

First Epistle to the Corinthians

23 – Essay Four: Women and Men in Church (4.3) – Spiritual Gifts and the Body

1 Corinthians 12:1-30

1. Outlines

a. *ESV Study Bible*

- i. Divisions over Corporate Worship (11:2–14:40)
 1. Head coverings and worship (11:2–16)
 2. Social snobbery at the Lord’s Table (11:17–34)
 3. Elevating one spiritual gift above others (12:1–14:40)

b. *Reading the New Testament Series*

- i. Problems in Corporate Worship (11:2-14:40)
 1. Prayer and Prophecy (11:2-16) – Different Though Equal in the Lord
 2. The Lord’s Supper (11:17-34) – Social Significance of the Supper
 3. Prayer and Prophecy (12:1-14:40) – Regulation, Not Suppression of Spiritual Gifts

c. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*

- i. In Response to the Corinthian Letter (7:1-16:12)
 1. Marriage and Related Matters (7:1-40)
 2. Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1)
 3. Women (and Men) in Worship (11:2-16)
 4. Abuse of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)
 5. Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual People (12:1-14:40)

d. Bailey¹

- i. Worship: Men and Women in the Church (11:2-14:40)
 1. Men and Women Leading in Worship (11:2-16)
 2. Order in Worship: Sacrament (11:17-34)
 3. Gifts and the Nature of the Body (12:1-30)
 4. The Hymn to Love (12:31-14:1)
 5. Spiritual Gifts and the Upbuilding of the Body (14:1-25)
 6. Order in Worship: Word (14:26-33)
 7. Women and Men Worshipping (14:3b-40)

2. Rhetoric

- a. A very long passage
 - i. It’s possible to spend lots of time in the details, but we will stick to mostly the major themes
- b. This is once more in response to something the Corinthians had written to Paul
- c. Intro + 5-part ring composition
 - i. Center is the Parable of the Body
 - ii. Center of center is about God’s arranging the body for his purposes
 - iii. Outer envelopes discuss the variety and diversity of gifts for the common good

¹ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 3428.

1 Corinthians 12:1-30 (ESV)²

Introduction

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts [or *spiritual ones*], brothers [and sisters], I do not want you to be uninformed [or *ignorant*]. 2 You know that when you were pagans [or *Gentiles*] you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led [or *moved*]. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;
6 and there are varieties of activities [or *energizings*], but it is the same God who empowers [or *energizes*] them all in everyone.

Diversity

7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom,
and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,
9 to another faith by the same Spirit,
to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
10 to another the working of miracles [or *works of power*],
to another prophecy,
to another the ability to distinguish between spirits,
to another various kinds of tongues,
to another the interpretation of tongues.

11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit,
who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

The Body of Christ

12 For just as the body is one
and has many members,
and all the members of the body,
though many, are one body,
so it is with Christ.
13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body —
Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—
and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
14 For the body does not consist of one member
but of many.

² Text divisions based on Bailey, location 3810.

The Parable of the Body

15 If the foot should say,
"Because I am not a hand,
I do not belong to the body,"
that would not make it any less a part of the body.

16 And if the ear should say,
"Because I am not an eye,
I do not belong to the body,"
that would not make it any less a part of the body.

17 If the whole body were an eye,
where would be the sense of hearing?
If the whole body were an ear,
where would be the sense of smell?

18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body,
each one of them, as he chose.

19 If all were a single member,
where would the body be?

20 As it is, there are many parts,
yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand,
"I have no need of you,"
nor again the head to the feet,
"I have no need of you."

22 On the contrary, the parts of the body
that seem to be weaker
are indispensable,

23 and on those parts of the body
that we think less honorable
we bestow the greater honor,
and our unpresentable parts
are treated with greater modesty,

24 which our more presentable parts do not require.

But God has so composed the body,
giving greater honor
to the part that lacked it,

The Body of Christ

25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

26 If one member suffers, all suffer together;
if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Diversity

28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating [or *acts of guidance*]³, and various kinds of tongues.

29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?

3. Introduction (vv.1-6)

- a. What specifically did the Corinthians write Paul regarding "spiritual gifts"?
 - i. First, "gifts" is implied and not present in Greek

³ *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*, entry for 1 Cor. 12:28.

1. 14:1 also uses the same word (*pneumatikos*), so it is certainly appropriate to infer gifts as the object to which the adjective refers
 2. But it can also possibly mean “spiritual persons”
 3. Paul may be playing on words here – we don’t know for sure
 4. What it seems to be is that the Corinthians had written Paul saying that they were indeed “spiritual” because they were manifesting ecstatic speech (tongues)
 5. In 1:7 Paul described the Corinthians as “not lacking in any spiritual gift”
 6. In 1:7 and rest of chapter 12 Paul uses “*charismata*” (gift of grace) to mean spiritual gifts
- ii. It seems that the Corinthians were asserting some kind of aberrant (ignorant) understanding of what it mean to be spiritual and pointing to spiritual gifts as proof of their spirituality. It may be that they were making the gifts the end rather than the means to some other purpose.⁴
- b. Paul reminds them that before coming to Christ their experiences involved the ecstatic (including ecstatic speech). Paul tells them that the ecstatic signs and “being moved in the spirit” don’t prove anything.
 - i. What Paul may be saying is that there is no such thing as “sacred speech (or language or words).”⁵ We can worship God whatever culture and language we happen to be in. We do not have to adopt something different in order to be “spiritual.”
 - ii. Bailey sees this in the significance of translating *ethne* as *Gentiles* as opposed to *pagans* (or *heathens*).⁶
 1. For a Gentile to become a Jew meant rejecting Greek culture and adopting the Jewish one
 2. But a becoming a Christian does not demand rejection of former culture
 3. Bailey observes that in the New Testament “there seems to be a studied avoidance of the word *Gentile* when speaking about Greeks who had believed and been baptized.”⁷
 4. In his writings, Paul is living out what it means to be “neither Jew nor Greek”
 - c. In Jewish synagogues “Jesus be accured (*anathema*)!” is reported to have been spoken⁸
 - d. To confess “Jesus is Lord” is to confess that “Caesar is *not* Lord”
 - i. In our day saying “Jesus is Lord” is generally with little consequence but for the early Christians, it could possibly carry a death sentence⁹
 - ii. It was a statement of challenge to the empire – a challenge to its priorities and methods
 - e. Paul is *not* introducing a test of Christian fellowship by these two pronouncements
 - f. A set of three parallel lines
 - i. Varieties of gifts – service – activities (energizings)
 - ii. Same spirit – Lord (Jesus) – God (Father)
 - iii. God (Trinity) is the source of diversity
 - iv. But there is one God – unity

⁴ *NICNT*, introduction text for section “E. Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual People (12:1-14:40)”.

⁵ Bailey, location 3879.

⁶ Bailey, locations 3880-3903.

⁷ Bailey, location 3897.

⁸ *Reading Corinthians* from *Reading the New Testament Series*, entry for 1 Cor. 12:2-3 (Evaluating Gifts).

⁹ Bailey, location 3919.

- v. There can be no unity without diversity (or, unity is not uniformity)¹⁰
- g. In Greek *pneuma* (spirit) is gender neutral but in Hebrew it is almost always feminine¹¹
 - i. Humans were created male and female – there can be no human without both genders – thus it is entirely appropriate to think about God as male and female
- 4. Diversity – Part 1 (vv.7-11)
 - a. Individuals receive manifestations for the common good (of building up the church)
 - i. There is no such thing as an individual, “Lone Ranger” Christian
 - ii. Gifts are not for “personal spiritual enrichment”¹²
 - b. The list is *ad hoc* – it is not meant to be exemplary or exhaustive – but illustrative
 - i. It is likely tailored to the specific needs of the Corinthians
 - ii. The details of this specific list aren’t that important
 - iii. Wisdom and knowledge were misunderstood issues (earlier in this letter)
 - iv. Paul first lists non-dramatic gifts, then dramatic gifts, and ends with “tongues” (its manifestation and interpretation), “tongues” being the issue of contention between Paul and the Corinthians
 - c. All are important. No gift is above another.
 - i. Each gift is provided by the Spirit to accomplish God’s purpose
 - ii. The Spirit coordinates all manifestations
 - d. Gifts or talents (natural abilities)?
 - i. Opinion is divided – the list that appears toward the end of the chapter includes those things that seem to be more “natural” abilities
 - ii. On the other side are those (Bailey, Blackaby¹³) who interpret these gifts as those things specifically given for ministry purposes that a person did not have before.
- 5. The Body of Christ – Part 1 (vv.12-14)
 - a. One and many. Unity and diversity.

The body is one, yet the body has many members. In saying that it is one, his concern is for its essential unity. But that does not mean uniformity. That was the Corinthian error, to think that uniformity was a value, or that it represented true spirituality. Paul's concern is for their unity; but there is no such thing as true unity without diversity.¹⁴

- b. Believers are all part of the body of Christ

Christ here is not the name of an individual, Jesus, but of the community that derives its existence and identity from the individual. Just as in the Old Testament Israel could serve as the name of an individual (Gen 32:28) and of a people, so in Paul the name Christ is used both for the individual (1 Cor 2:2; Rom 5:17) and for the Christian community (1 Cor 15:22).¹⁵

- c. The unifying element of the Christian church is not doctrine or belief, but common experience of the Spirit and his (her?) manifestation of powers, through individuals, in order to build up Christ, the church¹⁶

¹⁰ *NICNT*, entry for “2. The Need for Diversity (12:4-31)”.

¹¹ Bailey, location 3933.

¹² Bailey, location 3943.

¹³ Blackaby, Henry and Mel. *What’s So Spiritual about Your Gifts?* Multnomah Books, 2004.

¹⁴ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 12:12.

¹⁵ *RNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 12:12-27.

¹⁶ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 12:13.

- d. An observation from Fee:

Is it our lack of the Spirit that has forced us to attempt unity on other grounds? Paul saw the Spirit as the key to everything in the Christian life. It seems mandatory that such prevail again if there is to be effective Christianity in our day. But let the one who says that not force his/her own brand of "spiritual unity" on the church as simply another human machination. Our desperate need is for a sovereign work of the Spirit to do among us what all our "programmed unity" cannot.¹⁷

6. The Parable of the Body (vv.15-24)

a. Rhetoric¹⁸

- i. I don't belong
- ii. All are needed
- iii. God arranges as he chooses
- iv. All are needed
- v. I am inferior

b. Context may still be that of the "haves" and "have-nots" of the previous part of this essay¹⁹

c. Paul writes to those who think they don't have need of others ("I have no need of you" v.21)

The emphasis is on the problem of self-sufficiency. This cameo can be understood to reach beyond the status of individual Christians and apply also congregations... [Congregations] needed each other... The strong tendency then and now was and is for each tradition to become self-sufficient and say to the rest of the Christian world, "We do not need you! We have our own language, liturgy, history, theology, tradition and culture. All we need we find within ourselves." ... God's Spirit is not promised uniquely to us in our divergent organizational structures, but in our faithfulness to the one body of Christ. The sin condemned is not pride but self-sufficiency. The deepest problem is not, "I am better than you" but rather, "I don't need you." ... God has made us so that we will need each other. No church is an island.²⁰

d. Paul writes against the marginalization and shaming of those that the "haves" consider "less-than" through tradition and culture

- i. His primary audience is not those who are being shamed
- ii. To those who do feel they are "nothing," Paul writes they are something and necessary – warning against self-deprecation – self-deprecation is not a virtue

e. Evangelism is like sex

- i. Paul concludes the parable with a discussion of genitals. Why? Because the "body needs to reproduce itself."²¹
- ii. Seven points on why/how Paul uses sex to illustrate evangelism²²
 1. Evangelism is primary *a very private affair*
 2. Evangelism involves *deep personal relations*
 3. Evangelism is intended to be *sacred and honorable*
 4. Long-term commitments are assumed
 5. Personal advantage must never be involved

¹⁷ NICNT, entry for 1 Cor. 12:14.

¹⁸ Bailey, location 3988.

¹⁹ NICNT, entry for 1 Cor. 12:21.

²⁰ Bailey, location 4034.

²¹ Bailey, locations 4048-4049.

²² Bailey, locations 4051-4067.

6. Evangelism must *always be motivated by love*, not by a will to power
7. The fact the Paul repeats this theme four times in a row is surely indicative of its importance

If the body cannot reproduce—it will die and what it represents will be irretrievably lost. So it is with the church.²³

7. The Body of Christ – Part 2 (vv.25-27)

- a. Reiterates importance of unity and diversity
 - i. “Discord in the body is a disease”²⁴
 - ii. Abuse and disregard of another leads to divisions
 - iii. The church’s responsibility is to care for its own
 - iv. As in the previous part of the essay, to abuse members of the church is to abuse Christ
- b. When it comes to life of faith in the church, there is no individualism and isolation
 - i. The verb “suffer” and “rejoice” are in the indicative (rather than imperative)
 - ii. When one suffers, the entire community suffers
 - iii. When one is honored, the entire community is honored
 - iv. Members of the community must seek the common good of the community

8. Diversity – Part 2 (vv.28-29)

- a. Again, illustrative – not exhaustive or exemplary
- b. Tongues comes last – pointing to possible problem in Corinth
- c. Gifts, not roles or offices

The emphasis is again on “God has appointed.” Paul is not discussing elected church officers or natural abilities, but spiritual gifts.²⁵

But in fact he lists gifts and deeds, not persons. That probably suggests that the first three items are not to be thought of as “offices” held by certain “persons” in the local church, but rather as “ministries” that find expression in various persons; likewise the following “gifts” are not expressed in the church apart from persons, but are first of all gracious endowments of the Spirit, given to various persons in the church for its mutual upbuilding.²⁶

- d. Spiritual gifts are not abilities. They only exist when they are manifested through actions – help actions that build up community.²⁷

9. Summary

- a. Thesis 1: “A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good.” (v.7 CEB)
- b. Thesis 2: “But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted.” (v.18 CEB)
- c. Unity requires diversity
- d. Every individual has equal value in the building of the church

²³ Bailey, location 4067.

²⁴ Bailey, location 4074.

²⁵ Bailey, location 4089.

²⁶ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 12:28.

²⁷ Bailey, location 4094.