BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON THIRTEEN

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1–31

Thomas Schreiner, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, comments on the Lordship of Christ and the diversity of gifts He has given:

1. The phrase *Now about* (*peri de*), which often introduces a new section in the letter (7:1, 25; 8:1; 16:1, 12), does so here. As noted earlier, scholars dispute whether Paul responds to a Corinthian letter or is simply introducing a new subject. I suspect we have a response to a letter, but the interpretation does not change in any case. Most translations render the phrase *about the gifts of the Spirit* (*ton pneumatikon*), though the term could refer to 'spiritual things' or 'spiritual people'. Still, a reference to spiritual gifts is most likely given the ensuing discussion, for Paul does not discuss spiritual things or people but spiritual gifts. The word 'spiritual' emphasizes that the gifts are from the Holy Spirit. Paul uses a formula (*I do not want you to be uninformed*) found elsewhere to indicate that he wants the Corinthians to be informed about spiritual gifts (Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 2 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 4:13; cf. Rom. 6:3; 7:1).

2. The readers are reminded of their pre-Christian lives, when they were *pagans* (*ethne*). The word may be translated as 'Gentiles' (KJV, NKJV), suggesting again that Gentile believers are no longer pagans but are part of the true Israel, the true people of God (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1; 10:1; Rom. 2:26–29; Gal. 6:16). In their pagan days they were driven by and *led astray* to *dumb idols*. Many interpreters understand the leading here to be some kind of ecstatic experience, but Paul nowhere uses this verb to convey ecstasy, and terms that would signal ecstasy are lacking. What is communicated is that unbelievers are under the control of idols and false gods. Descriptions of the futility and powerlessness of idols are typical in Jewish polemic. Idols 'have mouths, but cannot speak' (Ps. 115:5). Jeremiah 10:5 sums up the ineffectiveness of idols (cf. Ps. 135:16; Isa. 41:23–24; 44:9; 45:20; 46:7; Jer. 10:14; Hab. 2:18–19):

> Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field,
> their idols cannot speak;
> they must be carried
> because they cannot walk.
> Do not fear them;
> they can do no harm
> nor can they do any good.

Why does Paul makes this point here? It helps set up verse 3, demonstrating that spiritual experiences are not self-validating and self-authenticating. Pagans have spiritual experiences as well, but they are to be rejected since they are led by idols.

3. The close connection between verses 2 and 3 is supported by the word *Therefore* (*dio*). The introductory words *I want you to know* confirms the importance of what follows. Those who speak in the Spirit never say *Jesus be cursed*. Some interpreters have detected here a Pauline rebuke to what was actually happening in the Corinthian congregation, where some alleged that they were inspired by the Spirit yet cursed Jesus. Scholars paint many different scenarios, explaining how it was possible that Jesus was actually cursed by those who claimed to be believers in the Corinthian congregation. All these reconstructions in which Jesus was supposedly cursed by the Corinthians should be rejected. It is quite unlikely that Paul responds to what was happening in the congregation, for his response would almost certainly be more extensive and vehement if the Corinthians were actually cursing Jesus. The contrast between cursing Jesus and confessing him as Lord is introduced because Jesus' lordship is the criterion for spiritual experience (cf. Rom. 10:9). The truth of Jesus' lordship is foundational and pivotal for the entire discussion of spiritual gifts, for those who exult in their own gifts are subtly—or perhaps not so subtly—thinking that they are sovereign. As Hays says, '[T]hose who are inspired by the Holy Spirit will speak and act in ways that glorify the lordship of Jesus.' Confessing Jesus as Lord is not the product of human insight, nor does it derive from human will. On the contrary, it represents the activity of the Holy Spirit, who so works in human beings that

they recognize Jesus' lordship.

4–6. One of the striking features of verses 4–6 is their trinitarian cast, such that we see reference to the Spirit, to the Lord Jesus and to God the Father. The work of God among the Corinthians is a triune work and is not limited to one person of the Trinity. Paul emphasizes the unity of the body with the repetition of the word *same*. The variety of the gifts is evident from the word *diaireseis* in each of the verses. The term is often translated *different*, though it may simply mean 'allotments' or what is apportioned (BDAG). In verse 4 the various gifts are featured, and we encounter here the word for *gifts* (*charismata*). The term *charisma* is used often in this chapter for the gifts of the Spirit (12:9, 28, 30, 31), though we find the term elsewhere in Paul as well (Rom. 12:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; cf. 1 Pet. 4:10). Identifying the gifts as 'spiritual' and as 'gifts' are two complementary ways of describing God's work in the congregation. On the one hand, the manifestations are the work of the *Spirit* (cf. 12:7), and, on the other hand, they are gifts. They are freely granted to believers by the grace of God. In every case in verses 4–6 the description of the gifts is matched with a reference to God that accords with the point Paul makes. So, in verse 4, the gifts are ascribed to the Spirit, confirming that they are supernatural manifestations. If the different gifts emphasize diversity, *the same Spirit* underlines unity. The body is not divided since the gifts granted come from the same Spirit who dwells in each one.

In verse 5 the various gifts are now described in terms of *service* (*diakonion*) or 'ministries' (CSB). Here Paul calls attention to the truth that the gifts are given to serve and strengthen others. He anticipates the long discussion in chapter 14 where the purpose of the gifts is described as being the edification of others. Believers serve one another in a wonderful variety of ways with the gifts they have been given. All these ways of serving one another derive from *the same Lord*. Certainly the gifts are intended for service because believers, in using their gifts, do so under the lordship of Christ (cf. 12:3!). The service and ministry to one another is not self-generated but expresses submission and devotion to Jesus as Lord.

The allotted gifts are next described in terms of *kinds of working* (*energemata*) or 'activities'. Such activities are the work of God, and Paul uses a verbal form from the same root as the noun, affirming that *in everyone it is the same God at work* (*energon*). The work of human beings which is apparent in the gifts is ultimately a divine gift (Phil. 2:12–13). God energizes and activates the work of believers when they use their gifts.

7. The nature of spiritual gifts is elaborated further here. The passive verb *is given* (*didotai*) stresses that the gifts are gifts! They are granted by God himself and are not the product of the human will; thus the divine source of the gifts, elaborated on in verses 4–6, is reaffirmed. We also see that every believer without exception has at least one gift because a gift is granted *to each one*. Every member of the community has something to contribute, and the work of each one is valuable (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:7). Gifts are described as *the manifestation of the Spirit*. The expression could be understood in two different ways. The Spirit may be what is manifested, such that the gifts show forth the Spirit. Alternatively, the point may be that the Spirit produces the manifestation so that the manifestation *comes from the Spirit* (my emphasis). Perhaps there is a deliberate ambiguity here, with both ideas being present. In any case, the gifts are not the manifestation of the self. They do not show off the human being, nor are they produced by human beings.

8. Verses 8–10 contain a list of spiritual gifts. The list is not exhaustive but representative. Some of the gifts listed are quite difficult to define. The verb *is given* (*didotai*) is picked up from verse 7 and is implied in all of verses 8–10. Once again, Paul impresses upon the readers that the gifts are truly gifts, excluding any basis for pride in the exercise of the gifts. To confirm such a perspective, both *wisdom* and *knowledge* are attributed to the Spirit; the gifts displayed are supernatural in that they are the result of the Holy Spirit's work.

Discerning what is meant by *a message of wisdom* and *a message of knowledge* is difficult. Some commentators despair of any solution and concede defeat, claiming that we do not know what these gifts are. In popular circles *wisdom* is sometimes understood to be the practical application of

knowledge, while knowledge is understood to be abstract, without any practical benefit. Such a view is almost certainly mistaken, since there is no basis for saying that knowledge in Scripture is abstract and impractical. Some charismatics understand the *message of knowledge* to refer to the ability to discern someone else's situation, thoughts or sins, but the definition is quite arbitrary.

The most promising solution understands both wisdom and knowledge to refer to the gift of teaching; if this is correct, a sharp distinction between wisdom and knowledge is not present, for the two words are often conjoined in the Old Testament (e.g. Exod. 31:3; 35:31; 2 Chr. 1:10; Prov. 1:7; 2:6; 14:6; Eccl. 1:18; 2:21, 26; Isa. 11:2). The following arguments support the interpretation proposed here. First, there is no mention of the gift of teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, yet the gift is so important in Paul that it is included in every other list of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:28–30; Eph. 4:11). It seems unlikely that there would be no mention of the gift at all in the first listing of the gifts. Second, Paul's long discussion of wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–2:16) is linked with the proclamation of 'the message of the cross' (1 Cor. 1:18), suggesting that a message of wisdom unpacks the message of the cross. Third, if we look at the NASB, we see the parallels between 'the word of wisdom'/'the word of knowledge' and the message Paul preached. He refers to 'the word of God' (Rom. 9:6; 1 Cor. 14:36; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; Eph. 6:17; Phil. 1:14; Col. 1:25; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 4:5; 2 Tim. 2:9; Titus 2:5), 'the word of faith' (Rom. 10:8), 'the word of truth' (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15, ESV), 'the word of life' (Phil. 2:16), 'the word of the Lord' (1 Thess. 1:8, ESV) and 'the word of Christ' (Col. 3:16, ESV). The 'word' refers to the gospel Paul preaches and teaches. Fourth, knowledge is closely related, it seems, to teaching—to the gospel which is proclaimed (cf. Rom. 15:14; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9–10; 2:2–3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1). All of this suggests that the 'word' of wisdom and 'word' of knowledge are best understood as referring to the gift of teaching. Paul does not sharply distinguish the words from one another; they overlap in meaning, and are different facets of the same reality.

9. The verb 'is given' (*didotai*) continues to be implied as the gifts of faith and healing are noted. The role of the Spirit relative to the gifts remains a constant as well; thus faith is provided by *the same Spirit* and healing by the *one Spirit*. No space is allowed for human boasting or arrogance since the gifts are the work of the Spirit. The gift of *faith* cannot be identical with saving faith, since all believers possess the latter and the gift of faith is reserved for only some Christians. The gift of faith must refer to extraordinary faith—faith that 'can move mountains' (1 Cor. 13:2). Perhaps we also see the gift of faith in 'the prayer offered in faith' that 'will make the sick person well' (Jas 5:15). The gift of *healing* almost certainly refers to the healing of those who suffer from sickness, disease and infirmities such as being blind, lame or deaf. It is difficult to discern if there is any significance in the plural *gifts* (*charismata*) with reference to healing. Almost every suggestion is quite speculative and lacks probative force. Perhaps the plural is used because there are different kinds of healing: some suffer from diseases, while others have congenital problems like blindness.

10. Five gifts are mentioned in verse 10, and the notion that the gifts are from the Spirit is implied. In case readers overlook the point, Paul reaffirms it in the strongest terms in verse 11. The five gifts are miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, speaking in tongues and interpretation of languages. The meanings of prophecy and tongues are the subject of more debate, so more attention will be given to these gifts.

The 'performing of miracles' is not difficult to understand. Some think it should be distinguished from healing since healing is mentioned previously. If this is the case, miracles may refer to exorcising demons and even nature miracles. Perhaps, however, the list is not technical; or perhaps miracles like giving sight to the blind and strength to the lame should be placed here instead of under the gift of healing. Alternatively, perhaps we are not intended to distinguish sharply between the gifts of healing and miracles. We have already seen that the gifts of wisdom and knowledge (v. 8) overlap in meaning.

Distinguishing of *spirits* represents a gift where one is able to discern what is true from what is false. We see this gift when Paul recognizes that the woman who commends his gospel to others is actually possessed by an evil spirit and he then casts the spirit out of her (Acts 16:16–18). This gift is especially valuable in detecting false teaching (cf. 1 John 4:1–3).

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The meaning of *prophecy* (*propheteia*) is particularly difficult, and scholars propound various interpretations. First, some understand prophecy in terms of charismatic exegesis. The evidence, however, that prophets actually engaged in scriptural exegesis is lacking and thus this view should be rejected. Second, others claim that prophecy is to be equated with preaching.51 This view is reflected in the famous work of the Puritan William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*. Certainly those who prophesy speak God's word and there is thus a proclamation of God's word in prophecy. Still, the gift of prophecy is typically more occasional and spontaneous, and the English word 'preaching' suggests a prepared message of some sort. The words of Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10) and Caiaphas (John 11:51–52), for instance, were prophetic, but they did not constitute preaching.

I suggest that prophecy is communicating revelation from God in a spontaneous utterance. The spontaneity is evident in 1 Corinthians 14:29–32 since a revelation comes to a prophet sitting in the assembly and the one speaking must give way to the one sitting. We see a similar phenomenon with the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 11:27–28. God revealed to him that there would be a famine, though this is not to say that prophecy always foretells the future: it may speak to current circumstances as well. In Acts 13:2 a prophecy reveals that Paul and Barnabas are to engage in mission. Prophecy may also be used to bring others to faith since it reveals the secrets of the heart (1 Cor. 14:24). Thus, prophecy could be granted during preaching since it provides insight into what a person (or a group) needs to hear. We see in 1 Corinthians 13:2 that the gift of prophecy is linked with having access to mysteries and knowledge that are not readily accessible. Although prophecy is for edification, consolation and encouragement (1 Cor. 14:3), these blessings are not restricted to prophecy since others gifts, such as teaching and the gift of exhortation, may edify and encourage as well.

Wayne Grudem argues that New Testament prophecy is fallible, unlike Old Testament prophecy, so it may be mixed with error (errors may crop up in the transmission of what God revealed). According to Grudem, New Testament prophets may err because (1) their prophecies are judged (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20–21); (2) some prophecies are disobeyed (Acts 21:4); and (3) Agabus's prophecy was in error (Acts 21:11), in that the Jews did not bind Paul and hand him over to the Romans. Grudem's reading is intriguing but fails to convince; it is more plausible to say that New Testament prophecy like Old Testament prophecy is infallible, for the following reasons.

First, the judging of prophecies does not indicate that prophets could err, for in the Old Testament the only way to determine whether someone was a true prophet was by assessing prophecies. If the prophecies were mistaken, the person was not a true prophet (see Deut. 18:21–22; 1 Sam. 3:19–20). Second, Agabus was not mistaken in Acts 21:11, since when Paul recounts the story of his arrest in Acts 28:17 he appeals to the very word Agabus used (*paradidomi*) to describe Paul being handed over to the Romans. We have further evidence that Agabus spoke as a prophet of the Lord, like the Old Testament prophets. He used prophetic symbolism in binding his own hands and feet, imitating the kind of prophetic symbolism we find in the Old Testament (e.g. Isa. 20:1–6; Jer. 13:1–11; Ezek. 4:1–5:17). In addition, the words of Agabus reflect a prophetic formula, 'The Holy Spirit says' (Acts 21:11). The word *tade* (lit. 'these things') is used over and over in the Old Testament to introduce the word of the Lord (cf. also Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

Third, in Acts 21:4 the prophecy was Spirit-inspired and accurate (Paul would suffer), but the inference drawn from the prophecy (Paul should not go to Jerusalem) is mistaken. I conclude that the prophetic gift in the New Testament is of the same nature as the gift in the Old Testament. God communicates, typically spontaneously, revelations by his prophets which are authoritative and completely true.

The nature of the gift of *tongues* is debated as well. Most scholars think that the gift in 1 Corinthians 12–14 differs from what we find in Acts, and many think that 'ecstatic utterances' are in view. Certainty is impossible, but I suggest that the gift is foreign languages, just as we see in Acts. In Acts 2 the gift is in human languages because people from all over the world 'heard their own language being spoken' (2:6); 'each of us hears them in our native language' (2:8), 'in our own tongues' (2:11). Peter says in Acts 11:17 that Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10:44–48) received the same gift as he had, and so it is most natural to see the gift as human languages (cf. also Acts 19:6). The reference to the

'tongues of … angels' in 1 Corinthians 13:1 may indicate a non-human language or ecstatic utterances, although the verse is probably a rhetorical flourish on Paul's part, for 13:2 is rhetorical when it speaks of knowing 'all mysteries and all knowledge'.

In Acts 2:11 those who speak in tongues proclaim the mighty works of God and the people present understand, but in 1 Corinthians 14:2 tongue-speaking is directed to God instead of to people, and, contrary to Acts 2, no-one understands what is being said. The person speaks mysteries in his or her spirit and this, according to many, refers to ecstatic utterances and a prayer language. Many interpreters believe that this verse rules out the idea that tongues are foreign languages. More explanation will be given when discussing 14:2, but a careful examination of the contexts of Acts and 1 Corinthians suggests that the gift is not of a different nature. First, there is no evidence in Hellenistic literature that the word 'tongue' (*glossa*) means ecstatic utterances where there is meaningless babbling, and the same conclusion almost certainly applies in 1 Corinthians. Second, in 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul is saying that people cannot understand tongues if they do not know the language and if there is no interpreter; in these instances tongues are spoken to God since he alone understands what is being communicated. It is not that the nature of tongues is different, but that the two contexts are different: in Acts those present know the languages spoken, but in 1 Corinthians no-one knows the language or the interpretation.

Tongues (*glossai*) may be incomprehensible but they are not non-cognitive. Tongues must be in some discernible code or language, even if the language is not known to humans. Since ecstatic speech cannot be interpreted or translated inasmuch as it consists of meaningless babbling and there is no discernible code, the word *glossa* points to some kind of language. *Different kinds of tongues*, then, points to the variety of languages. The gift of interpretation is not difficult to understand: someone who has the gift is able to translate the unintelligible language so that others are able to understand what is being said by the one speaking in tongues.

11. After recounting the various gifts (vv. 8–10), Paul returns to a central truth in discussing the gifts. The gifts cannot be ascribed to human wisdom or to native human ability. They represent *the work of one and the same Spirit* who grants the gifts according to his purpose. If the gifts are given according to the sovereignty of the Spirit, human beings have no basis for boasting in the gifts they exercise. The personality of the Spirit is also evident since he 'wills' (*bouletai*), and only a person makes decisions; thus notions that the Spirit is a force or an influence are excluded.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 11:12–26

William Baker, In the *Cornerstone Bible Commentary*, comments on Paul's metaphor of the body and how it relates to the exercise of spiritual gifts:

Paul's emphasis on the Holy Spirit's endowing every believer with a special, community-enriching ability led him to develop an extended metaphor of the human body, beginning in 12:12 and continuing through 12:26. Choosing the human body as a point of comparison for social and civic dynamics was by no means novel in the ancient Greek world (M. Mitchell 1993:157–164). Examples go back to Aesop (Dio Chrysostom *Discourses* 33.16), Plato (*Republic*), Cicero (*On Duties* 3.5.22–23; 3.6.26–27), Seneca (*Anger* 2.31.7), Dio Chrysostom (Discourses 9.2; 33.44; 34.32; 40.21; 41.9; 50.3), and a famous speech by Roman senator Menenius Agrippa (Livy *History of Rome* 2.32.7–33.1).

Paul set up his development of the metaphor in 12:13 by first establishing theologically that the church is in fact one body. He did this by reminding the Corinthians of their baptism. Not unlike his comments in Galatians 3:26–29 in which he wanted to show that all believers in Christ are truly children of Abraham because of being clothed with Christ at their baptism, he specifically notes that people from different races or cultures (Jew or Gentile) and at polar ends of society and economics

[1] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 252–262.

(slave and free) become one person when they are baptized into Christ. Notably missing in 1 Corinthians from his triad of covered distinctions is gender (male or female). Perhaps this is because the role of women in the assembly was already addressed as a touchy issue in 11:2–16, in which Paul emphasized that gender distinctions in terms of head covering should be maintained despite equal participation in assemblies, a topic treated again in 14:33b–35. Although some interpreters focus on the infusion of the Holy Spirit as Paul's primary point (Dunn 1970:129; Fee 1987:603–606), the fact that he relied on the commonality of the public immersion of believers into the Christian community does not exclude this (Garland 2003:591; Thiselton 2000:997–999).

Paul emphasizes the Spirit as the source who enlivens and enriches the body of Christ by isolating the role of the Spirit for the believer in the second part of 12:13. He uses a specific word that refers to liquid nourishment. This word can refer to the irrigation of crops or to someone drinking a cup of water (see note on 12:13). A few interpreters have become distracted by the picture of the church drinking from one cup as a reference to the sharing of the Lord's Supper (Calvin 1960:265; Collins 1999:463). Given the prior discussion of this in 10:14–21 and 11:17–34 and the temptation to see this as a balancing sacrament to baptism, this is understandable. However, any association of the Holy Spirit with the Lord's Supper or of the Lord's Supper as "drinking the Spirit," which is what this passage literally says, does not exist in the New Testament (Thiselton 2000:1001).

Other interpreters may be right to suggest that Paul was playing off his picture of baptism and wanted readers to visualize the body of Christ drenched or soaked in the Spirit (Garland 2003:591; Thiselton 2000:1001). However, the consistent image of the Greek word (*potizo* [4222, 4540]) is that of the water or some other liquid nourishing rather than cleansing. It is an internal image rather than external. Thus, the visual picture is of the Holy Spirit flowing into a person when they are baptized (Barrett 1968:289; Bruce 1971:121) and of the church, the body of Christ continually and regularly being filled with the Holy Spirit. In this way it nourishes every cubic inch of the body, both individually and corporately, and all its constituent parts, a point Paul will depend on in what follows.

In 12:14–21, Paul describes the relationship between the human body's parts nearly as an allegory or fable, animating the feet, the ear, the eye, and the head with speech. No matter what the foot and the ear *say* to bemoan their situations as seemingly less important than the hand or the eye, they are chastised to note that they are nonetheless essential to the body. Neither the hand nor the eye is so important that they can survive independently, and what a comical or grotesque sight it would be for the body only to be one giant hand or eye! All the parts are essential.

Interestingly, Paul does not maintain this as a conversation regarding the foot's grudge against the hand or the ear's frustration with the eye's arrogance. In 12:21, he has the eye speak to the hand of its value and the head speak to the feet. The result is to see that all the many parts of the body have an interest in seeing that all the rest of the parts are valued.

In 12:22–26, Paul transitions from the body metaphor to application for the church in Corinth. To do this he will contrast the parts of the body that people are most careful to keep covered with those that are readily and proudly displayed in public without clothing. Notably, the parts usually not clothed are the head (for men), eyes, ears, noses, feet, and hands. Those parts of the human body that people take greatest care to cover are those closest to their sexual organs. To be careless about exposing these in public would be shameful. From this generally agreed understanding, Paul employed reverse logic. The very fact that it is shameful to leave certain parts unclothed in public and that people take extra measures to keep them covered suggests, in fact, that those parts should not feel shamed but rather honored for all the attention they get (Garland 2003:596; D. Martin 1991:567). Paul may be speaking from the more modest, Jewish perspective, since nakedness for Greeks in their gymnasiums was not considered shameful.

Paul begins to unfold the implication of this for the church in 12:24. The church should receive the lesson from the way people treat their bodies. Those who appear to be weak and lowly esteemed by normal social estimates should receive all the more attention for how vital they are to the church. This lesson is not unlike his message to the Corinthians regarding their despicable Lord's Supper practices

that dishonored the poor and others among their number. An approach to one another that functions in this way will help every member of Christ's body feel cared for and should spill over into helping provide for the needs of the "weaker" members who are struggling with many more life pressures than others. In fact, as Paul emphasizes in 12:26, the pain of any member, "weak" or "strong," should be felt by every other member. So, too, the joys of life—just as it is in the human body, where every aspect of it is integrated and connected by the whole.[2]

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27–31

In the *Pillar Bible Commentary*, Roy Ciampa explains Paul's conclusion to his metaphor of the body:

12:27 While most of the preceding argument has spoken generally in terms of the metaphor of the body and implicitly of the church as a similar organism, at this point Paul wants the precise identity of the implied references to be clear: *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* As Garland observes, "In case the Corinthians have not realized it, [Paul] clarifies that he is talking about them." They themselves are the body he has in mind, and it is not just any body, but the body of Christ. Such memorable descriptions of the church are prominent in the letter and are used by Paul to clinch an ethical argument. In 3:16–17 and 6:19–20 the identifications of the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit are high points in the apostle's opposition to divisive factions and sexual immorality respectively. In this case, Paul tells each member of the church (*each one of you*), no matter how humble their social position in the world, that they are not just a part of a peculiar social group (that may seem in the eyes of the world to lack any significance) but instead are a part of Christ the Lord's own body. That is an incredible honor. It is an honor in which they all participate individually, and it is an honor which they all share as a group, reinforcing again the solidarity of the members. To dishonor any part of Christ's body would be to dishonor Christ himself.

12:28 Paul's statement that *God has placed in the church* recalls 12:18 ("God has placed … in the body"). Hays suggests that "[t]he numbering of the first three items (apostles, prophets, and teachers) may indicate a certain hierarchy of authority (cf. Eph. 4:11), but it may also indicate something about the temporal order in which these gifts come into play in the construction of the Christian community: the itinerant apostle comes first and founds the church, while prophets and teachers follow to continue the work of constructing and instructing the community. Just this sort of sequence has been described already in 3:5–14." There is probably a correlation among the three first crucial gifts that are needed for the establishment of a church and the three most valuable gifts that might function within the body of Christ. Paul does not seem to have a "hierarchy of authority" in mind here, but the reference to the "greater gifts" in v. 31 probably relates back to the order given here, which reflects not a hierarchy of authority but a hierarchy of value or profitability, with value or profitability measured in terms of the ability to (establish and) edify a church.

The order Paul presents here clearly "does not reflect the evaluation of the surrounding culture. The ranking of apostles as first and tongues as last is a reversal of the world's appraisal of apostles as society's scum (4:9–13)."

first of all apostles. The word "apostle" is used in more than one way in the New Testament. BDAG points out that in earliest Christianity the word "denoted one who proclaimed the gospel, and was not strictly limited." Besides referring to himself as an apostle (Rom. 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1–10; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:1), Paul uses the same title for Barnabas (Acts 14:14; 15:2), Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7), and James, the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19). With that in mind, some believe that by *apostles*, Paul has in mind missionaries or church planters. Fee argues that "there is no other evidence that Paul thought of a local church as having some among it called 'apostles,' who were responsible for its affairs,"221 and most would agree with Dunn that Paul has in mind the more "limited circle of individuals (though much wider than 'the twelve'), a select

[2] William Baker, "1 Corinthians," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians*, vol. 15 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 182–184.

circle which was soon closed, though not before Paul had been added to it." Dunn outlines three "key characteristics" of these apostles: 1) "they had been commissioned personally by the risen Jesus in a resurrection appearance"; 2) "they were missionaries and church founders"; and 3) they had "a distinctively and decisively eschatological role." Fee thinks that "with this word [Paul] is reflecting on his own ministry in this church" and that "the plural is in deference to others who have had the same ministry in other churches." As Sampley points out, "Paul's claim of priority for the apostles … reaffirms his standing, his authority, as did his references to the Corinthians earlier as babies (3:1) and as did his claim to being their father in the faith (4:14)."

second prophets. Paul dedicates considerable space to the importance of the prophetic ministry for the edification of the church in chapter 14. For a fuller discussion of the gift of prophecy, see our comments on v. 10. We find Thiselton's argument convincing that the gift consists primarily of "the proclamation of revealed truth in relation to a pastoral situation." While Paul indicates that any believer could prophesy, evidently those who did so on a regular basis came to be known as prophets. Calvin thinks that Paul has in mind "those who were blessed with the unique gift of dealing with Scripture, not only by interpreting it, but also by the wisdom they showed in making it meet the needs of the hour."226 He sees them, furthermore, as both "outstanding interpreters of Scripture" and "men endowed with extraordinary wisdom and aptitude for grasping what the immediate need of the Church is and speaking the right word to meet it." The second emphasis, on having a special ability to understand "the immediate need of the Church" and to speak "the right word to meet it," thus communicating the divine will, is very similar to our own understanding of the prophetic gift (for which the predicting of future events was a secondary and not essential feature). This verse raises some issues for Grudem's view that New Testament prophecy was of a less authoritative nature since it always needed to be weighed and evaluated, something that is not explicitly stated about teaching in general. But the importance of evaluating teachings was probably assumed,228 whereas, were it not for the repeated emphasis on weighing and evaluating prophecies, it may have been considered presumptuous to treat them in that way.

Thiselton points out that "Paul's language about prophets' 'inspiration' here need not imply a *Deus ex machina* event, but the *pastoral insight inspired* by instruction set forth by teachers." Garland is right that "it is difficult to see how prophets and teachers rank differently." In any case, prophets seem to have been more attuned to the particular message a church needed to hear at any given moment while teachers were expected to pass on the same Christian teaching that needed to be learned by all believers in all places.

third teachers. See above (in the comments on "prophets") on the possible distinction between teachers and prophets. Dunn suggests that the teachers were those with "the responsibility of passing on the tradition, received presumably, in the first instance at least, from the founding apostle," as well as "the interpretation of tradition and thus its development." Thiselton argues that teachers worked "to expound and explain what is the case about God's dealings with the world through Christ by the Spirit, on the basis of which the pastoral and situational speech-acts of prophets can have their effect." Thus, "teachers perform speech-acts of transmission, communicative explanation, interpretation of texts, establishment of creeds, exposition of meaning and implication, and, more cognitive, less temporally applied communicative acts." It would be a mistake to think that teachers were focused on teaching abstract theological truths while prophets entered into practical application and appeals. That might fit with some teaching in the formal educational contexts today, where children and adults are taught subject contents but little or nothing about how they should live, and where moral norms are often considered trespassers on school property. Such a mistaken understanding of teaching in the Bible could be encouraged by the common use of the word "doctrine" to translate the key New Testament word for "teaching." "Teaching" in the New Testament (and the surrounding philosophies and religions) typically was moral teaching. The teacher of Romans 2:21 teaches others not to steal or commit adultery. In 1 Cor. 4:17 Paul refers to his "ways," which he teaches everywhere. In Ephesians 4:21–24 Paul says that the readers "were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like

God in true righteousness and holiness." He then goes on to the end of the chapter and beyond, covering a number of other moral teachings.

Barrett's suggestion that teachers were "mature Christians who instructed others in the meaning and moral implications of the Christian faith" is properly balanced. The difference with prophets, then, would not be that the latter are the only ones applying the Christian faith, but that the teachers would pass on the traditional Christian theological and moral teachings that were valued and needed to be known by all believers everywhere, while the prophets were especially gifted at addressing the particular, context-specific needs of a gathered congregation with inspired pastoral insight.

then miracles, then gifts of healing. On these two gifts, see the comments on vv. 9–10. Here they appear in reverse order from that found there. It seems unlikely that Paul thinks of either of them as being "greater" than the other, so the order is most likely arbitrary. God himself is known for his miracle-working power, including his power to heal from disease. Since God is also known as the one who helps his people when they are in need and who guides or governs the universe (see the following gifts *of helping* and *of guidance* or governance), it may be that we are supposed to recognize in some of these spiritual gifts the ability not only to do what only God could empower people to do, but to do what God himself is famous for doing for his people and his creation.

of helping. That scholars do not know precisely what Paul had in mind should not surprise us since even Chrysostom felt the need to explain to his congregation (who spoke Greek) what Paul had in mind. In his view, it meant "To support the weak" and had to do with "aptness for a patron's office," referring to the ancient role of the patron or benefactor. Calvin suggests that this gift was either "both an office, and a gift, in the Church of long ago, but of which we have no knowledge now; or it has to do with the work of the diaconate, that is to say, the care of the poor."237 He prefers the second explanation. Garland points out that when the related verb appears in Paul's speech in Acts 20:35, it is used with respect to helping the weak. He thinks that it may have to do with "assisting the socially disadvantaged." In the LXX this word most often refers to help God granted his people (1 Esdr. 8:27; 2 Macc. 8:19; 15:7; 3 Macc. 2:33; 5:50; Pss. 21:1, 20; 83:6; 88:19; *Psalms of Solomon* 7:10; 16:1).

of guidance. The noun Paul uses is a substantivized form of the verb meaning "to steer a ship" and usually refers to the act of piloting a ship. It is just as closely related to the noun used for a "pilot"—one who carries out this role on a regular basis. The latter word is used in the LXX of 4 Maccabees 7:1; Proverbs 23:34; Ezekiel 27:8, 27, 28 and in Acts 27:11 and Revelation 18:17. Witherington says that the "important word" used here "is often unfortunately translated 'administration.' It really refers to those who give guidance or wise counsel." It depends on what one means by administration or giving guidance. In some contexts "administration" calls to mind clerical work while in others it refers to senior management. The word used here favors the latter. In some cases "giving guidance" suggests a personal counselor or advisor while in others it suggests that the guidance of an organization is provided by its senior management. Again, it is the latter idea that is suggested by the word choice, that of effective governance or leadership. The role of the pilot or helmsman was well known, both in its literal sense and as a metaphor for governance.242 "The clarity of the image of the work of the helmsman made it obviously suitable for fig[urative] use for the statesman," and the "conception of the deity as [pilot] became a favourite one." Margaret Mitchell has shown that the role of the ship captain was a commonplace in discussions of factionalism and concord, recalling the kind of leadership that guides a community through difficult waters [times/challenges] as a strong and harmonious unit.244

In Beyer's view, Paul's reference "can only be to the specific gifts which qualify a Christian to be a helmsman to his congregation, i.e., a true director of its order and therewith of its life."

and of different kinds of tongues. This gift comes last again, due to the fact that it has caused such problems in Corinth (as it has often done in other contexts where it comes to be considered a mark of the spiritual elite).

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12:29–30 Paul has been stressing the diversity of the gifts given to the church and the fact that no one has all of the gifts. Now he makes it clear that no spiritual gift is given to everyone. Most of the other believers will not have whatever gift any particular person in that same church might have and will therefore be in need of it. *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?* Each of these rhetorical questions is framed in Greek in such a way as to indicate that the only appropriate response would be "no." The readers should understand why none of these gifts are shared by all, since "Paul has said four different ways in this chapter, *the gifts are apportioned as God or the Spirit sees fit* (12:11, 18, 25, 28)." Thiselton criticizes Fee for suggesting that Paul is emphasizing the need for diversity. "Paul is not saying, 'Look at how varied your gifts are.' No, he is asserting, 'since none on his or her own receives this extensive range of necessary gifts, you need others, and others need you.' " It is not clear that Fee's point is different from Thiselton's. He certainly does not mean that Paul is saying, "Look how varied your gifts are." Fee's view is that Paul is saying, "The church needs people with a variety of different gifts to function properly."

The evidence of the New Testament suggests that there were few apostles, miracle workers, or people with gifts of healing in the early church (mainly the twelve apostles, Paul and Barnabas, Stephen, and Philip), while quite a few evidently spoke in tongues (cf. Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 14:5, 13, 18, 23, 27, 39; Mark 16:17). Paul's argument in chapter 14 will attempt to tip the balance away from an emphasis on tongues, toward a larger number of people exploring and exercising the gifts of prophecy and teaching (note esp. 14:6, 26).

12:31 Paul prepares for his focus on love in the following verses: *Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.* The Greek verb translated eagerly desire could be understood as either a statement (indicative mood), "you are zealous for the greater gifts," or as an imperative, "seek/desire the greater gifts." It is clear from Paul's way of addressing the issue that some Corinthians were seeking or eagerly desiring what they considered to be the greater gifts (esp. tongues) and that that had created problems in the community. In that light it may seem strange for Paul to encourage such behavior and exhort them to continue such pursuits,251 while a simple statement that they are behaving in such a way seems quite natural. The precise verb form used here will appear two more times in chapter 14 (vv. 1 and 39), however, and in both of those cases it is clearly used as an imperative. The parallels between the uses here and in chapter 14 are too great to allow us to interpret the verb any differently in each case. Thus, virtually all interpreters and English translations understand it to be an imperative.254

Of course, not all imperatives carry the same sense. Smit thinks that Paul is using an ironic *permissio* with which he "ridicules in an ironic manner the Corinthians' pursuit of these gifts as their highest goal." In this case the imperative would have the sense, "Continue to strive for the greater gifts! It will be to your ruin!" but Garland rightly objects that Paul is unlikely to have introduced his sublime discussion of love with mockery.256 The imperative could also have a nonironic but still permissive sense, as in "Go ahead [if you must] and seek the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way."

Thiselton provides the best explanation of this part of the verse and how it relates to the Corinthians' issues. They had demonstrated "a zealous concern, even a striving, for the gifts of the Spirit that were deemed to be greatest in the sense of their supposedly constituting a mark of a high social and/or spiritual status." But Paul redefines the terms since he completely rejects the Corinthians' approach to deciding what counts as high spiritual status and the way gifts relate to such a status. Ironically, he urges them, "Do not stop being zealously concerned about the 'greatest' gifts, provided that you follow me in transposing and subverting your understanding of what counts as 'the greatest.' " Of course, Paul will lead them to understand that the greatest gifts "are not those that minister to status or to self, but those which serve the good of others and build the community. I now show you that what is an even greater way still is the way of love." "Paul urges the Corinthians … to seek earnestly or be eager for the greater gifts, the intelligible ones that build up the body. They are greater only because they more easily function to strengthen the body."259 Paul's statement in 14:21, "Since you

are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church," suggests a similar idea. He does not discourage them from being eager for certain gifts, but seeks to change their view of the gifts in which they should seek to excel.

Further insight into another difficulty with this verse may be provided by 14:21–22. Paul has stressed that the gifts are distributed according to God's will (12:11, 18, 24, 28) and that each one should appreciate both their own gifts and contribution to the body and those of the other parts of the body. That raises a couple of questions: How "can one strive for or eagerly desire something that can only be given? Does Paul expect them to try to attain gifts that they do not have?" Garland rejects the suggestion that Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to pray to receive certain gifts, since "[h] e does not tell them to pray for these greater gifts."262 But Paul does in fact explicitly tell those who speak in tongues to "pray that they may interpret what they say" (14:22). And, remarkably, that comes immediately after saying that since the Corinthians eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, they should "try to excel in those that build up the church." The interpretation of tongues is more likely to build up the church than uninterpreted tongues, so one who has the gift of speaking in tongues should pray for the gift of interpreting them as well. Since that is the case, it would seem logical for believers to pray that they might be able to provide prophetic insight for the church, especially since Paul indicates that he would be very happy for them all to prophesy (14:1, 5, 24, 31, 39). Prior believes that when love "controls and prevails in a church, then every member will be freed to bring his particular gift and to ask God for more gifts, not for his own sake, but for the benefit of all."264

Van Unnik points out that "the gifts of God's grace do not work automatically; they are not in the state of permanent activity." Furthermore, they "need not be continually active," may "be neglected or quenched (1 Thess. 5:19)," and may "fall into disuse and need reviving." In Chrysostom's view, Paul "gently hinted that they were the cause of their own receiving the lesser gifts, and had it in their power, if they would, to receive the greater. For in saying, 'desire earnestly,' he demands from them all diligence and desire for spiritual things."267 Is *the most excellent way* the best way to pursue spiritual gifts or things of the Spirit or the most excellent way to live (and glorify God), or both? Chrysostom feels that Paul intends to "point out … a fountain of gifts"; "one way which leads to all [the gifts]." It seems best not to think that Paul was talking about pursuing love as a way to gain greater gifts rather than the way to live and prioritize life, but as one uses one's gifts in constant loving service to others, God may see fit to provide further enablements to allow one's service to be even more creative and effective.

Another question is whether Paul is urging the Corinthians (and us) to *desire* the greater gifts or to "seek" them. Many translate *zeloute* as "eagerly [or earnestly] desire" (TNIV, NIV, ESV, NASB, NLT); others with "strive [eagerly]" (NAB, NRSV). NET suggests, "you should be eager for," and NJB, "set your mind on." Thiselton translates it "continue to be zealously concerned about."269 There is ultimately little difference between these translations. The conclusion of BDAG, that the verb means to "be positively and intensely interested in someth[ing]," clarifies how the various translation possibilities, including "strive, desire, exert oneself earnestly, be dedicated," are related.

Chrysostom points out that this most excellent way is different from the gifts in that it "is open in common to all," while "the gifts are entrusted, to some these, to others those, but not all to all people." In that sense, love "is a universal gift."

Paul's promise to show the Corinthians a superior path to follow reflects an Old Testament motif that is usually associated with the exodus or second exodus. That God showed Israel the way or path by the pillar of cloud and fire is pointed out in Exodus 13:21 and Deuteronomy 1:33. Micah 4:2 tells us that in the time of salvation the nations will go to the house of God and be shown the way established by the Lord, while in Isaiah 48:16–17 the speaker affirms that the Lord will direct his people in the way they should go. Samuel was also committed to showing Israel the good and right way (1 Sam. 12:23). According to Jesus, the two love commands summarize the way we should follow God (Matt. 22:37–39; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27; citing Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18), and Paul will expound on the way of love in extended fashion in the following chapter (see also Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14). That Paul needs to

show them a more excellent way suggests that the way they are on right now is not the superior way that is to mark God's people.

Wright's remarks on Paul's understanding of the divinely intended way of being human, although not commenting directly on this passage, are apropos. He argues that while paganism consistently leads to "the fracturing of genuine humanity," as when "one category of human beings define themselves against another,"

Paul articulated … *a way of being human* which he saw as the true way. In his ethical teaching, in his community development, and above all in his theology and practice of new life through dying and rising with Christ, he zealously articulated, modelled, inculcated, and urged upon his converts a way of life which he saw as being the genuinely human way of life. And he saw this as the way of life to which Judaism had been called, but to which, without the Messiah, Judaism had not attained and could not attain.

That is the way he expounds in the following chapter.[3]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[3] Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 608–618.

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