

INTRODUCTION

I wonder if any of you like to play jigsaw puzzle. I am not a puzzle guy. It is still unthinkable to me why manufacturers have to break down a drawing or photo into tiny pieces and have the consumers buy the products and spend time to put the picture back together. I am told that playing jigsaw puzzle may help slow down aging of our brain. When I visited people living in retirement communities it is not unusual to see a jigsaw puzzle laying on a table in the activity room to freely allow people passing by to play a little bit. Perhaps when I reach that age I may develop an interest in the hobby. When you play the game the goal is to locate where each piece fits in the big picture. Each piece only represents a small part of the picture. No two pieces have the same shape or color pattern. If any piece is lacking then it is not a complete picture. A church is like that too. It is composed of a group of believers. No two persons are identical. That is why in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 Paul uses the human body as an analogy for the church. All the parts connect together to form a body. Paul uses a body to represent a church to highlight the fact that God who assigns each believer specific roles like different parts on a human body. God coordinates all the believers in a church so that by working together we can function as a cohesive body.

EXPLANATION

1. 恩賜不同，一位聖靈 Different Gifts, One Spirit

In this passage Paul tells us that God gives each of us different spiritual gifts. However, all these gifts are from the same Holy Spirit. Let us read from **verses 4-6**: 4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Paul uses three parallel statements to state the same truth. Though we all have different spiritual gifts they all come from God. Spiritual gift is a God-given ability for us to serve in the church. These gifts are given to equip us for services. Paul goes on to say in **verse 7**: Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. Therefore, spiritual gift is not for our personal gain like some people who has special talent in investment to make money for himself. But the exercising of spiritual gifts should benefit the church as a whole.

What follows in verses 8 to 10 is a list of various gifts. I will go through them briefly. In verse 8 there are the message of wisdom and the message of knowledge. Both gifts refer to understanding of information from God. A major difference is that knowledge can be acquired through study, wisdom is a direct insight from God. Then there is faith in verse 9. God gives us faith to believe in Christ as our Savior and Lord. God continues to give us faith in our daily life. However, God gives greater faith to some Christians to enable them to step out with boldness despite difficulties and unknowns. Back then when the Israelites sent 12 spies to investigate Canaan 10 of them were overwhelmed by the great stature of the enemies and their strong fortresses. However, Caleb and Joshua had great faith in God that the Israelites could surely

conquer the land. When it comes to big decisions in the church some people may focus on practical parameters like manpower and finance, whereas people of faith look to the Lord. Next on the list are two gifts that belong to the realm of supernatural power. They are the gift of healing and miraculous power. In the New Testament gifts like those were associated with the spreading of the gospel. For example, in Acts 14 Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium to preach the gospel. **Acts 14:3** reads: So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. These disciples used miracles to authenticate their gospel message. With the completion of the whole Bible the critical need for miracle has diminished, since the Word of God itself carries power from God to change hearts. However, even nowadays it is not unusual to read testimonies of missionaries serving in remote areas that they prayed for miraculous healing of patients when modern medicine was unavailable. God granted miracles in these cases to verify His presence. As we continue the gift inventory in verse 10 we can find prophecy comes next. In the Old Testament God conveyed messages of hope, comfort and judgment through the prophets. In the church era, rather than speaking through dreams or visions God speaks to people with the gift of prophecy through the Bible. The same gift is also mentioned in **1 Corinthians 14:1** when Paul says: Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. The Chinese Union Version renders the word as “prophetic preaching.” Sometimes when you heard a sermon you felt as if God spoke to you through the speaker. You may wonder: “How on earth does he know my situation?” No, he did not peek into your diary or hire a private investigator to go after you. But God gave the speaker the gift of prophecy to rightly divide the Word of God and apply it in such a way that suits your need. Going back to 1 Corinthians 12:10. The next gift is distinguishing between spirits. It is the ability to discern whether or not a certain message is truly from the Holy Spirit or it is a counterfeit. Next we have the speaking and the interpreting of tongues. People who have these two gifts can speak and understand an unlearned language, respectively. Some of you may remember in Acts 2 when Peter preached to a crowd many of them spoke in tongues to verify the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Again, with the completion of the whole Bible the role of these gifts have reduced.

Besides the nine gifts mentioned in this passages there are other spiritual gifts listed in the Bible. They are grouped in Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. Therefore, Paul is not providing us an exhaustive list of all the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians. He is giving us a sample of different manifestation of the Holy Spirit in believers. You may have one of the nine gifts here or God may give you some other gifts. As Paul concludes this section about different gifts he says in **verse 11**: All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. God has complete sovereignty over what gifts He decides to give us. Whatever gifts each of us has we should be thankful to God. We can desire after different gifts other brothers and sisters have, and we can ask God for the same gifts. But we should never compare with others or be jealous about others.

2. 功用不同，一個身體 Different Functions, One Body

God coordinates all the believers in a church so that by working together we can function as a cohesive body. Paul tells us that the same Holy Spirit gives different gifts to each of us. As Paul continues, he uses the human body as an analogy to illustrate that believers with different gifts in the same church are like different parts of a body. While each part performs different functions

there is only one body. Paul says in **verse 12**: The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. He repeats the same truth of many parts and one body in verses 14 and 20. Paul says that we are united as one body in a localized church despite our different background. **Verse 13** reads: For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body -whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Corinth was in Greece and so it was a Gentile city. The church consisted of people with diverse ethnicities and social status. The expressions of “baptized by one Spirit” and “drink from one Spirit” indicate that no matter what background the believers had they all received the same Holy Spirit when they became Christians. Just like the Corinthian church our church also celebrates diversity. In our Chinese congregation some people are from the north while others are from the south. Some from big cities and others from smaller towns. God puts people of various background in the same church.

Paul continues to share that since we are one body in Christ there are a few implications. First, Paul points out that no one is insignificant. He says in **verses 15-16**: 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. For example, no one should say that: “Because I am not a church official I do not feel like I am part of the church.” Even though you are not such and such person with a title, once you participate in a church you have become part of it. Secondly, since we are in the same body nobody is independent of each other. Paul says in **verse 17**: If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? An eye cannot replace the function of an ear, just like an ear cannot substitute a nose. Each organ serves a particular function and they have to be dependent on each other. You may have played a game where it requires team work. One teammate is blindfolded. The mission is to grab something from a table. He has to listen to instructions from a second teammate who is not allowed to walk. So this person will tell his teammate to go left or go right. In order to win both persons have to work together. Because we are inter-dependent of each other in a church there is a third implication – everyone is indispensable. Paul tells us in **verse 21**: The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" Even though there may be multi-talented people in a church, no one can do everything on his own. To think so is an expression of pride. Unfortunately, the Corinthian church was full of prideful people. Paul convicts them in **4:7** of the book: For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? Since every gift is from the Holy Spirit there should not be any pride as if we were born with all the talents. There should not be any comparison either as if some gifts were more important than others. We may think of some prominent gifts like teaching or leadership. In comparison, people exercising gifts like encouragement or showing mercy may work in a one-to-one setting. Other gifts like serving may involve some menial work. But that does not make the role less important. After all, we cannot choose what gifts to have. It is God who gives us freely according to His will. That is why Paul repeats this truth in **verse 18**: But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. God not only assigns us different gifts, He also arranges where we should use our gifts. Therefore, an important question for you is: are you actively using the gifts God has given you to serve? Since no one can replace the unique functions God has equipped you, if you do not put your gifts into service certain tasks in the

church would be left unfulfilled. You may say: I do not know what my gifts are. You can find gifts surveys on the internet to help you discover your gifts. Very often you realize your gifts through trying out different ministries. My prayer for our church is that not only we discover each of our gifts we also exercise our gifts to build up a healthy body of Christ.

3. 長處不同，一個心志 Different Strengths, One Heart

God coordinates all the believers in a church so that by working together we can function as a cohesive body. The Holy Spirit gives each believer different gifts. The gifts we received enables us to perform different functions, but we are still one body in Christ. Moreover, while each of us may have different strengths we should serve with a united heart. Paul encourages the Corinthian believers to preserve their unity in Christ. He says in **verse 25**: ...there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. Differences should not set us apart. Rather, we have to learn to appreciate our differences, because we complement each other. Sadly, the Corinthian believers were experts in division. While the church might still be intact they claimed this or that disciple as the leaders they followed. Early on Paul rebukes the believers in **3:3-4** by saying: 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? Paul said: "You guys are completely wrong. We all belong to the same Lord and the same church."

How should we appreciate our differences? Paul suggests in **verses 23-24** of chapter 12: 23 ...the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it. Paul says that we put on clothes to cover up the less presentable parts. Some Bible commentators said the "less presentable parts" Paul referred to may be the sexual organs. We wear clothes to maintain modesty. Of course, compare to Paul's era nowadays the cosmetic industry pours in millions and millions of R&D dollars to manufacture products just for our face. According to Paul, that should not be the case. Things like our internal organs which people cannot see are as important as our face that people can see.

How should we apply this truth in our church life? A simple thing we can do is to give credits to brothers and sisters who serve in less conspicuous roles. Brothers and sisters: when is the last time you thank the people serving lunch or helping clean up? Consider this too: our children Sunday school superintendent once encouraged parents to sit in at your kids' classes to understand how the class was conducted and to show support to the teachers. I do not mind at all if you skip the Mandarin service once in a while to go to your kids' classes. Though we all know that ultimately the Lord would remember our faithfulness a simple "thank you" can show our appreciation that we are not taking people's contribution for granted.

Since we are united with one heart in the body we should also show empathy to others. Paul says in **verses 26**: If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Whether good times or bad we should feel as if we went through the experiences together. Two Sundays ago a sister asked us for prayer because she had a toothache and would need to see a dentist. When you have a toothache not just your tooth feels the pain, but your

whole body suffers too. You cannot chew on food, you cannot focus on your work and you cannot sleep well. Every body function is affected. Let us consider another example. When you get a raise you go buy some new clothes or eat a nice dinner to celebrate your whole person would feel great. In the body of Christ we should show empathy to each other like a connected body. Thanks to the advancement of communication technology we can get in touch with each other in an instant. For instance, when brothers and sisters share prayer needs through WeChat moments later people would respond with words of caring. On our way back from the retreat last Monday our car was bumped by a pickup truck. Thankfully no one was injured. After I got home I sent a picture showing damage of the car via WeChat to some brothers and sisters. Without much delay, people sent in their words of caring. One sister even suggested a body shop to me! This is how a church family should work. Imagine when one of your family members has a severe physical illness you would never react with words like: "That is your problem." Instead, you would step in to give as much help and comfort as you can, and pray for God's healing. By the same token, when turmoil happens in our church you should not feel that it is not your business, or just single out the major partners involved and condemn them. Worse still, you should never join the non-believers outside our church to criticize how misbehave Christians are.

CONCLUSION

Paul tells us that we are one body in Christ. God coordinates all the believers in a church so that by working together we can function as a cohesive body. No one should feel prideful about what substantial contribution he makes. On the contrary, no one should feel that he is unimportant. It is God who enables us to complement each other with our different gifts in the body. While we may only see part of the image God sees a complete and beautiful picture from afar if we allow Him to work in us. A few years back an artist by the name Jorge Rodriguez-Gerada created the biggest outdoor art display in Ireland. He saw an 11-acre of vacant land and had an idea of turning it into an artwork. With the help of hired workers, volunteers and machinery this artist poured in tons and tons of soil and sand into the area. At first, only the Rodriguez-Gerada knew what the final artwork was going to look like. As the work progressed, the participants saw little indication that something amazing was about to emerge. From the ground, it doesn't look like much. But from above, viewers see a huge portrait - the smiling face of a little girl. God is doing the same thing in His church. To you and me we may feel like we are pouring soil and sand here and there. It does not look like it amounts to anything of much value. God is creating a masterpiece through our diligent work, such that only through His perspective we would be surprised to see His wonderful accomplishment.