

Comments on 1st Corinthians, Chapter 12

Bill Fallon – free@FreeGraceResources.org
Please see <http://www.FreeGraceResources.org>

The letter of 1st Corinthians was written by Paul to the church which he had established there during his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17). The church was largely composed of Gentiles (12:2) and had different problems than the primarily Jewish churches had been experiencing. The problems were not related to Jewish legalism or even primarily to heretical doctrine. The Corinthian believers were carnal (i.e. controlled by their fleshly desires) (I Cor. 3:3). There was no lack of spiritual gifts; the gifts were being misused (I Cor. 1:7; 14:1-40). The epistle's main thrust is "Christian conduct," or exhortation to "act like what you are." They were to be examples to the world, not of the world. The church was to go into the world, not the world into the church. See also Eph.4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10-16, Titus 3:8.

Parenthetically speaking, this is just one of the unscriptural fallacies promoted by the endorsers of the modern Church Growth Movement; find out what the world wants, give them what they want and the world will come in. This was definitely *not* the method that Jesus used. In John, chapter 6, we see that Jesus gave the crowd *what they needed*, not what they wanted. He gave the multitude the *needed* message of eternal life through belief alone in Jesus (vs. 35, 47), along with other important doctrine about Jesus being the bread of life. Many of the disciples who, "heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" (v. 60) Then, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (v. 66), leaving only a few. This would not look good on a pastoral résumé; built a congregation of thousands down to twelve. Biblical love dictates this methodology.

Isn't the major purpose of the local assembly to equip the believers to go *out* into the world to speak the truth in love, to make disciples (Eph. 4:11-15; Matt 28:19-20)? We are not told to make the church "worldly" to get them to come to our meeting in order to "win" them. On a human-wisdom practical note; the world can generally do a better job of entertaining them than we can. Why not give them something of substance that the world cannot offer? Please note; the balanced view of this dictates that we are to be "all things to all men, that by all means that [we] might save some." Please see 1st Cor. 9:19-23. Paul "tuned in" to where people were in order to win them, but not by endorsing sin.

A brief synopsis of the letter could be stated as follows: Chapters:

1. God's wisdom vs. man's wisdom.
2. God's Spirit vs. man's spirit, God's view vs. man's view.
3. Divisions in the body, the judgment seat of Christ.
4. Faithful stewards, humble servants, and spiritual parents
5. Incest, immorality, and what to do about it.
6. Litigation among believers, self-control.
7. A Godly view of marriage, divorce and celibacy.
8. Principles of liberty: Eating meats offered to idols.
9. Principles of liberty: The servant's right to be paid for his ministry, his obligation to present the gospel, and his methodology of self-discipline.
10. Principles of liberty: Warning against idolatry, immorality, and pride. All things are lawful but all things do not edify.
11. Principles of public worship: Public prayer and the Lord's supper.
12. Principles of public worship: Spiritual things, members of the Body with spiritual gifts. The description of the gifts; various and purposeful.
13. Principles of public worship: The method of application of the gifts; with divine love.
14. Principles of public worship: The use and misuse of languages in church. The purpose of application of the gifts; to edify the body.
15. The importance of the resurrection.
16. Some principles of giving.

Lordship Salvation?

A reading of I Corinthians would be just one way to dispel the possibility of ubiquitous teaching of Lordship Salvation being a true doctrine. The Lordship of Christ is emphasized throughout the letter but it is very clear that the Corinthian believers, though saved by grace, were *not* submitting to many of God's commands as believers ought.

One passage to consider in this light is 11:17-34. This passage is speaking to the "church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus..." (1:2), who will "be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8). Paul includes himself with the Corinthian Church when he refers to "us which are saved" in 1:18, 30. The letter is full of exhortations of how they should be living because they are believers, not what they should or should not do in order to be saved or to remain saved.

The passage considered is referring primarily to the disorders at the Lord's table. The believer who "eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself..." (v29). This judgment is manifested in believers becoming weak and sickly, and apparently, some dying before their time (v30).

There is no mention of Hell or eternal separation from God. Verse 32 states just the opposite. "But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." The practical way to escape this chastening is to apply v.31, (paraphrased); in other words, judge ourselves before God needs to."

A parallel passage that could be used with this is Hebrews 12:5-11. These verses present what our attitude should be about chastening (v5), who God chastens (v6), who He does not chasten (v8), a parallel to human chastening, (vs9, 10), and the present result and future purpose of divine chastening (v11). This is clearly a family matter and is temporal. It is not for unbelievers for eternity.

1st Corinthians 12

V4-6 Gifts have a unity in source.

Same Spirit (v.4), same Lord (v5), same God (v.6). A reference to our triune God.

V7-10 Gifts have a unity in purpose.

"Unity" and "difference" seem to be key words. *Union* is not unity and *conformity* is not unity. *Unity is diversity in harmony*. We tend to seek unity in conformity. Rather than encouraging each person's uniqueness, we discourage it. This passage stresses unity in Christ but it is worked out in different gifts, different administrations and different manifestations. (Gift = literally a gracious gift, seems to also apply to the gift of an enablement or talent as in Rom. 12:6-8; I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6. Administration = a service, such as waiting on a table. The same word from which we get our word "deacon." "Operation = a working, a thing effected, same word as "working" in verse 10).

v12-31. We each have different functions in the body. We are to work together for the betterment of the team, not just the individual members.

Some key concepts to be understood to help Christians maintain unity amongst the diversity of spiritual gifts (I Cor, 12:1-14:40):

1. We need knowledge (12:1) but not knowledge alone (8:1)
2. There are different types of gifts, ministries, and activities 12:4-6; 29-30).
3. Gods' Holy Spirit distributes them as *He* wills (12:8, 9, 11).
4. We are many members of one body. Each member is important and affects the whole (12:12-27) positively or negatively (12:26). Even the weaker members are necessary (12:22).
5. God composed the body how He pleased (12:18,24,28).
6. The one who exercises gifts without love "is nothing" (13:2).
7. There is no profit to the one who exercises gifts without love (13:3).
8. Love is permanent. The gifts are not (13:8). Prophecies and knowledge will fail. Tongues will cease of itself. (The verb used here is in the middle voice, meaning that the subject will perform the action of the verb upon itself. A different verb that is used for the other two gifts is in the passive voice, meaning that the action will be performed upon the subject by an external means, probably referring to "that which is perfect" of verse 10).

9. We should pursue love and desire spiritual things (14:1)
10. The gifts are *not* given to edify ourselves (14:2-4).
11. The gifts *are* given to edify the Church (14:4, 12, 26, 31).
12. If it causes confusion in the Church, it is not of God (14:33,40).
13. In general, we should recognize that an unspiritual man can have gifts and can also put on a good show with no real profit just as the Corinthians had been doing. Most translations translate the first part of 12:31 as being in the imperative mood. i.e. "But covet earnestly the best gifts." Grammatically, it can either be imperative as in a command, or indicative as in a statement of fact. Paul just got through telling them that God is the one who chooses who gets what gifts. It is likely that he now is telling them that they were seeking the greater or "showy" gifts. Then he continues to chide them by stating that there is a better way; chapter 13, exercise the gifts in love; chapter 14, with the goal to edify the Body of Christ, and not to show off. One function of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus (John 16:13, 14). We should do the same.

Is It the Pastor's Job?

He has the same responsibilities to exercise his gifts as do we, plus:

I Pet. 5:1-4; Feed (shepherd) the flock, be an ensample (example, pattern) to the flock.

I Tim. 3:1-7; Be an example and care for the Church.

Titus 1:6-9; Be an example and exhort and convince those in error.

Eph.4:11-16; Mature the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.

The Pastor should not and cannot exercise your gifts. If you do not use your gifts, the body will become lop-sided in its function. God gave you something that is needed to balance out the ministry (I Cor. 12:22). God knew that various members of the body were necessary in order to function. How far would the Church of Christ have progressed if everyone had been a gall bladder?

Could it be that our gifts simply need to be nurtured and stirred up? Late in Paul's ministry he exhorts Timothy to not neglect (I Timothy 4:14), but to stir up the gift of God which was in him (II Timothy 1:6). This was probably referring to the gift of evangelism (II Tim. 4:5). Is there a parallel between this and the long-term baby believers mentioned in Hebrews 5:11-14, who should have been teachers (maybe they had that gift) but did not reach maturity because they did not "by reason of use have their senses exercised"? It is not a crime to be a baby but it is a tragedy to remain one.