

# Discovering God's Wisdom

## STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

### Lesson 15 1 Corinthians 12:14-31

#### *Searching the Scriptures for hidden treasure*

*"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." Psalm 119:162*

The theme of *unity in diversity*, which began in verse 4, continues on in the verses we will study this week, with a small twist: verses 14-19 present *unity in diversity* while verses 20-26 reveal *diversity in unity*, and finally, verses 27-31 underline, once again, God's sovereignty in the appointment of the gifts.

#### **First Day: Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-19**

The *human* body is the illustration Paul uses to help us understand the *spiritual* body of Christ—the Church. It will be helpful for us to try to use our imaginations as we study these verses, to really gain an understanding of the body of Christ as a whole, and to see the significance that each of us has within that body.

#### Unity in diversity:

1. We know that we have just one *body*, but to make up our body there are many *members* or we could say *parts*. Make a list of some of the *parts* of which the human body is made up—be *diverse* in your list!
  - a. What are some of the *parts* that make up the body of Christ? (We studied some of these in our last lesson, but you can add to that list.)
  - b. Do you recognize what your part in this body is? Share with your group your understanding of the gift(s) you've been given and the avenue God has given you to use them.

Paul gives 3 pictures to help the Corinthians realize the value of their gifts, no matter what they are, especially for those who think their gifts might be insignificant. He uses a foot/hand scenario—the foot thinking it is not important because it isn't a hand; an ear/eye scenario—the ear thinking that it is of no value because it doesn't happen to be an ear; and then he gives us a rather funny image to consider, that of the whole body being an eye!

2. Consider the last scenario Paul uses—that of the whole body being an eye (v. 17): what would life be like for you if you could *see*, but not *hear*, *taste*, *feel*, or *smell*? What would be lost to you?
  
3. Now let’s apply the truths of verses 15-17 to the gifts of the Spirit:
  - a. What would happen to the body of Christ if there were prophets, pastors, and teachers, but no *administrators*? Consider this Bible study; would it be able to function properly with teachers only? What if there were no administrators; no leaders?
  
  - b. Consider your pastor—would he be able to function without those with the gifts of *helps*?
  
  - c. Acts 6:2-4 gives us a scriptural example of just this need—share from this passage the need and solution of the spiritual leaders of the day.

The Amplified Bible translates verse 15 as a question: *“If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, **would it be therefore not [a part] of the body?**”* The obvious answer is that of course it is still a part of the body—and a very needful one at that!

### *Making It Personal...*

4. From verse 18, how exactly did God place the members of the body of Christ?
  - a. Do you believe this for yourself? Are you thankful for your gift(s); are you thankful for the place God has given you in His body? Do you recognize that no matter what your gift is, it is important to the whole body of Christ? Use verses 15-17 to see the importance of not belittling yourself and your gift(s).

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today’s passage in a couple of sentences.

### *Pearl of Great Price*

**“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”**  
 Ephesians 4:7 This is your memory verse—begin memorizing it today!

**Second Day: Read 1 Corinthians 12:20-26**

In verses 15-17, Paul addressed one concern, an individual member of the body of Christ considering themselves unimportant to the rest of the body because they perceive their gift to be of lesser value: “*Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body*” (verse 15). In today’s passage, he speaks to the member who considers himself superior. This was the greater problem in Corinth, and this is the problem that created Paul’s first scenario. How generous of Paul to first address himself to those who were intimidated by the Corinthians who thought their gifts made them superior.

Diversity in unity:

1. Can any one member of the body of Christ truthfully say they don’t need another?  
v. 21

Consider having an eye but no hands. You could see where you were going, but you couldn’t do much when you got there! And the head is pretty important, but if it had no feet, it could do nothing but think!

- a. What does this tell you about the body of Christ?
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2. Speaking of the *human* body, what does Paul tell us about:
    - *The weaker parts* (v. 22)?
    - *The less honorable parts* (v. 23)?
    - *The unpresentable parts* (v. 23)?
    - Apply one of these analogies to the body of Christ.
  3. How has God composed the body, according to verse 24?
    - a. Why has He done it this way? v. 25
    - b. Verse 25 is truly the heart of what Paul is trying to communicate to the Corinthians—and to us! What is his exhortation here?

*Making It Personal...*

Paul says that when one part of the body suffers, all the parts of the body suffer with it, and when one part of the body is honored, all the parts of the body rejoice. To help us get the picture Paul is painting here, we might consider what happens when we slam our finger in the door—*ouch*—everything hurts! Or when our mouth receives a bite of our favorite ice cream—*yum*—the tongue, the taste buds, the throat, and the tummy all get blessed! That is how it is with the human body. Is that how it is in the body of Christ?

4. Romans 12:15 tells us to, “*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*” How do you react when a brother or sister in the Lord is suffering? Do you suffer with them? Is there any improvement needed in this area? Is there someone you know who is suffering right now with whom you might have empathy?
  - a. Sometimes a harder thing is to *rejoice with those who rejoice*. Are you able to rejoice with your brothers and sisters in the Lord when they are celebrating? Is there any improvement needed in this area? Is there someone you know who has just gotten a special blessing—maybe a new home, a new ministry opportunity, a job promotion, etc., with whom you might rejoice?

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today’s passage in a couple of sentences.

### **Third Day: Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-31**

Paul says that we are the body of Christ (amazing!), and members individually. In other words, just as our bodies have body parts, we make up those body parts of Christ here on earth! We all have our own individual function to fulfill the work of Christ in this world. We are His arms, legs, feet, and hands! What an honor He has given us! We must be careful to be grateful for the gifts He has sovereignly chosen to bestow upon us.

### *God’s sovereignty in the appointment of gifts:*

1. Name the appointments/gifts Paul lists in these verses:

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2. What is the first appointment Paul mentions?

- a. Share what you know about this gift. (We have looked at this gift previously in our studies this year.)

- b. Do you think there is any significance in the fact that Paul began his list with apostle?
3. What is the last gift Paul mentions?
  - a. What do you know about this gift? (You may see Acts 2 for help.)
  - b. Can you think of any significance in the fact that Paul named this gift last?
4. What is Paul trying to communicate in verses 29-30?
  - a. There is a teaching in our day that says that the gift of tongues always accompanies the baptism of the Holy Spirit (as it did at Pentecost). Or, in other words, if you do not have the gift of tongues, then you aren't baptized in the Holy Spirit. According to this passage, can this teaching be true? What is true?
5. Read Ephesians 4:11. Notice the same theme running through Paul's list of gifts in this verse. How many does he say were apostles, prophets, and evangelists?
  - a. Ephesians 4:12 tells us why these offices were given. Why was that?

### *Making It Personal...*

In Ephesians 4, when Paul lists some of the gifts Jesus Christ gave the Church, he says it this way: *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”* He doesn't say that he gave some men *these gifts*, but that He gave *them—the gifted men*, to the church. Do you realize that *you*, along with the gifts you've been given, are a gift to the Church? What difference might this truth make in your obedience to God's call?

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Tie this week's memory verse (Ephesians 4:7) with the heart of what Paul is saying in this chapter as a whole.

**Fourth Day:**

**Deeper Discoveries**

*This portion of the lesson will take a closer look at some of the words in the chapter. You will need to have your tools—or resources at hand: more than one Bible translation, a dictionary or Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, and encyclopedia. (If you don't have all of these, simply use what you do have to enrich your learning.)*

Using the tools you have at hand, do some digging into the following terms. Start with your dictionary (or Bible dictionary), and then look up the references to add to your understanding. If you have additional resources, you may want to keep digging (making notes in the margins). After you've completed the investigative process, write a definition in your own words. Your investigation in today's lesson will lay the groundwork for tomorrow's study, so be as thorough as you can in your research.

**Earnestly desire** (12:31) *“But earnestly desire the best gifts.”*

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
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What does the Bible have to say? 1 Corinthians 14:12; 2 Corinthians 7:11  
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❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Best gifts** (12:31) *“But earnestly desire the best gifts.”*

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
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What does the Bible have to say? 1 Corinthians 13:13; 14:1, 3, 12; 1 Timothy 6:18-19  
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❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
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***Fifth Day:***

***Heartsearch***

*Are you walking worthy of your high calling? Are you applying the wisdom of God to your daily life? Get ready for some self-discovery! This portion of the lesson will give you the opportunity to examine your heart, express your mind, and experience your lesson, by applying what you are learning to everyday circumstances.*

**Adventures In Serving**

By far, one of the most exciting and enjoyable aspects of the Christian life is discovering and developing our spiritual gifts. We learned from our last lesson that we are to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us, using our Master's gifts according to our Master's will. Not knowing what gifts we have does not necessarily keep us from using them. In fact, most Christians are already using their spiritual gifts to one degree or another, whether or not they have identified them; but having a better understanding of the gifts will enable us to use them more effectively in serving others.

*“Earnestly desire and zealously cultivate the greatest and best—the higher gifts and the choicest graces.” (1 Corinthians 12:31 AMP)*

The Corinthian believers were preoccupied with who was more spiritual, more liberated, more important, or more gifted. The result was that they were desiring what they believed to be the “best” spiritual gift—*speaking in tongues*. Their pursuit of “the best” was not in question, but rather their erroneous assessment of the value of speaking in tongues above the other gifts. Paul's instruction was not to seek a gift that is of personal value, but rather to seek the ones which build up the whole church (1 Corinthians 14:12). Paul's intention was that they would use their gifts in a “more excellent way”—the way of love.

1. Are you in pursuit of the best spiritual gifts, or are you wandering—and wondering how to get from where you are to where you should be? Please share your thoughts.

Paul's exhortation to his son in the faith, Timothy, contains words for us to live by: “...*I would remind you to stir up—rekindle the embers of, fan the flame of, and keep burning—the gracious gift of God—the inner fire that is in you...*” (2 Timothy 1:6 AMP)

*Selah* (pause and think this over for a moment...)

2. According to the above verse, *whose* responsibility is it to develop and maintain your spiritual gifts?
  - a. Does this understanding make any difference in your perspective? How?

3. What are you currently doing to discover and/or develop your spiritual gifts? Be specific in your answer.

Spiritual gifts are sovereignly bestowed; but they are individually discovered and developed by each member in the body of Christ. It is up to us to maintain them at their highest level of usefulness.

If you are still unsure about the wealth within you, take some time with the points below. Putting them into practice will give you useful tools to enhance your own adventure in serving.

- *Pray*: make the discovery and development of your spiritual gift(s) the object of daily, persistent prayer.
- *Study Scripture*: examine for yourself what God’s Word has to say regarding spiritual gifts. Keep a journal or notebook on what you learn.
- *Meditate*: take time to reflect on what you enjoy doing, what you would like to see yourself doing, and what you have done well in the past.
- *Seek feedback from others*: seldom do we see ourselves as others see us.
- *Explore possibilities*: step out and use your gift—try it on for size and see how it fits. If it’s uncomfortable at first, give it some time. If God gives you a gift, you will *grow into* it until it fits perfectly!
- *Be Spirit-led in your service*: you don’t want to be somewhere God has not called you—the location of service is *His choice*—not yours!

***Heartsearch:*** Briefly look back over your *entire lesson* before filling in the following.

❖ *Examine your heart*

What has God put His finger on through your study and brought to light in a new way? (What did you learn about yourself?)

❖ *Express your mind*

What change has this week’s study brought about in your thought process? What difference will this make in how you view your current circumstances?

❖ *Experience your lesson*

What nugget of wisdom from your lesson do you plan to apply to your life?



*Sixth Day:*

## ***Laying Up Treasure***

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.  
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21*

The highest calling of the believer, and the most important way to lay up treasure in heaven, is through intercessory prayer. You will want to give thoughtful consideration to what you record on this page, as it will be the basis for your prayer during group time. The format for this day of your lesson is based upon the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to these four, there is space provided for you to keep track of answered prayers, people and things you want to pray for in the coming week, and also a place to write out this week’s Scripture verse from memory.

Using the lesson as your focal point, write out your prayer for each of the following:

*I praise God for* (an aspect of His marvelous character) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I confess to God that I* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I thank God for* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I am asking God* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Praise for answered prayer:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*People/things I want to pray for this coming week:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Pearl of Great Price:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Notes*