

International Bible Lessons Commentary
1 Corinthians 12:12-31

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 17, 2015**, is from **1 Corinthians 12:12-31**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

International Bible Lesson Commentary

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

(1 Corinthians 12:12) For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members

of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Jesus Christ has one body on earth, the Church, often written with an uppercase “C” to signify the one true Church that is greater than a congregation or a collection of congregations or churches. The resurrected body of Jesus Christ resides in heaven at the right hand of God. The human body as a whole is considered one body. The one human body has many parts or members, and each part was created by God for the benefit of the body and so the body can benefit itself as a whole and also benefit others. So believers could better understand the role of individual Christians with a variety of gifts in the work of the Church, Paul compared a human body created by God with many members to the Body of Christ on earth, the Church, which God also created with many members. Individual Christians are parts of the Body of Christ, not the Body of Christ.

(1 Corinthians 12:13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

The one Holy Spirit completely surrounds or clothes the believer spiritually when he or she repents and trusts in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, just as the waters of baptism surrounded those baptized by Jesus’ disciples.

The one Holy Spirit also enters and nourishes spiritually all true believers once and for eternity when they trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, just as the Lord's Supper enters those who partake of the bread and the wine; though Christians repeatedly receive the Lord's Supper, they receive the Holy Spirit once and then are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). People of all racial and economic backgrounds (Jews and non-Jews; slaves and free) are brought into (or baptized into) the Body of Christ on earth, the Church, by the Holy Spirit who surrounds and fills believers by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit spiritually permeates the entire spiritual being of every believer; who nevertheless is commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

(1 Corinthians 12:14) For the body is not one member, but many.

The human body has many parts or members and each organ, part, or member plays an important role in the perfect functioning of the body. In a perfectly healthy body, each part functions in perfect harmony and cooperates with every other part of the body for the benefit of the whole body and to fulfill the purposes of God for that human body. After sin entered the world, no human body is perfect, but every human body still shows forth the image of God who created it. When the members of

Christ's body on earth, the Church, work in harmony and unity according to the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit leads, the Church shows forth the image of Jesus Christ; though not perfectly, the Church does show forth the image of their Lord and Savior substantially.

(1 Corinthians 12:15) If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

In comparing body parts to Church members, Paul wanted to teach that just by saying or thinking you do not belong to the body, because you are not some other body part, does not make it true. A lowly "foot" may think it does not belong to the body because it is not like the "hand" which is above it. Paul wanted all believers to know they are not less than any other believer. No matter what we once were, as members of the Body of Christ, whether a foot or a hand, we are all important to God and can serve God's purposes for the glory of God and the benefit of all.

(1 Corinthians 12:16) And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

The "ear" might think it is not as important or as valuable to the body as an "eye." It may think of itself as inferior, and may have been told so by other members, and it may feel or say, "I do not belong to the body," but the Bible says

even the most humble Christian (who may think they are unimportant to God and others) is nevertheless an essential part of the body that God designed to glorify Him and to express His love for all of His creation.

(1 Corinthians 12:17) If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

An “eye” cannot hear and an “ear” cannot see. If the whole body were an eye or an ear much important work could not be done, and the whole body would be impaired compared to a human body as created by God. An eye does not have hands and feet, neither does an ear. An eye alone may see the work that needs to be done; an ear alone may hear the command of Christ, but neither an eye or an ear alone could do the kind of work that God wants done through the Body of Christ with many carefully designed members organized and empowered by the Holy Spirit according to God’s will.

(1 Corinthians 12:18) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

God designed and created the human body with a purpose for each member and each part. God created each individual part and put it perfectly where it should be to do the perfect work needed beside every part around it. God

did this as He chose, not as the uncreated part may have wanted to be created before or after God created it. God designed the human foot and He put the feet where He chose to benefit the whole body. God also places the members of the Body of Christ where He wants them and He gives them the gifts He wants them to have in order to benefit the whole Body of Christ and achieve His purposes through the Church in the world.

(1 Corinthians 12:19) If they were all one member, where would the body be?

If every single body part were an eye or an ear or a hand or foot, where would the human body be? How much could it achieve? What could a huge collection of eyes or ears accomplish to glorify God compared to a human body with eyes, ears, hands, and feet doing God's will?

(1 Corinthians 12:20) But now there are many members, but one body.

Paul used an analogy or comparison that any believer could easily understand or apply. There are many members in and a part of the Body of Christ. Each member is important and no member is less important than any other member. Each member is surrounded by and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and together all the members make up the Body of Christ.

(1 Corinthians 12:21) And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

Just as some members may feel inferior to other members, so some members may think they are superior to or more important than other members of the body. Either way of thinking is wrong and can harm the body and other parts or members in the body. Imagine an eye saying to the hands, “I do not need you,” and then a spec of dirt blows into it that needs to be removed and no one is around to help it. Imagine a head saying to the hands and feet, “I do not need you,” and then it’s eye looks up and sees a raging bull charging toward it. Imagine a nose saying to the hands and feet, “I do not need you,” and then it smells smoke in the burning building where it sits. Though a member of the Church may not see the importance of some of the other members, God has placed each member in the Church where He wants them to glorify Him and achieve His plans.

(1 Corinthians 12:22) On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;

Sometimes the body does not know it needs certain parts or organs until it faces a problem or a missing part or an injured part presents the body with a problem. Those in the Church who seem to be weaker than others in the

Church are indispensable; especially from God's point of view because He chose them and created them for an indispensable purpose. Members in a church need to see the Body of Christ from God's point of view, and then they should thank God for one another.

(1 Corinthians 12:23) and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,

Some body parts are associated with cleansing the body of waste materials, and we put clothes over those parts. Other body parts we associate with the creation, bearing, and feeding of children, and we put clothes over those parts – all to show respect for those parts and our bodies. But imagine what a human body and the world would be like if these parts were eliminated from the human body that God so perfectly designed and organized just because we cover these parts with clothing.

(1 Corinthians 12:24) whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,

Arms, legs, hands, feet, eyes, and ears do not need to be covered and if covered may not function as well to achieve

the purposes of the head of the body. Once again, the Bible emphasizes that God arranged the body as it is, and what we may consider inferior and cover with clothing is absolutely essential for the body to survive and for human beings to multiply and fill the earth.

(1 Corinthians 12:25) so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

The hands can care for the feet, and the feet can take the body where it needs to go for food and shelter, especially if the hands have properly cared for the feet. Each member in the Body of Christ needs to care for every other member. Each member is indispensable to the Body of Christ. No member of the Body of Christ should consider itself superior or inferior to other members or do anything that would harm another member – which would harm the whole body.

(1 Corinthians 12:26) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

If one member of the Body of Christ suffers, every member of the Body of Christ suffers. We will not escape suffering in the Church until Christ comes again, but that is no reason for any member of the Body of Christ to be the cause of ungracious and unjust suffering in any other

member of the Body of Christ on earth. Whenever a member of the Church is honored, especially by God, all the members of the Body of Christ rejoice that one member is so honored. The one member that is honored brings honor to the whole body of which it is a part.

(1 Corinthians 12:27) Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

When Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, he said, “You are the Body of Christ.” No matter how large or small, each congregation is the Body of Christ and a member of the larger Body of Christ, the Church around the world. In some sense, each congregation in the Church is the Body of Christ, and in another sense each congregation is a member of the Body of Christ that has grown and spread throughout the world. Each individual Christian is a member, an indispensable member, of the Body of Christ locally and around the world.

(1 Corinthians 12:28) And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

As the Head of the church, the Body of Christ, Jesus Christ directs the working of the members of the body and provides all of their needs by directing their activities. God has appointed officers in the Church who are neither

superior nor inferior to any other Church member. Everyone has a function to fulfill for the benefit of the whole body, of each member, and those God has called and directed the Church to serve.

(1 Corinthians 12:29) All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?

Apostles saw the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, and they were responsible for writing the New Testament, for church government and order, and among other things the preservation and spreading of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Not every church member had the experience and responsibility to serve as an apostle. Prophets proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ and sometimes foretold the future. Not everyone had the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be prophets. Some church members were not able or inclined to teach though all church members need a teachable spirit to follow Christ. Paul did not expect every church member to be able to work miracles, though some could with the help of the Holy Spirit. What would a church be like if everyone in the congregation was a gifted teacher, and no one had any other gifts other than teaching in the church?

(1 Corinthians 12:30) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

Paul asked these questions expecting the answer to be “No.” No one possesses, nor should they expect to possess, all these gifts and appointments and experiences. No one should require another believer to possess any particular gift of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit gives His gifts as He chooses and when He chooses. No particular gift is a sign that a person is a Christian and qualified to be a member of the Body of Christ. No congregation will have all of the appointed offices and gifts that Paul wrote about. For example, no one has walked today with Jesus during His public ministry and then seen Him raised from the dead before He ascended into heaven, a requirement for the apostles. The church in Corinth had no apostles, but apostles for the Body of Christ did reside in Jerusalem and other places when Paul wrote as an apostle who had met the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. What if everyone in a congregation spoke in tongues, but no one had the gift of interpretation or teaching?

(1 Corinthians 12:31) But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

Some gifts attract crowds of people; such as gifts of healing and working miracles. Some gifts require teaching about

Christ and the Scriptures faithfully, truthfully, and dependably. Paul did not write what the greater gifts were, but said believers should strive for greater gifts – that the Holy Spirit chooses to give for the benefit of the Body of Christ to achieve God’s goals of service to believers and unbelievers. Believers can strive for greater gifts to be of greater service to God and the Church, to promote and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to lead sinners to saving faith. As valuable as striving for greater gifts might be, Paul wrote that there is a still more excellent way to live as a Christian – the way of love as Paul would soon teach them in First Corinthians 13.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why might a foot say it is not a part of the body because it is not a hand?
2. What are some limitations the church might face if everyone only had one gift and every person was exactly the same as the other with the one same gift?
3. Who arranged the members of the body and how was it done?
4. What can be a consequence when some members of the body think they do not need other members of the body?
5. What are two things members of the Body of Christ can do together that we have learned from this lesson?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly
International Bible Lesson.

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