

1Cor. 12:1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

Paul introduces this section as a topic about which every Christian should be knowledgeable. We discussed this at chapter 10, verse 1. The wording indicates he was probably responding to another question from the believers in Corinth. It's interesting to me that one of the very things Paul emphasizes causes some of the greatest division among believers and is probably one of the most neglected areas of instruction in the body of believers. (This is a comment based upon my own experience.)

Of note is that the word *gifts* is supplied by the translators, the Greek is actually a reference to "non-carnal" things or spiritual things.

1Cor. 12:2 Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

Point is made that the Corinthian church is composed primarily if not completely of Gentiles, heathen or non-Jewish people. The word *Gentiles* in this verse would probably be better translated "heathen" or "pagan," as in several of the other translations. Before turning to Jesus in faith they had followed the idol worship embraced by their countries. I thought it was interesting that the Greek for "carried away" referenced being "put to death." That is a very clear statement of the result of following a *dumb* (voiceless, mute, without signification) idol. The phrase "without signification" stood out to me since it emphasizes that the idol is totally impotent, unable to express its power or character in any way. This, of course, is in direct contrast to Almighty God, Who manifests Himself to man in the person of Jesus and continues to manifest Himself through the Spirit working in and through men—not to mention His mighty miracles of old and those continually on display through His creation.

"as ye were led" – This is also a significant statement. We all know the power of peer pressure. It's natural to want to fit in. What's interesting is how men could be deceived into following idols to begin with. This is another example of the power and effectiveness of Satan and his forces in this world. He is not called "the god of this world" without reason.

2Cor. 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

2Cor. 4:4 In whom **the god of this world** hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

1Cor. 12:3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and *that* no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

Paul makes two important points in this verse:

- No man will curse or speak evil of Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life.
- No man can declare Jesus is the Lord (supreme in authority, God) except through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life.

True believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, any person who curses or speaks evil of Jesus has identified himself as an unbeliever. To declare Jesus as Lord implies that you accept Him as the supreme authority in your life. Though one may not (and surely will not) be perfect, his/her life will certainly give evidence of that belief. If there is no evidence, there is a strong probability that person is not a true believer. (4/11) To declare Jesus is Lord also acknowledges He is God.

This verse is a proper introduction to the subject of spiritual gifting. The working of the Spirit in the life of the believer is to testify about Jesus.

John 15:26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

The Holy Spirit is empowering men so that they may glorify the Lord—not themselves.

I was listening to Jon Courson last night, and he had some interesting insight on this verse. He made application to speaking in tongues. He pointed out that even in his seminary training, they had been warned not to seek the spiritual gifting of tongues since that could open you up to influence by the forces of evil. You had no clue of what you were saying, and you could be cursing the Lord. He thinks this might have been the case with the Corinthian church. He then made reference to Matthew 7.

Matt. 7:9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Matt. 7:10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

Matt. 7:11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

The gospel of Luke words verse 11 this way.

Luke 11:13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

This made sense to me. It is the Spirit through whom the Father gifts the believer. Any and every gift He gives us is for the good. When we are operating in the Spirit, we will never curse the Lord; and it is only in the Spirit that we can claim Jesus as Lord of our life.

1Cor. 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

1Cor. 12:5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

1Cor. 12:6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

These verses seem to be a unit to me. The first thing I notice is the reference to the Trinity—Spirit, Lord (cf verse 3) and God. We are endowed by the Spirit through the obedient sacrifice of the Son as purposed by the Father.

Note that the same Greek word is used in verses 4-6, but is translated three ways—diversities, differences, diversities.

“diversities of gifts” = distinctions and differences of endowment

“differences of administrations” = distinctions or diversity of service for using one’s endowment

“diversities of operations” = distinctions or differences in the effect or result produced through one’s service or use of one’s endowment.

In other words, the Holy Spirit works in and through the body of Christ using many “gifts” in many different ways to accomplish many different things. This takes us back to verse one. It emphasizes that we are referencing spiritual working through the power of the Spirit vs. physical working through carnal abilities of the flesh.

“it is the same God...” – I think it is important to note that the work of One is the work of All in reference to the Trinity. The Greek for the word *same* indicates a reflexive pronoun. In other words, “God” is the power source for these gifts, administrations and operations. I thought it was interesting that the Greek for *worketh* included “shew forth.” The operation of the gifts in the life of the believer is to show forth the power of God at work in his/her life.

“all in all” = all (gifts, administrations, operations) in all (believers)

1Cor. 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit **withal**.

“manifestation” = exhibition, expression--from the root that means “to render apparent”

Special endowments of the Spirit are given to each believer in order to contribute to the good of the whole body of believers. I thought it was interesting that the Greek for “profit withal” included “to bear together (contribute).” That emphasizes that these workings of the Spirit in and through believers are meant to unify us—not separate us.

I think it is worth repeating that the gifts of the Spirit are meant to bring glory to God—not to the person being empowered.

1Cor. 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

I generally think of *wisdom* as the ability to understand how to apply what you know to achieve good. Webster basically states that it is to use knowledge with discernment and skill. More often than not, you will find wisdom and understanding paired in the scripture. I thought it was interesting that good old Webster chose a verse from Job to illustrate that truth.

Job 28:28 And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that *is* wisdom; and to depart from evil *is* understanding.

One is wise who fears the Lord; one who understands that truth will depart from evil. The Psalmist stated it a different way.

Psa. 111:10 The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do *his commandments*: his praise endureth for ever.

He identifies the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom; one who understands that truth will obey God's commands—one of which is to depart from evil.

A "word" of wisdom is a reference to something spoken. When the Spirit gives one a "word of wisdom," He is giving that person a revelation of God's truth that is meant to accomplish His purpose. James gives us a description of a word of wisdom.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

It will be:

- Pure – It will be holy, morally right, and free from that which harms or weakens.
- Peaceable – It will promote calm, contentment, harmony, and agreement in the body of believers.
- Gentle – It will be appropriate and will reflect patience (from the Greek) and will not be harsh.
- Easy to be intreated – According to the Greek, this means it will be good for persuasion.
- Full of mercy – It will be compassionate.
- Full of good fruits – It will be conducive to resulting in that which is good or beneficial.
- Without partiality – It will apply without bias or preference toward persons.
- Without hypocrisy – It will be sincere and without deceit.

The next *gift* on the list is a "word of knowledge." The Greek for *knowledge* is a reference to knowing something, having a "clear perception of fact, truth, or duty (from Webster)." It is interesting that wisdom was listed first, since it implies the ability to use knowledge in the right way. Being given a word of knowledge doesn't necessarily include the wisdom to use that knowledge correctly. Knowledge can be a dangerous thing if not used wisely, as Satan and his minions so aptly example. It's interesting to note that "knowledge" will one day pass away.

1Cor. 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

I think that is because at that time we will all be filled with wisdom, which includes knowledge. We will not possess truth or knowledge without the ability to utilize that truth according to God's purposes.

Point is made that the gifts of wisdom and knowledge come from the Holy Spirit of God. A “word of knowledge” is a supernatural revelation of knowledge not necessarily based on study or observation.

1Cor. 12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

Another “gift” given by the Spirit is faith. The Greek defines *faith* as “persuasion and moral conviction of the truth.” Since Paul is addressing believers regarding special works of the Spirit in their lives, I do not believe this is referencing saving faith (although I do believe that is a gift of God as well). I believe this is the gift I most desire. This type of faith is the basis for a mature, vibrant relationship with the Lord. It’s a faith that acts with confidence and without hesitation when one hears God speak to his/her heart. It’s a faith that discounts the circumstances and accounts God able in spite of—and then acts accordingly. I believe this faith goes hand-in-hand with healing and miracles, even though they are evidently separate giftings. I can’t help but think of the following verse regarding this type of faith:

Matt. 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

This is also the kind of faith necessary for enduring suffering and/or persecution without fear or bitterness. It’s the kind of faith that allows the believer to experience joy in the midst of suffering as was exemplified by Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:19-25 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew *them* into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

It’s the kind of faith that truly believes that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” (Romans 8:28)

It is interesting that next on the list is “gifts of healing” (plural), the ability to cure or make whole. We most often make application to physical healing of disease, but I think it includes more. It is the gift of making whole and can apply to emotional and spiritual sickness just as surely as to physical sickness. The gospels tell us that Jesus healed those who were sick, diseased and oppressed of the devil.

Matt. 9:35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Acts 10:38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

The use of the plural indicates to me that a person can be gifted for one type of healing and not another. It could also be an indication that healing is gifted as needed; in other words, the gift is available according to God's leading—not a gift to be used at will by the believer. I think there are many charlatans who claim this gift today and others who have actually been blessed with this gift at one time and now practice deceit at the expense of needy, hurting people. God does not heal according to the ability to pay or for the public acclaim of the healer. God heals according to faith. According to the biblical record of the ministry of Jesus, I believe that faith can be either that of the one being healed or the healer or both. Jesus used miracles to affirm His truth and to draw the unbelieving to saving faith and to grow the faith of His followers.

1Cor. 12:10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

Frankly, I consider all these gifts as *miracles* because of their supernatural empowerment. The miracles being referenced here would seem to reference those works that fall outside the realm of the other gifts mentioned—sort of like a miscellaneous category. Webster defines miracles as actions that transcend the laws of nature—i.e., raising the dead, turning water into wine, using 5 loaves to feed 1000's, walking on water, etc. I tend to think that God uses miracles today to affirm His truth and/or His servant. The purpose for Jesus' miracles was to inspire belief.

John 10:37 If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.

John 10:38 But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father *is* in me, and I in him.

I tend to think that miracles today would be for the same reason. This excerpt from the Jewish New Testament Commentary would lend support to that thought:

Spectacular miracles are reported more frequently in areas where the Gospel is relatively new. For example, in the 1960's reports came out of parts of Indonesia reached recently by the Gospel that water had been turned to wine and even that dead people had been raised to life.

Verifying the truth of such reports is beyond the scope of a commentary, but the integrity of the Gospel demands avoiding credulity and applying evidential standards at least as high as for establishing other kinds of facts.

I am convinced that, relatively speaking, these types of miracles are few and far between today.

The Greek for the word *prophecy* references "prediction" from a root that references "foreteller and inspired speaker." I believe that predictive prophecy falls more into the same category as miracles--not as prevalent today because God's message to man was completed with the Revelation. Any true prophecy that is given today will be in support of scripture. I think scripture does indicate

that this gift will be on the increase in the “last days,” so I won’t be surprised to see more true prophets appear on the scene.

Acts 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

I’m amazed at the willingness of people to accept the words of self-declared prophets today who have been proven false. Scripture is clear that what is prophesied by a true prophet of God will be 100% accurate—never false, never just partially right.

Deut. 18:20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

Deut. 18:21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?

Deut. 18:22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

Jer. 28:9 The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, *then* shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him.

The gift of prophecy is a supernatural gifting from God. It is God’s word coming through man. There is no room for error. God’s word always comes to pass.

Is. 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.

John 17:17 ...thy word is truth.

Jer. 23:25-26 & 32 I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall *this* be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart....Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.

I’ve read books that justify the mistakes made by today’s “prophets” as part of a learning curve. I’m sorry; I just don’t buy it.

It seems to me that the gift of prophecy that would apply to the inspired speaker is much more prevalent today than that of predictive prophecy. This would be the gift possessed by those who have the ability to preach the word of God with power and insight, with boldness and clarity, with the ability to inspire others into action.

Jer. 23:20 The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly.

Jer. 23:21 I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

Jer. 23:22 **But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.**

The next gift listed is “discerning of spirits.” I like the definition from the Greek for *discerning*, “judicial estimation.” Simply put, it is the ability to judge wisely. This wording indicates that there is more than one type of spirit. I more naturally associate them with spirit beings, of which there are good and bad.

Acts 8:7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them*: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

Heb. 1:7 And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits....

Rev. 16:13-14 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *come* out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles....

The same Greek word for *spirit* is used by the Apostle John to reference human beings.

1John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every **spirit**, but try the spirits whether they are of God: **because many false prophets are gone out into the world.**

1John 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

1John 4:3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

It would seem that the major application of this gift would be discernment among human beings (i.e., prophets and teachers) who claim to be representing God in what they say and do. I don't discount that it also applies to spirit beings, such as those associated with weeping statues, visions of Mary and other types of deceptive miracles. The Jewish New Testament Commentary (JNT) words it like this, “One might call it the supernatural ability to avoid being deceived.” I think it is interesting to note that this gift is listed right after that of prophecy.

The next gift is “kinds of tongues.”

“kinds” = “kin” (abstract or concrete, literal or figurative, individual or collective):—born, country(-man), diversity, generation, kind(-red), nation, offspring, stock.

“tongues” = of uncertain affinity; the tongue; by implication, a language (specially, one naturally unacquired)

This would seem to be the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language, the language spoken by people of another nation, a language that you have never learned before. This gift was introduced at Pentecost and at that time obviously applied to existing foreign languages.

Acts 2:7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

Acts 2:8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

I'm sure this gift was quite prevalent in the early church because of the importance of spreading the gospel. I'm not sure how necessary that would be today. I am not discounting that it is a true gifting; I'm just not sure how prevalent it would be today as a primary tool for spreading God's truth. I can totally see the Lord using it to protect His servants as shared in this excerpt from the JNT.

"For example, one Pentecostal group reported in its denominational publication that one of their missionaries in Africa was saved from the soup pot of a cannibalistic tribe when he began to speak in the language of that tribe, a language he had never learned."

These are gifts that are meant to serve and edify the church. The use of tongues in a public setting is to be limited to knowing that there is one who can interpret present. I do not think this gift is referencing the "prayer language" spoken of in chapter 14.

1Cor. 14:14 For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

1Cor. 14:15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

1Cor. 14:16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

I'll focus more on that distinction when we get to chapter 14.

The *interpretation of tongues* is the last gift mentioned in this section of scripture, and is obviously necessary for the beneficial use of the gift of tongues in most instances.

1Cor. 12:11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

"worketh" = to be active, do, be mighty in, show forth self

Paul is clear that it is the one and only Holy Spirit of God that chooses the gifts with which each believer will be empowered. I thought it was interesting that the Greek for the word *worketh* stated to "show forth self." When the believer is actively operating in one of these special *giftings*, he/she is the vessel through which the Holy Spirit is declaring His presence, power and authority. We are not gifted because we are special; we are gifted because we are privileged to call God "Father." We are privileged to call God "Father" because of the sacrifice of His Son and receiving His gift of salvation.

1Cor. 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

At this point Paul draws a word picture to help us understand the truth he is teaching. Our body is made up of many different parts; each part is unique and is designed to benefit the function of the whole. So too is the body of Christ.

1Cor. 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

1Cor. 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many.

“baptized” = to immerse, submerge

Webster gives more insight in the definition for *submerge*, “...to be merged; hence, to be completely included.”

When a person accepts Christ as Savior, he/she is merged into a body of believers that exists solely through His willing provision; he/she is not just a useless appendage; we are completely included as part of the whole. Paul emphasizes this truth by comparing it to drinking. The Spirit becomes a part of every believer just as surely as a drink of water assimilates into our physical body. I think the wording of the King James is awkward to our hearing, but I believe it conveys the truth. Through faith we drink in Christ and are joined together as one body in His Spirit. It is only “in Christ” that we have the privilege of relationship to God the Father. I immediately thought of the section in Romans that addresses this same truth.

Rom. 12:5 So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

And then the verses from our study of Galatians.

Gal. 3:26-28 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

It is clear that the different members of the body are all necessary for it to function properly and with the greatest effectiveness; therefore, none of the members are to be discriminated against or considered less important than another.

I think it is important to note that we believers are the members of the body, and Christ is the head.

Col. 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of **his dear Son**:

Col. 1:14 **In whom we have redemption through his blood**, *even* the forgiveness of sins:

Col. 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

Col. 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

Col. 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Col. 1:18 **And he is the head of the body, the church:** who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.

1Cor. 12:15 **If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?**

1Cor. 12:16 **And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?**

I think that in context the main point Paul is making is that the members of the body have no part in determining their function; they exist at the will of the Creator. So too, the members of the body of Christ have no part in determining their function through the gifting of the Spirit; it is totally His determination. The function of each member according to his/her gifting has no bearing on his/her position in the body of Christ.

1Cor. 12:17 **If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling?**

The Spirit is emphasizing through Paul that every member of the body is necessary and has a reason for being. It is the unique contribution that each member brings to the whole that affects the health of the body and its effective function. So too, it is the unique contribution of every believer through his/her gifting of the Spirit that affects the health of the body of Christ as a whole and its effective impact on this wicked world.

1Cor. 12:18 **But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.**

1Cor. 12:19 **And if they were all one member, where *were* the body?**

1Cor. 12:20 **But now *are they* many members, yet but one body.**

This verse is an emphasis to the previous verses. It is God who has designed and created the body according to His pleasure, His choice, His intention (all from the Greek). Knowing that He has taken such care in the creation and design of our physical bodies, we can be certain that He has taken great care in the creation and design of the spiritual body of believers in Christ. There is no reason for any member of the body to be prideful of his/her function in the body, and there is no reason for any member of the body to disparage his/her function in the body. We should all be rejoicing at the privilege of simply being a part of the body of Christ.

A body is formed by the composite of its members. It is the unique combination of its members that gives it its identity and defines its function. None of the members individually could accomplish what the body can as a whole. Each member makes its unique contribution, but the effectiveness of that contribution is affected by the function of the whole.

1Cor. 12:21 **And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.**

God is not only sovereign in his creation of the body, He is sovereign in determining the specific function of each part. Each part is dependent upon the other for optimal function. The eye provides information that facilitates the

function of the hand. Without the hand much of the information provided by the eye would be useless; the eye needs the hand to make use of much of the information that the eye provides to the body. I couldn't help but think in reverse about how the hand is dependent upon the eye. Both parts of the body are limited in their ability to function independent of each other. A blind person or a person with a missing or paralyzed limb would readily acknowledge that truth.

Paul paints a second word picture regarding the function of the head and feet. Without the feet, the head is limited in the directions in which it can lead the body; without the head the feet (or any other member of the body) are useless.

In reference to Christ as the head of the body, we know that He can function without impairment without the body of believers. Believers, however, are entirely useless and helpless without Christ as their head. God, in His sovereignty, has chosen to work through the body of believers to accomplish His purposes—just as He sovereignly chose to give man the ability to make choices. In that regard, He has limited Himself in ability, and is dependent upon the “body of believers.” The things that the body can accomplish are unlimited in Christ if each part were truly yielded to His Lordship and living according to the power of the Holy Spirit and His giftings to us. Each believer that chooses to ignore their gift(s), or to be satisfied with the status quo, or compromise with the world, or act with selfish or impure motives, or never spend time in His word or with Him in prayer, etc. impairs the function of the body.

1Cor. 12:22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

“feeble” = without strength, weak

There are so many parts of the body that we would classify as feeble just because they aren't visible or their function is taken for granted or seems insignificant in comparison to others that are more visible and/or of significant function. You don't give much thought to your big toe unless you hurt it or lose it. You don't think much about the function of your pituitary gland until you start having problems related to hormone levels. Lack of visibility and/or size have nothing to do with importance of function.

1Cor. 12:23 And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness.

I didn't really think any of the translations gave a clear understanding of what Paul was saying in this verse. I think an important phrase in understanding this verse is the phrase “we think.”

“bestow” = to place around, hedge round about

I think this is why the NLT translates the first part of verse 23 as:

And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care.

It was interesting to compare the NIV, NLT and CJB for the rest of the verse.

NIV - And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,
NLT - So we carefully protect from the eyes of others those parts that should not be seen,
CJB - and the parts that aren't attractive are the ones we make as attractive as we can,

The application to the physical body is obvious; but I have to make connection with the phrase "we think" when making application to the body of Christ. No part of the body of Christ is unattractive or needs to be hidden. I think the CJB makes the best application to the body of Christ and the individual churches that comprise that body in particular. Getting people to serve in the very visible positions in the church is quite easy compared to getting people to serve in the less visible (Sunday School, nursery, parking, etc.) and behind the scenes (prayer warrior, communion prep, stuffing bulletins, etc.) positions.

1Cor. 12:24 For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked:
1Cor. 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another.

The key point in these verses is that God is the Creator/Designer of the body, and He has given more honor to the parts that we tend to ignore or take for granted. He has made their function so necessary that we have to pay attention to them. God desires for the body to function as a unit. He desires that each member should "esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

I found a very thought-provoking quote from David Guzik regarding these verses:

"Sometimes there is a part of our body which only lives to serve itself. It doesn't contribute anything to the rest of the body, and everything it gets it uses to feed and grow itself. We call this *cancer*."

1Cor. 12:26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

God has purposely designed the parts of the body to be interdependent—so too the body of Christ. When one member experiences pain, distress or grief, or anything that negatively impacts his/her function, it has impact on the effective function of the whole body. When one member experiences honor or praise for their work as part of the body, we can all rejoice at the honor and praise it brings to the body as a whole. JFB gave two good examples:

"When a thorn enters the heel, the whole body feels it, and is concerned: the back bends, the belly and thighs contract themselves, the hands come forward and draw out the thorn, the head stoops, and the eyes regard the affected member with intense gaze" ... "When the head is crowned, the whole man feels honored, the mouth expresses, and the eyes look, gladness."

The culture today is so geared to the individual that we have a hard time embracing the significance of this truth. We are so encouraged to focus on self

and making choices that benefit self, that we have need for teaching and learning how to think in terms of our function as an integral part of a much larger whole.

1Cor. 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Now Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are specifically gifted members of the body of Christ. Implied - The application to the truth he has been teaching applies to that body.

1Cor. 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

This verse illustrates the truth of the previous verse. God has specifically gifted and appointed us to different positions and functions in the body of Christ. In order of priority, some are designated to be:

1. *Apostles* – The Greek defines this word as “a delegate; specially, an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ (“apostle”) (with miraculous powers)...messenger, he that is sent.” It would seem that the priority for the apostle is to spread the gospel and affirm its truth through the leading and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. All the apostles referenced in scripture were serving as missionaries, church planters and guardians of the doctrines of faith.
2. *Prophets* – “a foreteller, an inspired speaker” – I think the primary function of the prophet today is as an inspired speaker of the truth of God’s word. He/she is empowered with the ability to clearly and boldly declare that truth. He/she is the vessel of choice for getting the attention of the body of believers to motivate to positive action or to identify areas of weakness and/or disease in the body and declare the need to repent.
3. *Teachers* – Teachers are privileged to impart knowledge about the word of God and to explain how we are to make application of the knowledge learned. This office is essential to producing believers that can “give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear....” (1Peter 3:15) It is also essential for the body of believers to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2Peter 3:18)

Along with these foundational ministry positions necessary for the effective function of the body of Christ are those who work miracles, who are given gifts that result in healings, who are gifted with helps, governments and tongues (all as discussed previously). Paul is making a point here; this listing is not intended to be complete.

1Cor. 12:29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

1Cor. 12:30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

These are rhetorical questions; the answer is obvious—No.

1Cor. 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

“best” = **stronger**, i.e. (figuratively) better, i.e. nobler:—best, better” from a root that means “**vigor** (“great”) (literally or figuratively):—dominion, might(-ily), power, strength.”

I decided to look at the Greek for *best* after reading the NLT translation.

“And in any event, you should desire the most helpful gifts.”

I think this translation best explains Paul’s heart with this statement. We tend to focus on “better” or “best” as referring to that which is most prominent. I don’t discount some application since Paul makes a point of giving us a prioritized list, but the whole focus of this passage has been the importance of the whole body of Christ and every member of that whole and the need for us to recognize that truth. I felt like the Lord was saying to me, “The **best** service and gifts for you are the service and gifts that I have decided are the services and gifts with which you can best glorify and serve Me in the body of Christ.”

“and yet I show....” – Paul is introducing the subject of the next chapter. He is going to teach us a lesson of the preeminence of the gift of real love in the life of the believer—“a more excellent way.” Every other service and gift pales in comparison to serving Christ with the gift of love.