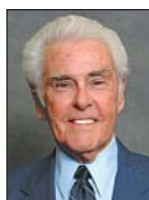


Used in God's service

In the closing verse of last Sunday's lesson, Paul affirmed that all of the gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12:4-10 are "the work of one and the same Spirit,



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and he gives them to each man just as he determines." Based on this reality, each church member is involved in a relationship with all others. Since this interaction is so important to the functioning work of the church in the world, Paul introduces his well-known metaphor of the human body as a way of explaining God's purposes for the church.

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). By this introduction, Paul makes it clear that the figure of the body portrays the unity of those who receive the spiritual gifts and, definitely the body, represent the church. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament points out that "since Christ's body is given for us, the term also carries for Paul the thought of the body in which we serve others, or Christ serves them in us" (p. 1147).

By emphasizing the essential unity of the parts of the body that are diverse but necessary for the body to function, he describes similar unity in diversity for the church. In his application of the parts of the body with the diversity of gifts in the church, Paul affirms that "the intention of the one God is that in the church there should be diversity in unity, or unity in diversity; for God, being one, cannot be the author of division and strife" (Philip E. Hughes, "First Corinthians," The Biblical Expositor III, p. 273). Just as the body is equipped for the various parts to work harmoniously, the various members of the church are designed to work in harmony. Each one is indispensable for the most successful

operation of the body and the church. How should members feel about their places in the church?

Don't consider yourself less important than others in the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-16). You have to let your imagination enjoy Paul's discussion of what the parts of the body might say to each other about their places in the human body! Even though the foot might seek to maintain distance from the body because it is not a hand, it does not cease being a part of the body. Similar responses might be made by the eye or the ear; each one is small but essential. That is the way God planned the body.

A family in our church has a young son who is blind. The members of the family make every effort to fit him into the youth activities and they do it well. But his full participation is hindered by his blindness. His importance to the church family is as real as though his eyes were clear and useful. Your value to the church body is not dependent on all physical parts working properly.

Don't consider yourself more important than others in the church (1 Corinthians 12:21-22). "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the foot, 'I don't need you!'" In reality, some parts of the body that appear weaker are indispensable for appropriate functioning of the body.

The interdependence of all parts of the physical body and of the church when all are in good condition is clear. Some parts are not as essential as others for the body to accomplish its essential purposes. At the close of World War II, I was the victim of a car-truck accident in Manila that shattered my right femur. An orthopedic surgeon awaiting his rotation back home was called in to repair the bone broken in three places, but the damage kept me in Army hospitals for eight months. I learned to survive without the use

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-16, 21-22; 1 Peter 4:9-11

of the leg, but my functioning was severely limited. Other soldiers had to learn to survive with total loss of body parts. We can get along better when losing some body parts rather than others. Throughout such losses or injuries, "If one part suffers every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Don't let negative feelings destroy your influence in the church (1 Corinthians 12:25). Every Christian is gifted to serve God and each part of the body should be honored for its purpose. "This fact rules out feelings of inferiority and superiority since each member needs the others, and all belong together" (TDNT, op. cit., p. 1146).

Use your gifts to serve others and praise God (1 Peter 4:9-11). Hospitality was a gift that was essential in the biblical world. In the nomadic culture there were few inns where travelers could receive food and have a place to sleep. Paul, in his letters, thanks members of the young churches for expressing hospitality to him, and he encourages it for ministers he sent to the churches. In Romans 12:13, he writes, "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." Do this, according to Peter, "without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9).

Similar instructions are given in Romans 12:6ff. The commentary on 1 Peter points out that "all ability, even such as would give a man an authoritative position in the church, must be seen as one of the gifts of God to the church." Speaking the word of God and serving for God are all to be done "with the strength God provides" so God can be praised in glory and honor.

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