

The Glorious Body of Christ: The New Way to Think

1 Corinthians 12:14-31

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

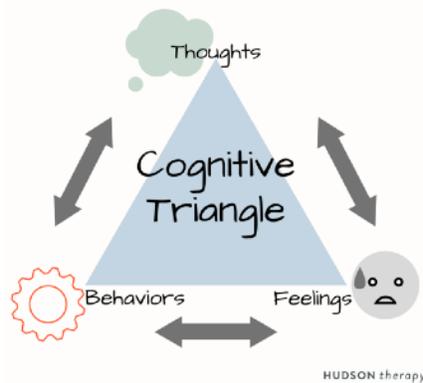
27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Introduction:

Many of you are familiar with the cognitive triangle. It's a diagram developed in the 60s to help cognitive behavioral psychologist to explain how thoughts, feelings and behaviors relate to one another. We as Christians would disagree with 99% of what secular psychologist use this tool for but it can be helpful in

explaining what Paul is trying to accomplish in this particular section of scripture.



To put it simply, what we think affects how we feel and ultimately how we behave. Example, if we were told that a particular person we've never met is a violent criminal, it would most certainly create some very negative feelings in us toward that individual. If we ever had an opportunity to meet them face-to-face our feelings about them would absolutely affect the way we behave toward them. That's human nature. But, what if we found out we were lied to and this person was anything but a violent criminal? In an instance our thoughts would change our feelings and thus alter the way we would behave toward this person. The way we think affects the way we feel and behave.

What does that have to do with today's text? The thinking of the Corinthian church was more influenced by the secular society around them than by the truth of God. They were thinking more like the world than they like God. Their worldly thinking has influenced their perceptions and feelings toward one another. The primary issue in the Corinthian church was divisions. They were a divided church because they brought the classifications and divisions from the Corinthian culture into the church with them. They were divided by race, social status, economics, intellect, talents and abilities, cultures, etc... All of these divisions affected their attempts to utilize the spiritual gifts that God had given them. Their divisions were ruining the life of the church and ultimately the mission. Paul had already told us in chapter 1:7 that they were not lacking in any gift, but they were lacking in their fundamental knowledge of what the Spiritual Gifts were, how to use them properly, and why they were given to them in the first place.

In chapter 12 Paul is trying to correct their thinking so that they can correct the way they feel about each other and ultimately change the way they are behaving toward each other. This is a must if they are going to be a God glorifying,

mission accomplishing, Christ-honoring church body. As it is for every local church body, including Heritage Baptist.

I'm going to briefly give a big picture look at our text today and then take you to Romans chapter 12 and blow your mind.

The New way to think (God's Way)

Vs. 12-14 The Human Body Metaphor - we are one unified body made up of many diverse members. (See last week's sermon)

Vs. 13 there is no Jew or Greek or slave or free in this body. All societal classifications are null and void in the body of Christ.

Vs. 18, 24, 28 God is the one who has chosen each member of the body and placed them exactly where he wanted them in the body and has gifted them through his Holy Spirit to accomplish the works he appointed for them.

Vs. 14-17 no one can claim that they do not belong to the body just because they feel they do not measure up with the showy gifts

Vs. 21-24 No one in the body has a right to look down upon another member as though they are less significant than themselves.

Vs. All of this equality is for the sake of love. A unified love that reflects the trinity

Vs. 27-31a Be conformed to God's way of thinking and you will then understand spiritual gifts and use them properly.

Vs.31b All of this is pointing to love. God is love. Love is God's way of thinking and therefore, behaving.

Now I'm going to blow your mind. First Corinthians chapter 12 is essentially the exact same as Romans chapter 12. I'm going to run through this quickly, but I would encourage you this afternoon when you go home to go back through these two chapters and look at their similarities.

Romans 12

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers,[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Use your Spiritual Gifts

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Get your thinking right (God's way of thinking) so that you can behave the right way. In a way that honors God, benefits the body, and accomplishes God's purposes.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober

judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

4 For as in one body we have many members,[e] and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Not everyone is the same but everyone has come to the body the same way, by the grace of God. We are unified as one yet very diverse in function and responsibilities. Don't be haughty in your thinking, you are no better than anyone else in the body.

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads,[f] with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. The Spirit Gifts each member as he wills to accomplish different things. So, wholeheartedly embrace your gift.

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. All of this is to lead you to the more excellent way of LOVE.

11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. All of this is for the common good of the body.

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it[i] to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Get your thinking right (God's way of thinking) so that you can behave the right way. In a way that honors God and accomplishes his purposes.

Let's dive into our text today and see if the Lord will use this time to conform our thinking to his thinking that we may grow in our love and affection for one

another and learn to treat one other in a way that honors God and accomplishes his purposes for the church.

1. The New Way to Think (15-24)

a. A look from the bottom up (15-20)

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts,[e] yet one body.

There was such a culture that has been developed in the Corinthian church of class distinctions that the people on the bottom of the food chain felt that their presence and contributions to the church were useless. Paul is discussing people divided over giftedness. We will see in verses 21 through 24 why they felt that way.

We learned last week that the body is one body but made of many diverse members. Those that would be deemed less than useful in society are now equally useful in the body of Christ. **For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Is. 55:8-9).**

b. A look from the top down (21-24)

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,

Here we see the people at the top of the food chain looking down upon the lowly and treating them like they were useless to the church. Here we see judgments and divisions based not on giftedness, but on socio-economic status. It is so natural for us to classify people, but when it comes to the body of Christ God classifies everyone as indispensable.

This section is a little bit difficult to interpret at first. It seems as though he is commending the church for doing the right thing. It looks as though they are bestowing greater honor on the less honorable parts and treating the unpresentable parts with greater modesty. That certainly seems like a commendation until he says, "but God". "But God" means that in contrast to what they're thinking and doing, this is what God does. So, clearly they are thinking and acting incorrect and God is correct. I believe it was in their attempt to bestow greater honor on certain parts and show greater modesty to others that they were really just creating more division. I said last week that Paul is adjusting their thinking because they're thinking was not the thinking of the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians were very worldly and very fleshly. Paul is telling them to wrap their minds around the fact that God bestows equal honor on every part of the body. That would've been a very difficult pill for the Corinthians to swallow.

The commentary on that is Matthew 20:1-16. Laborers in the Vineyard.

Col. 1:13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. We are now citizens of a new kingdom and this kingdom has principles that are unmatched in the domain of darkness where we came from. We must be transformed by the renewing of our minds to properly live as citizens in this new kingdom. Must learn to think like God. That's what it means to be conformed to the image of Christ.

2. The Purpose (25-26)

Why is the transformation of our mind so important to God? Because our thinking affects our behavior.

25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. Jesus loves everyone of his sheep, from the first to the last, exactly the same. He equally died for each one

the exact same death. He has given his Spirit to dwell equally in each one of them. He understood that every human is equally lost and depraved. There is only one love that can save. That same love is the only love that can sanctify and sustain every believer. There are no second rate Christians to Jesus. Therefore, there are no second rate members of the body.

3. Back to Spiritual Gifts (27-31)

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

Vs 27 - Every local church is the church and is a part of the church universal.

Vs 28 - Is this a random list, a sequential list, or a hierarchy? How we answer that question determines how we interpret verse 31. We can know for certain that according to the Scriptures it is a sequential list. Paul uses the words first, second, third, and then. He is talking specifically about the spiritual gifts given for the formation and continuation of the new covenant Church. According to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20 the household of God was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the corner stone.

Apostles - much like traveling evangelist and church planters. They took the gospel to places it has not been and where there is not an established church. They would preach the gospel, often times met with intense disbelief and opposition. The Lord provided spiritual gifts to remedy that as well see in a moment

Prophets - these are new covenant profits as opposed to Old Testament profits. The profits would receive direct revelation from God through the spirit and teach and preach that revelation to the gathered believers. This was before they had Bibles. Sometimes their messages were predictive and sometimes just simply proclamations of truth from God.

Teachers - these were people gifted to expound on and apply the revelation that came through the profits to the people. Much like what I am called to do this morning.

Notice how the list changes from offices to particular spiritual gifts. I don't want to read too far into it but I believe it is because the office gifts were normally long-term and in particular people for longer periods. Whereas, the rest of this list are gifts that I believe would come and go as needed and would be performed through different individuals at different times.

Miracles - as mentioned before the gospel was often met with disbelief and opposition. The Holy Spirit would gift particular people to perform miracles in order to verify the message. Miracles were performed to verify that the message was from God.

Healings - healings belong in the same category as miracles. However, I believe they were not only used to verify the truth of the Gospel when it is preached, but I believe healings were and are used throughout the church for the edification of the body of Christ.

Helping - here is where we begin to suppress the importance of each individual spiritual gift. Many times we would see helping as a very general and behind the scenes kind of gift. But, if we've learned anything that's not the way God would see it. The Greek word translated *help* is a *antilempsis*, and means to take the burden off of someone else and place it on oneself.

Administrating - this is really the gift of leadership. The Greek word, *kubernesis*, *literally* means "to steer or to pilot a ship". It refers to someone who is gifted by the Spirit to direct the Church toward its proper destination.

Various kinds of tongues - I'll admit I don't know everything there is to know about the subject of tongues but I do know for certain it was a gift given by the spirit to proclaim God's truth in other foreign languages. And it was only properly used when another person was given the gift of interpretation.

I would like to say a quick word about my understanding of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts cannot simply be talents and abilities. For one, they are manifestations of the spirit. We cannot think that every talent and ability a person possesses is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. There are many non-Christians who have incredible talents and abilities and we would never look at them and say it must be the Holy Spirit. So what makes an administrator who is a believer exercising the spiritual gift of administration different from a secular administrator who is phenomenal at their job? I'll attempt to give a quick definition to what distinguishes a spiritual gift from an every day ability or skills. The use of a spiritual gift, while appearing to be common in all of humanity, will be noticeably Spirit empowered and will result in the edification of other

members in the body of Christ. The very title of spiritual gift should immediately draw our attention to the spiritual nature of our work in the Church.

31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

This is the most difficult part of the entire text to interpret. I will pose to interpretations.

The first is that this is not properly translated in nearly every translation. That idea is based on the fact that Paul has encouraged the Corinthians to stop classifying the gifts according to some hierarchy and be content with the gifts that God gives you. He has explicitly said not to be seeking after other people's gifts out of jealousy or selfish ambition. If all of that is true why would he contradict himself by saying earnestly desire the higher gifts?

The explanation posed by John MacArthur is that this verse is mistranslated. The Greek word ZELOO, translated earnestly desire, does not specify whether it is indicative or imperative. Indicative meaning a statement of fact and imperative meaning a statement of command. English translations have obviously translated it as imperative. However, it is the contexts that should determine which way you choose to translate it. According to John MacArthur, the context would indicate it should be indicative. That would mean it should be translated, "***but you earnestly desire the higher gifts.***" In other words, you're doing it incorrectly. That does make good sense especially with the rest of the verse.

The second option would be that Paul is encouraging them to earnestly desire the higher gifts but to do it with the right thinking as we have discussed today. Earnestly desire the more prominent gifts but do so remembering God's way of thinking. All gifts are equally important and every member is indispensable. Conforming your thinking to God will help you in using the gifts properly but the more excellent way is to do everything out of love.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

CG Discussion Questions

1. The way we think affects how we feel and how we feel affects how we behave. Can you think of wrong thinking in the past that God has corrected in your mind and heart that has completely changed the way you behave?
2. In what ways do you struggle with bringing worldly socio-economic classifications into the church?
3. According to verse 26 what are some things we can focus on that will help us to see each other more as equals?
4. Do you struggle with feeling inferior or feeling superior when it comes to the use of spiritual gifts in the church?
5. How can feeling inferior when it comes to spiritual gifts affect your contribution to the church?
6. How can feeling superior when it comes to spiritual gifts affect your contribution to the church?
7. What makes a secular administrator different from a Christian administrator in the church who is exercising their spiritual gift of administration?
8. What result should we expect when the Holy Spirit is working through an individual in the church he has gifted?
9. What are your thoughts on how versed 31 should be interpreted?