

LESSON 19 (12:12-31)

DIVERSIFIED UNITY

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body.” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single organ, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 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.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, 25 that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members many have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers or miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

One body and many members working together unto one purpose under the one head, Jesus—such was God’s gracious will for the church everywhere as well as in Corinth. Having outlined the source of the diversity among the members, Paul begins to deal with the members in particular and their ungodly thinking about each other.

12:12 – Unity amidst diversity, both with the physical human body and the spiritual body of Jesus. In other epistles, Paul taught the proper attitude of mind to have to produce lives pleasing to God and helpful to the other members. Think on Gal. 2:10; Eph. 4:1-16; Phil. 1:21-23.

V. 13 – This verse spells out the means by which everyone became a member of Christ’s body. As remarked in lesson 18, it was by the Spirit’s direction that the proclamation about Jesus was given. The Spirit through those who preached was then responsible for their “common” faith and obedience. Paul wrote in Gal. 3:26-29 that faith in Christ resulted in obedience in immersion, and that made all a part of Christ. The same basic thrust is in Eph. 2. This verse enlarges the idea in 12:3, while still keeping attention on the divine source by which such was accomplished. Recheck 10:1-4 and read Titus 3:3-7.

V. 14 – While the analogy of the human body to the Church is not identical in every respect, much similarity exists, providing great potential for teaching. One thing among many is clear: unity does not mean conformity in every respect.

V. 15 – Beginning here and through v. 26, the apostle centers attention upon the various members and the differences among them, while at the same time attempting to prick the inflated

egos of some members in Corinth. It was also doubtless true then as now that some were failing to recognize their potential because of their own faulty view of themselves. Note vv. 22-25 in this respect.

I do not belong – No one is bigger than the whole. In fact, each is dependent upon the other. Eyes are important, but other parts are essential to it. “Denial of membership” does not change the fact of it, although it will hinder the body when such happens. It isn’t wrong to recognize differences for God has made it so—what is wrong is to deny relationships God has made.

V. 17 – Some things God has created are different than others is surely clear enough. The body was made a diverse unity so that many things might be accomplished. A “big eye” would be a poor replacement for the whole body just as a big ear or a big nose would.

V. 18 – Repeating the idea in vv. 4-11, if there be differences it is God who made is so. As Paul wrote in 10:22 in a somewhat different setting but along the same line, shall the members of the body disagree with the will and work of God?

v. 19 – The answer is obvious there would be no body as they then knew it. Thinking back to the ideas and warnings in ch. 3:1-23 would be helpful at this point.

V. 20 – Denying what some would like to be so, the apostle affirms that “one out of many” is the divine plan.

V. 21 – A sense of dependence must be established in the mind of every Christian as well as a sense of appreciation. Both were needed in Corinth and in our own day. One of the difficult things to do in many churches is to create this mental state so necessary to productiveness in the kingdom. To many then (and now) wanted to be “all” rather than “part” of all.

V. 22 – **weaker** – In the sense of less needed or important (such as the eye or hand or foot). We know that every part of the human body, having been placed there by a wise Creator God, has a place to fill, whether large or small. While the body can function without eyes or ears or feet, etc., it does not do as well as it could. The Corinthians then and all Christians since needed to realize how necessary each part was to the whole. Notice the strong “on the contrary” with which Paul begins this section.

V. 23 – Reasoning from the viewpoint of an enlightened mind. Paul showed them that when the truth is understood about the importance of each part, then appropriate action is taken. Perspectives are changed and things are reorganized to reflect the improved understanding.

V. 24 – **God has so adjusted** – The Greek term behind “adjusted” has the idea of mixing or uniting together, as in Heb. 4:12 or Rev. 14:10. In v. 18, Paul had written that God had arranged (i.e., placed them) the members as He deemed best. In v. 11, the Holy Spirit was said to have chosen (see on v. 4 for variety) each part and the place it was to occupy. The Corinthians ought to have begun to catch the idea by this time (do we see it?).

God had wisely ordained the whole body that each could feel worthwhile and contribute to the collective good so that the needs of all would be supplied. While some members, as God so willed it, might be “front and center” more than others, yet none are unimportant, if for no other reason than that God willed the place each filled. God doesn’t do foolish or thoughtless things. If then God had “adjusted” the Church, the acceptance of this fact would eliminate any discord and rather promote unity. Each part would supply its own special ability, Eph 4:16, with the whole wrapped up in love, Col. 3:14. In fact, if all did their part with God in the midst, 3:16-17; then all would grow up into the head, even Jesus, Eph. 4:15, a holy temple of God Himself, Eph. 2:20-22.

V. 25 – **discord** – See on schism, 1:10; 11:18.

care – This term was in 7:32-34.

V. 26 – Wrapping the matter up with a truism, Paul gave the final brush stroke to the picture of a well-organized body. If true in the physical world, it ought also to be true in the spiritual world.

V. 27 – For emphasis, the apostle stated the facts about the various individual members, whatever gifts they possessed, and the whole body of which they were part.

V. 28 – Repeating the expression of v. 18, Paul listed the various decisions God had made in respect to the church. If there were differences, God had so ordained them.

Church – As in 11:18, the term applies to the Christian community, either in a local place, as in 11:18, or the whole body everywhere, as here. If you want to check some other texts (the term is found about 110 times in the N.T., and about 21 times in I Cor.), read Mt. 16:18; 18:17; Acts 5:11; 7:38; 8:1, 3; 9:31; 13:1; 14:23; 15:22; 20:17, 28; Rom. 16:4; II Cor. 1:1; 8:1; Gal. 1:2; Phil. 3:6; Col. 4:15; I Thess. 2:14; I Tim. 3:15; Heb. 2:12; 12:23; James 5:14; III John v. 10; Rev. 1:4. As you can see, it never means a building but always a group of Christians, and not necessarily gathered together. Stated another way, our expression “going to church” is at least non-biblical (though we understand what is meant) since Christians are the church. The expression “church building” while understood by some is not others. The old expression “meeting house” would be less confusing in many ways.

The eight “appointments” God made are not identical with the list in vv. 8-10. Of these eight, some were temporary, as the apostles, some always needful, as the teacher. Some consider that all of these mentioned, plus those in vv. 8-10 and Romans 12:6-8 are yet present today. That is a possible position to hold. While having stated my own thinking in v. 8, lesson 18, it is recognized that any position taken has some problems connected with it as well as some reasons for holding it.

V. 29 – All seven questions in vv. 29-30 are so worded in Greek as to require a “no” answer. The points made in v. 7, 11, 18, 28 are then underscored. This should have helped to squelch the party spirit.

V. 31 – God had chosen some to be less honorable, v. 23, or first, v. 28, as He thought best. However, all were in the body and all received honor as it came, v. 26. If this were realized, for anyone who wanted to be minded like Christ and whose attention was set on things above, Col. 3:1-4, such as God had done would be accepted without question. While there was room for desiring of gifts of varied importance (note 14:1), there needed to be an attitude of thankfulness cultivated for that which God had done for each of them at that point in time. Moreover, something greater and more to be desired than any gift was available to all. Ch 13 as we know it presents love as the greatest attribute anyone can possess (compared to the gifts under discussion) and God had made it possible for all to travel the way of love.

LESSON 19 QUESTIONS

1. Was the use of the human body a good way to illustrate the topic of gifts?
2. Which members of the body are needed?
3. Who decided about the nature and composition of the body?
4. Because we know that some parts of the physical body can be lost and the body still functions, does that tend to make us think the same think about the spiritual body? Is this the best way to think?
5. How true in your local church group, or on a world-wide scale, is the point made in v. 26?
6. How does Paul demonstrate that all are not alike but all are as God desires?
7. Why show them a more excellent way?

