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1 Corinthians

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13

The opening words of this verse, "For by one Spirit" continues on with the theme of the previous verses. From verse 4-11, we have been shown that the gifts and ministries all came from the same Spirit and therefore their use should be united for one ultimate goal. There should be no disharmony among the believers, no boasting about one's gift, and no feelings of being of less value within the body because of the gift or ministry we may possess.

To support this, we are told that by this "one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." Paul just explained that "the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body." As this is so, then each member is a part of a cohesive whole which should be working towards the accomplishment of the purposes of the whole body. To further bolster this point, he then gives two examples which demonstrate the greatest extremes possible.

The first is concerns the identifier "whether Jews or Greeks." This is the Old Testament's greatest distinction. To be a Jew was to be of the chosen people of God. To be a Gentile was to be outside of the covenant promises. But now in Christ, that immense distinction is erased. Both Jew and Gentile have been baptized into one body.

Similarly, the same is also true with "slaves or free." A slave was one without rights and was under the authority and control of another. A free man had rights

and could own slaves, choosing to direct what the slaves did, when they did it, etc. However, the same Spirit baptized both slave and free into one body. In this body, each member has the same rights and privileges extended to him.

Together, regardless of the category they stood in from a cultural or societal aspect, they "have all been made to drink into one Spirit." Each received the same healing waters of regeneration.

A question which arises from this verse is whether the "baptism" mentioned is speaking of water baptism or the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The latter is certainly the case. Paul has been speaking of the work of the Spirit consistently. Water baptism is only an outward sign of an inward change in the believer. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time event which occurs upon belief and it is granted to all who believe - Jew and Gentile, slave or free.

As a final point, it should be noted that a Gentile doesn't become a Jew when they believe and a Jew doesn't lose his cultural status as a Jew. This is a point which some confuse, but throughout Paul's writings, he never equates one with the other. A slave who belongs to a human master doesn't stop being a slave to that human master when they come to Christ. Nor does a Jew stop being a Jew when they come to Christ. The very fact that Paul mentions the categories proves that those categories continue to exist after the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Life application: In Christ, you are no different than any other who is in Christ. You are a member of the body and have all the rights and privileges of that inclusion. Strive to be the best you can for the glory of the whole!

How good it is to be a child of the Lord

To know that I am one of His people

I will live my life according to His word

And will exalt Him with others under the church steeple

*By His grace and love He saved me from sin
And for eternity I will praise my Lord, Jesus!
A great change has been made without and within
What kind of love He has lavished on us!*

For in fact the body is not one member but many. 1 Corinthians 12:14

"For" in this verse serves two purposes. First, it reiterates what was said in verse 12, which was expanded on in verse 13. There it said, "For as the body is one and has many members." And secondly, it prepares for a continued expansion on the thought through actual examples of real body parts claiming they are not a part of the body and what the result of such a claim entails.

In the church, like the human body, there are various gifts, ministries, and activities which make up the whole. Even though the body is animated by one soul which is indivisible, the body itself is made up of an immense number of parts. Some of the parts, the head for example, are made up of smaller parts - the eyes, ears, mouth, hair, etc. But even these are made up of smaller parts. The mouth for example has lips, a tongue, taste buds, etc. And yet these are made up of smaller and smaller parts. Everything is interconnected and yet it is a functioning whole intended to work for the same purposes.

In this unity there is diversity, and yet in the diversity there is harmony. Such is how it should be within the church among its many members.

Life application: Are you a mouth? Don't boast over the tongue and taste buds because without them you wouldn't be a mouth. Work in harmony with others for the purpose of glorifying the Lord.

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 1 Corinthians 12:15

We were just told that "the body is not one member but many." In support of this, and yet in order to defend the unity of the body, Paul will use parts of the body as if they were in a sort of rebellion against one another. This then would be likened to individuals within the church who were warring over their individual gifts. And so he begins with the hands and the feet.

A foot is a foot, but maybe it wants to be a hand. However, it is a foot, and so it rebels and says that it isn't a part of the body because it's not a hand. Does this change the fact that it is a member of the body? Not at all! It remains a foot and it will continue to serve as a foot to the body, regardless of whether it is happy about its "footiness."

And whether the hand feels exalted over this or not, there is a truth which it may actually find to be rather underhanded. The hand can't get the body to where it's going without the foot! If the body is hungry and the necessary food is down the road at the market, the hand is rather useless in getting the body to the market. In fact, the hand may think that a conspiracy is afoot against it! But this isn't the case. Rather, the foot is designed to perform its function and get the hand (and the rest of the body) to the market in a fairly fine fashion, thus out-footing the footlessly failing hand.

The body was constructed in a handy way to ensure that all of its parts are interdependent so that none outfoots another, but instead each part will graciously accept the role which Divine Providence has handed it.

This very passage of Scripture may have been on the mind of Alexander Pope when he penned these words to consider -

"What if the foot, ordain'd the dust to tread,

Or hand, to toil, aspired to be the head?
What if the head, the eye, or ear declined
To serve mere engines to the ruling mind?
Just as absurd for any part to claim
To be another in this general frame:
Just as absurd to mourn the fate or pains
The great directing MIND OF ALL ordains.
All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.”
Alexander Pope, The Essay on Man, 1734

Life application: If you're a foot, you are no less important than a hand. You are a part of the body which is indispensable to the whole. Be content with who you are; the body cannot work properly without you.

And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 1 Corinthians 12:16

Paul just used the foot and the hand as comparative parts of the body. Now, using the same type of comparative analysis, he mentions the ear and the eye. Each has an important function for the body, and if either is lacking the whole body will suffer. But some might say one is more important than the other. Although not universal, it is common to hear people say that if they had to choose seeing or hearing, they would choose seeing. Because of this, the ear may hear and fear that should the choice be real its time has drawn near.

But Paul asks, "If the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," does it change the fact that it is actually still a part of the body? Of course not! The ear doesn't stop being a part of the body just because its feelings are

hurt that its not an eye. And so the ear can cry (well, if it were an eye), and wonder why its not an eye, but we should not fear that the ear will refuse to hear, even if it attempts to try.

The ear will continue to be a part of the body and it will continue to allow us to enjoy all the marvelous sounds for which it was intended. Both the ear and the eye were designed by God for special purposes which each beautifully performs when it is operating properly. And so it is with those in the church. If the individual understands that their gift is truly needed and of value, they won't complain against those with other gifts, but will instead work in harmony with them for the building up of the whole body.

Life application. If you are an ear, be happy that you can hear. For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Someone spoke the word to you and you believed it was true. In that you were saved, when you rightly behaved, by believing not by sight, but in your heart as God says is right. Be thankful for who you are and use your gift to His glory.

If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? 1 Corinthians 12:17

This verse is evident in and of itself. After discussing various body parts and how they relate to the whole, he turns the concept around. For example, what if there were just an eye and nothing else? He asks the obvious - "Where *would be* the hearing?" There would be none.

But further, if an organism were only an eye, it would actually serve no purpose at all. Without a brain, there would be no processing of the signal which passes through the eye. Without feet, there would be nothing to allow the eye to move in order to see in various directions. Likewise, there would be nothing to move the eye when a predator came along. The list could go on forever at the huge lack there would be in the existence of any eye with nothing attached to it.

And the same is true with any other body part. Paul asks about the ear (hearing). If the whole body was an ear, "where *would be* the smelling?" There would be none. His comments here are known as *Reductio ad absurdum*, or the "reduction to absurdity." This is an argument where the use of the assertion would have a ridiculous or untenable result. He is not attempting to be silly in his words, but rather to get those in Corinth (and thus us!) to consider the importance of each person, and the use of that person's gift, for the benefit of the whole body.

If a pastor (say, an eye) has no one to accomplish the multitudes of other tasks within the church, then he would actually have no purpose at all. A pastor without a church of people (ears, noses, feet, hands, etc.) is not a church.

Life application: Nobody's gift is so important that it can stand alone. Without a body to receive and compliment the gift, the gift is wasted.

But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 1 Corinthians 12:18

"But now" is stated to contrast the examples given in the previous three verses. The many body parts don't fight against one another, but rather they complement each other. And no part of the body reflects the whole. Instead each is designed to act in a particular way to benefit the whole, which is comprised of many. Therefore, "God has set the members." The word for "set" is *tithemi*. It shows an intentional arrangement has taken place. Each member has been fashioned by God and then has been set in a particular place in order to benefit the whole.

This same word is used in John 15:16 as Jesus spoke to the apostles about His intentional choice and appointment of the apostles. There, translated as "appointed," it says -

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." John 15:16

The idea is the same here. God has done this for "the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased." The wisdom of God is on display in the selection of each person for their appointed gift, ministry, and activity. It would make no sense to place an ear where a foot belongs, and to have knee in the middle of the forehead would show a significant lack of judgment and right thinking. As God is the Creator and the Giver of gifts to His creatures, He knows the very best placement for them within the body. There are no errors and all things work in the body exactly as He determines.

Life application: As you evaluate your own position within the church family, know that you are exactly where the Lord wants you. He has a good plan and a purpose for you. So trust that His placement is perfect. Then, use your placement to the fullest extent you can in order to give glory to God.

And if they were all one member, where *would* the body *be*?

1 Corinthians 12:19

A point that must have been on Paul's mind when he wrote out this verse is that no one member's interests, gifts, or ministry can be allowed to take overall precedence within the church. If the heart were to claim that it was somehow equal to the sum total of all the other members because of its unique makeup, then there would be no need for a body. If there was no need for a body, then there would be no body because that which is superfluous is unneeded and would eventually be cast off (like the shedding of unnecessary skin).

If this were the case, the heart would find out very quickly how lonely being heart without a body would actually be. The things that makes us feel unique and indispensable are actually the those things around us which we rely on, and which rely on us, in a harmonious and mutually-benefiting way.

Life application: No matter how much you do for the church, and no matter how important you feel your position in the body is, you cannot survive in that capacity without others. If the pastor of a church did every single thing in the church and yet there was no one to sit in the pews, then he wouldn't be a pastor of a church. Paul says in Romans 12:3 that we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Let us ponder that as our life application for the day!

But now indeed *there are many members, yet one body.* 1 Corinthians 12:20

This verse condenses and reiterates what he had previously said in verse 12 which was, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is Christ.*"

Now speaking specifically of the body of Christ, he notes the similarity of it to the natural body. And in the natural body he made his argument, even to the point of absurdity, that the parts were interdependent upon one another. As this is true, the same is true with the spiritual body. He will continue to demonstrate this in the verses ahead.

The reason for all of this detail is probably because there were individuals in the church at Corinth that felt that their greater spiritual gift meant that they didn't need to rely on those with lesser gifts. But as Paul has shown this to be false with the human body, he will also show it to be false with the spiritual body.

Life application: Too often, Christians will put a figure on a pedestal. Pastors and preachers are elevated to unhealthy levels of esteem when they are simply fulfilling a particular role within the body as it was appointed by the Spirit. They are completely dependent on the other members for their continued success; they are not independent of the body. While giving them due honor, we still need to make sure they aren't turned into idols.

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!" 1 Corinthians 12:21

The eye is an important part of the body. It receives the light and discerns between various objects and what the distance between those objects is. It allows for the body to know where it is going, where the food is, who different people are, etc. Some might say that without the eye, the body would be in a bad way. But if the eye decided it was the most important part of the body, even to the point of the exclusion of other parts, it would be overreaching its importance.

The eye might say to the hand, "I don't need you!" However, the hand is the member that is able to grasp the food that feeds the body. The eye can't do that. The hand is the one that defends against attacks against the body. The eye can't do that either. If the hand wasn't there, the eye would quickly perish.

Likewise, the head may say to the feet, "I don't need you!" Yes, the head is important. Without the head, we would be dead. But without the feet, the body wouldn't be complete. The feet take us where we need to go. Without them, the head would be left stuck in one place, unable to get to the pool of water to drink. It wouldn't be able to climb the mountain or enjoy a day by the beach. The head would be silly to think it could do without the feet.

And the same is true with the members within the church. Each has a purpose and each provides a necessary function which complements the whole. Just because one member thinks it is pretty great stuff doesn't mean that it is more important than any other.

Life application: It is certain that you need the other members of the body, so try to recognize their importance. Don't be fooled into believing that they are without value. If the Lord has saved them and the Spirit has given them a gift, they are valued by the Creator Himself!

No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 1 Corinthians 12:22

Paul is continuing on with his thoughts concerning the importance of all parts of the body. In this verse he notes something which is obvious but possibly not commonly thought of. There are a multitude of body parts and we often think about the ones that we use a lot and which have strength. Our hands, arms, biceps, tongue, legs, etc. are things that we think about because we voluntarily use them and we also work hard to strengthen them for tasks.

On the other hand, we have body parts that are hidden away and very fragile. The inner body parts like the liver, heart, lungs, and so on aren't things we normally think about as being "strong" or capable of doing great tasks. They are in there and they do their job, but we may consider them "weaker" in regards to our normal functioning. We don't spend time exercising our liver, do we? And yet, how necessary it is!

We can't function properly at all without them and when they fail, the body will die. However, if a leg fails, we can chop it off and continue to live. If we lose a hand, it may be a terrible loss, but we can make up for it by using the other hand or even the feet to accomplish necessary tasks.

If we think of these parts as different members of the church, we can see the importance of them. The pastor (maybe he is a right hand) gets lots of attention and he is often sent to schools or seminars for strengthening and learning, but the person who cleans the bathrooms (maybe he is a liver) is neglected. But what happens if the bathroom doesn't get cleaned for a while? The body will suffer and people will stop coming to that church. Without congregants, the body dies. The pastor's job can be filled by another pastor in the church and the church will continue, but if no one is there to replace the cleaner, then the church may actually suffer more than the loss of the pastor!

Life application: Be sure to thank the person who cleans the church. Let them know that they are appreciated.

And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty,
1 Corinthians 12:23

Continuing with how we handle the parts of the body and the interaction between those parts, Paul now mentions an observable truth. "Those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor." There are parts of the body which may seem less honorable than others. The ear for example may not seem to be worth as much attention as the eyes. And yet the ear may be given a beautiful gold earring to highlight it. The fourth finger on the hand may seem like an afterthought compared to the thumb, the pinky, or the middle finger. However, we tend to adorn this one with a ring of gold more often than the others.

The feet don't shout out for much attention; they're just feet. And yet, we may spend an inordinate amount of money on a variety of shoes to call attention to who we are. The shoes direct the eyes of others to the feet despite their otherwise plain appearance. And so it is true with members within the church. There are those who attend church, never missing a sermon. But they may be quiet and not flaunt their faithful attendance. They also may not strive to be noticed in any other way. And yet if the pastor is wise, he will call attention to such faithful attendees during a sermon, using them as examples for the others to emulate. Likewise, he may call them up for a special gift, noting their faithfulness to the church.

Paul continues with the thought that "our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty." There are those parts which distinguish us as male or female. These are covered for modesty's sake. There are also blemishes that some carry because of sickness, wounds, or birth defects. We will often cover these from sight. In essence, we are showing honor to these unpresentable parts through their

covering. Thus we are actually highlighting them through concealment. Paul will explain the result of this in the coming verse.

Life application: There is no person who is without value within the body. It is our duty to seek out the special points of each of these people and to recognize them for the value they possess. By doing so, they will know that they are of importance to us.

...but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, 1 Corinthians 12:24

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of the "unpresentable parts" of the body and how we cover them because they have "greater modesty." He now notes that this is completely unnecessary for "our presentable *parts*." Parts of the body which show no offense to others, which are not considered immoral when displayed openly, or those which we are not shy about presenting because they are somehow weaker or defective, are openly displayed.

And so there is a contrast in how we exhibit these parts. Likewise, there is a contrast in how our gifts are displayed. All of them are given by God. It is He who has "composed the body." And in this, there is actually great wisdom because He has essentially "given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it." As noted yesterday, we are showing honor to these unpresentable parts through their covering. Thus we are actually highlighting them through concealment.

Think of this on an individual basis. Suppose there is someone who has electrical skills in the church. He is quiet and doesn't want his gift noted for everyone to see and compliment. When something electrical needs to be done, he will do it. The church may have a fantastic display of Christmas lights, innovative lighting of signs or areas of the building, or a truly unique layout of certain display units, etc. All of these have brought honor both to the body and to God, and yet at the same time, this part of the body was essentially covered from the view of others. Those who

need to know the use of this gift will appreciate and acknowledge it directly while others will acknowledge it from afar.

Life application: Your gift has been given for the benefit of the whole. Use it for that purpose and to the honor of God who gave it.

...that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. 1 Corinthians 12:25

Paul has been speaking of the body parts and their importance, even if there are some that are seemingly unimportant. But he informed us that "God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it." It is with this thought in mind that he now gives the reason God has done these things. It is "that there should be no schism in the body."

This word, schism, is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 1:10 as he was opening the letter. It indicates a "division." This is exactly what precipitated the writing of the letter in the first place. There in 1:10 he said -

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

His use of the body parts to show the importance of each of them, regardless of how they are perceived at first, is to show that they are all "perfectly joined together." He is returning the body of this entire section back to the original thought of Chapter 1. Understanding this, we can see the heart of Paul (and God who inspired his writings) for unity within the congregation and felicity between the various members. And this is so that "the members should have the same care for one another."

As the epistle is given for this very purpose, then it is immensely important that the body of believers holds fast to what God has intended. Within the congregation, let no self-exalting occur and let no deprecation of others be found. Rather, let there be care for one another.

Life application: It won't hurt you a bit to treat the seemingly lowest person in the church with kindness and respect. And it won't hurt one iota to humble yourself before those you worship with. In fact, doing both will increase your esteem in the eyes of the Lord.