

The Body

1 Corinthians 12:12-27



Bearing Fruit

- ❑ Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.” (*John 15:5, NIV*). The metaphor of the vine and branches illustrates the need to be united with Christ to have the life and substance needed to bear Christian fruit. Another helpful metaphor is “the body” which also illustrates unity and dependence on Christ.¹

Spiritual Gifts

- ❑ In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul talks about “spiritual gifts” (*12:1*)² – special God-given abilities for serving in the church. Apparently, some of the Christians in Corinth believed the more spectacular gifts³ were more spiritual, thus more important. At least some of those who had these spectacular gifts were looking down on others, resulting in divisions in the church.
- ❑ Paul says there are different kinds of gifts, service, and working, but *all* are from the one God (*12:4-6*). These “manifestation(s)⁴ of the Spirit” (*12:7*) are for the common good.
- ❑ In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Paul provides a partial list of these gifts, services, and workings. After providing this list, Paul says, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (*12:11*).

One Body, Many Parts

- ❑ Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-20. Paul uses the human body as a metaphor. The body is a unit consisting of many parts. In this sense, the church is like a body. Thus the church is “the body of Christ” (*12:27*).⁵ The Spirit makes believers one body (*12:13*).⁶



📖 “And [Jesus Christ] is the head of the body, the church” (*Colossians 1:18*).

- ❑ Though the church is “one body,” divisions (whether social, ethnic or other) can still occur. Sadly, this is still true today. But Christians should promote the unity of the body (*12:13*).

¹ In this lesson, the body metaphor is used in the context of spiritual gifts, but the metaphor is not limited to this context (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Ephesians 3:6; 5:23-32; Colossians 1:18; 2:19; 3:15).

² ‘spiritual gifts’ (*pnueumatikōn*) – ‘spiritual things’ (‘things of the Spirit’) or possibly ‘spiritual people.’ Paul uses a different word (*charisma*) in 1 Corinthians 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31. *Charisma* is based on the word ‘grace’ (*charis*) and may be translated ‘grace-gift,’ which emphasizes God gracious bestowal of the gift. The Bible lists various gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:11. These lists are not exhaustive, but are illustrative of the various gifts God has bestowed on the church. Most of the spiritual gifts listed are God-given *abilities* (combined with their related ministries). However, some of God’s gifts are *functions* or *persons* whom God has enabled to perform particular ministries in the church (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). Spiritual gifts are not necessarily limited to special endowments of the Spirit exclusive of the underlay of the believer’s ‘natural’ abilities. For example, if the ‘natural’ abilities of teaching or service (also gifts of God) come under the power and control of the Spirit, they are not ruled out as ‘spiritual gifts.’ Certainly, some spiritual gifts are special abilities entirely new to the believer, and such special abilities might be temporary.

³ Spectacular gifts would include healing, miraculous powers, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Based on Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians 14, it is apparent that some had an extremely high view of speaking in tongues.

⁴ ‘manifestation’ (*phanerōsis*) – showing or revealing the reality and power of the Holy Spirit

⁵ The phrase can refer to the church universal (Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18) or a local congregation (1 Cor. 12:27).

⁶ ‘by one Spirit’ (*en henī pneumatī*) – or ‘in one Spirit’; ‘one Spirit to drink’ – all believers are indwelt by, and experience, the one Spirit, which is the basis of unity. Barriers of nationality, ethnicity & social status are removed.

1. What does Paul say about the necessity of diversity⁷ (being different) within the one body? (12:14-20) What are the implications for believers who feel inferior to other Christians?



2. Who decides how the different members are arranged? (12:18; cf. 12:11) How should this affect the Christian's view of his/her gift(s) relative to others?

Interdependence of the Parts

☐ Read 1 Corinthians 12:21-27.

3. How are the different parts of the body *not* to treat each other? (12:21-24) What are the implications for believers who feel that their gifts or ministries are superior to others?
4. What is God's desire in his combining of members in the body? How should believers relate to one another? (12:24b-26)



What is My Part?

- ☐ Pray for guidance and ask questions like: What are *my* gifts and abilities? What is the deepest desire of my heart? Where do I personally sense the needs of the world and feel the brokenness in God's creation? What is my unique personality and temperament?⁸
- ☐ It is important to note that we realize our part *in community*. Others can help us find our place of service in "the body." For example, other mature believers in the church can help us identify our gifts and abilities, and also help us develop them.
- ☐ Through the process of prayerful evaluation, we can better discern what God wants us to *be* and *do*. God has given us gifts and abilities for a reason. We are called to be faithful to exercise those gifts and abilities in accordance with God's purposes.

Reflection & Application

- Are you a member of the "body of Christ?" If not, what do like about the "body of Christ?" Are you open to the possibility of becoming a Christian? I encourage you to ask and seek.
- If you are a Christian, what are your responsibilities in "the body?" Think about how you relate to other Christians in your local fellowship, both in receiving and giving.
- What is your function or ministry in "the body?" Are you using your gifts and abilities for God's purposes? Identify your gifts and abilities, and find ways you can serve in "the body."

⁷ 'Diversity' is a popular concept in U.S. culture. In general, promotion of diversity is good because people tend to be egocentric (self-centered) and ethnocentric. However, the term 'diversity' has negative connotations for many Christians because the world's version of 'diversity' includes 'tolerance' (acceptance) of immoral lifestyles. The diversity Paul is talking about is within the 'one body of Christ.' In the body of Christ, there is a common devotion to Christ and His purposes, and particular moral standards as defined in the Bible.

⁸ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage & Calling* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), p. 37. These questions should be asked after making the fundamental commitment to submit our lives to God (Romans 12:1-2). For example, our desires will lead us astray if they are not submitted to God. On the other hand, see Psalm 37:4.