

1 Corinthians 12C

- Through the first ten verses of chapter 12, Paul has begun patiently teaching the church about the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts
 - We've learned that spiritual gifts are a consequence of the salvation work accomplished by the Spirit
 - As we believe, we are equipped by the Spirit
 - He is present in us from the very moment of salvation
 - And He unites the body of Christ
 - Though there is one and the same Spirit working in all believers, nevertheless He manifests Himself in a variety of ways
 - There are a variety of ministries
 - Therefore, there are a variety of gifts in the body
 - The Spirit is working to assign gifts according to the Lord's purposes
 - So we cannot assign greater worth to one member of the body over another based on spiritual gifting
 - Finally, all these gifts are given for the common good
 - No one receives a spiritual gift to "show off" or gain attention
 - We use our gifts so that the entire Body benefits
 - Gifts always draw attention to Christ and His work in the Body, never to us and our work
- At the end of our last lesson, Paul listed nine gifts as examples of how the Lord can assign very different gifts and yet all come from the same Lord with an intended purpose
 - At the very end of the list we read v.11, which is where we pick up again this week
 - The same Spirit works all these things according to the will of God

[1Cor. 12:11](#) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

- Paul summarizes his list of examples by repeating his main point
 - The diversity of spiritual gifts are all the work of the same Spirit
 - In v.11, Paul says the gifts of the Spirit are always a “work” of the Spirit
 - We can’t create our own gifts, either through hard work or by asking God for it
 - God assigns to each believer the gift or gifts He wills, and we don’t get a choice in the matter
 - Our gifts are assigned by the Spirit, according to His will, and they are ours at the moment we become a believer
 - Neither can we create a gift through persistence or effort
 - By definition, the word gift means something given to us, not something we obtain in our own power
 - So I can’t earn a gift
 - Nor can I learn a gift
 - Such things are works of flesh
 - So even if we honed some talent or ability to perfection, it doesn’t become a gift
 - You’ll know a spiritual gift when you see it...because you’ll recognize you couldn’t mimic it no matter how hard you tried
- On the other hand, we *can* develop or nurture our spiritual gifts
 - The Spirit who equips us also calls us to work with Him to develop our gift to its greatest effectiveness
 - As Paul counseled Timothy:

[2Tim. 1:6](#) For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the **gift** of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

- If gifted to teach, I must still apply myself to learning the word of God and delivering the teaching with polish
 - If gifted to pray, I must develop the discipline to solicit prayer requests and devote the time to prayer
 - If gifted to service, I must seek opportunities to become useful to others in the body
- When we develop our gifts in these ways, we aren't producing a gift out of nothing
 - Without the Spirit working in us, we might be able to mimic the behavior, but we'll never produce the same results
 - For the good our gifts is always a product of the Spirit working in us
 - The gifted teacher sees things in scripture no one else see
 - The gifted prayer warrior sees prayers answers more powerfully
 - The gifted servant continues serving long after the rest have lost energy or interest
 - And so on
 - From v.11 Paul now focuses his teaching to his main concern for what he's heard has been happening in the church in Corinth in the practice of spiritual gifts

1Cor. 12:12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

1Cor. 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1Cor. 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many.

1Cor. 12:15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

1Cor. 12:16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

1Cor. 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

- Paul introduces what is perhaps his most famous analogy in all his letters: the analogy of a human body to the church, the body of Christ
 - In v.12 he begins with his premise: the human body is a single organism
 - Yet that one whole is constructed of many “members”
 - The word members is *melos*, which literally means parts
 - So the human body is made up of parts
 - But we don’t perceive our body as a collection of parts
 - We think of ourselves as a single person, a single body
 - And more to the point, we instinctively appreciate that all parts of our body are equally important to us and work in unison
 - There is no part of our body that we would choose to live without voluntarily
 - We might use some parts more often than others, but when a certain part is required, it becomes all important at that moment
- Then in the second half of v.12, Paul draws the comparison to the body of Christ
 - Within the church, we find many individuals, each bearing a different spiritual gift as given by the Spirit
 - But this collection of individuals (or we could say parts) operates as a single body
 - The church is not one person, but everyone
 - That’s why Jesus said

[Matt. 18:20](#) “For **where two** or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

- Jesus wasn’t saying that He isn’t present with a single believer
 - For more certainly Christ Spirit lives in each of us and will never leave us or forsake us
 - Rather, His point was that Christ’s body is represented by the assembling of the saints

- So the collected presence of the church is a physical manifestation of Christ's body on earth in these days while we await His personal return
- This union of many into one is accomplished through our sharing of the one Spirit of God
 - As the Spirit indwells all of us, He becomes our connective tissue uniting the various members into a single organism
 - In v.13 Paul calls the collective indwelling of the Spirit "one baptism"
 - As Paul taught earlier, we have all received the same Spirit upon coming to faith
 - That indwelling is called the baptism of the Spirit
 - It's called a baptism in the sense that by faith, we are immersed in the Spirit of God and cleansed by the blood of Christ
- Notice again Paul emphasizes that all believers, no matter their origins or human circumstances, are unified by this common experience
 - Every believer receives the same Spirit, to the same degree and for a common purpose: to become part of the body of Christ
 - Also notice the tense of the verb Paul uses: he says we were "made" to drink of the one Spirit
 - We play no part in the coming of the Spirit and His power to equip us with gifts
 - We were made to receive the Spirit, and by His arrival came our entrance into a common body
- Then in vs. 14-21, Paul moves to the second half of his analogy to illustrate the importance of every member of the body
 - He says the human body is many parts working together for the benefit of the body
 - The fact that a foot differs from a hand doesn't mean it's less a part of the body or less important
 - It's not as though the hand standard for who can be considered part of the human body or who can be considered useful

- Furthermore, the foot doesn't look at the hand and pout because it assumes that only hands are worthy to be counted part of the body
- And Paul makes this point again with the example of the ear and the eye
- Next Paul points out the absurdity of such attitudes
 - If a body could be designed with only one kind of part, it would be a hideous, unworkable, useless thing
 - If the ear got its way and it could become an eye, then where would the body be when it needed to hear something?
 - We need our hearing just as much as we need our eyesight, of course
 - And in some situations, we need hearing even more than eyesight

A concerned husband went to a doctor to talk about his wife. He says to the doctor, "Doctor, I think my wife is deaf because she never hears me the first time and I always have to repeat things."

"Well," the doctor replied, "go home and tonight stand about 15 feet behind your wife and say something to her. If she doesn't respond, move about 5 feet closer and say it again. Keep doing this so that we'll get an idea about the severity of her deafness."

Sure enough, the husband goes home and does exactly as instructed. Secretly, the husband stands about 15 feet behind his wife in the kitchen as she is chopping some vegetables and says, "Honey, what's for dinner?" He hears no response, so he moves about 5 feet closer and asks again. No reply. He moves 5 feet closer. Still no reply. He gets fed up and moves right behind her, about an inch away, and asks loudly, "Honey, what's for dinner?"

She replies, "For the fourth time, vegetable stew!"

- Then Paul moves to making the point from this analogy

[1Cor. 12:18](#) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

[1Cor. 12:19](#) If they were all one member, where would the body be?

[1Cor. 12:20](#) But now there are many members, but one body.

[1Cor. 12:21](#) And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

[1Cor. 12:22](#) On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;

[1Cor. 12:23](#) and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,

[1Cor. 12:24](#) whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,

[1Cor. 12:25](#) so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

[1Cor. 12:26](#) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

[1Cor. 12:27](#) Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

- In the body of Christ, the Lord has placed a diversity of members, each gifted just as He desired
 - It's God's wisdom that determines who gets what gift
 - And that wisdom ensures a distribution of gifting that suits His purposes
 - So we must not make it a goal to force everyone to exhibit the same spiritual gift, if that were even possible
- In v.19 Paul makes the application of his analogy to the church
 - If everyone in the church were to have exactly the same spiritual gift, then what kind of body would result?
 - Imagine the conflict of everyone stepping over one another trying to serve the body in exactly the same way
 - Imagine all the needs that would go unmet as a result
 - Imagine the confusion
 - Imagine the uselessness
 - Just as the body needs a diversity of parts, so does the body of Christ

- Every member of the body has a place and purpose, so no one member can turn to another and say they are more important or that the other is unnecessary
 - Just as our eye needs our hand and our head needs our feet to be a complete, functioning, useful body...
 - So it is in the body of Christ...we are all equally important and necessary if we are to be a body useful to Christ and to each other
- In fact, Paul goes a step further and says that those members of our body who seem weaker are actually the most important to the body of Christ
 - Notice in v.22 Paul describes those who “seem” weaker
 - They seem weaker in the sense that they are in need of our particular spiritual gifting
 - From the perspective of the gifted teacher, a student in need of teaching seems to be the weaker one
 - To the gifted prayer warrior, the one in need of prayer can appear weaker
 - To the one gifted in service, the brother or sister in need of their care is the weaker
 - Obviously, this relationship cuts both ways
 - When someone in the church needs our particular form of spiritual gifting, we can say they are the weaker member of the body
 - But when we need another’s spiritual gifting, we become the weaker member
 - So in this context, weakness simply refers to a spiritual need within the body, a need others in the body have been gifted to satisfy
- Paul says the weaker members of the body are necessary to the health of the body of Christ
 - This sounds contrary to our expectations
 - We naturally assume that the strongest churches would be those in which we find no weaker members with spiritual needs

- Where everyone is self-sustaining and in no need of teaching, no need of prayer, no need of service, etc.
- But this isn't the truth; the strongest churches are those where many so-called weaker members reside
 - Notice again in v.23 Paul says these weaker members are those we deem as less honorable
 - They are not actually less honorable, but until we appreciate the true purpose of the church, we are likely to perceive them as less valuable
- The weaker members of our body are the most valuable members in the church because the church exists to bestow honor upon them
 - How so? Because everything we do as a body gathered together is for the our weaker members
 - We honor the weaker when we serve them
 - We bestow honor upon them when we use our spiritual gifts to meet their spiritual needs
- Paul says in v.23 that the body's purpose is to make the less presentable members of the body into more presentable members
 - In other words, when I come to the gathering, I find my purpose in teaching those who need to be taught
 - If I'm to make good use of my teaching gift, I must have someone who needs my teaching
 - But if no one were the weaker in respect to teaching, then I would have no one to serve, and I would lose the chance to develop my gift
 - If I could not develop my gifting, I cannot receive the blessings the Lord holds out for those who serve
 - Nor can I myself grow spiritually, since my own spiritual growth is made possible through serving in my gifting
 - So the Lord is in the business of bestowing honor upon the "weaker" members by sending them stronger members to serve them in their need

- Truly, the weaker members of any church body are the most important to the health of the body, for they give purpose to the body
 - We gather to pray for those who need prayer
 - We gather to serve those who need our service
 - We gather to encourage those who need encouragement
- We gather so that our collective strengths may serve our collective weaknesses
 - Sometimes we're the one who is less presentable and in need of strengthening
 - And at other times we are the one strengthening others
- Collectively, we are all growing and being strengthened spiritually, which is the very purpose of the church

[Eph. 4:11](#) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

[Eph. 4:12](#) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

[Eph. 4:13](#) until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

[Eph. 4:14](#) As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

[Eph. 4:15](#) but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

[Eph. 4:16](#) from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

- Paul says the various roles of service with their respective giftings exist in the church to serve and build up the body
 - And as the body is strengthened, we all attain to the unity of faith, to the knowledge of Christ, and to His full stature
 - We are all growing into all aspects of Christ as His living body on earth, fitted together according to the proper working of each individual part

- In v.26 Paul says that as one suffers or rejoices, so do the rest, because our very existence on earth is so closely connected to one another
 - As Christians, we have been left to live on earth for a time so we may use our spiritual gifts to serve other Christians even as we are served by others
 - This is our very purpose of our earthly lives, while we await the Lord's return
- We now have our third principle for understanding spiritual gifts properly
 - First, we learned that spiritual gifts come by way of the Holy Spirit at the point of our salvation
 - Everyone receives the same Spirit, in the same measure
 - No one gets more of the Spirit, and no gift in the body is more honorable or desirable
 - Secondly, Paul taught that the gifts in the body are assigned as God wills
 - We cannot decide for ourselves what spiritual gift we want
 - We should expect a diversity of gifts in the body, according to God's purpose
 - And now we learn that the purpose of gifts is found in serving others who are in need of our particular spiritual strength
 - If no one needed our gift, then we cease having purpose in the body of Christ
 - So we can be assured, there will always be someone in the body who needs what we can offer
 - Likewise, it would be absurd for everyone in the body to be gifted in the same way
 - It would be like a body made up only of hands or eyes or feet
 - A healthy body needs a diversity of parts working together
 - All three of these principles come to bear in the next part of this letter, as Paul begins to chastise the church for their abuses of spiritual gifts