

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

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Introduction: In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul lays down the great principle which governs the life of every believer, **“DO IT ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.”** Whatever a Christian does must be done to bring God glory. In chapters 11:2 through 14:40, Paul’s main concern is public worship. Certainly, everything which is done in Christian worship should bring glory to God. In chapter 12, Paul begins a discussion of how spiritual gifts should be used in worship.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Verses 12-14

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

- Paul compares the Church, the body of Christ, to the human body. Both are one unit but both have many parts. The human body and the body of Christ, the Church, are single units and each has many parts.

Verses 15-20

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

- Every part of the human body is essential to the proper functioning of the human body. Each has its proper role to play in making the body work well.
- Each part has been placed in the body by God as He ordered them to be.

- The parts of the body are mutually dependent. If the whole body consisted of only one of its parts, the body would be dysfunctional. The body requires all of its parts to operate correctly.

Verses 21-27

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

- Each part of the body needs all of the other parts of the body. Each part has its proper place in the functioning of the body. No part has greater value than the others. All are needed.
- Therefore, the body must regard itself as one unit. The parts must function in unity with all the other parts. There should be no division among the parts of the body.
- When one part of the body is malfunctioning the whole unit suffers. When one part is honored, the whole unit responds with joy.

Verses 27-31a

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

- As it is with the human body, so it is with the Church.
- Each believer is a part of the body of Christ as the Holy Spirit ordained.
- In these verses, Paul again lists some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The list is not all-inclusive (see 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 for a similar list of Spiritual Gifts). In this list the gifts are numbered. The question is, are these numbers given to indicate the importance of the gift to the body or do they recognize the order in which the gifts were given to the body. Since Paul

has spent so much time arguing that no gift is more important than any other gift to the proper functioning of the body, it would seem unlikely that he would now argue that some gifts are more important than others. So, the numbers cannot be taken to imply that. The first three gifts in this list, apostles, prophets, and teachers are “foundational gifts.” They were necessary to the founding of the Church. So, they were given first, second, and third in the life of the Church. After that the other gifts followed. In the list, they are not numbered. They are preceded by the word “then.” They were given after the first three.

- Not everyone has all the gifts. Therefore, all the members of the Church are dependent on the others.
- And then comes the problem. Apparently, there was division among the Corinthians about which Spiritual Gifts were more valuable to the Church (see chapter 14). They apparently valued the more showable gifts, like speaking in tongues, more highly than the other gifts. They are allowing their human thinking about the value of Spiritual Gifts to disrupt the body of Christ rather than allow its proper functioning. In the next part of his discussion he will show them that they should value the gifts which unite them above those which divide them.

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