

# **To Be Continued...**

## The Holy Spirit & His Gifts

First Corinthians 12:15-26

In the early 1950s, Brooklyn-born toy inventor George Lerner came up with the idea of inserting small, pronged body and face parts into fruits and vegetables to create what he called a "funny face man."

Mr. Potato Head was "born" on May 1, 1952. The original toy cost \$0.98, and contained hands, feet, ears, two mouths, two pairs of eyes, four noses, three hats, eyeglasses, a pipe, and eight felt pieces resembling facial hair.

The original Mr. Potato Head kit did not come with a potato "body," so parents had to provide their own potato into which children could stick the various pieces.

In the 1960s, government regulations forced the Potato Head parts to be less sharp, leaving them unable to puncture vegetables easily. By 1964, the company was therefore forced to include a plastic potato "body" in its kit.

I thought of Mr. Potato Head because Paul starts talking about various body parts claiming independent identity from the whole body. His point is simple enough: the true nature of your human body is that it is one body consisting of many necessary parts.

He will argue from that very obvious illustration that the body of Christ on earth - His church - is also one with many parts.

The application in Corinth was that the whole body was not to gather together only to speak in tongues. Many other manifestations of the Spirit ought to be present as well.

1Co 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?

1Co 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?

Is it just me, or does this read like a stand-up comedy routine?

Obviously the foot and the ear are parts of the body, regardless their function differing from the hand and the eye.

The parts of the body cannot deny their own place on the body. The ear cannot function as an eye; the foot cannot function as a hand. All have their divinely appointed place.

In the body of Christ, that place is appointed for you by God the Holy Spirit as He gifts you to function according to His will.

It would be pretty noticeable if my ear, wanting to be my eye, left its place on the side of my head and was on my face.

It is less noticeable when a believer wants to be, or thinks they are, gifted in some way or ways that they are not. You can appear gifted but be ministering in the energy of the flesh.

Let's pause and talk about this for just a minute. Christians are always wondering, "how do I discover my gift or gifts?" You should also be asking, "How do I know if I'm *not* gifted in the way I want to be, but am pursuing it for fleshly reasons?"

The answer is that there are a lot of ways to answer that question. I'm not trying to be evasive; it's just that every situation is a little bit different.

Let me give you two anecdotes to mull over:

1. I knew a guy, a gifted worship leader; I mean, awesomely gifted. He also taught a home Bible study. It was OK, his teaching, in the sense you'd say he was 'able to teach.' But when he announced his plans to go out and start a church as the senior, teaching pastor - all the honest brothers giving him counsel told him he was *not* gifted as a teacher. He should have heeded their counsel.
2. I knew a guy who thought he was a gifted Bible teacher. In fact, he told me he was. The trouble was, he never, not ever, lifted a finger to do anything in the church. He refused to serve unless he could teach because, after all, he was a gifted teacher. He might even have a gift for teaching; but he needs to learn humility before it will translate to something meaningful.

The best way to discover whether you're an ear or an eye is to gather together with believers and serve them by seeing the needs and meeting them. We will learn in chapter thirteen that love is the principle thing. Love others and you will discover your gifts.

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

People have opinions on whether they'd rather be deaf versus blind, but really all your members are important in their own right.

Especially when they are functioning for the good of the rest of the body.

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

However God the Holy Spirit has gifted you - it's good and you should accept it joyfully for the greater good of the entire body.

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

There wouldn't be a "body" if your whole body was a single member. It would be a monstrosity.

Don't forget what Paul was speaking to in this argument. The body of believers at Corinth was like one giant tongue. In the way they were functioning, they weren't really a body at all.

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

"Many members," in Corinth, ought to mean the manifestation of many gifts - not just tongues, or any other gift, for that matter.

When the many members are all functioning, then you've got body life as God intended it to be.

1Co 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."

Paul adds a little twist to the illustration. Gordon Fee points out, "Both the direction and content of what is said imply a view 'from above,' where those who consider themselves at the top of the "hierarchy" of persons in the community suggest that they can get along without some others, who do not have their allegedly superior rank."

There are lots of ways believers can think themselves superior to other believers:

1. One is to think that their gift or gifts are superior. To that we'd say, "try cutting down a tree with a hammer, or using a saw to drive nails."
2. Another way believers think themselves superior has to do with wealth and social status. There's no denying that we have a natural bent to think those with wealth and power are somehow more blessed by God. If you read the warnings in the New Testament to those who are rich, you'll be glad you're not!

Maybe you can think of some other ways believers can feel superior. The point is that we are one body, gathering together to minister to one another as we've been gifted by God.

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

Your weaker members are your internal organs. They need protection from the outside to go on functioning. But you can't function properly without them. Modern medicine can compensate to a certain extent, e.g., dialysis for kidney function. But that only proves Paul's point about how valuable they are.

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

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

He was talking here about wearing clothing and making a general observation that the very act of adorning those parts of the body, while letting others mostly alone, shows that we generally care for our whole body as is appropriate.

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

He's starting to drive home his point. Your human body is a marvel of cooperation in order to function properly and allow you to do remarkable things.

Likewise the body of Christ must cooperate according to God's gifting in order to accomplish its purposes on the earth.

For example I've mentioned that, because everyone in Corinth was speaking in tongues simultaneously, young believers and nonbelievers thought they were crazy. They should instead have been functioning properly, as a body should, so that those who visited them would instead be "convinced by all, [be] convicted by all... and so, falling down on [their] face[s], [they] will worship God and report that God is truly among you" (First Corinthians 14:24-25).

1Co 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.

Ever have an abscessed tooth? I can totally relate to that scene in *Castaway* where Tom Hanks uses an ice-skate blade to remove one of his teeth.

As far as one member of my physical body being "honored," I'm at a loss for an analogy. Closest I can come is my love of physical therapy. When that tens unit is zapping my back with high voltage, my whole body is honored.

Paul was saying, "start acting like a body rather than like a bunch of independent members."

Olaf the snowman in *Frozen* is an immediate classic Disney character. One of the things that's fun with him is that his body parts and his carrot nose and branch arms are always coming off or getting rearranged. He can't function properly until he's put back together.

Any church - cessationist or continuationist - that is over-emphasizing a particular manifestation of the Holy Spirit is not functioning properly; not according to Paul, anyway.

As we've pointed out, there is no biblical teaching that certain gifts have ceased. The historical arguments are inaccurate at best. The observational arguments, e.g., you don't see certain gifts mentioned later in the Book of Acts, are weak arguments from silence. If you say certain gifts have ceased, you are obviously emphasizing other gifts over them. You're not functioning properly.

A continuationist church that is like Corinth - emphasizing certain gifts because they seem outwardly to be more supernatural - is just as wrong.

We need to act like a body whose many members are functioning together as The Lord leads us by His Holy Spirit.