

Chapter Twelve Notes

Verses one to eleven

- In this chapter, Paul began his discussion of the Corinthian problem of spiritual gifts. This chapter can be broken into two sections: (1) the variety of gifts (12:1-11); and (2) The unity of the various gifts (12:12-31). There was evidently great rivalry among the Corinthians. The more flamboyant the gift was, the more exalted was the view which the Corinthians had of it. Some in Corinth thought of themselves more highly than they ought to think and others had a very low self-esteem.
- The phrase "now concerning" is the usual formula used in this letter to introduce new subject material. Paul did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts. Ignorance is definitely not bliss!
- In vs. 2, Paul is beginning to contrast the pagan religion and the Christian religion. The Corinthians were led away by dumb or speechless idols. There is no doubt the speechless idol is contrasted with God who is able to produce prophets and tongue-speakers. Man will certainly grope in darkness in order to worship when he has no divine revelation to guide him. When man departs from God, he even loses sight of all moral consciousness.
- Because of the Corinthians' previous condition of being led away into idolatry, their present novice state, and general ignorance of spiritual gifts, Paul gave this categorical guideline for determining who was and who was not under divine influence. Those who said "Jesus is accursed" were false apostles or prophets among the Corinthians who transformed themselves into the apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 12:13-15). Paul is teaching the Corinthians to test the teachers by their doctrine rather than by their pretended spiritual gifts. No one can be considered a Christian who fails to exalt Jesus as Lord both in word and deed (Matthew 7:21-23). Paul says that anyone who exalts Jesus Christ while claiming to be exercising a spiritual gift is genuine.
- Paul discusses the variety of gifts to emphasize that all of the different gifts proceed from the same Spirit and to emphasize that each manifestation of the Spirit is for the common good of the congregation. Brethren should not depreciate any of the gifts that come from God nor should any brother be arrogant against another since all gifts come from God. God's miraculous gifts came by grace, not by merit. Therefore, no one has room to boast about his gift.
- The different varieties of ministries refers to the same gift from a

different point of view. All of the different gifts that were distributed by the one Spirit serve the one Lord. God is the one who produces the miraculous effect of the spiritual gifts in all men who have the gifts.

- Spiritual gifts were not intended to be the private possession of the one who had them to be used for his personal profit; they were designed to be used for the advantage or profit of the whole church. The Corinthians apparently regarded the possession of such gifts as a matter of pride, and set up one against another on the basis of possession of certain gifts. There was a diversity of endowments conferred by the Spirit, yet it is the same Spirit. We should use our non-miraculous, natural endowments in His service rather than esteeming each other better than another.
- The word of wisdom was the oral proclamation of a message which had wisdom for its content. The word of knowledge was the knowledge of God's way of salvation through the cross.
- Faith could have referred not to initial trust in Christ for salvation but for deeper expressions of faith such as undergoing hardships, martyrdom, etc. The gift of healing was the miracle-working power to restore health to a sick body by the laying on of hands or through some other means other than natural healing.
- The working of miracles probably referred to the expulsion of demons, infliction of divine judgments, or raising the dead. Prophecy was the ability to be a spokesman for God. This person imparted divine revelation as well as foretelling the future. Discerning of spirits was the ability to distinguish a true prophet or teacher from a false one. Before the written word of God, there was need to distinguish the truth from falsehood. The gift of tongues was the ability to speak a language that one had not learned. Speaking in tongues was a sign for unbelievers. The interpretation of tongues was the ability to translate from one language to another. The interpretation of tongues presupposes that the gift of tongues was intelligible.
- The Holy Spirit is the one who gave each of the individual gifts. Therefore, no one with one gift has the right to think he is better than one who has another gift. The distribution of the gifts was the work of the Holy Spirit. He decided who received what gift. The fact that the Spirit has a will shows that he has a personality. The fact that he distributed these gifts as he pleased shows His sovereignty. The unity of all the gifts is continued in the following comparison of the gifts in the church to a human body.

Verses twelve to thirty-one

- In order to teach the Corinthians that the Lord's church is not to be composed of individuals in competition and warfare with one another, Paul compared the church to a body to illustrate how the various parts should work together for the common good of the one body. The church manifests a unity in diversity. However, the unity in diversity discussed in this chapter is not a doctrinal unity in diversity, but a functional diversity.
- Paul compares the church to a human body which is an organism composed of a variety of parts functioning together as a unity for the common good. Although various gifts are given to different members, they all work together for the common good. The various individuals who are in Christ are like the human body in their functioning together.
- All members, regardless of their previous backgrounds, were made a part of one body. All men are reconciled to God through Christ in one body (Ephesians 2:16). The Corinthians were all led to be baptized into one body under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The influence of the Holy Spirit was manifest in the proclamation of God's word. The word of God, which was revealed by the Spirit, taught that men had to be baptized. Therefore, all men were baptized because of the revelation of the one Spirit. Every person who was baptized did so because of the revelation of the one Spirit.
- Vs. 14 states that the body is a composition of many members working together so as to be an organism. Each represents something that is not so well represented in others. Each has its own function to exercise, and work to perform, which could not so well be accomplished without it.
- The fact that the foot says that it is not a part of the body does not make it any the less a part of the body. For the one who had the gift of healing to complain because he could not speak in tongues is no less absurd than for a foot to complain because he is not a hand.
- The church would be crippled if it were without all of its members. The Corinthians apparently had some among them who felt that they were useless because they did not possess some of the more highly respected spiritual gifts. Paul reassures these members that they are as important to the well-being of the body as are the others.
- Every individual member serves the body in a distinctive way. If the body was deprived of any individual member, the whole body would suffer because it lacked the service performed by that member. Every member has a service to render which contributes to the overall welfare of the entire church. The whole body will suffer when any member does not function as it should.

- The body is made up as it is because willed that it be so. If a person does not like the station that he occupies in the body of Christ, he should reflect on the fact that God is the one who gave it to him. For someone who only possessed a certain gift to complain because he did not have a certain gift would be rebellion against God since God was the one who gave him that gift.
- The body would be useless if it were composed of only one part. An orchestra can make beautiful music only when every instrument is tuned and laying harmoniously. Likewise, the body can function only when every member is functioning in its given field of labor.
- There were arrogant members who thought themselves superior to the rest because of their gifts. Pride is as much out of place in the body as is discontentment.
- Those parts of the body that are least conspicuous and more feeble are the most necessary. The avenue of greatness in the kingdom of God is through unassuming service rather than lording it over. Those members on whom the church will always depend the most are those quiet, unassuming members who labor in the kingdom. We may have a well-known preacher to hold our meeting, but the local members make the meeting successful.
- We put clothes over those parts of the body which we deem less honorable. By clothing them and giving them more of our attention, we bestow more honor on those parts. The weaker are the more necessary; on the less honorable we bestow honor by means of our clothing habits; the indecent are treated with greater presentability. The treatment we give to the less honorable parts of our physical body should be our example for learning how to treat the less honorable members of the church. We do not despise or disrespect these parts of our bodies; rather, on these we bestow more attention in our habits of dress.
- The comely parts are those which we leave exposed or unclothed. These parts of our bodies do not need the extra attention nor do those members of the church who serve in public function always being in the spotlight, need the extra attention which the less honorable need. God has willed to bled the body together in such a way as to place more abundant honor on the most insignificant parts.
- By creating a physical body in such a way that every part depends upon every part, God prevented warfare between the hands and feet. The interdependence of the members of the church upon each other is also designed to prevent schism in the body. The dependence of the tongue-speaker upon the one who translates is so great that one cannot exercise his gift without the other.

Christians are to have an anxious care and concern for another. The body of Christ is not a group of people in competition with one another. Every member should be concerned about the spiritual well-being of every other Christian.

- The condition described in vs. 26 cannot exist where division or indifference prevails. The physical body is so composed that when one part is injured all of it suffers. The body's parts suffer together and rejoice together. The church is a body and, therefore, should be concerned about the welfare of each of its members.
- God is the one who ordained that the church function in the same manner as does a body in which the members are dependent upon each other. Nowhere in these verses has Paul argued that everyone is equal in ability or that each has equal gifts. Instead, he said that every gift is needed and serves a function. Apostles were in a special relationship to God as agents through whom God revealed His will. They could also empower special gifts to others. Teachers passed the revealed message from one generation to another. Helps and administrations may have been gifts given to leaders in the church.
- The members cannot all be apostles, prophets, teachers, etc. The members cannot have the same gift and the church still be a body.
- In vs. 31, Paul encouraged them to honorably aspire for better gifts. They should desire the gift of prophecy over the gift of tongues because prophecy serves to instruct people more perfectly in the word of God. We should not aspire to cultivate natural abilities that produce amazement, but we should cultivate abilities which produce more permanent effects. The "more excellent way" was a way of love. Love will make the possessor a better Christian, which is superior to spiritual gifts.