

1 Corinthians 12:26-31a

"Interdependence, Not Independence"

1CO 12:26-31 "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way."

We have been looking at the body of Christ as Paul has used the analogy of our physical bodies to explain how the body of Christ is to be viewed and how it is to work. He has said such things as:

1CO 12:20-22 "As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,..."

And of course, Paul's point is that each one of us, who profess faith in the risen Christ for the remission of our sin, have been placed in the body of Christ. As such, though there are many of us, we still make up only one body of Christ, which just so happens to find its expression in any particular local church.

And so, no matter what part you are, you are still a vital part of the whole and it is Christ Himself who has placed you in the body as He sees fit, and as it pleases Him.

1CO 12:18 "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

It is with this in mind that we come to our text this morning to see, as each part is working properly and with love for each other, how the body moves forward in unity, not division. And it is the unity of Christ's body which is vital to faithfully and accurately represent the Master who has called us from darkness to light, that we might walk in that light to His honor and glory.

Unfortunately, when a part of the body does not work properly, every other part is effected in a way that can be harmful to the body as a whole. And yet, when one part is excelling in its work the other parts rejoice with it.

1CO 12:26 "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

There are two aspects to this truth. One is that when a member of the body of Christ suffers, or is going through an experience which causes that member not to be able to function properly, every other member of the body of Christ suffers with them. In other words, every other member feels the sense of loss, or the sense of pain, or the sense of hurt which that member feels.

And this is connected to the attitude which Paul just spoke of in the previous verse where he said that the other parts should have equal concern for each other as family. And so, when one part suffers, there should be a concern for that part. And of course, the concern should turn into action to one degree or another by coming alongside, comforting, encouraging, exhorting or whatever else might be appropriate to help get that part functioning properly once again.

Because if that part of the body is not functioning properly then it can cause the other parts to be negatively affected. And if that part continues to stay in a state of brokenness or suffering, then ultimately it can turn into what Paul also said in the previous verse, where it can cause further break-down which can be harmful to the body as a whole.

And so, what we see is that we always need to be on guard to ensure that the body of Christ in which our Lord has placed us stays united and healthy. And as each part is doing its work and likewise some part is honored for its work then every other part ought to rejoice with that person.

But the second aspect of the analogy Paul uses, when addressing a part suffering or a part being honored, has to do not just with that individual part receiving attention from the rest of the body, but the responsibility of that part to continue to promote unity.

For the part that is suffering it is the responsibility of that part to then take whatever care it has received from the rest of the body and then make the effort to not only begin the healing it needs, but then to be reunited to the rest of the body so that the whole body

can once again begin working properly, using Paul's analogy of the human body.

The same is true of that part which is honored. To have a part honored and then have that part puff itself up, or boast in its honor can be just as damaging to the body as a whole. And so, whether a part is suffering, or a part is honored, those individual parts must still see their responsibility, along with the rest of the body, to fulfill their roles in that body for the sake of unity and bringing glory to God.

And so, Paul continues in our text.

1CO 12:27 "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

Again, he is repeating what he has taught previously. But as is often the case, we need to hear it more than once. We need to have it brought home in a way that gets our attention. And the point he is driving home is that we not only belong to Christ as He is in us and we in Him, but we also belong to one another.

And the problem Paul is addressing in Corinth, with its divisions, its sinfulness, its pride, its inability to maintain that unity, is that, like it or not, they are all part of the same family in which Christ has placed them.

And if this is the case, it's time to start acting like a family and loving like a family, as the Head continues to bring new people to that family. In the case at Corinth you had Greeks, Hebrews, slaves, freemen, all part of that local church, who are also part of the same family of believers, who are to demonstrate Christ in their lives.

Before we move on in our text, I'd like to quickly address one more aspect of the body of Christ and how we should view this most precious organism for which Christ died. And I use the word organism because that is exactly what it is.

As one commentator points out, it's not a society; [but] a communion, it's not a guild; [but] a fellowship. It's not an association. Membership in a society, guild, or association means you have to pay dues to be a part of it, or your membership is canceled. You can't say that a guild or an association is a living, breathing entity. (Simon J. Kistemaker)

But, in contrast, to address the people of God as a body, an organism, is to identify the One who created it as such. God creates organisms, living things. Men create societies and guilds and associations. And unfortunately men have tried to recreate the church into more of a guild and association whereby you need only show up and pay your dues to be a member in good standing.

When we lose sight of the fact that we are a living organism in which our Creator is active and moving, then we find ourselves being that sedentary inanimate object, rather than a vibrant living being which has life breathed into it through Jesus Christ, who is life.

The church which is the body of Christ is meant to be that living vehicle, or organism, through which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is seen to be moving in this world as we take His message of hope to them. It is the "living" Christ they are to see. Not a Christ which is only displayed through teachings and portraits.

This is precisely what Paul told the Christians in Rome.

ROM 6:10-11 "The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

To be a part of the body of Christ necessarily means that you and I have been brought from death to life.

COL 2:13-14 "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

If we're alive, then we need to show the world that we are in fact that living organism which Christ has created and through which the world sees Him. And one of the ways in which that organism we call the body of Christ demonstrates itself in this world is through its desire and ability to grow and not tear itself down. To promote unity and not divisiveness.

Your physical body, when working properly, is not trying to destroy itself. And in the same way, Paul is telling this church in Corinth, that its present course of destructiveness is not the way to promote the One who gave them life.

As we come to the end of chapter 12 Paul sums up the necessity of unity and the gifts that each has by showing how all of these gifts are given by God and useful in His body, and that no one gift is to stand on its own.

1CO 12:28 "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues."

I'm not going to use the time this morning to go into any lengthy teaching on any of these gifts, since I did this just a few weeks ago with our study on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If you'd like the tapes on these teachings I'd be more than happy to make them available.

But, I will just quickly touch on them for the sake of continuity this morning. Paul has purposely given a number of gifts in what appears to be a descending order of importance. He starts with apostles and ends with the gift of tongues.

Part of the reason he is doing this is to show these Corinthians that despite what they deem to be most important, which in their case is tongues, God has designed such gifts in the body to be used in their proper role. Now, having said that we need to be careful not to read into this more than what Paul intended. We always need to compare Scripture with Scripture.

If we were to do that we would have to conclude that tongues is more important than the gift of Pastor which is described in Ephesians 4, because Pastor is not even mentioned here in our text. In fact, we would have to say that tongues is more important than the gift of evangelism for the same reason.

EPH 4:11-12 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...."

And so, the point is not that Paul is coming up with "the definitive" list of gifts which, here in 1Cor. 12:28, are "the" most important, but rather to show them how what they deem to be "the" most important gift, (the gift of tongues) is actually the last one on Paul's list for them here.

This is not to say that the list Paul gives has no value in showing what are, in fact, very important gifts. The gift of apostle is a gift which was given to those personally selected by Christ, either before His crucifixion or after His resurrection.

And what makes this gift so important is that it was only given to a very select few, not because this few deserved it, but only because of the grace of God. But what also makes this gift important is what it was designed by God to do for the church. It had three main functions, according to John MacArthur, which no other could accomplish.

1) The apostle was to help lay the foundation of the church.

EPH 2:19-20 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

To lay a foundation was to give God's full revelation on what it meant to have redemption and to reveal the One who gave that redemption; namely, Jesus Christ. This is one of the reasons for the qualification of an apostle to have personally seen the risen Christ and to have been personally commissioned by Him.

By the way, there were not just 12 apostles. According to God's word there were at least 15, which would have included the original 11 after the resurrection of Christ, including Matthias who replaced Judas, bringing the number back to 12. But we also need to recognize the apostle Paul, who would make 13.

But along with Paul there was Barnabas. He is identified as an apostle with Paul when they were seen as gods in Lystra by the locals because of a miracle God accomplished through them.

ACT 14:14-15 "But when the *apostles Barnabas and Paul* heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you."

When Paul went up to Jerusalem on one occasion he expected to meet with the apostles there in Jerusalem. And yet this is what he says in GAL 1:19 "I saw none of the other apostles -only James, the Lord's brother."

Here Paul describes the brother of Jesus, James, as an additional leader among the original 12 apostles. Then Paul goes on to place

James in the exact same category as some of the other apostles who are referred to as pillars of the Church.

GAL 2:9 "James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews."

So, now you've got Paul, Barnabas and James added to the original 12. But, we do have one other portion of Scripture which alludes to possibly two other apostles.

ROM 16:7 "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was."

This is not definitive but it is interesting that Paul puts these men in great company among the apostles who were called by God to a specific work. And so, the apostles were to lay this foundation with Christ being the very cornerstone.

2) The second responsibility an apostle had was to declare the revelation of God's very word. The apostles were to the N.T. what the prophets were to the O.T. when it came to giving us the written word of God. This is one reason that there are no apostles today, since part of their job was to give us this revelation.

The revelation of God's very word has ceased. The word of God is complete, neither to be added to or taken away. And the 3rd responsibility of the apostles was to give confirmation of that word from God through signs and wonders and miracles.

2CO 12:12 "The things that mark an apostle -signs, wonders and miracles - were done among you with great perseverance."

By the way, never are we told in the Scriptures that a true apostle, after his death, was to be replaced. Judas was not a true apostle, but turned out to be a false apostle. And so, with the death of the apostles, including Peter, no one was to take up their mantle. And so, to suggest that there is an office of apostle today, or the Roman Catholic equivalent in the Pope, just isn't supported by the word of God.

The next few gifts Paul mentions in our text are prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

The prophets, as we spoke of in our study of the gifts, are those people who are identified as having the gift of prophecy with which to edify others. And so, we have people like Agabus, or the daughters of Phillip who are designated as prophets or prophetesses.

It is interesting to note however, that nowhere in the word of God do we have an office of prophet which is responsible for ruling the church. That privilege falls to pastors and elders, and to a lesser or greater degree to deacons.

Next, are teachers who are responsible for teaching the church the fundamentals of the faith and for encouraging the church to walk with Christ so that they can be effective in ministry to each other and the world and to fulfill the mandate given by the risen Christ to make disciples.

Paul spends a great deal of time speaking of sound teaching which must be done faithfully in the church. And teachers play a role in this exhortation. A teacher would certainly include the pastor, it would include elders who are able to teach, children's ministry teachers, bible leaders, or any other person, including elders, who do have the gift of teaching in the body of Christ and helps others grow in their faith.

Paul then moves to those with the gift of miracles, which are still in effect in the church today, along with the gift of healing. There is then mentioned the gift of helps, which would be closely associated with the gift of service that Paul mentions in Rom.12:7.

The gift of helps is essential and vital in the church today especially as someone in the body is able to come along side the pastor or others in ministry and help them in their ministry, to whatever degree, to take some of the burden off of them, as they lighten the load.

This word for help is the same word Paul used when speaking to the elders in Miletus before going to Jerusalem, where he was arrested.

ACT 20:35 "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must *help* the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Again, the idea of helping here is to take the load and make it lighter with the express purpose of building each other up. The

gift of helps certainly does that and Jesus knows we need such help as He personally gives such a gift.

The gift of administration is another one Paul mentions in our text. This gift is usually associated with people who have the ability to hold things together. In the corporate world they might be the one who is the boss and who is able to keep the company on course and the people in it as the vision for that company is kept at the forefront.

And so, when we think of a good administrator we often associate them with being a good manager. The terms are synonymous. But in our text, though it includes some of these ideas, it has something a little different in mind.

The word administration in our text is a Greek word which literally means to steer or pilot a ship. The intent is to demonstrate that the one at the helm knows where he's going and is willing to take the right course to get there. It doesn't always mean that the individual has the kind of management skills that could manage a business, which unfortunately is what the church has looked like at times in history.

The one with the gift of administration is one who has a vision for the church and is willing to follow Christ as he steers the body of Christ toward the Lord. In the process he may recognize the abilities of people in the body to help with the everyday management of the church, as it pertains to managing such things as the money, the property, the needs of individuals. This is usually taken up by those servants designated as deacons.

And so, my point is that simply having an ability to manage people and things does not always equate to having the gift of administration in the body of Christ.

Now, last, and least, as far as these Corinthians are concerned at this time in their walk with Christ, is the gift of tongues, as Paul is trying to make his point for these people that their perspective on the importance of tongues is askew.

In reality Paul is not saying that the gift of tongues is unimportant, only that compared to other gifts it is not the type of gift which could take the place of the other gifts which lend to the instruction of the church and its advancement through the other gifts which promote service.

And so, as to drive home his point, Paul reminds these believers in Corinth that being the body of Christ, made up of many members, they must realize that despite what they deem important in the way of gifts, it is ultimately up to Christ who gets what gifts. This is what he mentioned earlier when addressing each of these gifts.

1CO 12:11 "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."

And so, just because you may not have a particular gift which someone else thinks you ought to have to be truly spiritual, Paul winds this section up with this most important truth.

1CO 12:29-30 "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?"

The implied answer to these 7 questions is no. No, not all are apostles, and no, not everyone has the gift of miracles any more than everyone has the gift of tongues. This by the way, flies in the face of a popular teaching in certain quarters of Pentecostalism which teaches that if you do not speak in tongues, you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, or worse, you are not saved.

This could not be further from the truth. In fact, that sort of teaching has placed a burden on people that doesn't need to be there and creates a sort of peer pressure where if you don't have the gift of tongues in these particular churches, you're tempted to fake it, or to be a part of that church where you're seen as a second class Christian who simply doesn't have enough faith.

No, not everyone speaks in tongues. That settles the issue for anyone who is willing to take God at His word. But because there is a sort of spiritual pride which can accompany this gift of tongues if used improperly Paul raises another issue.

1CO 12:31 "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way."

Desiring the greater gifts has nothing to do with everyone wanting to become an apostle or a teacher or whatever else we deem to be the most important. In fact, as Paul brought out earlier it's not ultimately up to us anyway, no matter how much we desire a gift, since it is the Holy Spirit who distributes gifts according to His will.

The idea here is to be zealous to use the gifts properly, whatever gift you have, while making sure you don't seek after something with carnal motives. Because there is a way to seek to do God's will and that is as Paul says here, "... And now I will show you the most excellent way."

That excellent way is where Paul has been going and where he is going to take these Corinthian believers along with us in the next section. That most excellent way is the love of Christ applied to everything we do and everything we say, and the attitude we should apply to ministering to one another and the world.

That excellent way is actually found in the very person who said, "I am the way", and when we're following Him with the gifts He's given each of us that way will point to the only who can give life eternal to a dying world.

Let's show people the way back home. Let's show people Jesus working in and through us as we consider one another as more important than ourselves and loving each other where we can demonstrate that unity of the Spirit with the diversity of gifts He's given in His body to His honor and glory.