

Maximizing the Ministry

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

I. **The Body Unified :27**

A. Discourse Structure- Verse 27 is a fitting conclusion to 12:17-26, but it also is a transition to the next paragraph, hence it is a hinge verse.

B. Theological Structure

1. Formal Fact of the Body: The fact that Paul says that they are Christ's body is not to take that they are the universal body of Christ, but they are the local body of Christ.

2. Functional Fact of the Body: Also notice he says that "you are" as opposed to "you ought to be." These are Christians who are obviously in violation of God's principles of conduct, and yet Paul continues to address them as saints (see 1:1-2; 5:7).

Summary

Paul envisions this local expression of the universal body of Christ to be fully outfitted or fitted for ministry, as it will employ a diversity of gifts at its disposal.

Transition: Paul's goal is to help this church, and all churches, understand that they need to utilize and maximize the use of the gifts that God has put in the church. Hence, Paul is going to discuss a strategy that will yield maximum output for its various members.

II. **The Body Divided :28-31**

Review- The Divine Prerogative

Key here is what is found in both verse 28 and in verse 18, as well as verse 11, where Paul remind the Corinthians and us that it is God, by his direct divine action, who has appointed gifts to the body. God is the one who does just as he wills (v. 11) and just as he desires (v. 18).

Preview- The Divine Plan

Hence, in light of God's divine design of gifting the church, Paul now helps us understand how to yield the greatest profit as he sequences the order of gifts in a descending value. This seems to parallel the list in Ephesians 4:11. This might seem surprising in light of the effort Paul has gone to in verses 24b-26 to show equality. However, Paul is showing us that in God's mind, certain gifts yield greater output or outcome. Not that a person is higher or lower than another, but that a gift can be more functional in its effect than others.

It should also be noticed that tongues, once again, is listed last, as is Paul's practice. This obviously is meant to show that that which the Corinthians put as first, was from God's perspective, the least important. It is often that way with God's value system.

A. The Reality of Division

1. Apostles

- a. Definition: The term apostle means “sent one.” The Bible includes both those who are **A**postles and **a**postles. Apostles are those that were involved in personal contact with Jesus while he was on earth and experienced seeing him alive after the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1-2). Also, an apostle needed to have a direct appointment by Jesus (Luke 6:13; Rom. 1:1). The Bible tells us there were twelve apostles in this special sense (Luke 6:14-16). Matthias was substituted for Judas after the ascension (Acts 1:26).

There were two lesser known men bearing the title Apostle: Barnabas and James, the Lord’s brother (1 Cor. 9:5-6; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19). Also, there were lesser known individuals, such as Andronicus and Junias, who perhaps possessed the gift (Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 15:5-7). Obviously, a special category of apostle was the apostle Paul who saw the resurrected Christ in a very unique way (1 Cor. 15:8-9). Many believe that the disciples miscalculated in rushing to replace Judas with Matthias. In the Lord’s mind, that role was to be fulfilled by the apostle Paul. However, the sovereignty of God has allowed for the results that are evidenced in the New Testament.

- b. Duty of the Apostles: The function of the apostle was to be both a church planter and a doctrinal facilitator. They functioned as the foundation of the church Eph 2:20, 4:11
- c. Difficulty: It is obvious that the number of apostles was not firmly established since there were those that had been designated “false apostles” (2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2). Hence, the church was trying to distinguish its leaders without compromising.

Although it was possible for an apostle to make an error in their speech or actions (Gal. 2:11-14), this was not possible in regard to the writing of the New Testament. For as an apostle wrote the scriptures of the New Testament, they were under the inspiration, and hence the scriptures were God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21).

What about Apostles for today? NAR??

2. Prophets

The gifted person called a prophet comes second on the list, similar to Ephesians 4:11,2:20 (also similar to that in 1 Cor. 12:10), however there is a difference. In verse 10 the function is in view, verse 28

names the person who possesses the gift. The prophets were men and women (female – Acts 21:9) who were recipients of new revelation. Hence, their gift involved revelatory information from the mind of God to the mind of the prophet, which as to be conveyed to the church (1 Cor. 14:30; Eph. 3:5). This might entail an overlapping with the “word of wisdom” or the “word of knowledge” (1 Cor. 12:8; 13:2). It seems that the apostles and prophets in this present list replace the “word of wisdom” and the “word of knowledge” in verses 8-10. The prophet of the NT sometimes but apparently seldom, not only told forth but also fore told concerning the future. (See Agabus Acts 21:10)

Prophets were closely aligned and associated with apostles, but all prophets were not apostles, because not all had encountered Christ incarnate personally, nor were they appointed by Christ personally. Hence, they were not authoritative in the same sense as an Apostle. In fact, 1 Corinthians 14:37 indicates that their authority was subject to that of the Apostles. In the city of Corinth, it appears that prophets made it their “home base”, otherwise Paul wouldn’t go to such extreme measures to clarify a problem, as seen in chapter 14.

Prophets and apostles were the foundation ministry of the church (Eph. 2:20). Hence, as the foundation was laid, and now were on the 21st floor, i.e., century, there seems to be no need for the role of the apostles and prophets in the founding of churches or the providing of new revelation for scripture since the New Testament canon is complete. (The question is one of a closed canon. It is philosophically possible but realistically not probable that there is to be scripture added to the 27 books of the NT.) The ministry of the prophet was to produce conviction (1Cor.14:24-25), education, exhortation, and comfort (1Cor.14:3). Some have concluded prophecy is equated with preaching.

3. Teachers

The gift of teaching is different than apostles and prophets in that the apostles and prophets were revelatory in nature. The gift of teaching, or the teachers’ ministry included the ability to explain, expound, and exhort with the doctrine given from the apostles and the prophets. The teachers’ ministry seems to be more localized. Apostles and prophets could travel and minister to a variety of churches, whereas the teachers seem to focus on a specific location. Elders in the church are to possess this gift (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2), though some elders appear not to have this gift all of the time (1 Tim. 5:17). A large part of Timothy’s responsibility was in the area of teaching (1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2).

4. Miracles

Miracles or miraculous “powers” are the same gift used in verse 10. This would be a person especially empowered or endowed with this ability (1 Cor. 2:4; 4:20; 2 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 1:5). When miracles were

done, the effect on the hearer was to create an impression of God's direct involvement in what was being said. Oftentimes the word for "miracles" is translated with "sign and wonders and miracles" (Heb. 2:4; Rom. 15:19; 2 Thess. 2:9).

5. Gift of Healing

This gift is also found in verse 9. It is the supernatural ability to heal people completely of their infirmity.

6. Helps

This comes from the word that means "to take a burden on oneself in place of another." Key concept- *anti*, "in place of another" (antiphis) (Acts 20:35; Rom. 8:26). The gift of helps is obviously in contrast to the revelatory gifts. As such, the Corinthians were not inclined towards it, because it did not center on their own ambition and public recognition. The absence of helps will create a very serious roadblock to spiritual effectiveness in any church. Paul was helped by many concerning his personal needs. Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30), Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16-18), Onesimus (Phlm. 10-13).

7. Administrations

This word can also be translated "governments" or "leadership" (Rom. 12:8). This involves administrative directing or organizational skill. It draws upon the word for "piloting of a ship" (Acts 27:11) or being a shipmaster (Rev. 18:17). The Greek word is the base for the English word "cybernetics," the science relating to the nature of the brain and its governing of the body. Some Christians in the body of Christ have a special ability for spiritual administration. They know how to organize and marshal the functional resources of the local assembly to mount the strongest possible concerted effort. These are the people who need to be in charge of leadership responsibilities. This falls also to the role of elder or overseer (1 Tim. 5:17) where the concept of ruling is the same as that of leading (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12). "Have charge over" is another way of translating this word for "rule."

It's only when this special kind of practical wisdom is available that spiritual leadership is provided (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). Every church must have leadership. A leaderless congregation is not part of God's plan. God desires everything to be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

8. Diversities of Tongues

"*Various* kinds of tongues" (Genos- kinds) in verse 28 is the same as the gift in verse 10. It is important to note that Paul lists this last to show the Corinthians that they're placing it as of first importance in contradiction to the apostle Paul's value. (More later!!!)

B. The Reason for Division :29-30

Paul obviously is implying that not everyone has the same gift. He has articulated this in the previous section, but now summarizes it again to reinforce the fact that not everybody at Corinth needs to speak in tongues, nor have the gift of prophecy.

III. **The Body Maximized :31**

A. The Request :31a

“Earnestly Desire (Be Zealous for) the greater gifts”- (zalao – Zealous)
The Greek verb translated eagerly desire could be understood as either a statement (indicative mood), “you are zealous for the greater gifts,” or as an imperative, “seek/desire the greater gifts

B. The Reality

A Better WAY! Love

Life Principles

1. We must know, use and be satisfied with our spiritual gifts since they are given to us by the Lord to serve His body not for our ego gratification.
2. Be aware of people trying to tell you how you “can get or learn” a spiritual gift through a book or seminar. Unless it is free!!
3. How and where are you honoring the Lord and serving His church as you utilize your Spiritual gifts that HE has specifically and uniquely given to you?