

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)

27Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

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

29All 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?

30All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

31aBut earnestly desire the greater gifts.

12:27-Direct application of body analogy. Verse 27 provides a fitting conclusion to verses 14-26, but it is also a transition and introduction to the next paragraph, verses 28-31a. Besides the importance of body relationships just discussed, the readers need to see various gifts in their proper perspective so they may utilize them to maximum advantage within the body. Only with such knowledge are believers in a position to "earnestly desire the greater gifts" (v.j.31

The body analogy has been carried out thus far without specific statement of the readers' involvement in it. Their part was alluded to in verse 13, where the analogy was first introduced, but now the apostle turns to them directly and says, "You are Christ's body" v. 27). *In so doing, he sets squarely upon their shoulders the responsibility for*

*implementing the lessons that have been taught. Included in these are the danger of underestimating one's contribution Jvv. 14-2% the danger of overestimating one's contribution vv. 21-24a~, and the needed compassion of every member toward every other Jvv. 24b-26~. The Corinthians had great need of these lessons. Only by understanding them could a smooth operation of their church come about. This same requirement continues wherever people associate in the name of Christ.*

For Paul to use "are" rather than "ought to be" when addressing a group so torn by internal strife is a source of amazement. This church was anything but a smoothly functioning assembly. Jealousy and bitterness were the rule rather than the exception. Yet the Holy Spirit states, "You are Christ's body," and His statement is always accurate. This is a subtle reminder that all who are in Christ enjoy an exalted position in God's sight, no matter how unfortunate their behavior may be at times. This is not an encouragement to relax all ethical restraints, but a reminder of the magnitude of God's grace. Those who so obviously were in violation of God's principles of conduct were addressed individually as "saints" (1 Cor. 1:2~ and collectively as "Christ's body" (1 Cor. 12:27. The unspoken plea to them or anyone whose life is marred by such inconsistency is, "Become in your daily behavior what you have already become in God's sight" (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7, "Clean out the old leaven ... as you are in fact unleavened").

Paul labels the Corinthians as "Christ's body," but clarification is necessary to discern the sense in which this was true. As the Greek construction shows, he does not mean that the church in Corinth was the whole body of Christ. Nor does

he mean that they were one of many bodies of Christ. Rather, the Corinthian church was a miniature representation of the universal church.<sup>1°</sup> He informs them that they, as a local group, possess the quality of the whole and should function in this light. Every local church has this obligation. Each group of believers has within itself sufficient gifts to operate in its own locality, and in that way it presents an image of the total body which, of course, is never assembled together at any one time or place. The whole body of Christ includes all believers in Christ throughout the world and from every generation of the Christian era. Those who are Christ's belong to this body because the body is Christ's. Yet, in a deeper sense, the body is not just Christ's; it is Christ v. 12. He is the life principle that permeates the whole.

Another side of the picture is found in the phrase "individually members of it" v. 27). *While Christians are collectively one body, at the same time they individually constitute separate parts of that body. No one member can look upon himself as more than a small part. He is not the whole body. Yet, each one has a definite part in the life of the whole. Each has an assigned position and responsibility that differs from every other part. These several parts are now to be discussed vv. 28-31a).* A strategy that yields maximum output from the various members has been devised. That is why each one must have a proper appreciation for his own duty.

12:28-Divine appointment according to rank. In expanding upon the "individually members of it" of verse 27, Paul shows in verse 28 how the common life of the church is like the common life of the human body. One demonstrates its presence by a diversity of gifts, while the other does so by differing

tasks performed by differing human organisms. The scope of verse 28 extends beyond the local representative body in Corinth to include believers wherever they were located. This broadened sense of "church" is necessary since "apostles" are included in the list. A plurality of apostles was not provided for each church, nor did every church have the privilege of even one visit by an apostle.

Echoing a 'note that has already sounded with great force vv. 11, 18), Paul reiterates that placement in the body of Christ (the distribution of spiritual gifts) is the result of direct divine action. "Has appointed" in verse 28 represents *etheto*, which is the exact word translated by the "has placed" in verse 18. In the earlier verse, the more direct reference was to God's placement of members in the human body, but now it is to the spiritual counterpart. He has also placed gifted men and their functions in the body of Christ, His church. This He has done for His own purposes. Human choice to be an apostle, prophet, teacher, or possessor of any other gift is not a criterion. Placement is solely the outcome of His good pleasure cf. "just as He wills," v. 11, and "just as He desired," v. 18).

In order to identify the gifts that would yield greater profit, Paul enumerates in verse 28 a sequence of gifts arranged in an order of descending value. That is the significance of "first ... second ... third ... then ... then." The order of listing is parallel to that in Ephesians 4:11, where gifts with higher value are also placed higher in the list.

A first reaction to ranking gifted persons and their gifts may

be that of surprise, since the action comes so close on the heels of an emphasis given to equality among the members (12:24b-26). Careful consideration reveals, however, that Paul does not deny this equality at verse 28, but instead simply shifts his attention from mutual concern among various members to the profit derived from them. A local assembly does well to emphasize those gifts that produce edification rather than those that result in little or no benefit. Such a strategy does not exclude the necessary mutual compassion so strongly enjoined in verses 24b-26.

Several words of clarification are in order regarding the way Paul reflects rank in verse 28:

1. With the first three gifts, he is very specific about their standing in relation to the other five, as well as to one another. Apostles have top priority, followed by prophets, who are in turn followed by teachers.

2. With the fourth and fifth gifts, and even more so with the last three, the ranking is more general. The words "then ... then" represent a double occurrence of *epeita*, a Greek conjunction indicating sequence. It is unquestionable that the last five gifts in the list are subordinate to the first three, but it was not feasible for Paul to continue his series with "fourth," "fifth," and so on, as he did not intend to make this an exhaustive list of gifts. Obvious omissions from Paul's other lists of gifts occur ~cf. Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10; Eph. 4:11). Nevertheless, it is doubtless that rank is still in view, though in a lesser way, in this last part of the list. The expression "the greater gifts" in verse 31 would be less meaningful if it were otherwise.

3. The positioning of tongues last in the list doubtless carries connotations of rank also. Corinth was a church that overvalued the gift, and a major purpose of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is to counteract their wrong sense of values. Tongues and their interpretation come last in the list of verses 8-10, just as they do in the questions of verses 29-30 (see also 14:26. An important lesson of 1 Corinthians 14 is the uselessness of tongues without interpretation. Whereas the Corinthians were coveting earnestly the gift of tongues, their zeal should have been for gifts in the upper echelons of importance.

The list of eight gifted men and gifts found in verse 28 names four not noticed in the list of verses 8-10 apostles, teachers, helps, and administrations and one that is cast in a role slightly different from the previous list (prophets; cf. v. 10). This second list includes the following gifts.

"Apostles." Apostles is the title given to a group of men who lived at a particular stage of history. What might be called "natural prerequisites" for holding this office included personal contact with the Lord Jesus while He was on earth, followed by the experience of seeing Him alive after His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1-2~. In addition, it was required that an apostle have a direct appointment from the Lord Jesus to this office (Luke 6:13; Rom. 1:1). When an individual had all these, he also had the spiritual gift of apostleship.

Most likely the exact number of apostles was undefined. Had there been a specific number of which the church was aware, "false apostles" who could pass themselves off with any degree of credibility could never have arisen *cf. 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2*). *Of course, there were the twelve who were apostles*

*in a special sense (Luke 6:14-16; with Matthias substituted for Judas Iscariot after the Ascension, Acts 1:26. Two others bearing the title were Barnabas and James, the Lord's brother 1 Cor. 9:5-6; 15:7; Gal. 1:19). Lesser-known individuals such as Adronicus, Junius, and still others who are not named in the New Testament possibly possessed the gift (Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 15:5-7). The last person to be appointed to the apostolic office was Paul, whose induction came about under highly unusual circumstances 1 Cor. 15:8-9.*

The reason for the absence of apostles from the body of Christ subsequent to Paul is obvious: the various kinds of personal contact with the incarnate Lord Jesus required for this office restrict the time for its functioning. Eyewitnesses to Jesus Christ's personal life had all but ceased to exist by A.D. 100. The apostle John, one of the twelve, died at about this time, and so far as history records, he was the last living witness of Christ's resurrection.

Leadership in the founding and early growth of the Christian church belonged to apostles. For this purpose they were granted special authority as Christ's personal representatives. This meant that when speaking or writing in certain capacities, they were mouthpieces of the Lord Himself. Their jurisdiction pertained to the church as a whole, not just to one local congregation. They were particularly instrumental in expanding frontiers of the gospel, and thus their connection with one particular locality was never more than temporary.

A person with the gift of apostleship possessed many and perhaps most of the other spiritual gifts. Sign gifts of healing (Acts 5:12-16), miracles (Acts 13:8-11), prophecy (Acts 27:25),



and tongues (Acts 2:4; 1 Cor. 14:18) were given as badges of their apostleship (2 Cor. 12:12). Since they were the vehicles of revelation that eventually composed most of the New Testament books, they also must have been in possession of the gifts of wisdom and knowledge (1 Cor. 2:7, 10, 13; 2 Peter 3:15-16~. As spokesmen of this revelation and as prophets of future events, they likewise possessed the gift of prophecy (Rev. 1:1-3~. Instances of their special abilities in other areas of gift bestowal could likewise be adduced. One should remember, however, that apostles, though so richly endowed, were not always guarded from error in their speech and actions in the same way they were when they wrote books of the New Testament (cf. Gal. 2:11-14~.

In light of the wide range of abilities and responsibilities of an apostle, it is no surprise that Paul gives this office and the associated gift of prophecy top ranking from the standpoint of benefit derived.

"Prophets," Coming second in the list of verse 28, as it does in that of Ephesians 4:11, are those with the gift of prophecy. This is the same gift referred to in verse 10. One difference between the two citations is that in verse 10 the function is in view, while this instance names the person possessing the gift. Placement of the gift in the earlier list indicates another distinction between the two occurrences. Earlier it accompanies sign-oriented gifts, but here its location emphasizes the gift's revelatory and intellectual characteristics. In company with apostles, prophets (female [Acts 21:9-10] as well as male) were recipients of new revelations from God which, of course, appealed to the mind, and which they were responsible to

convey to the church (1 Cor. 14:30; Eph. 3:5). This ministry entailed an overlapping with the words of wisdom and knowledge (v. 8), as 1 Corinthians 13:2 implies. In fact, it is a point well taken that "apostles" and "prophets" in the present list replace "the word of wisdom" and "the word of knowledge" in the list of verses 8-10.

Though associated closely with apostles, all prophets were not apostles because not all had encountered personally the incarnate Christ and did not have a personal appointment by Christ. Consequently, a prophet was not authoritative in the same sense as were apostles. Their utterances were authoritative, but their authority was subject to that of the apostles 1 Cor. 14:37. Another difference between apostles and prophets lay in their geographical responsibilities. Though to some degree the prophet appears to have been, like the apostle, a minister to the church at large, on occasion, prophets did settle in one locality for ministry to a single local church Acts 13:1; 15:32.

Great likelihood exists that prophets were a part of the congregation in Corinth. The strong case for prophecy in chapter 14 would be irrelevant were this not true. It is significant that Paul, after commanding his readers to seek the best gifts (12:31), does not use apostleship in his comparison with tongues in chapter 14; having the top-priority gift in opposition to the bottom priority would have constituted an even stronger contrast than the one he uses there. This he could not do, however, because no apostles resided in Corinth. For this reason, he substituted the number-two gift, prophecy, for apostleship in the comparison.

Another important feature grows out of the association of prophets with apostles in Ephesians 2:19-22. They closely identify with apostles as either constituting the foundation of the building that is the church, or else participating in the laying of that foundation. As even the most casual observer recognizes, the foundation is the earliest part of a structure to be erected. So it is with the spiritual building that is the church. Certain gifts were necessary in the beginning stages that ceased to be needed later on. So it is that the New Testament assigns the apostles and prophets to the earliest period of church history.

Prophecy's predictive aspect has already been seen to be a temporary part of church history (see discussion of v. 10~, as has apostleship (see earlier discussion of v. X. The proper conclusion dictated by all these avenues of consideration is that prophecy as a total gift pertained to approximately the first seventy years of church history. This was the period when the Holy Spirit chose to use direct revelation to communicate previously unrevealed truths to the body of Christ. This was vital in the absence of a written New Testament. Upon completion of a written record of "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3~, further special revelations would have been superfluous and even derogatory in that they would have implied an inadequacy of the written Word.

Since the ministry of a prophet produced conviction (1 Cor. 14:24-25), edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3), some have sought to identify prophecy with activities in twentieth-century Christianity, such as preaching. Similarities between these two areas do exist, but modern preaching does

not qualify completely as the biblical gift of prophecy. Preaching combines the gifts of teaching (v. 28; Rom. 12:7; Eph. 4:11) and exhortation (Rom. 12:8). These two were only part of the functions of a prophet, however. (For further treatment of the gift of prophecy, see discussion at 12:10 and Appendixes A, C, and D at the rear of this volume; for an evaluation of a recent unusual view of the gift, see Appendix B).

"Teachers. " An office that has not appeared in a previous list is that of the teacher. Instruction was always uppermost in the mind of Paul (1 Cor. 14:19. He considered an intellectual grasp of the truths of the faith a vital prerequisite to acceptable Christian living and service. It is not surprising, therefore, to find him and the other apostles and prophets engaged in teaching almost constantly (Acts 18:11; 19:9-10; Col. 1:28; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). Yet, the whole responsibility of instructing the body of Christ did not fall upon apostles and prophets alone. Another group distinct from them also engaged in this activity. Because of the premium placed upon instruction, this band ranks third in fruitfulness among the spiritual gifts in the list, taking a place just behind apostles and prophets (see also Eph. 4:11).

Teaching does not include receiving special revelation from God, but it does entail special ability to grasp these revelations, whether oral (during the first century only) or written (permanently, in the Old and New Testaments), and to communicate them effectively to listeners. This is beyond what teaching on a natural plane can accomplish, because spiritual truth is interwoven into the content (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14-15). The teacher's ministry was more oriented to one locality than were those of apostles and prophets. A usual qualification for local

church leadership, in fact, was that overseers or elders be in possession of this gift (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2), though some elders appear not to have used the gift all the time (1 Tim. 5:17). A large part of Timothy's responsibility lay in the area of teaching (1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2). Of course, teaching was what the Lord Jesus Himself engaged in on so many occasions. It is natural that His church should carry on that emphasis. All other spiritual factors being what they should be, an instructed church is a stable and advancing church.

Without any factors to limit this gift to the revelatory period of early church history, it is proper to recognize teaching's continuing operation from the earliest moment, when the church began, down to and through the present, until finally the church goes to be with its Lord. The only variation has been that for a time teaching was based on oral transmissions from the apostles and prophets, along with the written Old Testament. After this its basis became entirely written, the books of the New Testament replacing the oral revelations.

Like many other gifts, teaching in the body of Christ is not limited to those possessing the gift. Every Christian is responsible for explaining the gospel to other people, and this is a form of teaching. A person without the gift who attempts to teach has not done wrong. In fact, some teaching must be done by the ungifted because of the unavailability of endowed teachers. Through identification and maximum utilization of those who have this as their special ability, however, the body of Christ will grow most effectively.

"Miracles." Continuing the list of verse 28 and following his mention of teachers, Paul shifts his attention from persons

possessing gifts to the gifts themselves. The first of these abstractions is "miracles," or "miraculous powers." This is the same gift discussed in connection with verse 10. Men specially endowed with this power in the early church consistently displayed it along with the preaching of the Word (1 Cor. 2:4; 4:20; 2 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 1:5). In each case, the miracle's effect on the hearers was to create an impression of God's direct involvement in what was being said. The same word is translated "miracles" in the oft-recurring scriptural combination, "signs and wonders and ... miracles" (Heb. 2:4; see also Acts 2:22; 8:13; Rom. 15:19; 2 Thess. 2:9).

"Gifts of Healings." Another gift found in the earlier list (v. 9~ comes next. The Greek usage behind the verse 28 expression is identical to that of the earlier one. As already seen, "gifts of healings" sustain a close relationship to gifts of faith and workings of miracles, as well as other sign-oriented gifts. For example, a healer was one kind of miracle worker. The goal of the gift, therefore, was verification.

"Helps." Making its first appearance in the chapter at verse 28 is the gift of "helps." Derived from a word that means "to take a burden on oneself in the place of another" (cf. "help," Acts 20:35; "helps," Rom. 8:26), this term specifies help of all kinds administered to those in need. The name Romans 12:7 uses for this same gift is "ministry," or "service." In a general sense, "ministries," or "services" (1 Cor. 12:5) is a designation applicable to all spiritual gifts. But in a more specialized way, it speaks of different kinds of physical help or relief given wherever there is need. The nature of the need in Acts 6:1-3 was an equitable arrangement for table serving at meals. Other kinds of needs met by such service include those of widows,

orphans, the sick, strangers, travelers, and any other case where some temporal or physical demand is present.

In contrast to the speaking gifts, which cater more to man's inner and spiritual needs, the gift of helps has more to do with outward areas. Thus "helps" are a special prerequisite for the "deacons" (a word that also means "servants") of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. People with this gift appear to have played a large part in meeting Paul's personal needs (e.g., Epaphroditus, Phil. 2:25-30; Onesiphorus, 2 Tim. 1:16-18; Onesimus, Philem. 10-13).

This activity is not such as attracts widespread attention. The Corinthians apparently were not inclined toward a gift like this because it did not cater to their ambition for public recognition, as did some of the other gifts of verses 8-10 and 29-30. Yet the Scripture placed the gift side-by-side with the more overt manifestations as a reminder that such a behind-the-scenes operation is just as indispensable as the rest. In Corinth, in fact, it was of even greater importance because of their tendency to neglect it. All too often the same lack has characterized other Christian assemblies.

The absence of "helps" posed a serious roadblock to spiritual effectiveness. It might even be said that the effectiveness of speaking and sign gifts was largely missing without an atmosphere created by such temporal ministries. In a real sense, "helps" is more directly tied to love, the vital counterpart of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31b-13:13). Only love can motivate performance of the less-noticed spiritual acts. Public recognition furnishes no incentive for these. Only an unselfish concern prompts a Christian to offer such help (cf. 1 Cor. 12:25-26). In fact, as a general rule, where love is not

present, neither will there be these more inconspicuous operations. But where love is a prime force, services rendered will be the rule rather than the exception.

As is true with most of the gifts, a general responsibility applicable to all Christians lies in the area of "helps." Every member of the body of Christ should demonstrate love-evidencing help. Those with the special gift are not to render the only help in the body. Yet the existence of a special function indicates that some are more apt in this kind of service. A person with the gift can meet a specific need more effectively. If those who are especially adept can be identified and freed to perform where their gift best suits the situation, the operation of Christ's body becomes a more efficient one.

"Administrations." Another gift named for the first time in 12:28 is "administrations," or "governments." This is the same gift referred to in Romans 12:8 by the expression "he who leads." This special ability includes administrative directorship of matters of external organization related to the body of Christ. The word for "administrations" in verse 28 draws upon the skill requisite in piloting a ship ~cf. "pilot," Acts 27:11; "ship-master," Rev. 18:17. The notion of shrewd and wise direction is entailed. This Greek word is also the source of the English word "cybernetics," the science relating to the nature of the brain and its governing of the body.

Some within the body of Christ have special abilities in spiritual administration. They know how to organize and marshal the functional resources of a local assembly to mount the strongest possible concerted effort. These are the ones who have charge of leadership responsibilities.



The gift of government is the special need of overseers or elders ~cf. 1 Tim. 5:17, where "rule" stands for the same word as "leads" in Rom. 12:8; also 1 Thess. 5:12, where "have charge over" is another way of translating this word for "rule"\$ It is only with this special kind of practical wisdom that Christians can provide adequate spiritual leadership cf. *Heb. 13:7, 17, 24*. The gift guarantees a Spirit-given insight into how the Lord's work can operate most efficiently.

Though this gift might frequently accompany a natural ability in administrative efficiency, it is something over and above merely natural insights. This capability is supernatural, just as are all the other gifts, for the Holy Spirit is the source. A non-Christian could never function successfully in such a capacity since he is not alert to spiritual dimensions. By the same token, not all Christians have been granted this practical alertness, and it is the local church's responsibility to seek out those who have this ability of leadership. Of course, all Christians are responsible to organize their own lives and whatever Christian work they oversee. But the larger task of rulership should belong to those who are especially so gifted.

A leaderless congregation has never been, and is not, God's concept of Christ's body. Paul's obsession with doing all things decently and in order bears the Holy Spirit's endorsement *1 Cor. 14:33, 40*, and such coordination is impossible without capable leaders to guide the ship. Those who can identify gifts of various members and establish an organization through which these gifts can best operate are needed in positions of control. Otherwise, duplication of effort and even conflict and confusion will come, even though well-meaning Christians attempt to use what they have to serve the Lord.

The presence of this gift in verse 28 suggests several comparisons. The authority derived from the gift is, of course, much smaller than that of apostles. By its nature, the gift will also bring some degree of recognition to the person using it. Yet it is not the same kind of admiration that accrues to the person with one of the speaking or sign gifts. In fact, much that goes into spiritual administration is thankless because it is completely unnoticed. It is thus a labor of love just as the gift of helps. To continue functioning as an organizer when no regular word of appreciation comes for excellence of service requires a high degree of unselfish devotion to the Lord and other members in the body. It means carrying on when hard feelings arise because of leadership decisions. To continue in the face of adverse circumstances requires a quality closely akin to, if not identical with, love. Paul will turn shortly to this subject (1 Cor. 12:31b-13:13).

"Diversities of Tongues." The expression "various kinds of tongues" in verse 28 is identical with the naming of the same gift in verse 10. As in verse 10, except for the interpretation of tongues, the gift again stands last. This can hardly be less than intentional in that the problem of gifts in Corinth centered in an overemphasis on this gift. As striking as it was, the Corinthians had serious need to understand the proper place and manner of exercising the gift (14:20-23~. For use within the body itself, this gift was furthest from any claim of being the "greater gift" (12:31).

12:29-30-Necessity of diversity. After arranging the eight gifts of verse 28 in order of fruitfulness, Paul proceeds to a series of rapid-fire questions that establish variety as indispensable. With hammerlike impact come seven questions, each

demanding a negative answer to show that no gift is possessed by all Christians." This emphasis serves to reassert what is implied by the "individually members of it" in verse 27 and what is stated more pointedly in illustrative fashion in verse 14: "The body is not one member, but many." Had God bestowed all the gifts on each part of the body, each one would be a complete body in himself. That would nullify dependence on others and destroy the one-body organism. The nature of the relationship, therefore, renders it imperative that no one function be the common property of all gifted persons.

In the main, the questions of verses 29-30 pertain to gifts listed in verse 28. They omit only helps and government and add only interpretation (cf. v. 10). A further distinction between the two sets is a recasting of the last five gifts of verse 28 from the abstract into a more concrete form, with persons rather than abilities in view. That is done by the use of "all" with each gift.

The question "All do not speak with tongues, do they?" along with its associated "All do not interpret, do they?" relegates the gift of tongues to the bottom position once again. That gift more than any other placed the speaker in the forefront and directed particular attention to him. In the estimation of these Corinthian Christians, it was of paramount importance. But the Spirit-inspired writer has a radically different sense of values.

12:31a-Best strategy for growth. The apostle says, "Earnestly desire the greater gifts" (12:31~). A course of action infinitely preferable to the assumption that everyone can have every gift is to see the higher value of some gifts and give more attention to the superior ones. The "greater gifts" are doubtless

identified by the ranking established in verse 28. At the top stands apostleship, a gift so rich in benefit to the church that no thinking person would dare compare any other with it.

The Christians at Corinth thus received very practical advice as to how they could improve their phase of the body's operation, that is, by cultivating gifts at the top of the list rather than those at the bottom. In fact, it required more than cultivation. "Earnestly desire" calls for burning zeal." If their interest in obtaining those higher services was intense enough, their practical effort to obtain them would follow as a natural consequence.

How to obtain these services is a matter that needs clarification. Since no person who had never seen the incarnate Lord Jesus could aspire to apostleship, it is clear that the command of verse 31a does not entail an individual's seeking apostleship for himself. Furthermore, the point has just been made (vv. 29-30) that no gift is available to all Christians. Such a course would also be contradictory to God's sovereign determination concerning who receives what gifts (12:11, 18). It is not for man to decide this.

So how can each be commanded to seek for himself a gift at the top of the list? Paul is encouraging a sense of values to determine the action of a whole assembly. This is a quest for men, such as those in verses 29-30-not for abstract gifts-to be added to the persons already present. These additions to a local congregation might come by conversion or through Christians coming from other localities. That system of priorities also means the Corinthians must stop placing such a

premium on those who spoke with tongues and begin valuing more highly the gifts at the upper end of the spectrum.

Much of value for today comes from the principle advocated here. Apostles and prophets, in the strictest sense of the terms, are no longer available to the church as vehicles of ministry to the body. But teachers are. The congregation that gives a prime place to its teachers is steering a wise course in utilizing its personnel to promote growth most effectively in the body. The gifts available to the church are all beneficial. They cannot help but be so because they are generated by the Holy Spirit. Yet their strategic use will yield the highest return. Such strategy lends itself to the body's maximum unified output.

## Chapter Four

# UNQUESTIONED SUPERIORITY OF SPIRITUAL FRUIT: LOVE

12:31b-13:13

A. PREEMINENCE OF LOVE (12:31B-13:3)

12:31b And I show you a still more excellent way.

13:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do