holy Spirit, and as individual members He is in each of us.

Paul was at a point where he could start putting all this together. The individual members of Jesus Christ’s one body on the earth are to function as follows:

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.

This is a very instructive verse. Paul has been talking about gifts but he began this list with gifted men. He said God “appointed” certain men “in the church.”

- “Apostles and prophets” were used to establish the foundation for the church in the first century.
- They were followed by “teachers” who continue to build upon the foundation through the centuries.

We might order it like this:

1. First, gifted men establish the church - men like the "apostles" and "prophets."

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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.

Take a look at the life of the apostle Paul in the Book of Acts and you will see that by "the church" he means the local gathering of believers. He was *not* talking about the universal church. He assumed, as do all the writers of the New Testament, that individual believers would attach themselves to a particular, local body.

Paul went around and established churches. He appointed pastors and elders and deacons. He was into the church as a visible, functioning group of people who regularly met together.

While he understood that the church was also universal, comprised of every believer from the Day of Pentecost to the rapture, the idea of a Christian doing his or her own thing apart from a local church was foreign and weird to Paul.

It should go without saying that you must be involved with a local body of believers. *Otherwise you are like a limb or other body part that has been dismembered!*

I say this to encourage most of us. We're involved; we're committed. Until the Lord comes for His church, we're part of it.

Some need to be exhorted. We all know folks whose contact with a local church is nonexistent.

In every church that God has established are individuals with the various gifts He has given them. Paul mentioned five of them that we've discussed and defined previously. I don't think there is any importance to the order in which they are placed - except that the gift they were emphasizing is placed last.

The real importance is what Paul asked in verses twenty-nine and thirty.

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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?

Everyone is in agreement that all these questions require 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."

For the church at Corinth to emphasize that all the believers speak with tongues at once, and without even the corresponding gift of interpretation, requires a “No” answer.

Even though this is obvious certain groups try to get around it. For example, some say that the gift of speaking with tongues Paul was talking about was the public gift, but that *every* believer has a private ability to speak with tongues. But the Bible makes no such distinction.

And that is why, or one reason at least why, Paul spent so much time setting up his conclusion. If you really understand the illustration of the one body with many members you’ll know that any such emphasis on one particular gift is out of order.

In Corinth they looked like one huge tongue! (I don’t even want to dwell on that!).

Instead they were supposed to ‘look’ like Jesus in all His fullness.

You were immersed into the body of Jesus when you were saved. How involved in this local body are you?

We have a pretty good track record for getting folks involved. We’ve raised-up men and sent them out to pastor. We’ve raised-up men to teach right here. We have tons of volunteers. We’ve got programs to reach-out and to reach-in.

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If you want to be involved, we'll help you discover your gifts and gifting and get you serving the Lord.

Until He comes for all of us, we want to look like Him in His fullness. If and when a visitor comes, we want them to see and hear and sense that Jesus is alive.

A church, a local gathering, ought to be doing just what Jesus would do if He were still on the earth. It's as if He is on the earth in the body of believers.