

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
May 17, 2015

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 12:14-31
Lesson Title: Members of One Body

Introduction

There are many metaphors in the New Testament used to describe the church. The church is called a bride, family, flock, and kingdom, just to name a few. Each of these were designed by our Lord to give us a different picture of His church and her function. One of the most unique ways the church is described is in comparison to the human body. Understanding this description is essential in understanding Christian relationships. It is difficult to understand where we belong or who we really are in Christ and His church without understanding the metaphor of the body of Christ.

The human body is a wonderful creation of God (Psalm 139:14). It functions in an incredible and amazing fashion. Each member of the body is designed by God to work in unity with every other part. Every part of the human body has a design and purpose. Each part is essential.

Just as the human body receives all of its direction from the head so does the church from her head, the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18). As the human body manifests the individual person in the world so does the church manifest Christ in the world. So the church is the body of Christ and Christians are members of one body, the church.

Diversity and Unity within the Human Body (1 Corinthians 12:14-24a)

When a sinner is saved by God's grace they become a part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). That process is called the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at the moment of salvation, not later in a separate experience. Repentant sinners come into the body of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has the indwelling Holy Spirit by the baptism of the Holy Spirit and are equal in the body of Christ.

After establishing the fact that all believers are in the body of Christ through salvation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul explains the diversity and unity of the human body. He is laying the ground work for a comparison of the human body with the spiritual body of Christ, the church.

Verse 14

“For the body is not one member, but many.”

The word “member” is the Greek word *melos* {mel-os} and means “a limb in the human body.” The human body consists of “many members.” There are bones, muscles, glands, organs, nerves, and blood veins. Paul’s key point here may be the word “not.” He wants the Corinthians to understand that the human body is “not” just the eye, the arm, or the foot. There are “many” parts or “much” to the human body.

Verse 15-17

“If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?”

Paul’s point in these verses is that the human body is not limited to one part. If the “foot” thinks it is insignificant because it is “not the hand,” then the “foot” would not feel like it was a part of the body of Christ. The same is true with the “ear” not being a part of the body because it wasn’t the “eye.”

Paul’s question, “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing” and “If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling,” is meant to stimulate the thinking of the Corinthians. Different parts of the body are given so the entire body can function. When you place an emphasis and priority on one part of the body you do harm to the unity of the entire body. That is what was happening in Corinth, especially in the misuse of the spiritual gifts of tongues.

Suppose the gifts of tongues was still operative today (of course it is not). It still would be true that not every believer would speak in tongues. Our bodies are not all tongues. The Holy Spirit does not give the same spiritual gift to every person any more than the human body is all tongue, knee, or eye! Just as the human body has different parts every believer in the body of Christ has different gifts.

Verse 18

“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

This verse, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” could settle every bit of confusion in the church today over spiritual gifts if believers would just believe it. “God”, not evolution, determined how the human body would be made. It was “God” who put arms, legs, feet, eyes, ears, and every other “member” of the human body where they

were needed and designed them to function. Would you not look strange with your nose turned upside down? You could possibly drown in a heavy rain. Plus, if you wear glasses they would stay steamed up all the time!

It is “God” who sovereignly places believers in the body of Christ with the spiritual gifts needed for His church to function. The distribution, placement, and function of those “members” are “as it hath pleased him.” The word “pleased” is the Greek word *thelo* {thel-o}. It means “to will, intend, resolve, determine.” This is not about what pleases you, me, some denomination, or some group of people who want to feel spiritually superior to others. This is about what is “pleasing” to God. This is about what He has “willed.” As much as man attempts to challenge the sovereignty of God the fact remains that you can not make an arm a leg or a knee into an elbow.

Verse 19-20

“And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet one body.”

Paul expands on his point he made in verse 17. A body that only has “one member” would not be a “body.” Likewise a church whose members all had the same gift and the same ministry would not be a church. It is foolish and immature not to be content with or use what the Lord has given us. “Where is the body” if there is only one or two parts? That’s Paul’s question.

Look at the human body. The human body is not “one” part. It is “many members.” That makes it “one body.” Paul’s point is that the diversity of body parts is what makes a body a body! Likewise, the diversity of spiritual gifts among God’s people is what makes the church the body of Christ!

Verse 21-23

“And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.”

Paul has shown us the *diversity* and *unity* of the human body. Now he shows us the *humility* of the human body. If the “eye” and the “head” were to tell the “hand” and “feet” that they were not needed, that would be wrong. In other words, the visible body parts are sometimes valued more because they are seen.

“Those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable” probably refers to the parts of our body that are not particularly attractive. This most

likely refers to the part of our bodies on which we hang clothes. The word “bestow” means “to place around” and suggests the idea of clothing the body in general. We spend more time and money clothing those parts of our body than the ones that are more presentable, such as face and hands. And by doing so, on these we “bestow more abundant honor” or time and investment.

Sometimes the most vital ministries in the church are those that are not obvious. We see the “face”, the “hands” and the “eyes” every Sunday as the preaching, singing, and other visible parts. But what about the prayers? What about the administrative needs? The Corinthians had reached a point to where they only noticed the noticeable parts of the body. The out front gifts such as prophesy, languages, and healing had become the focal point. Honestly, if you removed about three visible parts of the church today she would have no ministry at all!

Verse 24a

“For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked...”

“For our comely parts have no need” means that the parts of our bodies that are seen do not need as much attention as those that are unseen. The unseen parts of our bodies such as our internal organs are certainly not “comely” or attractive. However, they are essential to life. These parts do the work that is not attractive to look at, but functions to keep life in the body.

“But God hath tempered the body together” is a beautiful expression. The word “tempered” means “to combine.” The word was used in biblical days in reference to the mixing of colors. When “God” mixes the colors or arranges the members in the body the way He wants, it results in “more abundant honour to that part which lacked” or may have been viewed as inferior or unnecessary. Again, the human body is wonderfully made. When you apply that truth to the body of Christ you must say God has done a marvelous job of mixing the colors in His body, the church.

Diversity and Unity within the Spiritual Body (1 Corinthians 12:24b-31)

Verse 24b-25

“That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.”

“Schism” means “division.” All the “members,” the attractive and the unattractive, the external and the internal, have been placed in the body so the body will not be divided. The result is “that the members should have the same care one for another.” In the body all the members without distinction work for

the good of the whole. No special “care” should be given to one member to the exclusion of another. The word “care” has the meaning of “anxiety or heavy emotion.” Used in this context, Paul is saying, “As believers, we should care as much for the nursery worker as the pastor, as much for the custodian as for the Sunday school teacher.”

Verse 26

“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

When your physical body suffers or hurts, you do not say, “Half of me hurts but the other half is feeling fine!” No. If one part of our body is suffering or hurting it affects the entire body. If “one member” or part of the body is “honoured” or rejoicing and celebrating, then “all the members rejoice with it.” Paul’s use of words emphasizes the impossibility of rivalry or competition within the body of Christ.

Verse 27

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

The entire family of God makes up “the body of Christ.” Every believer from every place on the globe is a part of the body of Christ. Each believer is also “members in particular.” “In particular” is *ek meros* {mer-os} in the Greek which means each of them belongs to the body of Christ but none of them can claim to be the whole, but none are excluded. Paul wants the Corinthians to know that they are “the body of Christ.” He’s been talking about them. They are the issue. And so are we!

Verse 28

“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.”

Paul now lists some of the different parts of the body of Christ that “God hath set in the church.” At the time 1 Corinthians was written, the spiritual gifts of “apostles, prophets, miracles, gifts of healings, and diversities of tongues” was still operative. These were temporary sign gifts and are no longer operative today. The gifts of “teachers, helps, and governments” are still operative today.

Teachers note: To see a list of temporary spiritual gifts compared to permanent spiritual gifts, click on “lesson archives” and open the May 10, 2015 lesson entitled: “Gifts of the Spirit.”

Paul lists these particular gifts here not to discuss their meaning but rather to lay the foundation for his question in verses 29-30.

Verse 29-30

“Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?”

There are six rhetorical questions in verses 29-30 and the answer to every question is “no.” God does not want every believer to be an apostle or to speak in tongues. God does not want every believer to have the gift of administration or helps. Since that is the case, why were the Corinthians all wanting the showy gifts? Why do some preachers and teachers tell believers today that if they do not have certain gifts or do certain things in the name of the Holy Spirit that they aren’t saved or baptized in the body of Christ?

As a born-again believer, saved by God’s grace, you have been given a spiritual gift or spiritual gifts sovereignly by God. You have nothing to seek for; you have nothing to be envious of; and you have nothing to feel superior about. It is all about being members of one body.

Verse 31

“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”

Paul now applies the analogy. If you read this verse and interpret this verse the way some Charismatic theologians do, you would think Paul is commanding you seek certain gifts. My question is why would Paul spend 29 verses teaching the Corinthians to be content with the spiritual gift God has given them and then say the exact opposite in the last verse? The answer is, he does not.

The word “covet earnestly” means “to burn with zeal towards” or “to earnestly desire.” “Best” means “stronger, better, and more noble.” Paul is saying, “There is nothing wrong with having a zeal to possess the more noble gifts. Paul has not hesitated to rank certain spiritual gifts in order. He has also indicated in the verses we have just studied that the unseen parts of the body are vitally important. So it is not a sin for the Corinthians to apply the truth Paul has just taught and “covet earnestly” the best gifts. However, even their coveting the best gifts is not the best way to be effective as a member of the body of Christ.

“And yet I shew unto you a more excellent way” means that Paul is about to show them the way of love in the next chapter. The Corinthian’s were wrong if they were seeking the showy gifts and they were even missing the point of spiritual gifts if they were just seeking the more noble gifts. They were

obviously placing a high value on certain gifts which never contributed to the unity and diversity God intended. It is not enough to have just the Holy Spirit and His gifts. There must be maturity and love if we are to minister as members of the body of Christ.

Conclusion

There is no place in the body of Christ for individualism. There is no place in the body of Christ for an independent attitude. The body of Christ is about interdependence. All of God's children are able to minister to each other and serve the Lord because of each other. That is Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 12-14. If you are having trouble with this truth, cover one eye for a week; tie one arm behind your back; do not use your legs for a few days; refuse to feed your stomach and see how your heart reacts! Now hopefully you know I am not serious but I hope I have made my point.

Christians are members of one body. That body is the body of Christ. God has placed you into His family and His church according to His plan. There is no need for you to feel inferior or be jealous of anyone else. If you are a hand, be a hand. If you are some other unseen organ, function where God placed you. You are vitally important to the body of Christ!

Amen.