

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Spiritual Gifts in the Body of the Church

*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. (1 Corinthians 12:1-6, KJV 1900)*

*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:27-28, KJV 1900)*

Most New Testament letters were written with a need or purpose that required its content to inform or to correct its first century recipients. In the case of First Corinthians, we see a rather long list of problems that Paul systematically addresses and corrects. There is evidence in the first chapter that some godly people in the church wrote to Paul. Since we do not have a copy of that letter, we cannot know its contents. Many New Testament scholars believe that the letter likely contained questions regarding many of the problems that Paul confronts in the letter, seeking Paul's wise counsel regarding those matters. Often in this letter, Paul will open his teaching on a problem with "Now concerning...." Could this phrase indicate that he was responding to that letter to him? Possibly.

Given the "Ink" that Paul devotes to spiritual gifts (Chapters 12-14), we shall spend some serious study time within these chapters and their teachings regarding the Lord's church and her function as a spiritual body. Given the language of Verse 27 and the central focus on the "Body" analogy in Chapter 12, it is obvious that Paul intended the Corinthians—and us—to understand that the right view of the church is that the "body of Christ" and the "church" are one and the same. There is no mystical "body of Christ" separate and apart from the church. Paul uses the two terms in this verse as synonyms for the same entity. We should further note that every use of the word "Church" in the New Testament with one exception in Acts either refers to a local church body or to the whole family of God finally and eternally gathered together in Christ at the Second Coming. Whenever a New Testament writer refers to more than one local church body, he uses the plural form of the word, "Churches." No New Testament writer ever uses "Church" to refer to all the churches or to the whole community of believers; not once. Neither should we.

Why should we put so much emphasis on spiritual gifts in our study of the doctrine of the New Testament church? Paul answers the question,

"And God hath set some **in the church**...." In the context of this three-chapter thesis on spiritual gifts, we should think of spiritual gifts specifically in terms of the church. If the Lord intends to use a spiritual gift as Paul describes these gifts in this setting, He will "set" that gift in a church body. As the verse unfolds, we learn that even the gift of apostle was set "in the church," not over the church and not independent of the church. To be "in" a body, the specific analogy of a human body in this chapter, means that you are a part of that body, not an autonomous entity apart from, outside, or over that body. In our age and culture of inflated "Self-worth" and self-focus, it is sadly common for people to think that God has called them privately and wholly apart from any body of people or church, so they function as if the Lord had "Entitled" them to do their own thing with their "Own" spiritual gift. Rather than adopting a self-centered attitude within the body (Verses 14-21), these folks prefer to operate their own way wholly independent of any church. You will see this attitude in their words and attitudes, "God has called me to...." They typically stubbornly resist any form of accountability to anyone, including especially to any church. I do not doubt that many of these people may have seen so much that is wrong in churches that they think they can serve God better all alone than as a part of any church body. Sadly, they tend to make a bad situation worse instead of better. Scripture never teaches that any one person or any one church is so holy as to have arrived at flawless, perfect knowledge or service. And a church body is not a perfect body. A brief survey of the churches described in the New Testament should make that point quite clearly. However, despite all those flaws, even the long list of flaws in the Church at Corinth, Paul still emphasizes that the Lord operates through His "Body" in the world, His "Church." If we desire to carry on a truly God-honoring, Biblical work, we should do so within this church body, not independent of it.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Paul begins his teaching on spiritual gifts with a far broader definition of spiritual gifts than we typically think. We think of a spiritual gift as some unique and exceptional talent or ability. Paul starts the whole theme with the most basic of God's gifts to His children. A right belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, embraced in a life-changing transformation by someone who was formerly anything but a faithful believer, is the first and most central spiritual gift, the foundation gift on which the Lord builds every other "spiritual gift" in this lesson. In terms of the human body analogy that Paul uses in this chapter, the heart and the little toe are both members of the body; both exist in the "Body" as a gift to it and are to function for the health and well-being of the body, not for or with their own private agenda.

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Our age has witnessed a rather heated doctrinal controversy, the "Lordship salvation" idea. Proponents of this idea adopt an imbalanced view of discipleship, confusing discipleship and new birth. The confusion appears in a fundamental idea that they promote. "Unless Jesus is Lord of your life, He cannot be your Savior." To relate this errant idea to our study passage, their idea is "Unless you are a good member of the body, you can't be part of the body at all." That any of us has a sense of truth regarding Jesus is the result of a spiritual gift from God. The relationship in Paul's teaching here is the body of the church, not the family of God. He associates the evidence of this most basic spiritual gift with the church body, not with the family of God, with God-glorifying service in the Lord's church, not with the new birth.

To apply the errant idea of lordship salvation to a human family, a parent with this idea would constant drill his/her children with this sentiment, "Unless you are a good, obedient child in this family, you really don't belong to this family at all." Would any caring and wise parent speak such despicable words to their own child? And if a child strays, should the parent immediately disown the child? No. A wise caring parent would reach out to the erring child and do whatever possible to recover the child from his/her error. This error is deep and grave.

To speak "by the Spirit of God" and call Jesus Lord does not teach that the Holy Spirit wholly controls and orchestrates our speech in something of a puppeteering role. It rather means that we speak within the sphere of the Holy Spirit and of His rich and gracious work within us. His permanent presence and His influence in us, His "Gifft" in and to us, leads us to this belief toward Jesus. It is the believer who speaks and calls Jesus Lord, not the

Holy Spirit using the believer as a puppet or as a loudspeaker. The godly confession in speech is a gift from the Holy Spirit to the believer. It is the believer who, so "Gifted" by the Spirit, chooses to speak words of praise and truth regarding Jesus.

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. On a few occasions I have observed people who manifested a low, unbiblical attitude toward the church, treating the church and their participation in it as if it were a business or a social club, subject to the whim, however benevolent, of the loudest voice or the most convincing person. This attitude wholly ignores and contradicts Paul's teaching here. It is not the smartest or the most influential person in a church who should control other people to their wishes. In this lesson, ask the questions. "Who is the 'Administrator' of the gifts? Who directs the 'Operations'? Above all, who is 'Lord' over this body?" If you can make the case that any mortal human is to occupy these roles, you win. If not, you need to repent. A New Testament church is a unique body of people whom the Lord brings together and unites under His governance alone. When we get over ourselves and think of ourselves as His child in His church under His direction, all designed and ordered by Him to the permanent service of His "Body," not ourselves, we will begin to understand Paul's teaching regarding spiritual gifts.

Any believer or member who has such a low regard for the church as to think that it is nothing more than a collection of humans to be managed and controlled as if it were a business has no sense of the New Testament's teaching regarding the Lord's church. If we in any way draw a valid comparison between the New Testament church and a business, we must begin with this fundamental premise. The Lord Jesus Christ is the CEO of this business, and He doesn't relinquish any of His authority to self-appointed lords over His church. The church's future and spiritual health depend on the members submitting to Him and to each other as a united, harmonious body, one body in which all the members strive to cooperate, "Endeavoring to **keep** the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)

Think in terms of the body analogy that Paul uses in this teaching. In a healthy, strong human body, all the body parts and body functions constantly work together for the body, never for themselves. When any part of the human body becomes "Confused" and thinks it knows better than the head of the body what to do or how to do it, de facto, that body part starts working exclusively for its own benefit, and we see a sick body. We refer to those body parts that are working for themselves by the dreaded disease we call cancer. Cancer will not stop until it has killed the body in which it lives, and a church member who loses

his/her way and thinks of himself or herself as above or over the body will inherently strive for personal gain or for his/her personal wishes and will impact that church exactly the same way that cancer impacts a human body. "I know better what the Bible teaches than you or anyone else in the church knows, so I'll decide for you what is best." This sentiment sadly reveals spiritual cancer in its most threatening and advanced stage.

The Lord who is the one true Head over all things to His church knows far better than any of us. He bestows spiritual gifts into the body according to the body's needs. What about that church that has a crying need? A pastor becomes ill or passes into glory, leaving the church without a pastor? A wise and gracious member whose very presence imposes a sense of grace and tenderness onto the whole membership and culture of the church passes into glory or must move to another region? How should a church respond to a lingering need that seems to go unanswered and unfulfilled? Jesus taught the disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send laborers. (Matthew 9:38; Luke 10:2) A church that senses an unfulfilled need should go to the Lord in prayer for the needed gift.

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Worship service each Sunday                      10:30 A. M.  
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