

In attempting to expound chapters 12 to 14, we face two main problems. **First**, we don't know for sure the nature of the query or queries which the Corinthians had raised in their letter to Paul. As in 8.1, he begins the section with the words 'now concerning'. This is now the fourth of the six occurrences of the expression – the first of which read in full, 'Now concerning the things *about which you wrote*', 7.1; cf. 7.25; 8.1; 12.1; 16.1, 12. But, as in the case of chapters 8-10, we have no way of knowing what it was that the Corinthians had written – we can only guess. Probably the only thing of which we can be sure is that, whatever more general issues they may have raised on the subject, they had raised specific issues about the gift of tongues. It appears, for reasons which will become clear as we proceed through chapter 12, that at least some of the Corinthians regarded the gift of tongues as the principal sign of possessing the Holy Spirit – that they regarded possessing the gift of tongues as the unmistakable evidence of being men of the Spirit and, indeed, of being true believers. Inevitably, this put everyone under tremendous pressure to obtain and experience this particular gift. Having regard to the contents of chapter 14, it is likely that the church had also asked Paul about the relative importance and value of the gifts of tongues and prophecy, and about the procedure they should follow in the exercise of these gifts in the church meetings.

The **second** problem we face is that we live in very different days to those of the first Christian century and, as I see it, lack any experience of the more spectacular gifts mentioned throughout the section. In fact, this very problem was felt keenly by Christians much nearer to the first century than ourselves. For example, in introducing this section of 1 Corinthians, one commentator wrote, 'This whole section is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to - being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place'. The commentator was John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, writing about 400 AD.

As I understand it, the purpose of chapter 12 isn't so much simply to set the scene for what was to come in chapters 13 and 14, but *to demonstrate at the outset that a person doesn't need to have the gift of tongues to be part of the church, the body of Christ*. The point of the opening three verses is that the only true and proper evidence of having the Spirit is the confession of Jesus as Lord. One of the main purposes of the remainder of the chapter is to establish that the lack of any one particular gift doesn't exclude a person from being a member of the body of Christ. That is, Paul is concerned to show that the real purpose of God-given spiritual gifts isn't to provide *proof* that particular people have the Spirit and therefore belong to the body of Christ – but rather to provide *profit* for the church, v.7. As we shall see, the long section from verse 14 to verse 27 isn't principally concerned with the relative value of one gift against another, but with the twin dangers that (a) because someone lacks some particular gift, they come to doubt that they belong to the body at all, and that (b) for the same reason, other people come to deny that this person belongs to the body!

A very simple **outline** of the chapter would be :

- The evidence and test of having the Spirit, vv.1-3
- The unity of the Spirit and the diversity of gifts, vv.4-11
- This unity and diversity in the church paralleled by the human body, vv.12-26
- Application and conclusion, vv.27-31.

First, vv.1-3 provide the evidence and test of having the Spirit

Verses 1-2. Paul didn't want the Corinthians to be ignorant about spiritual matters and gifts. But he recognised that their background was very much against them. At least some of them had once been idolaters, 6.10-11. Verse 3 begins '*Therefore I make known to you*'; that is, Paul needed to inform the Corinthians of certain things *because* in their unconverted days they had been in bondage to idols, and therefore knew nothing of the Holy Spirit or of genuinely spiritual things. They had then been 'carried away' – the word implies being dragged rather than enticed – as if to trial, prison or into bondage. It isn't clear whether Paul meant that they had been 'carried away' by their background, by heathen priests or by the demons which lurked behind the idols, 10.20. Paul described the idols they had left behind as 'dumb', mute – as voiceless, speechless; cf. more than once the psalmists poured their scorn, 'The idols of the nations are silver and gold – the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak', Psalms 135.15-16; cf. Psalm 115.4-5. But the Corinthians had now turned to the living God who does speak, and whose Spirit speaks through the true Christian, v.3b!

Verse 3 can have two possible meanings. (i) It might furnish a test by which the saints could test the 'spirits' who spoke, whether through tongues and prophecy. That is, it might provide the equipment to discern the 'spirit' which was speaking. But this is unlikely. First, because Paul doesn't make any reference to other spirits – indeed later he specifically refers to 'the discerning of spirits' as a particular spiritual gift possessed only by some, v.10. Second, this interpretation would mean that the verses weren't directly relevant – except by way of some general introduction – to the subject matter of chapters 12-14; namely the place of tongues among the gifts of the Spirit. (ii) Far more likely, verse 3 provides *an infallible guide as to whether a person has the Spirit or not*. That is, it furnishes a very simple rule to apply by which the saints can test who possesses the Spirit of God and who doesn't.

The evidence of having the Holy Spirit did *not* lie in the possession and exercise of certain spiritual gifts - whether tongues, miracle-working or whatever. The evidence lay in the acknowledgement of the lordship of Jesus. That is, *the sure-fire test of having the Spirit isn't whether people can speak in languages which they don't know but what they say about Jesus in the language they do know.*

Before his conversion, Paul had himself been a blasphemer, 1 Tim.1.13, and may well have expressed himself in such strong language as, 'Jesus is accursed' – literally 'anathema Jesus'. That is, 'Jesus is devoted to God for destruction as under His curse', as was indeed everyone hanged on a tree, Deut.21.23. Before his conversion, Paul had also done all in his power to force the early disciples to blaspheme, Acts 26.11. But that was all in the past. Now, to Paul, Jesus was Lord. And, as he made clear in his letter to the Romans, the only yardstick for becoming a Christian (and therefore possessing the Spirit) was the confession of Jesus as Lord – Rom.10.9 – and it still is!

To those who looked for some special spiritual manifestation (e.g. speaking in tongues) as a guarantee of the Spirit's indwelling, Paul says: 'You're on the wrong track altogether'. If some in the Corinthian church believed that the gift of tongues was the tell-tale sign of possessing the Spirit they were wrong. The unmistakable evidence of having the Spirit consisted, not in tongue-speaking, but (a) in refusing to adopt the cry of 'Anathema Jesus' which may well have resounded from the synagogue next door (next door, that is to the house of Titus Justus, where quite possibly the church still met, Acts 18.7), and (b) in acknowledging with sincerity that Jesus was Lord.

Vv.4-11 stress the unity of the Spirit and the diversity of His gifts

Verses 4-6 emphasize *the unity of the origin, the use and the operation* of the gifts in the context of the three Persons of the Godhead. True, Paul says, there are differences and diversities of gifts (viz. 'free gifts, gifts bestowed by grace'), but *it is the same Spirit* who distributes each of these gifts, **v.4**. True, there are differences and diversities of useful service in which these gifts function, but *it is the same Lord* who is served – all forms of true ministry being rendered to Him and directed by Him, **v.5**. True, there are differences and diversities of powerful workings and energies, but *it is the same God* who works and energises 'all' of these 'in all' of those through whom these workings and energies are performed, **v.6**. Paul introduces the three Persons of the Godhead to lay stress on the unity which lies behind all spiritual gifts – it is the one Spirit who gives, the one Lord who is served and the one God who is at work. How privileged we are as Christians to be the objects of such divine interest and activity.

Verse 7 states *the purpose of the gifts* - that they are imparted by the Spirit for the common good. Paul had earlier argued that it is a person's personal confession of Jesus' lordship which provides the infallible test and sign of the possession of the Spirit, vv.1-3. But that was not to say that someone's confession of Jesus was the only 'manifestation' of the Spirit to be witnessed. Far from it, Paul now says, for by means of the gifts which He bestows on individuals, the Spirit makes known His presence in the church.

Note the expression '*each one*' – rendered 'every man' or 'every one' – vv.7,11,18. This expression translates a word which Paul employs elsewhere in the context of spiritual gifts – both of gifts given *by God* ('God had dealt to each one', Rom.12.3) and by *the ascended Christ* ('to each one ... according to the measure of Christ's gift', Eph.4.7). The point is that *all* Christians receive spiritual gifts from the Godhead – the gifts aren't limited to a few special people.

And these 'manifestations of the Spirit' are given '*to profit*', v.7 lit. Twice earlier Paul had insisted that 'all things' do not profit, 6.12; 10.23; now he insists that spiritual gifts do! These gifts are bestowed for the common good, which Paul later defines as the strengthening and edifying of the church, 14.3,12. Already therefore Paul is laying the foundation for the teaching of chapter 14 that profit and edification are the yardsticks for deciding what is and isn't admissible in the meetings of the church. Spiritual gifts aren't given either for one's own self-enjoyment or for one's self-display and glorification.

Verses 8-10 provide *examples of the kinds of gifts which the Spirit gives*. For his present purpose, Paul selects *nine gifts of the Spirit*, just as in Galatians 5 he selects *nine graces of the Spirit* to illustrate the Spirit's fruit in the lives of believers.

'**The word (utterance) of wisdom**' probably refers to fresh revelations of divine wisdom ('the deep things of God'), in contrast to human philosophy; cf. 2.6,10. Just possibly the expression refers, in a more general sense, to the application of knowledge to a particular situation. '**The word (utterance) of knowledge**' refers, not to knowledge acquired the hard way by labour and study, but to knowledge imparted direct from God; cf. 'Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"', Acts 5.3-4. '**Faith**' refers, not to saving faith (because saving faith isn't – as the 'faith' here – a spiritual gift confined to some), but to outstanding faith given to some to rely on God in a special way, and possibly to wonder-working faith associated with healings and the working of miracles, which appear next in the list of gifts; cf. at foot of Mount of Transfiguration, 'Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will

say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move'", Matt 17.14-21 – a saying echoed in 1 Cor 13.2. '**Gifts of healings**' – the plural may well indicate the curing of different kinds of diseases and ailments. '**The working of miracles**', as distinct from the gift of healings, probably refers to such evidences of divine working as the raising of Dorcas and Eutychus, and the smiting of Elymas. Paul may well have included also the casting out of demons – of which there are many cases in the Book of Acts – Philip in Samaria, 8.7; Paul in Philippi, 16.18; and in Ephesus, 19.12.

The apostle next introduces the gifts of 'prophecy' and 'different kinds of tongues', together with their ancillary gifts – of 'discernment' and of 'interpretation' respectively. '**Prophecy**' refers to the making known of some special revelation, whether the 'forth-telling' of God's word into a present situation or the 'fore-telling' of the future (as in case of Agabus; Acts 11.28; 21.10-11). '**The discerning of spirits**' was an important gift because messages being declared in the church weren't to be accepted uncritically. There was the need to test whether any particular message had come from the Holy Spirit or from some evil spirit; cf. Acts 16.16-18; 1 Thess.5.19-21; 'doctrines of demons', 1 Tim 4.1; 'test the spirits whether they are of God', 1 John 4.1-6. '**Different** (various) **kinds of tongues**'. In the book of Acts, the 'tongues' spoken were normal human languages, capable of being understood without the spiritual gift of interpretation by those versed in the particular languages; see Acts 2.4-11. But we can't be absolutely certain that the 'tongues' in exercise at Corinth were also normal human languages. What we do know is that, in 1 Corinthians 12-14, 'tongues' are a spiritual gift which enabled a believer to pray, sing or give thanks to God in languages unknown to the speaker and requiring the spiritual gift of interpretation. '**The interpretation of tongues**'. The word is akin to that used of a 'translator' in the Greek Old Testament at Genesis 42.23 – where Joseph spoke through an 'interpreter' so that his brothers wouldn't know that he understood them. Later Greek also used the word in the sense of 'translation' – e.g. 'Rabbi/Teacher', John 1.38, 'Cephas/Stone', 42; 'Siloam/Sent', 9.7. The expression 'the interpretation of tongues' refers here then to the Spirit-given ability to convert words which weren't intelligible to the hearers into words which were intelligible to them.

Verse 11 serves as a summary of verses 4-10. The unity of the gift-giving Spirit has been emphasised throughout those verses (note 'the same Spirit' and 'the one Spirit'). The fact that all spiritual gifts are distributed by 'one and the same Spirit' guarantees unity to the diversity of the gifts.

The expression '*as He wills* (determines/purposes)' is clear evidence that the Holy Spirit is both (i) a Person and (ii) sovereign. It is worth noting that spiritual gifts are given as the Spirit '*wills*', and not because the recipient is necessarily a spiritual person who walks close with God. The Corinthians were specially gifted, excelling in every kind of gift, 1.7 – but they certainly weren't spiritually mature, being described by Paul both as carnal and as babes in Christ, 3.1. It is no doubt for this reason that spiritual ability is never the sole criterion for a position of leadership among Christians. The emphasis is rather on Christian maturity and character, 1 Tim.3.1-13; Titus 1.5-9. After all, the Holy Spirit can grant remarkable spiritual gifts to somebody in a moment, but character and maturity take many years to build. The recognition that the distribution of spiritual gifts is '*as He* (the Holy Spirit) *wills*' would sound the death-knell to much of the complaining, boasting, envying and rivalry which sadly is found among God's people.

Vv. 12-26 teach that the combination of unity and diversity in the church is paralleled by the human body

This section shows that the principle of 'unity in diversity' among believers derives not only from the oneness of the Spirit, vv.4-11, but from the nature of the church as the body of Christ. Just as the Spirit is 'one', vv.11,13, so the body is 'one', vv.12-13.

We note that, when Paul speaks of the church as 'the body', he isn't using a mere illustration or analogy. The church *is* the body of Christ in reality – see 'so also is Christ', v.12 - 'we were all baptised into one body', v.13 - 'now you are the body of Christ', v.27. What Paul does in verses 12-26 is to draw attention to the interesting parallel between the church and the human body and, in so doing, points to some of the practical lessons which can be learnt from this parallel.

Verses 12-13 assert how individual Christians, with their differing gifts, came to be one body. That is, these verses provide the doctrinal basis for the body imagery which extends down to verse 26.

'The body is one', v.12, affirms that every member of the human body (and indeed, as we now know, every cell) is linked by one common life – by what we now know as one common DNA code. It is important to note that verse 12 doesn't conclude with the words, '*so also is the church*' (as we might have expected), but with the words, '*so also is Christ*'. For Paul wants us to appreciate our oneness in and with Christ. This was something he had learned himself at the time of his conversion, when the risen Lord had asked, 'Why do you persecute *me*', Acts 9.4; 22.7; 26.14.

Verse 13 opens with the word 'For', telling us that the purpose of verse 13 is to explain how we all came to be incorporated into the one body. (In this chapter 'the body of Christ', v.27, isn't the *local* church – hence the inclusion of apostles among the gifts set in the church, v.28.)

The key expressions to note in verse 13 are '*in* (not 'by', NKJV) *one Spirit*' and '*into one body*'. There are, in all, seven references to baptism in the Spirit in the N.T. The four gospels boast one reference each (all of which record John the Baptist's prediction that the Lord Jesus would at some time baptise people in the Spirit), the Book of Acts contains two references (the first where the Lord alerted the apostles to the imminence of the event, Acts 1.5, and the second where Peter pointed back to the extended fulfilment of Pentecost in the house of Cornelius recorded in chapter 10, Acts 11.16), and Paul provides the final reference here (where he explains the doctrinal meaning and significance of the event).

The Bible distinguishes clearly between baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit – see, for example, the words of John the Baptist, 'I indeed baptize you in water... but ... He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit,' and the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, 'John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit after not many days,' Matt.3.11; Acts 1.5 (both literal translations). That is, the Lord Jesus was the baptiser, and the Holy Spirit was the element in which believers were baptised. According to scripture, believers are baptised '*in*' the Spirit – not '*with*' or '*by*' the Spirit.

'*Into one body*' means '*so as to constitute one body*'. Although it is true that baptism in the Spirit also brought the disciples the power to witness, Luke 24.48-49; Acts 1.8, the main purpose of that baptism was to unite all believers in the body, the church – to incorporate them into the body of Christ. Baptism in the Spirit is all about the way in which the body, the church, came into existence. It has everything to do with placing men and women in that body.

It should be noted that, in Acts 8, 10 and 19, Luke records three special extensions of the original Pentecost experience. Only Jews experienced the baptism in the Spirit at the beginning, 2.1-4. There was therefore no problem when other Jews were saved later. There was no reason for anyone to doubt that later Jewish converts were regarded by God as included representatively in the initial Pentecost event and that they therefore formed part of the body, the church. But there were several other kinds of people about – some were half-Jew and half-gentile (the Samaritans- for whose origin see 2 Kings 17); some were fully-fledged gentiles; and some could be said to be half-Jew and half-Christian (the disciples of John the Baptist).

If groups from these various kinds of people were to be accepted into the public fellowship of the (originally Jewish) church, it was essential that both (i) those in each group, and (ii) the Jewish believers themselves should be given some public confirmation that the groups were in fact indwelt by the same Spirit, and had, '*in the Spirit*', been baptised into the one body. Luke was at pains therefore to report how the baptism of the Spirit was extended to representative samples of each group – as said, in chapters 8, 10 and 19 respectively. These chapters record three *unique* and *unrepeatable* extensions of one *unique* and *unrepeatable* event.

With an eye to the claims made in some sections of the church today, we note that (i) on no occasion was the special experience sought, (ii) in no case was the experience dependent on the spirituality of the recipients, and (iii) in no case was it an individual experience – the experience was always shared collectively by the whole group. Scripture gives no grounds for individual Christians seeking some special '*baptism in the Spirit*' experience today.

What happened on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 was a representative event – in the same way that what happened at Golgotha was a representative event. In God's eyes, when Jesus died, all believers were crucified with Him, Gal.2.20. When Jesus rose, all believers were seen by God as raised up together with Him. Similarly, when He baptised the nucleus of the church in the Spirit, God saw all believers as baptised in the Spirit that day also. At my conversion, I came into the good of what happened almost 2,000 years ago - at the cross, in Jesus' resurrection *and on the day of Pentecost*.

Scripture never contemplates baptism in the Spirit (still less '*baptism of the Spirit*', an altogether non-scriptural term) as some kind of special and higher experience for Christians. Indeed, as we have previously noted, the very church of which Paul said that they had '*all*' been '*baptised in one Spirit*' was a particularly carnal and immature church, 3.1,3. Again with an eye to the claims made in some sections of the church today, we note also that '*all*' the Corinthians are said to have been baptised in the Spirit – yet certainly *all* of them didn't speak in tongues, vv.10, 30.

It is by the baptism in the Spirit that the church (the body of Christ) came into existence – in which body, Paul says, there are no differences on account of either race or rank, v.13.

In summary, the baptism in the Spirit isn't some '*second blessing*' or experience subsequent to conversion, enjoyed only by some – it is an initial experience enjoyed by all – along with the other blessings of salvation – or they wouldn't be in the body of Christ at all. This is how the church came into existence – and in which – Paul adds – there are no differences of race or rank, v.13

Verses 14-26. First, a general overview of the section. It is worth noting that, if this entire section had been omitted, we would never have noticed that there was anything missing between verse 13 ('*by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body*') and verse 27 ('*Now you are the body of Christ and members individually*'). We need to

ask therefore what does the intervening section (verses 14-26) add to the apostle's teaching about spiritual gifts, and about the gift of tongues in particular?

In this section, Paul draws attention to several features of the human – the physical – body. But the apostle's purpose was *not* to give the Corinthians a lesson on human anatomy. Verses 12 and 13 had prepared the Corinthians to expect that many of the features of the human body would have a direct application and read-across to the body of Christ – the church.

The section breaks down into two parts. **Verses 14-19** underline the fact that the body of Christ is made up of *many members, not one*. **Verses 20-26** underline the fact that, although the body has many members, it remains *only one body*. Note the differing emphases in **verses 14 and 20** – 'the body is not one member but many' – 'there are many members, yet one body'. In both parts, Paul speaks in terms of many 'members' and of the 'one body' – with obvious links to what he says about the church in both verse 12 and verse 27.

In the first part (verses 14-19), Paul stresses that *it is God* who has 'set' the various members in the human body as it has pleased Him, v.18, and in the second part (verses 20-26), that *it is God* who has 'composed' (blended together, harmonised) the human body, v.24b. When later speaking of the church directly, Paul makes the very same point; it is *God* who has 'set' the various gifts there, v.28.

Throughout the section, the apostle personifies the various members of the human body, attributing to each the power of speech. **Verses 15-17** make the point that no member is unnecessary to the body - even if it thinks it is and says so about itself. **Verses 21-26** make the point that no member can be said to be unnecessary by another member of the body. **Verses 15-17** envisage members with *an inferiority complex*. **Verses 21-26** envisage members with *a superior and dismissive attitude* towards others. **Verses 15-17** teach that nobody should belittle his or her own role and function, so as to draw the conclusion that he or she isn't in the body. **Verses 21-26** teach that nobody should disparage and belittle others, drawing the conclusion that they are superfluous as far as membership of the body is concerned.

Now to look at the section in more detail. In **verses 14-18**, Paul asks the Corinthians to consider just how ludicrous it would be for either a man's foot or ear to conclude that it didn't belong to the body – simply because it didn't share the same functions (and wasn't as glamorous) as the hand and the eye respectively! And yet clearly there were some at Corinth who were led to doubt that they had the Spirit and to doubt that they properly belonged to the church – simply because they didn't experience and exercise one of the more spectacular gifts, such as tongues. Note in passing that Paul speaks of the foot contrasting itself with the hand, and the ear with the eye. He doesn't imagine the foot contrasting itself with the eye. That is, we tend to envy those with similar gifts to our own and who we believe come a little above us – rather than those we know to be at a far greater distance from us in terms of their spiritual gift. In **verse 19**, Paul raises the rhetorical question, 'But what would happen if all the parts of the body were one and the same?' His answer? The body wouldn't be a body!

Verses 20-26. Paul points out that the weaker and less presentable members are necessary – often far more necessary than appearances suggest, and far more necessary than the more presentable parts. More often than not, Paul says, our weaker and more delicate organs, which are altogether unable to protect themselves (e.g. our liver, kidneys and stomach) are the more vital members. A man can live without such strong members as an arm or leg, but he can't live without such organs as the brain, lungs or heart. Again, those parts which decency requires us to cover up, we not only conceal but go out of our way to adorn. God has, Paul observes, so made and harmonised the body that what one member lacks in one respect is compensated for in another, v.24. God has done this that there should be no division, no discord, no friction in the body. Are you Corinthians listening? - with your countless factions, aligning yourselves as you do behind your favourite teachers and forever disparaging others because of your supposedly superior gifts.

In the human body, no one member (such as the eye or head) would ever dream of denying the necessity and usefulness of another member (such as the hand or foot) simply because that member had a different function in the body, **v.21**. And yet clearly there were some in Corinth (e.g. who possessed and exercised the gift of tongues) who gave themselves airs, and were prepared to write off others as not needed – simply because these others didn't share the same gift. Paul doubtless chose his examples carefully. How absurd it would really be for the eye to disclaim any need for the hand – for without the hand, the eye would be altogether powerless either to obtain anything which it saw or to protect itself from injury. And how would the head travel to its desired destination if the body had no feet? Paul's argument rests on the fact that our bodily members do *not* each serve their own interests, but the common good.

Sadly, some bodies do have parts which live only to serve themselves. These parts don't contribute anything to the rest of the body. Everything they get, they use only to feed and develop themselves. We call these parts cancer!

Continuing to personify the members of the body, Paul teaches the principles of (i) mutual concern, **v.25**, and (ii) mutual sympathy, **v.26**. In his commentary, John Chrysostom offers an illustration of Paul's words 'if one member

is honoured (glorified), all the members rejoice with it', v.26. Chrysostom adds, "And how do they rejoice with it?", say you. The head is crowned, and the whole man is honoured'. Indeed! And which of us has never made the uncomfortable discovery that the whole body feels terribly out of sorts when we suffer a headache or toothache?

Vv. 27-31 provide the application and conclusion

Paul told the Corinthians, 'you are body of Christ', **v.27** lit. He didn't say that they were 'the' body of Christ, as rendered by the AV. The church of God at Corinth certainly wasn't the whole of the body of Christ, into which all who believe are baptised, v.13. Yet each local church *is* a microcosm of the big thing. Each local church is a miniature version of the whole church, and has the same characteristics as the whole church. The principles expounded in the chapter are therefore directly relevant to each local church. And the fact that today we don't have the full range of spiritual gifts listed in the chapter does nothing to rob the chapter of its relevance to us.

As God has 'set' members in the human body, 'But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body as it has pleased Him', v.18, so He has 'set' gifts in the church, 'And God has set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets', **v.28**. And just as the human body wouldn't exist if it consisted of only one member – no matter how big and impressive that member was, v.19 – so the church can't exist with only one kind of gift, no matter how impressive that gift is, **vv.29-30**.

It is possible that the gift of tongues (together with its interpretation) is listed last – both in verse 28 and verses 29-30 – because it was this particular gift which was causing problems at Corinth – and that Paul therefore led up to the mention of tongues as some form of climax. It seems more likely, however, that the lists represent a definite ranking – note Paul's use of 'first', 'second' etc in v.28. That is, the gift of tongues (of which the Corinthians were so proud and to which they attached such great importance) occurs at the bottom of Paul's list – as it does also in verse 10 – because, *in terms of the contribution which tongue-speakers made to the edification of the church, it ranked the lowest among the gifts*. Most certainly, the exercise of the gift of tongues was no proper criterion by which to judge whether or not somebody had the Spirit, and whether or not that person was therefore in the body of Christ.

Paul is careful to guard against any misunderstanding about his attitude to spiritual gifts. 'But', he says, 'earnestly desire the greater gifts', **v.31** lit. Although the possession of any particular gift was no proof of having the Spirit, it was only right that the saints should be zealous for the higher gifts – namely, those which would be most useful to the church. Paul returns to this point at both the beginning and the end of chapter 14 in the context of the gift of prophecy, vv.1, 39, and also instructs the saints at Corinth that in certain circumstances they should pray to receive a certain gift, 14.13. Clearly then, although the Spirit distributes and apportions gifts to individual Christians as He purposes, v.11, it is still proper and right for us both to desire and ask for the greater gifts – though only, of course, that we might excel in building up the church, 14.12.

'And yet', the apostle concludes the chapter, 'I show you a more excellent way'; i.e. a way beyond comparison, a way par excellence'. For 'love' is greater than any number of gifts and, unlike the gifts, is open to all. But more of this later.

[Based substantially on the notes which have been published in Precious Seed during 2002 and 2003.]

AN OUTLINE OF 1 CORINTHIANS 12

The evidence and test of having the Spirit, vv.1-3.

The unity of the Spirit and the diversity of gifts, vv.4-11 :

- **Unity of the gifts, vv.4-6 – the one Spirit who distributes, the one Lord who is served, and the one God who energises.**
- **Purpose of the gifts, v.7.**
- **Examples of the gifts, vv.8-10.**
- **Sovereign distribution of the gifts, v.11.**

This unity and diversity in the church paralleled by the human body, vv.12-26 :

- **How individual Christians, with differing gifts, became ‘one body’, vv.12-13.**
- **The body is made up of many members, vv.14-19 – that a member regards itself as unnecessary does not make it so.**
- **The many members are one body, vv.20-26 – that a member regards another member as unnecessary does not make it so.**

Application and conclusion, vv.27-31.