

gifts.

It is, then, because of one body with one personality that the Scripture declares in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 a unity underlying the functioning of spiritual gifts.

## B. INTERRELATION BECAUSE OF UNITY (12:14-26)

### 1. NEEDINESS OF LESSER MEMBERS (12:14-20)

14For the body is not one member, but many.

15If the foot should say, "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.

16And if the ear should say, "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.

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

18But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

19And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

20But now there are many members, but one body.

Just as cooperation among members of any human body is essential to the orderly functioning of that body's activities, so is cooperation essential in Christ's spiritual body, His church.

Because of the Corinthians' need for developing this oneness, the train of thought shifts from declaring the body's existence (vv. 12-13) to discussing spiritual implications of unity in that body. Until Christians realize the important lesson of mutual dependence upon one another, they can accomplish little, no matter how impressive the array of spiritual gifts.

12:14-Necessity of variety. In proving his thesis of unity based on variety, Paul flatly states, "The body is not one member, but many" ~v. 14). Indeed, without constituent members, each one having a part of its own, no body exists. Each part has a responsibility that can be handled better by itself than by any other. No two members are exactly alike. If they were, one would be unnecessary. This is another way of saying that a maximum variety of function characterizes the physical body. Yet who would venture to say that the body is not a unit? Were it otherwise, it would automatically cease being a body. No set of circumstances can cause one member to be equated with the whole body. Variety of parts is compulsory.

12:15-Inferiority of the foot. The fifteenth verse literally reads, "If the foot says, 'Because I am not the hand, I do not belong to the body,' it does not because of this' not belong to the body." The principle is obvious. No member can accomplish its own removal from the human body by complaining and depreciating its own importance. Each one has a responsibility to carry out, no matter how inconspicuous it may be. The foot in verse 15 is such an inconspicuous member. The foot may compare itself with the hand and all its complex skills, realizing how far short of the hand it falls. Besides envying the hand, it may be despondent because of its own perceived

unimportance and begin to feel, "I am not needed. I do not belong."

Though specific application is not made, the comparable situation in the body of Christ is obvious. Here is a Christian whose gifts are less conspicuous. Because he is never in the limelight and does not have the prominence of Christians with more spectacular gifts, he becomes discouraged over his own gift status. He may even grumble and allow himself to become discontent and jealous of those who have the more conspicuous gifts. Verse 15 very specifically declares that no amount of grumbling is sufficient to remove such a person from Christ's body.

Every member is important, no matter how hidden from view. None can be dispensed with. The body is crippled when one member is not functioning. It can be at peak efficiency only when every single part is active.

Christians need to learn this lesson. They need to be content with whatever abilities God has provided them (see vv. 11, 18) and to make it their business to operate as constantly as possible in areas where the Holy Spirit has given special aptitude. (See Appendix F, "How to Discover and Use Your Spiritual Gift(s).")

12:16-Inferiority of the ear. Verse 16 resembles verse 15 very closely, the only difference being that the writer chooses two new members to represent less favored and more favored members of the body. In this case it is the ear that becomes disgruntled. To have an ear speaking confirms that Paul has a member of the spiritual body ultimately in mind. Perhaps here

as well as in verse 15, the reference is to beauty as well as functional ability. The eye is by far the more attractive to look at, and the ear might easily begrudge this comeliness in addition to envying the eye's perception.

Many indications point to jealousy in the Corinthian church, but the Corinthians were not alone in this. Christians are always inclined to selfishness and self-centeredness. This wrong spirit finds its antidote in 1 Corinthians 13, where among the other perfections of love is recorded, "Love ... is not jealous" 13:4).

12,17-No part equal to the whole. Turning to a new aspect of the same argument, verse 17 shows that no organism can survive where only one member is involved, no matter how prominent that member. In function, the eye is superior to the organ of hearing. Yet, the normal body cannot dispense with its hearing faculty. Similarly, the organ of hearing is superior to the organ of smelling in function and appearance. Yet again, a body that has no capacity for smelling is substantially limited.

No matter how exalted may be a Christian's abilities, he cannot function as a spiritual "loner." The gifted apostle Paul was dependent upon that lowly believer with the gift of helps (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28, for an inconspicuous person endowed with only a "minor" gift could perform feats that no other could. For this reason, no child of God should underestimate his own importance as a member of the body. He need not covet the prestige of another; in God's sight his operation is just as significant. In fact, if it were left only to the more prominent members, there would be no more body, for all parts are essential.

12:18-Divine origin of the body. To summarize the body's present status and show reason for differences between members, verse 18 turns to Him who created the body. God has seen fit to create a unit that does not follow the lines of uniformity. He did not pour the members into one monotonous mold but, in accord with His own purposes, made each member different from all the rest.

"Placed," in verse 18, significantly looks to the act of divine appointment, an appointment equally meaningful both to human and to spiritual bodies. Only because God has planned it can members of the body complement one another so well. The power of vision was not self-assumed by the eye any more than the power of hearing by the ear. That a wisdom lies behind the placement and ability of each member cannot be disputed. This in itself gives unparalleled dignity to every part of the body, no matter how much or how little recognition it may receive. For a member to feel otherwise smacks of selfishness and rebellion against the supreme will that has established conditions as they are. God has made it this way for His own purposes, and the clay dare not ask the potter, "Why did you make me like this?" (Rom. 9:20).

That the divine will covers every member is clarified in the words each one of them" ~v. 18~. A less-important one might readily concede that God's plan covers the more important, but in so doing he may not see how the plan can be applicable to himself. The Holy Spirit through Paul makes plain that none is excluded. "Each one" is where he is specifically because of God's placement.

Reiterating a truth already stated in verse 11, Paul in verse 18

varies his perspective and looks at the divine will from the Father's standpoint rather than from the Holy Spirit's (cf. v. 11). The will (Greek, *boulomai*, v. 11) of the Holy Spirit pictured earlier as a more passive intention is now the will Greek, *thelo*, v. 18) of God the Father pressing this underlying intention into action. The entire Trinity is involved in distributing and operating spiritual gifts, as verses 4-6 have already divulged.

The present discussion deals with the physical body, but along with this are occasional inklings of these principles at work in Christ's body. One such implication stems from emphasizing God's part in the body's creation. A Christian does not select his own spiritual gifts, which in turn determine his place in Christ's body. God's pleasure alone determines His gifts. Human inclinations have nothing to do with the choice, and for a man to question the wisdom of the arrangement amounts to questioning what God has willed to do. No provision exists for a Christian with "inferior" gifts to be discontent. Rather, it is his place to take the gifts he has and use them to maximum advantage for the benefit of the rest of the body.

12:19-No variety, no body. The thought returns in verse 19 to uniformity as opposed to variety. A condition where no variety exists would be preposterous. No one member can account for the variety of functions necessary for a whole body v. 17). *It is thus a foregone conclusion that no body can exist composed of only one member v. 19~.*

The essence of the argument lies in the absurdity of such a concept. A body with only one member would be no longer an admirable organism, but the lowest kind of animal, if even that.

Every Christian must firmly grasp this principle and keep his own place and service in cooperation with other Christians in proper perspective.

12:20-Multiplicity, but unity. As a summary of verse 19 in particular and the whole paragraph in general, verse 20 picks up the section's initial thought-diversity and plurality in a body v. 14. Variety is mandatory for any organic unit, and this is especially true of the human body and what it symbolizes.

People with widely varying capabilities compose the body of Christ. It is true that only a few have gifts that gain fame. Nevertheless, those in the background are necessary. Freedom to withdraw and form another body does not exist. There can be no plurality of bodies. The body is one and it exists only because of the many members that compose it.

## 2. NEEDINESS OF GREATER MEMBERS (12:21-24A)

21And 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."

22On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;

23and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness,

24whereas our seemly members have no need of it.

12:21-Dependence of the eye and head. Building upon the

oneness of the body that closes verse 20, verse 21 initiates a new application of the body figure, an extreme opposite to that just treated. Attention has been upon the danger of underestimating one's importance, but now Paul issues a word of caution to the one who overestimates his own importance. The one cautioned is the member who possesses the more conspicuous gifts and therefore enjoys greater prominence. One who is in the limelight for a time will develop, unless he is careful, a proneness to look down on abilities that do not earn as much human recognition. Verses 21-24a were written to counteract this tendency.

When the writer speaks of the eye and the head, he refers to members that are superior to the hand and the foot. The eye's function in the body is more important, and it therefore occupies a more noble position than the hand. Likewise, the head performs the combined functions of eyes, ears, nose, and throat, and because of its complex responsibilities occupies a more exalted place than the foot ever could.

Yet, what would the eye be without the hand? It would be only a small fraction of what it is when the hand is active. Or what would the head be without the foot? It would have no means for propelling itself to a desired destination. The eye and head could make such statements as those denied in verse 21, but they could not function in the manner supposed without infinite cost to themselves and to the body as a whole.

The head sometimes typifies Christ in Pauline writings *Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:17-18*. Here, however, Paul differs from what was to become his practice in the prison epistles. Thus, no



reference to Christ's headship over the body appears in this verse, as it is unthinkable that Paul would ever think of Christ the head ever dispensing with another member. The head is just another part of the illustration in this verse.

The service of Jesus Christ is never a solo performance. No place remains for individualism. No matter how great and impressive one's abilities may be, his duty is to cooperate with other Christians. The body is one, not many, and God's plan has never been for His own to act as separate entities.

12:22-Necessity of the weaker members. After stating interdependence in a negative way (v.21j, the focus moves to the positive side of the same principle (v. 22j. For the eye and head to make such arrogant claims as suggested is not representative of the true state of affairs (v. 21). But conversely, it is completely accurate to observe that the weaker members are absolute necessities (v. 22i).

The truth expressed in verse 22 goes even further than that in verse 21. The more humble ("weaker") parts of the body are just as indispensable to successful activity (v.21 as the rest (cf. "it is much truer," v. 22i. Despite their seemingly secondary part, their presence and functioning are mandatory if the body is to continue.

Identification of the "weaker" members is important in grasping the total picture taught by the human body analogy.' Since verse 22 is a contrast to verse 21 (cf. v. 22, "on the contrary"j, it is reasonable to see in verse 22 members that are weaker and even more secondary than the hands and feet (v.21j, or any others. Sensitive internal organs such as the

lungs and stomach are susceptible to injury, and their only protection is what the members surrounding them afford. These internal organs, completely hidden from view, says Paul, are vital in sustaining life. Their praises are unsung. Yet they must be present and operative or there is no body.

The Corinthians had a clear preference for the gift of tongues. It attracted attention and had an aura of mystery about it. They chose to capitalize on these external features, according to the teaching of chapter 14. Their failure to be considerate of those who did not possess such spectacular manifestations necessitated the strong words in this section. The Holy Spirit through Paul informed them decisively that tongues, or any other gifts of a similar sensational character, were unable to stand alone. Gifts with glamour were completely dependent on every other gift, even those completely unnoticed by men, if the body of Christ was to function effectively.

12:23-Special attention to less honored and unbecoming members. Verse 23 mentions two more types of unsung members, as the passage continues to argue that the eye and head cannot do without the rest of the body. Rather than counting these two as dispensable, the body demands special attention for them. Designated "less honorable" and "unseemly" in verse 23, they are to be distinguished from the internal organs depicted as "weaker" in verse 22.

The former of the two, the "less honorable," are parts of the body that are less attractive in appearance. These would include, among others, the trunk, hips, shoulders, arms, and legs. We intuitively put clothing on these to render the person

more pleasing in appearance. The less natural the appeal, the greater the instinct to put on some adornment.

The second category in verse 23 is not completely distinct from the first, as the "unseemly members" are also covered by clothing. Yet here more specifically are those that are covered for reasons of modesty. Whereas the "less honorable" members are only usually clothed, clothing always gives these "unseemly" members artificial attractiveness.

The course of action dictated for the body of Christ in these illustrations is self-evident. Since the habit with the physical body is to take the "behind-the-scenes" parts and devote special effort and attention to them, how much more should this be true in the spiritual body? It is a distorted sense of values when a Christian, well-known because of his well-received speaking gift, looks disparagingly at other Christians who possess no such gift. This is in direct contradiction to the principle of self-concern that characterizes any body. It is far more consistent with the principle of self-preservation that members possessing greater beauty and functional ability devote themselves tirelessly to the well-being of those not so well equipped. (See Appendix F for suggestions on practical implementation of this principle.)

12:24a-Natural beauty of honorable members. Paul closes out this theme with the first statement of verse 24: "Whereas [but is actually preferable to whereas to show a contrast indicated by the conjunction *de*] our seemly members have no need of it." The more attractive and functional parts of the body need no adornment. The total organism adjusts to the need of each member, and the self-sufficiency of these "seemly" parts means

they require no special attention. The eye and the head [v.21] have their own beauty. They do not need clothing to make them more attractive. The body's energy can best spend itself elsewhere, tending to areas where needs exist.

Prominent, gifted Christians should not draw attention to themselves. They already have all the attention they need. They should be looking instead to the less favored of their number, recognizing their own dependence upon them and their obligation to do for them what will enhance their growth and effectiveness.

### 3. PROVISION FOR MUTUAL CONCERN (12:24B-26)

24bBut God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,

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

26And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

12:24b-Divine equalization. The "but" in the middle of verse 24 begins not only a new sentence, but also a new paragraph, as the writer takes up another aspect of his discussion. The difference in outlook from the immediately preceding discussion is twofold: (1) Verses 21-24a are in the main descriptive of what the human body takes care of by instinct, but verses 24b-26 show what God has done in forming the body. (2) Verses 21-24a, as well as verses 14-20, have dealt

primarily with a functioning human organism, with only indirect allusions to the body of Christ. Beginning at verse 24b, however, the words have direct, if not exclusive, application to the spiritual organism rather than the physical counterpart to which it is analogous.

"But God" (v. 24), therefore, is indicative of a method of operation different from the system of mutual relations expressed in verses 21-24a. The focus of attention is now on God's part as He has put the body together rather than upon the concern of individual members for one another. It is not a mere natural force that has made the body what it is. God is ultimately responsible for the balance that exists between different members of the church.

The process represented by "has so composed" (v. 24) is quite descriptive. God is pictured as combining and adjusting separate members of the body into a composite unit in such a way that every part stands in equal dependence on the rest. The word for "composed" has been found elsewhere in ancient literature describing how an artist carefully mixes colors to produce the exact shade needed for his rendition. In a similar manner, God has arranged the body so that the uncomely parts are absolutely essential to the well-being of the rest. He has made it one harmonious, mutually dependent whole.

As a further definition of this tempering process, "giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked" is added at the end of verse 24.9 In forming the body of Christ, a process spoken of earlier as a baptism by one Spirit and a drinking of one Spirit (v. 13), God has utilized an equalizing process. In the case of members who lack esteem because of inferior ability, He

has made up the inferiority through the addition of "more abundant honor" (v. 24). This means that no one has a deficiency. What this person lacks in prominence because of the nature of his gifts is compensated for by way of a divinely given honor. The result, then, is an exact equality and a perfect balance among the members of Christ's body.

The Christian who is aware of his own deficiency and is prone to magnify his unimportance in his own mind can take great comfort in God's equalizing action. It means that neither he nor anyone else is called upon to take a "back seat" or be looked down upon. Equality of honor reigns within the body of Christ, no matter how great the gradation in functional abilities. It is reassuring to recall once again God's part in putting all on the same plane. Because of this, we have a basis for complete internal harmony.

12:25-Purpose of equalization. God's intention in bringing about this blend in the body is stated next v. 25. Negatively, His intention is to remove "schism" or "division" in the body; positively, it is to create mutual concern by and toward every single member.

Schism did exist among the Corinthians. Near the outset of his letter, Paul mentions a report that there were "quarrels" ("strifes," "wranglings," 1:11[ in the church. His plea has already been "that you all agree, and there be no divisions ["schisms," same word as in 12:25] among you" (1:10).

He wants them to be "made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" 1:10, on the basis that Christ has not been divided 1:13~. Further indications of dissension are seen in 3:3-

4 and 11:18. In the latter reference, "divisions" is again the same word as the word in 12:25. Alienation of feelings among Corinthian Christians was indeed unfortunate, and the Holy Spirit used this means to alleviate the problem by pointing out God's intention in so constituting the body of Christ.

It takes no astute observer to discern that the divisiveness besetting the Corinthians has continued to plague the Christian church down to the present. Division among Christians is not in accord with divine intentions. Jealousy and strife can never be attributed to God's will. To be sure, differences of opinion and judgment will arise. Even Paul himself was involved in disputes (Acts 15:36-41; Gal. 2:11-14). But these should never find their basis in selfconcern (1 Cor. 13:4-5 [.

When members "have the same care" v. 25), *they fulfill God's purpose. This is a condition of harmony, not schism. Terminology chosen by Paul in this last part of verse 25 is expressive of deep-seated feeling. This is not a superficial or casual concern, but a thoughtful or even anxious compassion for others. It shows no respect of persons. It has the same concern for every single one. The eye is not selfishly interested in its own welfare, nor does it show partiality toward a fellow prominent member such as the head; its care for the less-honorable foot is just as great because of the foot's special nobility, its additional honor bestowed by God v. 24).*

When Christians allow God's purpose to be fulfilled in their lives, their community can be characterized only by peace, harmony, and cooperation. This is a condition of loving one another as Christ loved His church and is thus in compliance

with the command of Christ (John 13:34; 15:12, 17; 1 John 2:8-10; 3:23; 2 John 5). It is this theme of love that the apostle plans to develop shortly (1 Cor. 12:31b-13:13).

12:26-Results of mutual concern. As a follow-up to the purposed mutual concern of verse 25, verse 26 describes the typical outcome of such a relationship. The resulting intimacy will bring about a mutual suffering experience in all whenever just one member of the body, no matter who he is or what his position, suffers some kind of adversity. It is inconceivable for one member to be in pain and the rest not to notice. One member in adversity involves all in the adversity.

On the other side, when one member is recognized because of his usefulness or attractiveness, a common joy pervades the whole body. Unless an abnormality exists, it is unheard of for one member to begrudge the success of another. Such an analogy shows how ridiculous rivalry within the body of Christ is.

This, then, is the essence of the unity that characterizes Christ's body (12:12-13). The interrelationships of this body are so binding that believers have no alternative but to live together in harmony (12:14-26). To do otherwise is to run counter to the plan and activity of the one who has established the body. To operate in accord with these relationships, however, is to comply with the new commandment delivered by Him who is the life principle of the body (cf. John 13:34; 1 Cor. 12:12).

C. UTILIZATION FOR UNIFIED OUTPUT (12:27-31A)