**YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST  
*1 Corinthians 12:1-31a***

***“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (27)***

The human body is an amazingly designed machine, with many parts working together to compose a unified whole. The body contains approximately 37 trillion self-replicating nanomachines called cells, each one containing the DNA blueprints for the whole body. If all the DNA in your body were to be uncoiled, it would stretch around 100 billion miles—to Pluto and back! Despite each of your cells having the same DNA that makes them part of you, cells are specialized to form organs that make up a complete body. My body has many different parts, including ones I’ve never heard of, like the choroid plexus. Specialized doctors spend many years studying even just one part of the human body. In today’s passage, Paul likens the church to a human body—intricately designed with widely varying parts with essential functions to form a unified whole. We will learn about the various gifts of the Holy Spirit with which God equips the church and how we should view them and use them in the context of the church, which is the body of Christ.

1. **One Spirit, Many Gifts (vs 1–11)**

In the last section of 1 Corinthians, Paul taught about the Lord’s Supper, a ritual that proclaims our union with Christ and unity with one another, since we all share one loaf. Now he moves on to a new topic; look at verse 1: “***Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.***” At the beginning of this letter, Paul expressed his thanks that God had enriched them so that they did “*not lack any spiritual gift*” (1Co 1:7). It seems like many of the Corinthians were already exercising spiritual gifts. However, they didn’t understand the proper role or significance of spiritual gifts. So Paul felt the need to inform them and broaden their perspective of the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit.

It’s very significant the first thing Paul mentions. Look at verses 2–3: “***You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3 Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.***” Here we can see the first and primary work of the Holy Spirit. In the past, the Corinthians had been led astray by evil Spirit to worship mute idols. The futility of worshiping something that cannot speak or act or do anything shows the extent to which they had been deceived and blinded. Paul affirmed that their change of heart to sincerely confess the lordship of Jesus and receive his salvation was due to the work of the Holy Spirit. When Paul depended on the power of God and preached the message of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins, the Holy Spirit worked in their hearts through the gospel and led them to repent, believe, and confess, “Jesus is Lord!”

Ability to recognize and submit to the lordship of Christ is not something we can muster on our own; we need the Holy Spirit to change us and strengthen us as we struggle to submit to Christ in every area. Likewise, submission to the lordship of Christ is not something we can produce in others through the right words or methods. As we evangelize or disciple others, we must depend on the Spirit through prayer to make all our efforts bear fruit.

Verse 3 gives us a practical test for whether someone is speaking by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit seeks to glorify Jesus Christ, so what people say or don’t say regarding Jesus can be a clear indicator whether or not what they are saying is from the Spirit.

Next, Paul gives an introduction to spiritual gifts. Look at verses 4–6: “***There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.***” First, we can see the source of gifts. It is the Spirit who distributes the gifts, but Paul mentions the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus, and God the Father together in these three parallel verses. The whole trinity is involved. When we receive the gifts from the Spirit, we serve the Lord according to God’s work in us. The Father, Son, and Spirit have different roles, but they are eternally one, displaying unity in diversity.

Second, Paul teaches the purpose of gifts. Look at verse 7: “***Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.***” Paul mentions each one, all of them, everyone—everyone who trust in Christ and submits to his lordship has been given a manifestation of the Spirit. Each believer has some divine gift, whether we know it or not, and we have the responsibility to use what God has given us for the common good of the whole church. The gifts of the Spirit are not meant for the good of the individual, but for the gifted individual to serve and edify others in the church—to build up the body of Christ, and ultimately to glorify God. They are not meant to make us proud, but to make us a blessing.

Paul continues by giving a sampling of some gifts of the Spirit. Look at verses 8–10: “***To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.***” Paul lists nine distinct gifts here. We shouldn’t consider this list as comprehensive, since already in chapter 7, he mentioned celibacy as a gift.

The first gift, a message of wisdom likely refers to the gospel message itself. In chapter 1, Paul taught that the message of Christ crucified is, to those whom God has called, “*the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1:24). The Spirit enables fruitful preaching of the gospel. A message of knowledge may be revelation by the Spirit of Scriptural knowledge about God and his way of salvation. The gift of faith listed here is not the same as saving faith, which every believer has by definition, but deeper expressions of faith, including the faith to endure sufferings and even martyrdom.

Gifts of healing and miraculous powers are straightforward—supernatural works, such as Jesus and his apostles performed in the New Testament. When we pray for healing, God often works through doctors and the natural healing ability of the human body—which is also amazing—but sometimes God works inexplicably to display his glory (as we heard in Spencer’s message). Such miraculous gifts are more common in areas where the gospel hasn’t yet been established, such as remote tribes in 3rd-world countries.

Prophecy is speaking a message from God, and not just about the future. It includes ability to give insights into God's word and convey the deeper meanings thereof, as well as to set spiritual direction. This is different from the inspiration given by the Spirit to the authors of Scripture. Prophecy should be weighed carefully (1Co 14:29) and tested by Scripture, which is our ultimate authority as the infallible word of God.

The gift of distinguishing between spirits goes beyond the distinguishing that we are all supposed to do based on whether or not the spirit glorifies Christ.

Speaking in different kinds of tongues is speech or prayer in unlearned languages. It is only edifying for the church if it is accompanied by the gift of interpretation of tongues, in which case it is akin to prophecy.

Look at verse 11: “***All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.***” Paul repeatedly mentions the one and the same Spirit, emphasizing the unity believers have despite different gifts. The distribution of gifts is according to God’s sovereignty and wisdom, according to his good determination. So we can trust God to supply us as members with the gifts he determines are necessary to complete the task he has for us as a church.

1. **One Body, Many Members (vs 12–31a)**

Having explained the diversity and purpose of giftings, Paul now explains how we can apply them to serve the whole church using the metaphor of a body. Look at verse 12: “***Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.***” The body is made up of diverse organs: hands, feet, head, stomach, eyes, ears, nose, pancreas, etc.—forming a unified whole. Likewise, God has chosen to build his church, the body of Christ, out of diverse people with diverse gifts.

Despite our wide variance in background, God has brought us all together and made us one. Look at verse 13: “***For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.***” When we put our faith in Christ, the Lord Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit—which is symbolized through baptism—and we drink that one Spirit as living water that truly satisfies our souls in Christ. The commonality we share through Christ who loved us, saved us, and dwells in us through his Spirit supersedes any dissimilarity that would otherwise separate us into disparate cliques and factions. If we have the most important things of all in common—Savior, kingdom, Father, mission, Spirit—then the other factors can be secondary.

And through the body metaphor, Paul teaches that the differences between diverse Christians are not obstacles to unity, but what give the church its versatility and beauty, showcasing the “*manifold wisdom*” (Eph 3:10) of our ingenious Creator.

Paul says in verse 14, “***Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.***” In a body, all the parts work together for one purpose. When my wife bakes cookies, my ears hear the mixer beating the dough; my nose smells the cookies baking in the oven; my feet take me over to the kitchen; my mouth wheedles and pleads for a cookie; my eyes also plead silently after seeing how good they look; my hands lift a warm cookie to my lips; my teeth feel the soft, chewy texture; my tongue tastes the sweet flavors; my stomach digests the sugar and butter to supply my whole body with energy. Each different part plays a different yet essential role in the unified purpose of transferring that delicious cookie into my stomach.

There is beautiful harmony when all the parts work together, but this is not always the case. Paul employs metaphor of the body to address three maladies that can ail the body of Christ. First, a sense of inferiority. Someone may think, “Because I am not like that guy, I don’t belong to the church, or I don’t have anything to contribute.” Paul shows the absurdity of such reasoning in verses 15–17: “***Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?***” God has gifted the human body with many amazing senses and functions to perceive and interact with the world around us. Each body part contributes to gain a comprehensive picture of the world around us, us to avoid injury, fight illness, learn new information, or perform many amazing tasks—snowboarding, drumming, cooking, painting, dancing, etc. Someone who is missing a sense is considered disabled, and though they can still function in society, they face many difficulties in everyday tasks.

Likewise, in the church, each member brings something important and indispensable. I shouldn’t think that my gifts cannot help, or that I don’t belong. This train of thought leads to failing to use my gifts, which ends up depriving the whole body. Instead of fretting because of what I lack, I should use what I do have to build up others. Paul urged Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:14, “*Do not neglect your gift,*” and later in 2 Timothy 1:6, “*fan into flame the gift of God*”. When I understand that my gifts are not redundant but unique, I can also realize my responsibility to the rest of the church not to neglect my gifts but fan them into flame to serve and edify the body as a whole. Each one of us has been given a gift to serve a need of the church.

Feelings of inferiority actually show a lack of trust in God. Paul says in verse 18, “***But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.***” You are gifted how God wants you to be and placed where God wants you to be, according to his perfect plan and sovereign working.

The second malady Paul refutes is self-sufficiency, or a sense of superiority. Someone may think, “Because that guy is not like me, he is unnecessary.” Paul addresses this in verses 21–22: “***The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’ 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable***”. The eye is very different from the hand, but people are able to perform amazing feats of hand–eye coordination in sports and juggling. And seemingly weaker parts are indispensable—like the pinky finger: it seems small and weak, but without it you would lose about 50% of your hand strength. The appendix is another organ that is famous for being nonessential since Darwin hypothesized it to be vestigial and useless today. This assumption led to surgeons sometimes removing the appendix at birth to avoid appendicitis. However, we now know it does play several important roles, such as fostering good bacteria and supporting the immune system.

Likewise, in the church, everyone can contribute something unique and valuable to the body of Christ. We should not recognize only our own gifts but also the gifts of others so that we may have respect and thankfulness for one another. Just like taking one step involves up to 200 muscles working in coordination, each worship service involves the faithful serving of many members. Opportunities for service in our church services include worship area preparation, presiding, playing praise songs and hymns, projecting slides, offering representative prayers, delivering messages, giving announcements and prayer topics, and preparing and serving food. Many of us share the load for all these important tasks we offer to God each week. Moreover, separately we can build each other up through praying for one another and teaching the Bible.

Paul’s teaching against self-sufficiency is a rebuke I need to heed. I tend be like the eyeball Paul described, thinking that seeing is the best, and handling isn’t that important—that is, that my gifts are more necessary or important than the things I cannot do. But there are many things I cannot do; the only reason I often don’t notice my weaknesses is because God has mercifully put many gifted individuals around me to compensate. I should grow in others-centeredness, appreciation, and humility, recognizing God’s grace to supply precious, valuable coworkers in his mission.

Perhaps the most important support I need is prayer. E.M. Bounds, in his book, *Power Through Prayer*, has a chapter entitled, “Preachers Need the Prayers of the People”. He writes, “Preaching never edifies a prayerless soul. … The gospel cannot be projected by a prayerless preacher. Gifts, talents, education, eloquence, God’s call, cannot abate the demand of prayer, but only intensify the necessity for the preacher to pray and to be prayed for.” I heard about one preacher who was experiencing God’s powerful work through his sermons. He began to feel proud of his preaching skill, but then God revealed that the fruit he was seeing from his preaching was because there was one old lady in his congregation who faithfully prayed throughout each of his sermons. Please pray for me when it’s my turn to deliver the message, and for him whosever turn it may be in future weeks.

The third malady is division, which Paul had already addressed at the beginning of his letter. He says in verses 24b–25, “***… But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.***” Realizing that we are a body teaches us to treat the less honorable with special honor and the unpresentable with modesty. We are connected to one another in Christ such that, “***If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it***” (26). If one part of my body is injured, the rest of my body compensates to make sure it doesn’t get bumped but can heal quickly. If my legs are honored, my arms are not jealous but glad that at least one part of me is strong. Likewise, if one of my brothers or sisters is honored, I should rejoice with them rather than feel sorry that I am not honored, and if they are wounded or struggling, I should be extra considerate and pray for their strength and recovery.

Let’s read verse 27 together in one voice: “***Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.***” It is so important to maintain this perspective as we relate to one another and as we regard the universal church. Then we can love and support one another and avoid fighting with other body parts. When a human body starts attacking parts of itself, that’s called an auto-immune disorder. Type I diabetes and lupus are examples of this. In type I diabetes, the immune system stops recognizing the pancreas as part of the body and attacks it until it stops producing insulin. Left untreated, it leads to death. Thus, it’s very important that we recognize who the real enemies are. Paul teaches that *“… our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against … spiritual forces of evil …*” (Eph 6:12). The way to combat spiritual forces of evil is through prayer. As we learned in 1 Corinthians 6, when Christians fight, the only winner is the devil.

Paul gives a list of different ministries and gifts in verse 28: “***And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.***” Paul again emphasizes God’s sovereignty in gifting and placing various members according to his grand design. This list is an ordered list, giving an order of importance. The apostles, with their pioneering ministry, had a variety of gifts due to their difficult task. House churches that pioneer previously unreached campuses need a lot of gifts, but the Holy Spirit provides either the necessary gifts or the necessary coworkers. It is significant that teachers are listed above even miracle workers; faithful, prayerful, Spirit-filled Bible teaching can do more to edify a church than even a miraculous healing. Helping and guidance are also important functions the Spirit empowers within the church. Paul makes it clear in verses 29–30 that these gifts are not for everyone. God has designed us to need one another if we would fully glorify him. He spreads out his gifts so that we must co-work.

Look at verse 31: “***Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.*** *And yet I will show you the most excellent way.*” “Greater” shows us that some gifts are better than others. This makes sense when we consider that the purpose of gifts is to edify the church, and some gifts edify more than others. We should eagerly desire and earnestly pray for the gifts that will most benefit the body of Christ and best equip us for the ministry God has given us. Still, Paul hints that there is something even better than gifts of the Spirit—namely, the first fruit of the Spirit: love. We’ll learn more about this “*most excellent way*” next week.

“***Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.***” The same Spirit gave each of us life in Christ through the gospel and empowered us to confess and submit to the lordship of Christ. That same Spirit has given each of us a special gift so that we can serve Jesus and one another for the common good of Christ’s body. We must be careful not to harbor feelings of inferiority or uselessness, self-sufficiency or pride, envy or division, but instead love, serve, and honor one another. May God empower us to serve Christ in the power of his Spirit, providing us with all necessary gifts, and may we fan them into flame and employ them for his glory! Amen!