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ONE BODY, MANY PARTS

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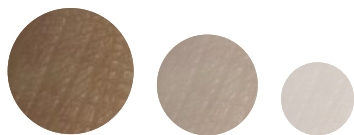
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„For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

Lack of understanding for differences that exist among believers is a common problem today in the body of Christ. Due to this lack of understanding pastors and believers often

attempt build imitations of the latest Christian fad, and so arise unhealthy churches and strained relationships; one kind of believer is accepted while another is not. For quite some time we have witnessed spirituality often

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founded on “possessing” gifts with very little character building. More and more we see divorce, financial scandals, and breakdown in family relationships in the body of Christ; we find her in great distress because while we see good intentions displayed the emphasis is wrongly placed. A similar problem arose among the Corinthian believers.

The Corinthian church was in great conflict with its surroundings. The apostle Paul founded the church during his second mission trip and the church was comprised of pagans who had come to Christ. Their faith came under many trials and tribulations because of the great immoral surroundings in the city. Believers began to fall into temptation. Additionally, there was much confusion and disorder in regards to spiritual gifts; it seems they misunderstood the concept of spirituality and the gifts.

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Therefore, Paul wrote a letter in order to address the problem, heal the divisions, and answer their frequent questions. Moreover, he confronted their sin and encouraged them to take some much needed measures in order to show their commitment to Christ.

Nearly the entire twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians emphasizes the fact that every person is given a specific gift and ability for building up of believers and the church, and not for selfish gain and elitism.

Although we are not given a comprehensive list of gifts, because they are also mentioned in other books of the Bible, we are shown that various gifts are present. Some believers possess more than one gift, but one thing is certain – no one gift is superior or more spiritual than another; all spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit and the primary goal is to build up, not divide Christ’s body. Unfortunately, many strive to use the gifts for promotion and exaltation of self.

The problem that took place in the Corinthian church, and that also arises today among believers, is that some believers felt they had greater standing than others because they “possessed” certain gifts; rather than building up and unifying the body they divided it and used the gifts for manipulation and selfish gain. Spiritual gifts, for many, have become a symbol of spiritual

strength and forming “spiritual” and “non-spiritual” cliques. Because of their attitude they missed the goal of spiritual gifts – rather than building and equipping the church they hindered the church’s effectiveness. This is why Paul, with the desire to correct their error, confronted the church and clarified for us that every part of the body has a specific and important function. Each part of the body is different and functions according to its purpose, yet works together for the common good.

► **1. THE CHURCH IS COMPRISED OF VARIOUS KINDS OF PEOPLE WITH VARIOUS GIFTS, TALENTS AND ABILITIES ACCORDING TO GOD’S WILL, YET THEY MAKE UP ONE BODY**

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

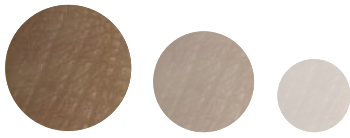
We must understand that we cannot make cookie-cutter Christians. We ought not to expect others to be exactly like us and to possess the same spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities that we do. We can either imitate someone’s faith or we can work together as different parts of the body.

Many pastors, churches, and even believers fall into a certain snare when they speak or

emphasize unity of the church; they often consider unity to mean that every one must be like them, that all share in the same gifts and talents; that all serve in the same capacity and in the same way as they do. Churches who try to imitate other churches or ministries are not taking into consideration the context of the place, the call or the culture of the ministries they are copying.

If we fail to understand that God has matched the church to people of different backgrounds and with various gifts and talents we will work against the will of God and divide His body while convincing ourselves that we are more spiritual and more elite than other believers. In doing so we will begin to scorn some and consider them to not be an important part of Christ’s body because they do not belong to our elite spiritual club.

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We must understand the undeniable truth that God has made us different and we do not all have the same affinity for the same things, we do not all possess the same spiritual gift or service in the same way. This is what the Corinthian Christians could not understand. Instead of seeing how rich they were in their various gifts and allowing those differences to enrich them they let their differences divide them. The same thing happens in towns that possess many churches. Rather than accepting their individuality and gifts, working according to their own ability and call, and doing that which God has called them to do in that city regardless of what others are doing they often compete or imitate one another. These actions bring a bad spirit which in turn causes church splits, jealousy, and weak

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cooperation and as a consequence weakens their spiritual effectiveness.

The condition of the Corinthian church was very similar. First of all, they thought if they possessed certain gifts that they would be superior to others. Secondly perhaps those who spoke in tongues looked down on those who didn't or considered them to be less spiritual. Thirdly, they leaned on their intellectual knowledge and grew proud due to it. Fourthly they were divided into parties according to their teachers. Lastly, although they spoke in tongues and possessed spiritual gifts, they lived in immorality and lacked consideration for others needs. We see an example in the first chapter when Paul shared that he heard that among them there were disagreements among them (some considering themselves to be spiritually elite). "Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:12-13)

What needs to be established in our thoughts when we speak about the gifts is that despite our differences we have one thing in common – our belief in Christ. We make up one body. On this common ground of truth the church is united, in spite of the differences in our abilities, talents and

callings. As believers we are all baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body – the church. If we truly believe this we will be united in Christ.

When a person becomes a believer the Holy Spirit dwells in him; he is born into God's family. This is why the Apostle Paul says that we "have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13), therefore the same Holy Spirit inhabits our body. We are one body. Even though we have various personalities, gifts and callings we have one congregational goal – to build the body.

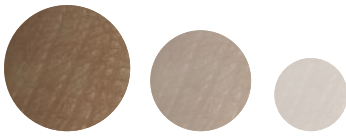
► 2. CHRIST'S BODY IS CONNECTED AND CANNOT BE DIVIDED

"For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? 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? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they *were* all one member, where *would* the body *be*? But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. 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.' No, much

rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 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, but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another." (1 Corinthians 12:14-25)

Using the analogy of the body, we see that Paul emphasizes the importance of every part in relation to the church body. If one part is not doing its share and concludes that

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they do not belong the whole body then the body becomes ineffective.

If God has made us to be different parts we do not have to strive to have another function. The tendency is to try and become a different part than we have been created to be; from there spring struggles and divisions. If God created us to be a leg why do we want to be the head? Or if God created us to be an arm why do we yearn to function as a leg. You see that because of this we lose our understanding for the gifts, which is that those who are given gifts are given "...individually as He wills." (1 Corinthians 12:11) and need to connect, uplift, and build the body – Christ's church, and not divide it. In Pentecostal-Charismatic circles, often

★ In Pentecostal-Charismatic circles, often arises a misconception; those who claim to have a certain gift (lately it is most popular to have the gift of prophesy or healing) credit themselves with greater honor than the rest of the parts who have other gifts that a do not have the same exposure, such as administration or wisdom.

arises a misconception; those who claim to have a certain gift (lately it is most popular to have the gift of prophesy or healing) credit themselves with greater honor than the rest of the parts who have other gifts that a do not have the same exposure, such as administration or wisdom. The problem we face in elevating certain gifts over another is that ministries, or even new churches, are founded on this misconception.

Every person who is a part of Christ's body, according to God's will, is important for the spiritual function of that body. This is why we must take care not to make a mistake in thinking that our gifts and talents are more important than another or that the other parts of the body are not needful; this is a sign of spiritual pride and rebellion that can lead us to spiritual blindness and devilish fallacies. We must not reject those who seem less important to us, we ought not to envy others whose gifts and callings are more extrovert in nature; rather, let us use our gifts to encourage others to function in their own. In this way Christ's body will become more effective.

We must not divide the body creating elite cliques and ministries; rather we ought to build it with love. Without love all of our service, our callings and our gifts will be ineffective and destined to failure. It is unfortunate to see the gifts used for division

rather than unification. We must not to say to one another “I don’t need you” simply because they have a different function.

▶ **3. THE PARTS OF THE CHRIST’S BODY
FUNCTION FOR THE GENERAL GOOD
BECAUSE THEY FOLLOW A MORE
EXCELLENT WAY OF LOVE**

“...that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*.”

(1 Corinthians 12:25-26)

“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:31)

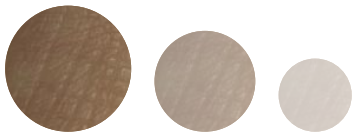
John Wesley once said something akin to “Take care that you do not devour books! A gram of love is worth more than a pound of knowledge.”

Believers who possess gifts possess them for the purpose of building up Christ’s body in their city and the world. We are motivated by God’s love not by vanity or competition.

How do we react when we hear that another part of the body has received honor? How do we react when we see that another part of

the body is in need? Are we envious of others or passive toward those in need? Are we happy when another suffers? If we wish to support our church in a healthy way we must become one body, support one another for the general good of God’s Kingdom, and bear in mind that without a more excellent way it is impossible to have a healthy church. That more excellent way is love.

Operating in the spiritual gifts without love brings division, arrogance, elitism, and fallacy. When the Apostle Paul spoke about the “best gifts” he did not mean that we throw out spiritual gifts, consider them unimportant, or exchange them for love. This would be contrary to his instruction to “...desire spiritual *gifts*” (1 Corinthians 14:1). The problem with the Corinthians was that they chased after spiritual gifts for prestige. They sought the mostly the gift of tongues, prophesy, and knowledge in order to have a more extraordinary appearance. For this reason Paul encouraged them to seek more earnestly gifts that build up others around them, not those that build up self. He went on to say that nothing has value if it is not mingled with a “more excellent way” – love. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all



faith, so that I could remove mountains,
but have not love, I am nothing.”
(1 Corinthians 13:1-2)

One of the spiritual gifts that the Corinthian church sought after was speaking in tongues because they believed that this was the “tongue” with which the angels spoke, thus they felt like angels and spiritually above other Christians. To them this was the most prestigious gift to possess; some even believed that they were in a different body and because of that some even believed they were angels. Therefore, Paul, bringing them back to earth, taught them that without love the gifts are of no use; they are destructive and lead to error. Love is a basic and vital element to every effective body. It is a stepping stone to salvation! Without love we will not see quality results; we may have big churches with big programs and a big name, but one day we will have to give account to for our life and work.

Let us come to understand the differences that make up the body of Christ and unity that does not bring elitism, division, and prestige. We are parts of a body; we are motivated by love. Spiritual gifts are given to us according to the will of God and for the use of the general good and building up of the saints; not for building up of self. We are baptized and are given to drink of the same Spirit. We are one body that cannot be separated from the other parts. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.” (1 Corinthians 12:13a, 13c-14)

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