



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

“The Church - The Body of Christ”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, according to our clock at the back, it's time for us to start. And we're going to begin by looking to the Lord for a few moments of prayer. Let's bow our heads.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee again. We thank Thee for the privilege of studying the Word of God together. We again thank Thee for the blessings of life that are ours through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We thank Thee for the forgiveness of sins. We thank Thee for the gift of righteousness which is acceptable to Thee, pleasing to Thee, wrought out for us by the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross.

And we thank Thee for the ministry of the Holy Spirit about which we speak this evening. We thank Thee for his permanent indwelling of all who have believed in our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the confidence that gives us, for his guidance; for his direction in our lives; for the enlightenment that he gives us as we read the word of God; for the marvelous way in which he is our companion and brings to us constantly the truths of Scripture that have to do with the provision that the Lord Jesus has made for us.

We thank Thee for the comfort that we have of his presence in the experiences of life. And we thank Thee for the word of God to which we turn this evening. We give Thee thanks for the apostles who have been faithful, to the ministry to which Thou hast called them. We thank Thee for Paul. What a marvelous man of God he was and has

been in the gift to us of the inspired Scriptures which have come through Thee first through him. And now, Lord, we ask that Thou will guide us and direct us in our meditations this evening; not only for me but for those who hear. May our thoughts be brought into conformity with the truth of our triune God in heaven.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] We continue, of course, our study of 1 Corinthians, and we’re in chapter 12. Our passage for today is 1 Corinthians 12:12 through 26. And in a moment, we’ll read it. The apostle has made plain in chapter 12, verse 1 through verse 3 the test of spiritual utterance. Specifically in verse 3, he wrote,

“Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

In other words, the test of spiritual utterance is the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the person who speaks, and there are things that he can only confess by the ministry of the Spirit, and there are things that he cannot say if he is speaking by the Holy Spirit. He cannot call Jesus accursed. He cannot say Jesus is Lord except by the ministry of the Holy Spirit first to him.

We talked last time about the unity and diversity of the gifts; the unity of the gifts in verse 4 through verse 6 in which the apostle rings the changes on the fact that they are gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is a unity in them. They come from the Spirit. They come from the Lord. They come from God who speaks as he says, “all in all.”

And then the diversity of the gifts. And we mentioned some of the gifts, but we did not talk about all of the gifts. One of the reasons is just the matter of time because some of these gifts we could devote an entire message to and some are, on the other hand, a bit difficult to know precisely what the apostle is speaking about because they’re not referred to in the word of God in such a way that we can absolutely know. Such as,

as I mentioned last time, the gift of knowledge and the gift of wisdom. We do not have any specific identification of those gifts. Other gifts, of course, we do have, but those two are difficult.

I did not say anything about the gift of faith. I think we would all understand what the gift of faith is. It’s not the faith by which we believe to salvation because every Christian has that. And so consequently the gift of faith is something beyond the gift which is given us by which we cast ourselves upon the Lord and become members of the family of God and related to him in the forgiveness of sins and justification of life. The gift of faith, then, is something beyond that. Again, the Bible doesn’t define it in great detail but if we look at the history of the Christian church, there are individuals who stand out in the history as men who not only have had faith in Christ but have in the ministry that they have had evidence of the fact that they’re gift of faith is beyond the ordinary.

Many of us think of George Mueller, for example, a man who with the Bristol orphanages was able to feed so many thousands of young children by never -- and I should say -- and never appealing for funds publicly. And that would, of course, in our day be regarded as something of a miracle; if we looked at the way by which the Christian church and individuals today beg for funds to carry on the Lord’s work. Our churches beg for funds with their pledge systems, our ministries – para-church ministries beg for funds. If you’ve ever given to one, you know that because the letters come constantly. They come off by arrangement, so you’re constantly bombarded with letters begging you for funds. To think of the fact that at times there were thousands in the Bristol orphanages, and they were fed by no appeals whatsoever is a miracle in itself. I don’t know of anyone who would want to debate whether George Mueller had the gift of faith or not.

Now, it’s very embarrassing for many of these Christian works today to think about George Mueller because the very fact of the knowledge of what God did through George Mueller is a conviction. And I think one of the most abysmal things to my mind

that has been said by some Christians recently is that Mueller was a person who didn’t live up to his own principles. Back behind this is the attempt to justification, the begging for funds. And Mueller is said not to have lived up to his principles because at the end of the year, he sent out a letter thanking those who had given gifts during the past year.

Now, I would have thought that being a Christian man, it would be perfectly proper for a person to be thankful for unsolicited gifts. And so Mr. Mueller did do that. I cannot see how that violated his principle at all. And, furthermore, if my friends – and some of them are my friends who are saying things like this – if my friends would just say, “Okay. We will follow Mr. Mueller’s principle. We will look to the Lord, and then we will let our readers – I mean, our givers at the end of the year, receive our thanksgiving.” If they would like to live by that, then I invite them to do it. I would like to see them so that. Stop their solicitation; do not look to anyone but the Lord, and then we give them permission at the end of the year to write a letter of thanks. Let’s see how they will do.

One of the reasons, in my opinion, that the Bible sets forth these principles of looking to the Lord is that that’s a test of whether we’re really doing the Lord’s work. If we’re doing the Lord’s work, we have the confidence of holy Scripture that he will supply the needs of those who do the Lord’s work. If he supplies our needs, we have the confidence we’re doing his work. And so it’s a way to attest the validity of the work and at the same time, it’s a way to stir up and support the conscience and the work of individual Christians who are seeking to do the work to please the Lord.

Now, I would say that George Muller had the gift of faith. I cannot point to a text of Scripture that says that. I know there is a gift of faith. He mentions the gift of faith. And it’s not salvation, which everyone has, the faith to believe. It’s beyond that, it’s obvious. So I would suggest that he had the gift of faith and furthermore, that he carried out that gift in a most admirable way.

Hudson Taylor who was the founder of the China Inland Mission also did not appeal for funds. And that great mission became the largest of all the Christian missions. And incidentally, George Mueller was one of the supporters of the China Inland Mission. They had similar ideas with respect to the Lord’s work. Hudson Taylor, in my opinion, had the gift of faith.

Louis Sperry Chafer, who was the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary in the early days of the seminary, sought to follow the principle of Mr. Mueller for the seminary up until about the middle of the 1940’s. I must say that I admire Dr. Chafer greatly. He’s one of my favorite Christian men, and I hope that he will not be angry with me when I get to heaven. But I think that perhaps unwittingly he violated his own principle by signing contracts with certain professors after he had invited them to the faculty. In other words, they came but not on the same principles by which the seminary was operating. It would have seemed to me that the faculty members should also have been men of faith who looked to the Lord. And most of them were. But some he signed contracts with, and later on they became an embarrassment to the seminary because they were unable to pay those contracts. But Dr. Chafer sought to do that.

Now, I don’t know whether Dr Chafer had the gift of faith or not. I cannot say that. Maybe he did not have the gift of faith and that accounted for the fact that they did not completely succeed. But when I first became a faculty member there, one of the things that interested me so much was the fact that we thought we were living by faith only. No letters were going out asking for funds. And when I would go to certain places to preach, and I remember specifically going to Nacogdoches, Texas, in a church there that supported the seminary. It was a pleasure to be able to stand in the pulpit and say that I’m associated with Dallas Seminary, and we look to the Lord to supply our funds because it gave a certain sense of this institution is in the will of God if we have had our needs met by the Lord God without solicitation.

So the gift of faith -- I didn’t say anything about it, now I’ve said something about it. I didn’t say anything about discerning of spirits. And I’m not really absolutely positive what that means either, but I think I have a good idea, and I’ll pass it on to you, and you may accept it if you like. The gift of discerning of spirits is the gift of being able to distinguish between truth and error. And there are individuals who have an interest in that point and who also have skills in determining that distinction between truth and error. Sometimes these individuals get a bad name. People accuse them of being so critical all the time. But we need that kind of criticism if the church is departing from the faith. We need someone to rise up from time to time and say, “Look. You are not following what Scripture says for this reason.” And today, we have a number of people who are doing that.

We’ve had in the past men like Charles Hodge, William G. T. Shedd, and others who [wrote] systematic theologies and made very distinct points about what was truth and what was not truth. And in the present day, we have individuals who seem to be majoring in that kind of thing. We have Robert Morey, a young -- younger theologian who’s interested in the distinction between truth and error. We have David Wells, professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, who wrote *No Place For Truth* and now has another book out dealing with the same topic on how the evangelical church is moving away from what he would regard as the truth of God.

We have others also who have been doing that, and we’re thankful for them. Michael Horton is another one who has written a number of books in which he has sought to point out the errors that have been pervading the evangelical church in recent years and warning us against them. And we ought to read and ponder some of those things that they are saying. Those men may be individuals who have the gift of discerning of spirits.

James Moffett, Scottish theologian, Professor of New Testament also at the University of Glasgow some years ago, earlier part of this century said, “The church is not

to lie at the mercy of any ranter or unbalanced enthusiast.” There is a spiritual gift of discernment. A later illustration of this capacity is Wesley’s treatment of the French Prophets and the Jumpers -- what an interesting name of some professing Christians: the Jumpers. They weren’t the Rollers but the Jumpers, and Wesley didn’t hesitate to speak out against them.

So it’s not wrong for individuals to stand up and say, “We’re not following the word of God in this respect or in that respect.” We need such men and the gift of the discerning of spirits, it seems to me, has to do with that.

Bunyan remarks concerning great grace, you may remember in his allegory, “Who was the king’s strong fighter who rallied fate-hearted followers and routed misgivings.” He said with reference to him, “All the king’s subjects are not his champions.” We need some champions here and there who will steer us back onto the path of truth when we have veered here or there. We need them in Believers Chapel. We need someone in Believers Chapel to watch people like me and to say, “I don’t think the statement you made there is really something that’s true to the word of God,” and have the teachers of the word of God face up to it.

Now, Paul uses in this passage that we’re going to look at in verse 12 and following, uses the human body to reveal and illustrate the relationship of believers to Christ and to one another in the one church. The human body -- there’s an interesting story which F.F. Bruce refers to and Moffett also refers to. And I think since Moffett wrote first, Bruce may have gotten it from Moffett. In 494 BC when the Plebians in Rome seceded from Rome -- you may remember the Plebians were the common people. That’s why we have Plebs at our military institution, the common people.

And the Patricians were the ones in authority. The Plebians seceded from Rome. An envoy from the city authorities persuaded the rebellious commons to rejoin the state by telling them, according to the Roman historian Livy, who records the incident, by telling them a quaint epilogue of how once upon a time the members of the body --

human body -- had a grievance against the belly because it did nothing but enjoy what they bestowed on him. And so the members, aside from the belly, struck against the belly but they soon found out that they were really starving themselves by striking against the belly. And the belly, of course, represented the Patrician Class. So the Plebians were persuaded to come back to Rome because to strike against the “belly” was to weaken themselves.

Now, in a sense, lying back of this is something like that in Paul, because what he is going to tell is that all of the members of the body are necessary just like all of the members of the physical body make for a healthy, fruitful kind of life. So the body now comes before us as his great illustration.

Plato has a comment in which he points out -- I don’t think this is altogether true, but Plato says that when one’s finger is hurt, one does not say, “My finger is in pain.” Now, I think I’ve said that, “My finger is in pain.” Plato says, in his day at least, we don’t say, “My finger is in pain” when my finger hurts but “I have a pain in my finger.” It’s *I*; in other words, the finger’s a part of me is the point he’s trying to make. Well, I do know that people say, “I’m hurting” then someone says, “Why are you hurting?” Well, I have this or I have that, but I’m hurting, although it’s a part of my body that is hurting.

So now we’re going to look at what is the nexus of the binding arrangement between the members and the body. And I’ll read verse 12 though verse 13, first of all, where Paul writes,

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

This is the first time, incidentally, that Paul elaborates the comparison of the functioning of the gifts with the functioning of the parts of the body, but he does it in other places, but this is the first time that he does it in his writings comparing the spiritual gifts with the functioning of the parts of the human body.

In the brute creation, it’s a well-known fact, that it is the stomach that rules the world. Tonight before we came, we looked at *Wild America* again with Marty Stouffer on channel 13. Some of you probably look at that. That’s a rather gruesome 30 minutes if you’re eating your supper because the lions and the tigers and the eagles and the foxes and the wolves are all eating each other. And Buckland taught his Oxford pupils a fact about the brutes or the brute creation. It is the stomach that rules the world. Have you noticed that?

It’s interesting when people compare us to animals and call us all simply animals; we’re animals. Well, in one sense one might think so watching what is happening in human society because the stomach is becoming more and more important. I’m not talking about it’s become bigger and bigger, of course. It’s that, too. But it’s becoming more significant for us, so we’re interested in the financial things in order to feed our stomachs and our other likes. The ultimate aim for the violence and cunning of each animal is to feed itself. And so tonight we looked at the eagle, we looked at the fox, and we looked at how they managed by their cunning and skill to trap and conquer other animals and then eat, pulling the flesh out of the stomach as I was trying to eat my salad. [Laughter] I was happy that I was almost through of everything before I saw a bit of that. But that’s what they do. The ultimate aim, to feed oneself.

Now, in the Christian world, it’s not like that Paul says. That is, it should not be like that. Because in the Christian world, it should not be the stomach that rules the world. The thing that we should be interested in is not ourselves. The thing we should be interested in, he says, is the well-being of the whole body. That is what we as Christians should have as our controlling power in Christ.

So for the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. That’s an interesting expression, “so also is the Christ.” And when he says that, evidently, that expression *the Christ* comprehends not simply the head of the body, but the members as well so that together they are called by Paul, the Christ, the anointed. Over in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 in verse 21 it is stated with reference to us,

“Now he who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God.”

Now you know Christ is the term that means simply “anointed.” So he has anointed us in Christ. He has “Christed” us so that we are anointed ones. But Paul says the whole body may be called the anointed one -- the body. So also is the Christ; an interesting expression. Then he says *for*. This is why there is one body. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For we have all been baptized into one body.

Now, I’m just going to have to give you what I think is the New Testament teaching. You’ll have to take my word for it. Otherwise we’d stay for long periods of time on a clause, and we don’t want to do that in this particular study. When we talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we ask the question, “Who is the baptizer?”

Now, from Acts chapter 1 and the statements made there and the prophecies of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it seems clear that the baptizer is Christ. Now, we often have people talk about the Spirit as being the baptizer. I disagree with that. It’s not a big difference to fight over, but I think that putting all the passages together, our Lord is the baptizer. The Spirit is the element in which we are baptized. And the body is the end toward which the act is directed. In other words, we are baptized by Christ into the Spirit

in order that there may be formed one body which, as the New Testament sets forth, is the body of the redeemed or the church.

Now, we want to talk about this for a moment because I think there’s a great deal of misunderstanding, not in Believers Chapel, I hope, but in other Christian assemblies. In the first place, you’ll notice that this is a universal fact among Christians. We read, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into Christ”

Now, there are large professing Christian groups -- and I’m not suggesting they’re not Christians because most of us have been at one time or another in error on truth, have we not? Shall I confess? I was an Amyraldian at one time, and I had some Arminian ideas and so I was in error. I know I was in error, and probably most of you have, at one time or another, will be willing to confess were in error at that time. I’ve often said that we were born again but we were born as Pelegians; we were born again as Armenians, and the process of sanctification is to bring us to Calvinism. [Laughter] That just makes such beautiful sense to me. We’re all born Pelegians, believing salvation by works. We’re born again but we have all these Arminian ideas about free will. And then, as we study the word of God, suddenly the truth dawns on us. The doctrine of free will is contrary to the grace of God because the doctrine of free will states that it’s my decision that brings me to the Lord, and the Lord cannot act until I act, and thus I participate in my salvation. What a revelation that is. We thank God for the freeness and the purity of divine grace. Salvation is of the Lord.

Now, there are people who tell us that if we have believed in Christ, we’re not the kinds of Christians we should be because what we need now is to seek for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And that’s a second work of grace. There is no two-stage initiation into Jesus Christ. Notice what the text says, “For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

If you’re a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. If you’re a Christian, you have been baptized into the element of the personal Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. You have the Holy Spirit. And if someone says to you, “Are you a Christian?” You say, “Yes.” If he should say, “Well, have you had the baptism of the Spirit?” You’re justified from the apostle’s language to say, “Of course, because when I believed in him I was baptized into Christ.”

I want you to notice another thing about it. Paul is talking to the Corinthians, and he refers to this as a past fact. He says but we *all*; for by one Spirit we were all baptized into the Holy Spirit. Pentecost was the time when the baptism of the Holy Spirit, so far as we can tell, first took place. I think that’s an established fact. The Holy Spirit baptized the believers into one body. That began what might be called a new age in the life of God’s people. From this time on, and not before, every single believing person -- for they were believing persons -- they were part of God’s people like the apostles. Every single one of them from this moment on possessed the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit. That was the day that the Spirit came to indwell our Lord’s people throughout this age and forever. So if you’re a believer in Christ, you have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. The Spirit of God has come to dwell in you and permanently in you.

Now, Peter makes it very plain. That is, the events in Peter’s life makes it very plain -- did I say makes? -- make it very plain that it was on the day of Pentecost that this took place. Because in Cornelius’s house, when the Holy Spirit fell on the believers there, Peter has this to say; in verse 15 and 16 of Acts chapter 11, he says,

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

And so now Peter, as he recounts what happened in Cornelius’s house, says that as he was preaching the word of God, the Holy Spirit fell upon them. And he said then I remembered what had been said and he refers back to Pentecost, which lets us know that Pentecost is the time when the baptism of the Holy Spirit first took place and the new age in the life of God’s people began then; every believing person permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

One other point: this is such an important verse in our day because -- I must say this -- many of our charismatic Christian friends err at this point. He says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

Now, what is stated here is the finality of this. Experienced by all, and if it’s experienced by all, never are we to have to seek the presence of the Holy Spirit within us by any kind of spiritual exercise. So often in the past churches have gone astray there -- here -- and have invited people to go into meetings in which we pray that the Holy Spirit will fall upon us. Don’t have time to talk about that but I think you can see, this occurred on the Day of Pentecost. At the moment of a believer’s conversion, he enters into the blessing of this forever. It’s a final fact for all of us.

Now, when he says in verse 13 also that we have been made to drink into one Spirit, what this simply means is that the Spirit is the common possession of us. He refers, in my opinion, to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit here. We’ve been made to drink into the one Spirit. And that statement emphasizes the unity that exists between us and the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit’s relationship to believers is very much like our relationship to the air. The Spirit is outside, but the Spirit is within us. Just like air is outside of us, but air is within us. Like fish that are in the water, but the water is in the fish. Air is in the bird, but the bird is in the air. Fire may be in a poker, and the poker in the fire. The kind of language of the New Testament is the language of an element and so that we are in the

Spirit and the Spirit is in us. It’s that kind of language. What a marvelous blessing it is to have a permanently indwelling Holy Spirit who lives within us. I cannot think of anything more wonderful than to have the representative of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit who is sent by the Heavenly Father to us, to permanently indwell us. In all of the experiences of life, the Godhead dwelling within the believing people. What could be more wonderful than that? It’s almost enough to cause us to say Hallelujah -- almost. For some of you, that would be difficult. But nevertheless, within -- there are lots of hallelujahs in my heart when I think about this.

Now, the apostle turns to what he talks about when he says here and being many, are one body also in Christ. And I will talk about the body and its members and the diversified relationships that they have. Starts out with a series of rather absurd or ridiculous assertions to illustrate the need of each member. Notice what he says.

“For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”

Can you imagine, a human body in the form of one big eye walking into our meeting? Can you imagine that? Suppose there should come into our meeting at the moment -- this is where if we want drama in the church, we should have some way of doing this. We should have at this point someone walk in, fixed up so he looks like one big eye. That’s absurd. That’s so ridiculous. And so the apostle is stressing that we need all the members of the body, not one big eye. Suppose we happened to look out before the meeting began and saw an ear sidling up to the door outside to come into the

meeting? What would we do? Probably faint or rush for Howard Pryor and ask for help or something like that, you know. Or a leg; suppose a leg alone walked in. We might say, “Well, that’s better because he doesn’t have his belly with him.” But still, we’d be so astonished. Well, that’s what Paul is talking about. He’s talking about these ridiculous things when he says -- I have to look on this so I can be sure I’m reading this correctly -- if the foot should say, ‘Behold I’m not a hand,’ is it therefore not a member of the body?

H. A. Ironside has an interesting expression with regard to his, and I think maybe I can find it where he talks about the fact that this suggests that it may come a time in which the body may refuse to do work, and the foot go on a strike. This is what Mr. Ironside says, “Even though set apart to God in Christ with new natures, we so often still find working within us envy and jealousy, and there’s a tendency to say, ‘Well, as I cannot do as so and so does, I will not do anything.’ And so discontent is engendered.” That often happens in the church when we look and think of ourselves, and we try to say -- put ourselves into place of doing what someone else does exceedingly well, and we discover that we cannot do what they do so well with anything like the skill at which they can do it and we just say, I won’t do anything.

And so discontent is engendered, Ironside says. Remember that every member of your physical body has its own special function. Just imagine a foot going on strike and one morning as you wake up and you get ready to get out of your bed, you go to put your foot on the floor, the foot speaks to you and says, I don’t like being a foot. I don’t like always being shut up; have stocking pulled over me and then a shoe. And not only that, since you’re old now and you want a stocking at night also, I have a stocking on most all the time -- that’s a personal confession. Your feet get cold. Leave off those stockings. So I do not like it that the hand does all the writing, the painting, and the playing of the piano while I have to be hidden away all of the time. I don’t like that kind of thing and I’m not going to function unless you train me to write and to play the piano. I refuse to walk any longer or as -- work any longer as a foot.

And there are a lot of Christians like that sit in our audiences. They have gifts from God just like the rest of us, but they think that they have to do -- if they have a gift they have to do like the person who stands in the pulpit or the person who teaches a Sunday school class or the person who has another form of ministry, like working in the tape ministry. And if they’re not doing something like that, that is visible, that people see; therefore they say, I just won’t do anything. That, of course, is to deny the truth that Paul is talking about. We all have a place in the body. We all have a specific gift, and we know from the New Testament that we are to be rewarded by the faithfulness with which we manifest our gift, whatever that gift may be. The person who stands behind the pulpit may discover -- probably will discover when the time for the Lord to -- for him to stand before the Lord and to have his works judged by the Lord, that while he had a gift that people thought was a great gift was not nearly so great as people thought it was and others who had a very insignificant gift, did it faithfully and their rewards are greater. Scriptures are very plain on that point.

Ironside goes on to say, he heard of a man born without arms who had been so wonderfully trained that he could hold a pen between his toes, write, paint on a board, but he was a freak in a side show. A normal person would not do that. The foot cannot do the work of a hand. If a foot’s content to do its own work, what a splendid thing it is. If it tries to do the work of a hand, what a failure it is. That’s true of spiritual gifts Paul is telling us. We need to pay attention to what he is talking about.

And notice the statement in verse 18. “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased.”

In verse 11 we read, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each man individually as He wills.”

So in one verse, we’re told by the apostle that our gifts are given to us as God pleases, and then in another verse, we’re told we have we gifts in accordance with God’s will. Those two verbs, incidentally, are slightly different. One of them means to will, the

other means to wish but often means to will too and Paul evidently uses them in a very similar way.

Our gifts are given to us as God wills. So if he wills for me to be a teacher of the word and I decide I’m not going to be a teacher of the word, I’m going to try to exercise some other gift, then of course I would be following guidance that is not from the Lord God. All of us need to think very deeply and very seriously about our spiritual gifts; ask ourselves, “What is my gift?” and remember that it is on the basis of the gift that is given to you as God pleased, as he willed, that you will stand ultimately before the Lord God. Verse 20 states the present situation with Paul, “But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.”

Now, having said that, in the last few verses of our section, verse 21 to verse 26, he talks about the body’s interdependent relationship; more specifically -- talking more specifically about the superior gifts rather than the inferior gifts, although it’s difficult to make that clear distinction. I’ll read verse 21 through verse 26, and that will be the end of our study this evening.

“And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. (Not only, of course, are we to be judged regarding our gift before the Lord and our gift is a service for Him, but also our gifts are gifts that pertain to others, and we need them and they need us.) And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our presentable *parts* have no need. (Doesn’t say anything about those who have no presentable parts at all. Isn’t that comforting?) But God composed the body (verse 24), having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body (Not schism, schism; we all say schism in Believers Chapel because that’s what Webster says: schism, schismatic,

schism -- one of my favorite words.) that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. (I’m still a school teacher, you can tell.) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*.”

And we close with that reading.

Now, what Paul is specifically saying here is that we each have need of each other. We cannot say, “I do not have need of you.” You cannot say, “I do not have need of me.” And his illustration is the illustration of the human body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you.” The head cannot say to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No. Much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

Now, Paul mentions three classes of members here. And this is an interesting study because no one seems to have been able to clearly differentiate these in such a way that he persuaded all of the other commentators. But he mentions three classes of members. He calls them first “less honorable members.” Notice verse 23, “those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable.” And then he talks in verse 24 of our presentable parts, “but our presentable *parts*.” And in verse 23 also near the end of the verse, he talks about our unpresentable parts. So we have less honorable parts. We have unpresentable parts -- what the Authorized Version calls ‘uncalmly’ -- and we have presentable parts -- which the Authorized Version calls ‘calmly’.

Now, that raises a question: What is the less honorable part of the body? What is the unpresentable part of the body? And what is the presentable part of the body? Evidently, we all have these parts of our body. I know some of you think, particularly when you were a young man and you saw a beautiful girl, you said, “She has no unpresentable parts.” That’s the way you were impressed, no unpresentable parts. Paul’s wrong. Where are the unpresentable parts, or the less calmly ones?

Well, as you mature, you discover that there are other things than what hits you the first time. Perhaps, perhaps -- because I’m not sure about this -- perhaps, when we are talking about the less-honorable parts, we’re talking about the feet. Maybe that’s one reason we wear shoes. We hide our feet, don’t we? Some of us do, at least. I’d hate to have to come in this auditorium without my shoes and have you look at my feet. They are not presentable. They are -- well, I won’t call them that because it’s a biblical thing, but they are certainly less honorable: my feet.

My stomach -- I’m holding that in throughout the whole message -- my stomach, the intestines -- well, I’ve never seen the intestines, but they sound to me as if they are less honorable, the heart and the nose. The Lord gave me my nose to humble me. None of you would say that to me because -- you wouldn’t dare say it to me, but members of my family have said it in the past. And, unfortunately, the older you get -- so I’m told -- the more your nose keeps growing. So I’ll call that: less honorable part of the body.

Now, we also read here about unpresentable parts. What are the unpresentable parts? Well, we’re pretty well agreed on this. They are the organs of sex and secretion. That’s why they’re hidden. That’s why they’re hidden. They are unpresentable. They are the uncalmly parts.

And then, the presentable parts, what are they? Well, our heads, our face -- that’s presentable, isn’t it? Faces of all of you, presentable; your face, your eyes, your ears, perhaps your hands; some have no need of clothing, some we clothe, some we clothe very carefully: parts of the body. But all -- and this is the important point, Paul says -- all are necessary, necessary. The calmly parts, the uncalmly parts, the less-honorable parts, all are necessary. We need our feet. We need our stomach. We need the intestines. We need the heart. We even need our noses. We certainly need the organs of sex and secretion. We need our head, our face, our eyes and ears. As a matter of fact, Paul says some of these we clothe even more carefully than others; showing, of course, their importance as well.

So the point of the apostle is that not only are we responsible before the Lord to exercise our gift before him, but we’re responsible to each other, to minister our gift in the body for the benefit of others so that every one of us is necessary to one another. That’s a comfort to know that very fact.

Now, the apostle says in verse -- let’s see which verse it is -- verse 24, “But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it.” So what he’s stating simply is that those parts of the body which have the greater honor are those which we are so careful to clothe. He’s given them greater honor. That word that is used, composed, in my text in verse 24 is a word that’s very interesting because it means essentially ‘to mix’ but it refers, not simply to the kind of mixing of two sorts of grain, for example. If we might eat oats and wheat together, they don’t mix. But this is a word that means to mix so they become one element like mixing water and wine. They are blended together. And so what he is suggesting is that God has blended the body, having given greater honor to that which part -- to that part which lacks it. So what we have in the church of Jesus Christ is the product of God’s blends so that we all are necessary for the finished product.

Now, over in 2 Corinthians the apostle says something I’d like to refer to. In verse 28 and verse 29 of chapter 12 in 2 Corinthians -- I should say chapter 11 -- 28 and 29 Paul writes, talking about himself and what he’s had to suffer, “Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation?*” He talks about his concern for the church, and then further that when someone suffers, he suffers. He burns with indignation because of something that’s happened to others; the care and concern that the saints should have for one another.

I love one of the statements that Martin Luther made because it illustrates this, I think, so beautifully. Luther, talking about this whole matter, says, “See what the whole body does when a foot is trodden on, or a finger is pinched, how the eye looks dewy,

the nose draws up, the mouth cries out, and all the members are ready to rescue and to help and none can leave the other so that it means that not the foot or the finger is trodden on and is pinched but the entire body.”

Can you just see someone [moaning]? It affects our eyes, our face, everything about us if our foot is hurting. This is the kind of thing that happens to the Christian church when something happens in the Christian church. The whole body is like a body, and so we all should feel the concern and care of one member who is suffering, the foot that is trodden upon or the finger that is pinched caught in a door of the car or something like that. That’s what Luther is talking about.

Well, our time is up. The apostle is simply underlining the best he can the importance and blessing of the oneness we share, rejoice in, and are honored by. I love what Dr. H.A. Ironside has said with reference to his ministry because it pertains to me. He talks about how in the 43rd year of his ministry, he acknowledges the fact that he is sure that the reason that he has been at all successful in his ministry is because of those who have prayed for him in his ministry. Those who have had the gift of prayer, that’s not a special gift, but it’s a practice that all of us need one for another and especially us who preach. And I’d like to say to you a word of thanksgiving. I thank God for those of you in this congregation who have prayed for me -- and not only in Believers Chapel, but in other places that in the ministry of the word of God, I may be faithful and fruitful. For whatever fruit there is, is part your fruit, as well as mine. We are one body. We are one in Christ, and we serve one another; one family: some of us are feet, some of us are hands, some are eyes, some of us are ears looking at the whole body but we all are necessary. The apostle makes the point well.

I’m going to answer a question, and I think I can do it very quickly. The question is: to be absent from the Lord is to be -- to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. I made reference, I think, to that in one of our previous studies. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. How does this -- how is this harmonized

with the rapture in 1 Thessalonians? The Bible teaches that when a person dies, he goes immediately to be with the Lord. The rapture, of course, is where the whole church rises up to meet the Lord in the air. That’s the time of the resurrection. It’s at that point that the resurrection takes place. In this particular epistle, the apostle will talk in chapter 15 about the coming of our Lord, and he will speak about the stages along the way. He’s the first fruits and then those that belong to the Lord at his coming. We’ll talk about that later on. But the rapture is the time when the church is called up to meet the Lord in the air, and there that is the time of the resurrection of the body. And so the rapture is simply a catching up of the church, but it is also the time when the bodily resurrection takes place when to be absent from the body -- this body -- is to be present with the Lord and present with a new and resurrected body.

Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this marvelous section that we have looked at. And we do ask, Lord, that Thou are to enable us as a body of believers to realize our relationships to one another, to know our gifts, to be content with them, to exercise them in the power of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of all of the rest of us in such a way that together we do Thy will. We thank Thee for the gifts that Thou hast given to us, for we know that they’re given to us as Thou hast willed and Thou hast pleased. We pray that Thou wilt enable to be thankful and useful whether we be feet or face or hands or legs or voice, whatever, enable us, Lord, to truly be the body of Christ in a significant way.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“The Church – The Body of Christ” by S. Lewis Johnson
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