

## CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

### STUDY 15

# One – yet many

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 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. [1 COR.12:27,28]

#### Study 15a: DIVERSITY, but within UNITY (12:12-20)

#### 12:12,13 What is the unifying -- and life-giving -- 'liquid' in the body of Christ? (Romans 6:3-5)

There are these diversities of gifts ... You have one, and I have another, and someone else a third, a fourth, a fifth; and they are all intimately related. They are separated, but related; and the unifying principle, if principle is the right word (I would rather say the unifying personality), is the Personality of the Holy Spirit Who bestows gifts as He will. [Morgan 154]

Every organism, or organic whole, supposes diversity and unity. That is, different parts united so as to constitute one whole ... and this diversity is essential to unity; for unless the body consisted of many members, it would not be a [soma], i.e. an organic whole ... Paul does not say that we are made one body by baptism, but by the baptism of the Holy Ghost; that is, by spiritual regeneration. Any communication of the Holy Spirit is called a baptism, because the Spirit is said to be poured out, and those upon whom he is poured out, whether in his regenerating, sanctifying, or inspiring influences, are said to be baptized ... As the body is one because pervaded and animated by one soul or principle of life, so the church is one because pervaded by one Spirit. And as all parts of the body which partake of the common life belong to the body, so all those in whom the Spirit of God dwells are members of the church which is the body of Christ ... **It is one, not as united under external visible head, or under one governing tribunal, nor in virtue of any external**



Charles Hodge

**The church has no visible head**

visible bond, but in virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all its members. [Hodge 253,254, emphasis added]

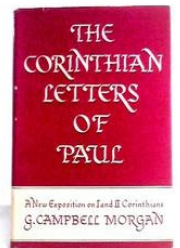
#### 12:14-16 The essential unit: the BODY, not the INDIVIDUAL. What inevitably happens when 'body members' compare themselves with other Christians? (2 Cor. 10:12,13,17,18; Gal. 6:2-5)

Aristotle had used *soma* of the state as the body politic. What Paul here means is Christ as the Head of the Church has a body composed of the members who have varied gifts and functions like the different members of the human body. They are all **vitaly connected with the Head and with each other**. [Robertson 170, emphasis added]

[v.15] The Corinthians were disposed to exaggerate the value of certain gifts, which, from their extraordinary character, were fitted to strike the senses, in particular of the gift of speaking in tongues. From this prejudice there followed two evils: On the one hand, those who did not possess such gifts kept aloof discontented and discouraged, and the Church was deprived of their services, which might have been very needful; on the other, those who possessed the gifts, took pleasure in displaying them in the assemblies, so as to prevent the less brilliant gifts from filling the place which should have been reserved for them. [Godet 640]

[vv 15,16] Bodies need feet as well as hands, ears as well as eyes. Chrysostom [the 'Golden-mouthed'] acutely points out that the foot contrasts itself not with the eye, but with the hand. We are prone to envy those who surpass us a little, rather than those who are patently in a different class. [Morris 175]

Between [vss.] 12 and 27 Paul used the word 'body' 16 times, in the whole paragraph 18 times in all. [Morgan 155]



#### 12:17-20 What would the body be WITHOUT variety of members?

[v.19] We ought to *respect each other*. In the body there is no question of relative importances. If any limb or any organ ceases to function the whole body is thrown out of gear. It is so with the Church. "All service ranks the same with God." Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Christian Church, the possibility of really Christian work is gone. [Barclay 127]

It is the humblest workers, the day-labourers in each trade, that are not only as necessary as the higher ones, but are more necessary. We can spare this artisan better than this poet; but can spare all the poets better than all the artisans. [Robertson/ Plummer 275]

#### Study 15b: AVOID SCHISM – HONOUR ALL (12:21-31)

#### 12:21-27 Identify the verb, and related noun, which dominate Paul's thinking on maintaining unity in the body of Christ (cf. Rom.12:1-10)

[v.27] There can be no such thing as isolation in the Church. Far too often what happens is that people in the Church become so engrossed in the bit of the work that they are doing, so convinced of the supreme importance of the side of the work to which they have given themselves, that they neglect or even criticize others who have chosen to do other work. If the Church is to be a healthy body we need the work that everyone can do. [Barclay 127]

## **12:28-31 If we absolutely *have to* rank God's gifts, here's the official Top 10 (cf. v.8-10; Rom. 12:6-8)**

[v.28] We would not have expected that *teachers* would rank so high. The fact that they do indicates the importance attached to teaching in the apostolic age. We must bear in mind that the cost of hand-copied books was high, so high that, according to A. Q. Morton's estimate, 'a gospel represents in papyrus alone a year's wages and a New Testament about eight years' pay of a skilled workman'. Few believers could look forward to owning a Bible. The function of a teacher in such a church must have been tremendously important. [Morris 179]

**Helpers** (lit. 'Helps') may have been those who were specially deputed to attend to the poor, weak or sick members; **administrators** (Gk *kyberneseis*) were the 'helmsmen' of the church, who directed its life and action. It is not by accident that **speakers in various kinds of tongues** come last in this list, as, together with interpreters of 'tongues', they do also in the list of verses 8-10 ... The seven questions from **Are all apostles?** to **Do all interpret?** – amounting to a third list of spiritual gifts in descending order of value – are each introduced by the Greek negative *me*, implying the answer 'No'. 'It would be as preposterous', says Paul, 'for all to have one and the same gift as for all parts of the body to perform one and the same function'. Once more he inculcates the principle of diversity in unity, and incidentally explodes any tendency to claim that all spiritual persons must manifest glossolalia. [Bruce 123]

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## Honouring one another: the Divine Pattern

Though the Christian church – in ALL its denominations – acknowledges the equality of the 3 persons in the Trinity, yet we observe in the interrelations of those Divine Persons no exaltation of self-esteem. Rather the opposite – Divine humility (which confuses the cultist and other critics of the Trinitarian dogma) . [compare John 8:49,50; 16:13,14; 17:4,5]. But we have not observed this humility in the church, rather the amputation of body members which follows the exalting of some spiritual gifts ABOVE others – severing which limits, even disables, the body.

Why do the Christian denominations NOT honour one another?

ROMAN CATHOLICS think their leaders have unique apostolic succession, and their sacraments unique salvific or sanctifying power. Since Vatican II, the official position has liberalized to admit salvation and believing communities outside the Roman communion, but this new teaching has not filtered down to millions of lay Catholics.

ANGLICANS (Church of England, Episcopalians in U.S.) agree with Catholics that apostolic authority is downloaded principally through the bishop, and that liturgy and sacrament are far more important than other Protestants may grant, but allow (with generally less suspicion than Catholics) that God may choose to work around these obstacles, indeed may use vessels not authorized by the church (even those in other faiths, say liberal Anglicans).

PRESBYTERIANS & REFORMED suspect all forms of imposed authority that intrude upon the autonomy of the local church; since Calvinism exalts God's sovereignty, acknowledge that salvation happens outside their circle, but are very suspicious of evangelism that exalts human will or choice in the process (i.e. mass evangelism, TV preachers, evidential apologetics). The teaching and preaching

offices have traditionally been lifted up in Reformed churches.

BAPTISTS, like P & R, exalt the intellectual aspects of our faith (to the point that believers must consciously choose God before baptism), and are suspicious of hyper-emotional forms of 'spirituality' which denigrate the mind as 'carnal'.

METHODISTS generally have emphasized outreach more than teaching (though this is definitely not true of founder John Wesley), and have criticized other denominations for exalting head over heart in both evangelism and worship.

PENTECOSTALS go well beyond their Methodist or 'Holiness' precursors (like the Nazarenes) in emphasizing the inadequacy of Christian confession without the 'Spirit baptism', a second work of God in the believer accompanied by the sign of tongues; there are 'signs' that Pentecostal leaders (at least in Canada) are reconsidering this article of their faith.

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