



## 1 Corinthians - Chapter Twelve

### V. 1 Corinthians 11:2-14:40 - Divisions over Corporate Worship (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Twelve

Within an orchestra there are some instruments that a musician would consider to be superior to others. For example, the stringed instruments are often considered more superior to all other instruments and, within the strings, the violinists would claim superiority. Similar claims might be made within the wind section, with flautists claiming superiority over trombones and tubas.

The church in Corinth had adopted an attitude that some spiritual gifts were superior to others and those with such gifts, especially it seems the ability to speak in tongues, tended to look down on others with the 'lesser gifts'. The problem Paul now confronts in Corinth is that, within the Christian orchestra so to speak, there were some who considered themselves superior to others, and there was a danger, as a result, that the whole symphony might be played out of balance and even out of tune.

Paul initially enlightens the Corinthians to the fact that all the gifts are given according to the will of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the whole church, the body of Christ. He then writes quite clearly that this body is made up of many members that are all interdependent on each other, regardless of the specific function they are designed for.

Paul's conclusion is that it is God who calls each individual into service and equips them accordingly; the church should be thankful to God for that. He agrees that there are different types of instruments in the orchestra but that each needs the same level of musicianship to be effective. He alludes to the fact that it is not within their power to possess such gifts, although he does encourage them to strive for the greater ones.

Paul's eagerness that the Corinthians should understand how every single member in the Christian family matters as much as every other one is leading him to lay deep foundations for the practical application of all this in Chapter

14. In doing so he has taken the metaphor of the body, which was well known in the ancient world as a picture for civic society, and has made it function in quite a new way altogether.

#### V.c 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40 - Elevating one spiritual gift above others

Some Corinthian Christians seemed to have been creating divisions over spiritual gifts. Paul's use of the body analogy in 12:12-27 implies that they have placed so much emphasis on one gift that those without that gift feel that they are not part of the body (vv.16-17). Considering its prominence in the discussion, that one gift is probably speaking in tongues.

#### V.c.i 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 - Spiritual Gifts

Paul now turns to enlightening the Corinthians about the work of the Holy Spirit with regard to the way that he distributes a variety of gifts to different believers in order to equip them for ministry and for the edification of the church.

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

#### 1 Corinthians 12:1

**Now concerning.** Paul returns to the issues raised in the Corinthians' letter to him: <<Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is well for a man not to touch a woman'>> (1 Corinthians 7:1), <<Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy>> (1 Corinthians 7:25), and: <<Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up>> (1 Corinthians 8:1).

The Greek has only the plural adjective *pneumatikōn*, i.e. spiritual things, and this could refer either to spiritual people: <<And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny>> (1 Corinthians 2:13-15), or to spiritual gifts. In: <<Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy>> (1 Corinthians 14:1), the same word clearly refers to gifts, which would indicate that is what is meant here.

In the light of the way this word is used elsewhere in the letter, it should probably be understood that some at least in Corinth, in line with their other tendencies, were regarding people who possessed some of the gifts as more spiritual than the others - a danger which recurs in the church from time to time. Paul faced a problem which the modern Western world faces a lot - the confusion in people's minds between something that is spiritual and something that is Christian.

The specific spiritual gifts that Paul has in mind are specified in vv.27-31.

I do not want you to be uninformed. The Corinthians had prided themselves on their knowledge and wisdom. Paul, however, has pointed out that much of this was misplaced and he seeks to address that on issues of charismatic gifts.

<sup>2</sup> You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.

### 1 Corinthians 12:2

Pagans here are literally Gentiles, Greek *ethnē*, or non-Jews. The implication is that the Corinthians, although not Jews in the ordinary sense, are nevertheless now part of the people of God, standing in continuity with OT Israel (v.13). Refer also to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 10:1.

You were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. This was a problem that had always plagued the people of God. This was despite their knowledge that idols were mute, inanimate objects: <<*They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see*>> (Psalm 115:5), <<*Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor is it in them to do good*>> (Jeremiah 10:5), and: <<*What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it – a cast image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak!*>> (Habakkuk 2:18).

<sup>3</sup> Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.

### 1 Corinthians 12:3

Because of their background in pagan worship services (v.2), some Corinthians may have had concerns about speech gifts empowered by the Holy Spirit in the church. Paul first assures them that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’, and therefore they should not worry that Christians who speak in tongues might be uttering blasphemous things; and also that no one can say in genuine faith that ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit, which was demonstrated by his disciples: <<*You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am*>> (John 13:13). Therefore, all who genuinely profess faith in Christ have the Holy Spirit within them, and none should be excluded, for they all have valuable gifts for the benefit of the church.

Let Jesus be cursed! There is no evidence in the bible that anyone actually said this. It may be that some, in Corinth or elsewhere, were wanting to go beyond Jesus into new forms of spiritual experience or, perhaps through Jewish influence, regarded him as cursed because of his crucifixion: <<*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’*>> (Galatians 3:13).

Jesus is Lord. This is a very important statement. Jesus is Lord is one of the most basic statements of Christian faith: <<*But what does it say? ‘The word is near*

*you, on your lips and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved>> (Romans 10:8-9), <<and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father>> (Philippians 2:11). This means that every Christian has already said it; every Christian, therefore, according to Paul, has already been brought to this point by the Holy Spirit. This fits with what Paul says elsewhere, that the spirit works through the preaching of the Gospel to bring people to faith and baptism: <<For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake>> (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5), and: <<We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers>> (1 Thessalonians 2:13).*

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

#### 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Spirit, Lord, God. Paul makes a Trinitarian reference to the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus, and God the Father, as he does in his benediction in his final letter to Corinth: <<*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all*>> (2 Corinthians 13:14 ESV). Although Paul does not give a theological treatise on the Trinity, it is a clear reference here to the unity of the Godhead, as well as its diversity, and that should be reflected within the church.

The most common pattern in the NT Epistles is to refer to God the Father with the word God, Greek *Theos*, which is the normal Septuagint translation for the OT Hebrew *'Elohim*, and to refer to God the Son with the word Lord, Greek *Kyrios*, which is used in the Septuagint over 6,000 times to translate the OT Hebrew name *Yahweh* or Lord. Therefore both names are evidence of deity.

The diversity of divine persons within the unity of the Trinity should be reflected in the diversity of gifts within the unity of the body of Christ in Corinth. Refer also to Ephesians 4:3-16. Therefore Paul wants the Corinthian church to understand how their unity can be enhanced by appreciating the variety of gifts God has given to them.

The Corinthians were in danger of looking at spirituality as an area of personal growth and experience. Paul wants them to see it as the place where the one true God, known in the three ways he outlines here, equips people to advance his Kingdom in the face of the principalities and powers of the world.

There are varieties of gifts, services, activities. The diversity within the church is quite astounding. The church is equipped to deal with whatever the Holy Spirit  
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leads it to do and Paul reveals that it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone: <<*Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*>> (Philippians 2:12-13), and: <<*It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will*>> (Hebrews 2:3b-4). No one needs to strive to achieve something in the church; they just need to be attuned to the work of the Spirit in their lives and then put into practice the gifts they have received.

In everyone does not literally mean all people but just those who have made a confession of Christ and received his Spirit.

<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

### 1 Corinthians 12:7

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit. All who call on Jesus as Lord receive his Holy Spirit. This had been prophesied many years before Jesus came in the flesh: <<*Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit*>> (Joel 2:28-29). Jesus then promised his disciples he would send them the Spirit: <<*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you*>> (John 14:16-17). This came to pass on the Day of Pentecost, shortly after Jesus had ascended into heaven: <<*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability*>> (Acts 2:1-4).

For the common good. The Holy Spirit does not just indwell believers for their own good. He is there to guide them to do the will of God and thereby benefit both the church and the communities it serves.

<sup>8</sup> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,

### 1 Corinthians 12:8

To one, to another. These expressions do not mean that a person only receives a single Spiritual gift but can, in fact, receive several. The way Paul phrases these passages is more in line with the fact that not everyone receives the same gifts, or indeed all of them. This will be discussed in v.29.

The same Spirit. There is only one Holy Spirit and it seems that part of his role is to equip individuals with the gifts they require for ministry.

Utterance of wisdom, utterance of knowledge. Some understand these to be miraculous gifts by which a speaker is given supernatural wisdom or knowledge from God to impart into a situation. Others take these to be more natural gifts - the ability to speak wisely or with knowledge into a situation. The Greek expressions *logos sōphias* and *logos gnōseōs*, occur nowhere else in the Bible, and Paul does not give any further explanation, so it is difficult to be certain. But since Paul already has a different, broader term that he uses to refer to speech based on something that God suddenly brings to mind, i.e. prophecy, the second view seems preferable. Paul had earlier spoken of the wisdom he brought to the Corinthians through the gift given to him: *<<Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish>>* (1 Corinthians 2:6).

<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

### 1 Corinthians 12:9

This is not the faith that all Christians have in Christ, since Paul implies that some Christians have it and others do not. It is probably a special endowment of faith for accomplishing a particular task: *<<And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing>>* (1 Corinthians 13:2), *<<In Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and had never walked, for he had been crippled from birth. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said in a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And the man sprang up and began to walk>>* (Acts 14:8-10), and: *<<The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven>>* (James 5:15).

Gifts of healing. Both terms are plural, that is, 'gifts of healings', suggesting that different people may be gifted regarding different kinds of healing.

In several cases where Jesus healed people, as with the woman who had suffered from menstrual bleeding for twelve years, the word for healed also means saved: *<<When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace'>>* (Luke 8:47-48). Although it is only God who saves, it is possible that the gifts of healing could include those who are able to bring people to the Lord.

<sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

### 1 Corinthians 12:10-11

**Miracles.** This is the ability to work various kinds of signs and wonders, including but not limited to healing, something which is frequently recorded in Scripture: <<But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong>> (Acts 3:6-7), <<Even Simon himself believed. After being baptised, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place>> (Acts 8:13), <<Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive>> (Acts 9:40-41), <<God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them>> (Acts 19:11-12), <<A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer. Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground three floors below and was picked up dead. But Paul went down, and bending over him took him in his arms, and said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him'>> (Acts 20:9-10), <<For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ>> (Romans 15:18-19), <<Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?>> (Galatians 3:5), and: <<It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will>> (Hebrews 2:3b-4).

The word **prophecy**, Greek *prophēteia*, as used by Paul in 1 Corinthians, refers generally to speech that reports something that God spontaneously brings to mind or reveals to the speaker but which is spoken in merely human words, not words of God. Therefore it can have mistakes and must be tested or evaluated: <<Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said>> (1 Corinthians 14:29), and: <<Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good>> (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

An alternative view of this gift, held by some, is that it involves speaking the very words of God, with authority equal to the OT prophets and equal to the word of Scripture.

A third view is that it is very similar to the gifts of preaching or teaching. This gift is widely indicated throughout the NT churches, examples can be found in Acts 2:17-18, 11:27-28, 19:6 and 21:9-11; Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 11:2-5, 12:28-29, 13:2, 13:8-9 and 14:1-40; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, 1 Timothy 1:18 and 4:14; and 1 John 4:1.

Prophecy is used to build up, encourage and comfort the gathered community: <<*On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation*>> (1 Corinthians 14:3).

Prophecy is also used evangelistically to disclose the secrets of the hearts of unbelievers and lead them to worship God: <<*But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reprovved by all and called to account by all. After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, 'God is really among you'*>> (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). Because God used this gift to build up the Christian community, Paul urged the Corinthians to value it highly: <<*Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church. Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up*>> (1 Corinthians 14:4-5), and: <<*So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues*>> (1 Corinthians 14:39).

The discernment of spirits is a special ability to discern the influence of the Holy Spirit and the influence of demonic spirits in a person's life. Those who claim to speak under the Spirit's prompting could be mistaken, and so God also gives gifts of discernment to the Christian community: <<*Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said*>> (1 Corinthians 14:29), <<*Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21), and: <<*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world*>> (1 John 4:1-3).

Tongues refers to speech in a language the speaker does not know, and that sometimes does not follow the patterns of any known human language: <<*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal*>> (1 Corinthians 13:1). Paul sees this gift as a means of expressing prayer or praise to God: <<*The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God*>> (Acts 10:45-46a), and: <<*For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit*>> (1 Corinthians 14:2), in which the speaker's human spirit is praying even though the speaker does not understand the meaning, as Paul also reveals in 1 Corinthians 14:11-23.

The normally unintelligible nature of tongues makes their interpretation necessary if the gathered community is to be edified by them, see 1 Corinthians 14:1-25. This does not apply when the gift is to speak in a human language not learned by the speaker but understandable to foreigners who may be present, which is also intended here as Paul writes to another various kinds of tongues. This was seen on the Day of Pentecost: <<*Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galilæans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?'*>> (Acts 2:7-8).

Paul probably placed the last two gifts at the end of the list because an overemphasis on tongues in Corinth had led to the neglect of those with other gifts (vv.14-26). See also v.28 and v.30.

Bible-believing Christians disagree as to whether the gift of tongues ceased after the apostolic age of the early church, or whether tongues is a spiritual gift that should continue to be practiced today. In either case, there is no indication that speaking in tongues is a normative requirement that all Christians must experience.

Who allots to each one individually. The gifts may be for the corporate good but they are allocated to each member, not according to rank, social status or ability but just as the Spirit chooses.

#### V.c.ii 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 - One Body with Many Members

Paul now reaches the main point in this chapter, one that focuses on the unity of the church. As the body of Christ, the church is made up of a diverse range of members, each having a specific purpose but at the same time, having interdependence on the other members in order for the church to function.

However, Paul is not merely saying that the church has many members and all are equipped to serve in the wider church, a truth in itself. His statement goes beyond that. He is declaring that those who believe in Jesus as the Christ are now the new people of God, Spiritual Israel. It is Christ who represents the people and in whom the people are summed up or expressed.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

#### 1 Corinthians 12:12

For just as the body is one. Paul assumes the Corinthians know that the church is Christ's body and individuals are the members of the body. This is something he has alluded to earlier: <<*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?*>> (1 Corinthians 10:16). This is something he expresses more clearly elsewhere: <<*For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another*>> (Romans 12:4-5), <<*And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in*

*all>>* (Ephesians 1:22-23), and: *<<He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything>>* (Colossians 1:18).

So it is with Christ. Readers might have expected Paul to say ‘and so it is with the church’, but Paul goes much further in establishing that it is in Christ that the church exists and functions as a unified whole.

<sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

### 1 Corinthians 12:13

Since there is but one Spirit, he unites peoples across lines of ethnicity and social class, and indeed gender, that would otherwise divide them: *<<For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him>>* (Romans 10:12), *<<As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus>>* (Galatians 3:27-28), and: *<<In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!>>* (Colossians 3:11). The church is called to this same unity in Christ.

In the one Spirit we were all baptised. The same Greek construction, the verb *baptizō* plus *en* i.e. ‘in’, plus the dative of *pneuma*, i.e. Spirit, is used here as in the other six ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ passages in the NT. Refer to Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:16. Here it seems clearly to refer to the cleansing and empowering work that the Holy Spirit does in a new convert at the point of conversion. Baptism is used metaphorically here to refer to the Spirit’s work within the believer to unite him or her to the body of Christ, which is also the corporate body of believers. Water baptism is an outward symbol of this reality: *<<Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life>>* (Romans 6:4), and: *<<As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ>>* (Galatians 3:27).

We were all made to drink probably not a reference to the cup of the Lord’s Supper but to the outpouring of God’s Spirit on his people: *<<On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”’ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified>>* (John 7:37-39), *<<and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us>>* (Romans 5:5).

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot were to 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. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear were to 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.

### 1 Corinthians 12:14-16

Body, member, refer to the comments made on the church being the body of Christ with individual believers as its members. Each member has its own distinct part to play in the corporate life of the church.

I do not belong. Paul is speaking of a person who believes he is over the body because of some special gift. Paul will go on to point out that such people need to exercise their gifts in love for others else they are indeed nothing. See 1 Corinthians 13:1-2.

<sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

### 1 Corinthians 12:17

If the whole body were an eye, were hearing or an ear. One problem Paul seeks to address throughout the section from 12:1-14:40 is the elevation of one gift, probably speaking in tongues, above all others. The general principle applies to an unbalanced emphasis on any particular gift at any time or place in the church.

<sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be?

### 1 Corinthians 12:18-19

God arranged. The Corinthians' thinking will be corrected when they consider God's sovereignty in assigning.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? This is a profound truth that demonstrates the strength the church has due to its diversity rather than its individuality.

<sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

### 1 Corinthians 12:20

Many members, yet one body. One of the key themes in these chapters is church unity in the midst of its glorious diversity.

<sup>21</sup> 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.'

## 1 Corinthians 12:21

I have no need of you. This probably reflects Paul's assessment of how those Corinthians with the gift of tongues, and perhaps other more spectacular or showy gifts, were treating those with other gifts.

<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

## 1 Corinthians 12:22-26

The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. The purpose of the gifts is to build one another up and to care for one another, not to flaunt one's own spirituality. This indicates that those with perceived lesser gifts are to be held in high regard for the part they play in the church. Paul may also be alluding back to those of weaker conscience whose faith was put in jeopardy by those of stronger faith: <<***But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ***>> (1 Corinthians 8:12).

Our less respectable members are treated with greater respect. In the human body Paul alludes to the genitalia, which most societies believe should remain covered up. However, within the body of Christ, these members are the very ones that should be raised up in honour rather than being looked down upon by those imagining they are of greater importance because of a particular gift they have or a certain ministry they work in.

Some philosophies despised the body, and the sexual organs in particular, as dirty, shabby, and potentially or actually evil. Paul, by contrast, celebrates them as God-given. Just as Paul has demonstrated that men and women were created equal in God's own image, so too he has created his church to be equal in his sight,

If one member suffers. If a person suffers an injury or an illness, for example, a broken leg, then it is not just the leg that is the problem, with the associated discomfort and immobility, for it has a tendency to affect the overall well-being of the person. In the same way, the whole church feels the pain of one of its members; shared grief when someone dies is a common experience within the church where they come together in support of the pain they all experience.

If one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Again, there are many analogies from the physical body that can be used to demonstrate how the church rejoices when someone from their community is especially blessed. One example could be how the warm sun shining on a person's face can give them a sense of comfort and well-being throughout their whole body.

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.

### 1 Corinthians 12:27-28

You are the body of Christ and individually members of it. These words should be engraved on the heart and mind of all church members. They should be especially taken to heart by those who are called to more high-profile office, or who have been given some special gift that, by thrusting them into the public eye, brings upon them the temptation to arrogance that was afflicting some in Corinth. This statement is the basis of all true understandings of the church, and of all humble service within it.

Apostles translates the plural of the Greek word *apostolos* and describes those commissioned to be Jesus' special representatives, while disciples is used more broadly to refer to anyone who believes in and follows Jesus. Paul was an apostle for he too was chosen directly by the Risen Lord and referred to his calling as such: <<*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God*>> (Romans 1:1), which emphasises that Paul's authority was equal to that of the twelve apostles chosen by Christ during his earthly ministry; refer to Matthew 10:1-4 and Luke 6:12-16. They established and governed the whole church, under Jesus Christ, and they had authority to speak and write the words of God, equal in authority to the OT Scriptures.

Prophets. The gift of prophecy was commented on in vv.10-11.

First, second, third, then seems to be a ranking of importance or benefit to the church of these gifts, with apostles being primary and then prophecy and teaching also contributing greatly to building up others. Teachers, helping, and administrating do not appear in the list in vv.8-10, and helping and administrating do not show up in the rhetorical questions in vv.29-30, indicating that the different lists are representative rather than exhaustive.

It should perhaps be noted that Paul is not establishing a church hierarchy here according to gifts. Although he recognises the need for church offices in terms of a functioning organisation: <<*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons*>> (Philippians 1:1), he does not advocate doing so on the basis of one person ruling over another. This is in line with the teaching of Jesus: <<*But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all*>> (Mark 10:43-44).

<sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

### 1 Corinthians 12:29-30

Are all apostles? The answer is obviously no, setting up the reader to answer no to all of the following questions. Therefore, do all speak in tongues implies that the Holy Spirit does not give the gift of tongues to everybody, but just those to whom he wills to give it, as he does with the other gifts.

The point Paul is making is that the gift is God's gift to the whole church through the individual who has received it. God, naturally, gives gifts to different people in such a way that the church will be bonded together in ways that God sees as appropriate.

Since all the gifts are spiritual the concept in some churches that some of the gifts are charismatic and some are not does not stand scrutiny.

<sup>31</sup> But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

### 1 Corinthians 12:31

Strive for or earnestly desire implies that Christians can and should seek additional spiritual gifts through prayer rather than individual effort: <<*Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy*>> (1 Corinthians 14:1), <<*Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret*>> (1 Corinthians 14:13), and: <<*If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you*>> (James 1:5).

The greater gifts means those that do more to build up the church: <<*Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up*>> (1 Corinthians 14:5). Greater here and in 14:5 translate the same Greek word, *meizōn*, the comparative form of *meγas*, and can also be translated as higher.

A still more excellent way than merely seeking the greater gifts is to use the gifts in love (Chapter 13), so that others are built up (Chapter 14).

Spiritual gifts without love are worthless, and love is supreme because it lasts forever. Paul now moves on to make the case for this in the next chapter.