

GOSPEL HIGHWAY

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2. THE CHURCH IS ONE BODY (1 Corinthians 12:1-31)

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In this first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul deals with various problems that the church was facing: for example, sectarianism, immorality, a believer suing another in the law court, and food offered to idols. One of the problems faced by the Corinthian church was the exercise of spiritual gifts in public worship. The gifts of prophecy and tongues, and especially tongues, are singled out. There was disorder, chaos and disagreement concerning the use of these gifts in public worship. This is exactly the problem we are observing in many of today's churches. To find the solution to the problem we are facing today, we must come back to the Scriptures and determine what they teach about this matter.

Of the many passages in the Bible that are relevant to this subject, the 1 Corinthians passage is the fullest. We must therefore make a careful study of this passage before we consider the others. We must note that chapters 12, 13 and 14 belong together. All three chapters deal with the one subject of the use of "the sign gifts" in public worship. Remember that the original Bible did not have chapter and verse divisions. The chapter and verse divisions were added by scholars to help us in the study of the Bible.

Paul was a great teacher. In this letter, he deals with some important underlying principles before coming to the problem of "the gifts". We can see the wisdom of this. By dealing with the underlying principles first, he knows that the readers will be more convinced of the practical instructions later. We see this operating in everyday-life. If you tell your children to finish their homework before dinner, they will do it if they are already trained to be obedient. But they might be wondering why it is that they have to finish their homework early today. However, if you tell them that you are taking the family out after dinner, they are more likely to finish their homework with greater willingness and joy. Understanding the reasons behind the practical instructions will help so much in securing obedience (cf. John 15:15). Furthermore, when the underlying principles were understood, the readers would be able to apply them to some other similar situations, and not just to the immediate problem.

The first basic principle is taught in this chapter of 1 Corinthians. Other important principles are given in 1 Corinthians 13 and 14, before practical instructions are given on how tongues and prophecies are to be used in public worship. Here, in 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle wishes to emphasize the truth that ***the church is one body***. This truth is developed in three basic sections. Verses 1 to 11 form the first section, in which is taught the truth that ***there is unity in diversity***. Verses 14 to 31 form the last section, in which is taught the truth that ***there is diversity in unity***. These two sections are connected by the middle one, which is made up of verses 12 and 13. This middle section acts very much like the spine of a book, which connects the front cover to the back cover. It teaches the truth that ***the body is one***. It is this truth, in the middle section, which gives unity to the whole chapter. That is why we say that this chapter emphasizes the one important principle, namely that ***the church is one body***.

There Is Unity In Diversity (12:1-11)

Act like true Christians!

Let us come to the first section of this chapter. Remember that chapters 12, 13 and 14 belong together. The first three verses of chapter 12 therefore serve as the introduction, not only to this chapter, but also to the whole passage, from chapter 12 to chapter 14. Paul begins by saying, "Now concerning

spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant” (12:1). Note what Paul is saying; he says, “...I do not want you to be ignorant”. He is here emphasizing the importance of knowledge, in order that errors may be dispelled. This is a typical emphasis of the apostle. He said virtually the same thing in the earlier chapters, when dealing with other problems. In chapter 10, verse 1, he said, “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware...” In chapter 11, verse 3, he said, “But I want you to know...” In Colossians 2:1, the same apostle said, “For I want you to know...”

When faced with error of any kind, it is important to know the correct teaching with regard to the matter at stake. Otherwise, we will never be sure of what is right and what is wrong. And when we are not sure, we will not be able to steer clear of the error, let alone to counter it. We are currently faced with the errors of the charismatic movement. How can we be sure that the charismatics are wrong? We can be sure only by coming to the Scriptures to see what is taught there. We must face the issue, and make effort to study what the Scriptures teach on the subject. Retreat is never the solution. When you try to run away from the problem, it will continue to dog you. If you face it, however, there is the possibility of becoming clear about the matter. When you are clear, you will have peace of mind. You will not be troubled by the “problem” any more, since it will no longer be a problem to you. You will then be in a position to help others who have the same problem.

The apostle moves on to say that he is dealing with converted people: “You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led” (12:2). This is, again, a typical approach of the apostle. He always reminds his readers what they were before, and what they are now. We see this, for example, in Ephesians 2:1-6. There, he reminds the Ephesians that they were once “dead in trespasses and sins”, they once “walked according to the course of this world”, but now they have been made alive by Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, he reminds his readers how they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...” The purpose of reminding his readers of what they once were and what they now are is to jolt them to the realization that they must behave as new creatures. They must act like Christians, and not like unconverted people.

The Corinthians were once pagans. They did not use their mind to think. They were simply carried away to dumb idols by their traditions and prejudices; they were led about without correct knowledge. But they are different now. They once called Jesus accursed, but now they trust in Him as Lord. “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” (12:3).

Taking the three verses together, Paul is saying to his readers that in the matter of spiritual gifts, they must ***act like true Christians, and be guided by correct knowledge!***

Gifts are from God

The general introduction has been given. The apostle now makes the point that ***all gifts come from the same God***. He says, in verses 4 to 6, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.” What he is saying is basically that there may be different abilities seen among church members, but they all come from the same God. Call them “gifts” (*charismata*) if you like, they all come from the same Spirit (verse 4). Call them “ministries”, or “services”, if you like, they all come from the same Lord (verse 5). Call them “activities” if you like, they all come from the same God (verse 6). In short, all abilities come from the same triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. None can boast that he is better than others, because whatever gifts or abilities he has come not from himself but from God.

Gifts are to profit all

The next point he makes is that ***the different abilities are meant to profit all in the church***. It says, in verse 7, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:”. Here, “the manifestation of the Spirit” is a reference to the many gifts or abilities spoken of in the earlier verses. Examples of these gifts are listed in the verses following. The Spirit is invisible, but His working in God's people may be seen publicly. That is why the gifts of the Spirit are a “manifestation”.

It says, in verses 8-11, “for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the

word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” This list of gifts is not exhaustive. There are other gifts of the Spirit mentioned in verses 28 to 30 of the same chapter which are not mentioned here. Other passages of the New Testament, such as Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11, also mention gifts that are not found here. For example, the Romans 12 passage mentions the gifts of leading, giving and showing mercy that are not found in 1 Corinthians 12. This goes to show that the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 are meant only as examples of the “manifestation of the Spirit” that was referred to in verse 7.

Since these gifts are meant only to illustrate the sort of things the apostle is referring to, we should not be too obsessed with determining what exactly each of them is. We should not be side-tracked from the main issues which the apostle wants to bring across to us here, in this chapter. As long as we know what he means by “spiritual gifts” (verse 1), as long as we know what he means by “the manifestation of the Spirit” (verse 7), it is sufficient for the purpose at the moment.

Gifts are distributed as the Spirit wills

While we must not dwell on the details, we must not miss the main points either. There are a couple of points that he is emphasizing here. He has already said, in verse 7, that all spiritual gifts are meant for the profit of all. Another point he is emphasizing is that all these ***gifts are distributed according to the sovereign will of the Spirit of God***. This is clear from verse 11, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” You see now how the apostle turns the attention of the Corinthian Christians away from themselves to God and His church. There is a tendency in fallen men to be inward looking. The apostle wants Christians to behave differently - to look not to themselves, but to the need of others.

The apostle had begun by urging us to ***act like true Christians, and be guided by correct knowledge***. Concerning spiritual gifts, he has three things to say about them. Firstly, ***all spiritual gifts come from the triune God*** (vs. 4-6). The gifts do not come from the individuals, nor belong to the individuals, who have them. Secondly, ***all spiritual gifts are meant for the profit of the church***. They are not meant to benefit only the individuals who possess them. Thirdly, the ***gifts are distributed according to the sovereign will of God***. They are not given because certain individuals are in some ways better than others, nor are they given simply because they have been asked for. The diversity of gifts and individuals are drawn together, as it were, by the triune God to form the church. ***There is unity in diversity***.

This unity, or oneness, of the body is discussed next by the apostle.

The Body Is One (12:12-13)

Verses 12 to 13 say, “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.”

What is the body spoken of here, and in other verses of this chapter? We have assumed that it is a reference to the church. The context requires that we understand it as such. In this letter, Paul was addressing the local church in Corinth. In verse 27 of the present chapter, he says, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” In verse 28, he plainly declares, “And God has appointed these in the church...” From these considerations, we are convinced that Paul is referring primarily to the local church. He is referring to the Corinthian church in particular, and other local churches in general.

Local churches, however, are the manifestation of the universal, invisible, church of Jesus Christ. The universal church is made up of believers from all ages. Many of them are now in glory, others are found in all parts of the world, and yet others will be called out of the world through the preaching of

the gospel. It is God's purpose that when a believer is called out of the world, he is to become a member of a local church. He becomes a member of the universal church of Jesus Christ from the moment he is converted, and he should join himself to a good local church somewhere.

These are the only two ways the word “church”, or *ecclesia* in Greek, is used in the New Testament. It is a reference either to the universal church, or to local churches. Since local churches are the manifestation of the universal church on earth, we should not be surprised if Paul switches the discussion from one to the other. The two are intimately linked together. The characteristics of the universal church should be reflected in the life of the local church. Paul has been addressing the Corinthians as a local church, but he now links them to the universal church. This he does in verses 12 and 13. In verse 12, he referred first to the local church, saying, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body,...” He then links it to the universal church by saying, “so also is Christ”. Verse 13 then goes on to talk about certain truths connected with the universal church that are true also of the local church.

We say that verse 13 is, strictly speaking, a reference to the universal church because the same apostle referred to it as “the body of Christ” in Ephesians 5. He says, in Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body.” He goes on to say, in Ephesians 5:25-27, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” The church referred to here is the universal church. We see, then, that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, is comparing the local church with the universal church. In verse 13, he is drawing out some truths concerning the universal church to apply to the local church which is referred to in verse 12, and elsewhere in this chapter. Let us now see what Paul has to say in these two verses.

In verse 12, Paul tells us that the local church may be compared to the human body, which has many different parts, or “members”. Although the parts are many, they make up one, and only one, body. The emphasis is on the oneness of the body. This oneness is to be expected since, in the universal church, which is the one body of Christ, there are diverse members. We are told, in verse 13, that in the body of Christ, people of various ethnic backgrounds and various social standings make up its membership - “whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free”.

Paul is, of course, talking about spiritual oneness - a oneness that has been brought about by the Holy Spirit. He says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” He is taking for granted that all his readers know that union with the Holy Spirit takes place at conversion. Sad to say, this is not the case today. Not everyone knows that a person receives the Holy Spirit at his conversion. In fact, many have been taught that a believer still needs to be “baptized by/in/with the Holy Spirit” some time after his conversion. We must therefore prove the truth that the Holy Spirit is received on conversion.

In Galatians 3:2, Paul asks the rhetorical question, “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” A rhetorical question is a question whose answer is obvious. Here, the answer is obviously, “By the hearing of faith.” Clearly, a person receives the Spirit when he comes to faith in Christ. We know that “the hearing of faith” is a reference to conversion because the same apostle says, in Romans 10:17, “faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”. The Holy Spirit is received when a person is converted. It is impossible to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit living in you. It says in Romans 8:9, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” Again, in verse 11, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

Note, by the way, that the same sort of language is employed in Romans 8:9 and 11 as in 1 Corinthians 12:13. In the Romans passage, the believer is “in the Spirit” at the same time that the Spirit dwells in him. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, we were baptized by the Spirit and we have been made to

drink into one Spirit, which is the same as saying that we are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. It is normally impossible for one thing to be in another at the same time that the other is in the one. An illustration might help us understand this concept, however. If a bucket is immersed in the sea, we can say that the water is in the bucket at the same time that the bucket is in the water! This, however, is only an illustration, which comes far short of the spiritual reality that the Bible is teaching. What is being taught is that we receive the Holy Spirit, and become united to Christ, at the point of our conversion.

The thrust of 1 Corinthians 12:13 must not be lost. It is the oneness of the body of Christ that is being emphasized. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." What Paul is saying in this section is that just as the body of Christ is one despite being made up of diverse members, so also *the local church is one body although made up of many members*.

There Is Diversity In Unity (12:14-31)

We come to the last section of this chapter, which comprises verses 14 to 31. Here, the truth is established that *there is diversity in unity*.

No place for discontent or envy

This last section begins with a repetition of the truth, "For in fact the body is not one member but many," in verse 14. This is followed by, "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?" (verses 15-16). Here is a case of discontent and envy. The foot envies the hand, and the ear envies the eye. The foot is not content with what God has made it to be, and so is the ear. We do meet with such individuals in the church. They think they are worse off than others. They think they are not as useful as others. They become discontented with themselves, and begin to envy others who appear to have more gifts, or who appear to be more greatly used by God. They begin to dissociate themselves from the life of the church, claiming that they are not important. They say that the church can continue to function well without them. They speak as though they are so humble when, in reality, they are discontented with themselves and are envious of others. Beware! God knows your heart. And, often, others are able to see through your pretended humility.

Let us think and act in a more mature way. By pretending not to be part of the body, do we really cease to be part of the body? Such thinking is ridiculous! When the foot or the ear says that it is not part of the body, does it cease to be part of the body? You know that it is impossible for you to cease being a part of the body of Christ, unless of course, you turn out to be an apostate! Only a person who is not a true Christian will eventually drop away from the church of Christ. This truth is clearly taught in Hebrews 6:4-6, "For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."

Coming back to the 1 Corinthians 12 passage, we imagine an eye growing bigger and bigger, at the same time that the other parts of the body grow smaller and smaller, until they disappear. What we would have then is a giant eye! "If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would* be the hearing?" The same can be said of the ear, or any other part of the body. "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" (verses 17-18). The sovereign will of God is put forth again, as in verse 11. It is God who has made each one of us the way he is. We have no right to mourn. We have no right to be discontented with ourselves or to be envious of others.

No place for pride or arrogance

We move on to the next point. Just as there is no place for discontent or envy in the church, there is also no place for pride or arrogance. This Paul shows from verse 20 to the first part of verse 24. Those who are prone to discontent or envy like to think of themselves as not needed in the church, while those who are prone to pride or arrogance like to think that they alone are important in the church.

Imagine what will happen to the church when both groups are present at the same time. One group wishes to dissociate itself from the circle of the church, and the other group wishes to shrink the circle of the church. The rift between the two groups will become very wide indeed! To the first group, who are prone to discontent or envy, Paul has given the reminder that the body is not one member but many (verse 14). In other words, they are important to the well-being of the church. To the second group, who are prone to pride or arrogance, Paul now says that there are many members, yet one body (verse 20). In other words, they are not the only ones who are important in the church.

He elaborates this point by saying, “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. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour” (verses 21-23). The, eye may be weaker than the hand, but it is very necessary to the proper functioning of the whole body. Similarly, the head may not be as physically strong as the feet, but it is absolutely necessary to the living person. The eyes and the head are, therefore, regarded as more important, or as possessing more honour. However, the hands and the feet, which we think are less honourable, receive more attention from us. Others may not pay much attention to our hands and feet, but we do. We would wear gloves when necessary, and we would wear shoes most of the time. In fact, we would cover up the unseemly parts of the body all the more, in order to give to them a dignity not needed by the comely parts. “And our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our presentable *parts* have no need” (verses 23-24). Yes, even the private parts of the body are important, for they are necessary for procreation.

Thus far, figures of speech have been used. Paul has been talking about the human body and its many parts. He now begins to speak more plainly, in verses 24 to 27, about the body, which is the local church - “But God composed the body, having given greater honour to that *part* which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another.” His basic message here is that the unity of the church must be preserved and manifested. Instead of competing with one another, there should be mutual care between the church members. After all, we share the same life. “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with *it*” (v. 26). We know this in real life. If a foot steps on a nail, it is not only the foot that is hurt, but the whole body. When a member of the church suffers, we all suffer together because we share the same spiritual life in Christ. And within the local church, we feel it all the more because all the members have covenanted together to be a church-family. Conversely, when a member is honoured, we all rejoice together. Who will not rejoice if his brother or sister is honoured in some way in society? Just as in the family, so also in the church - only a small-hearted and perverse person will not rejoice when a fellow church member is honoured!

Just in case you have missed the point and are still not clear about all that has been said so far concerning the body and its members, Paul says, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (v. 27). **You** are the people I am referring to, not others.

How these truths relate to spiritual gifts

Paul now relates all he has been saying about the members of the body to the issue of spiritual gifts. He says, in verse 28, “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.” A few observations must be made.

Firstly, we observe that there is an order of importance in the gifts. Deliberately, Paul lists them in order - “***first*** apostles, ***second*** prophets, ***third*** teachers, ***after that*** miracles, ***then*** gifts of healings...” The apostle does not hold to the mistaken idea that everyone in the church must be absolutely equal before there can be unity.

Secondly, we note that the greater gifts are, in fact, the teaching gifts. Apostles, prophets and teachers are mentioned before all the other gifts, showing that those whose duty it is to make known the will of God are regarded as more important. The first part of verse 28 reminds us that it is God who has appointed these in the church.

Thirdly, we note that of all the gifts, tongues is listed last! This is significant, in view of the fact that this was the gift most controverted in the Corinthian church. We should take note of this fact today.

A series of rhetorical questions follows in verses 29 to 30, all of which require the answer, “No!” “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” The obvious answer to all these questions is, “No!” This underlines the truth that there are many members, with diverse gifts, in the church.

The chapter ends with the words, “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” (v. 31). We already know what are the best, or greater, gifts. They are the teaching gifts. There are no more apostles and prophets around today. This we will show in a latter chapter of this book. Only the office of teacher remains. To desire the best gift today is to desire to be a teacher of the word. It is to desire to be a pastor. Why then should people be clamouring for the gift of tongues, as though that is the most important gift? As for “the more excellent way”, Paul shows what it is in the next chapter of 1 Corinthians.

Some Conclusions

Errors of the charismatics

From this study of 1 Corinthians 12, we are now able to see where the so-called charismatic movement has gone wrong.

We note, firstly, that the charismatics are wrong in emphasizing experience at the expense of truth. Their emphasis on experience - on what they feel, or what has happened to them - is contradicted by verses 1 to 3, verse 28, and verse 31. All these verses emphasize the importance of truth, of doctrine, of correct knowledge.

Secondly, the charismatics are wrong in teaching a post-conversion baptism of the Spirit. Their claim is that when converted, the person still needs the “baptism of/with/by/in the Spirit” to make him a better Christian. This teaching is contradicted by verse 13, which teaches that the baptism of/with/by/in the Spirit occurs at conversion.

Thirdly, the charismatics are wrong in teaching that the proof of your Spirit baptism is tongue-speaking. This is contradicted by verses 4 to 6, 11, 18 and 30. These verses show that it is God who sovereignly distributes the gifts according to His will, and that not all have the same gifts. All other gifts are also “the manifestation of the Spirit”.

Fourthly, the charismatics are wrong in claiming that the gift of tongues is for personal edification while other gifts are for edifying the church. This is contradicted by v. 7, and also by chapter 14:26, which we shall come to in a later study. Verse 7 of chapter 12 show that all gifts are meant for the profit of all.

Fifthly... “Enough! Enough!”, you might say. But we have not finished yet. There is another characteristic of the charismatic movement we must point out, and it is this. The charismatics are wrong in advocating unity among believers and churches at the expense of truth but, along the way, creating so much disunity. It is a well-known fact that wherever the charismatic movement has influenced a church, division has resulted. At the same time, the charismatic movement is uniting people of diverse and questionable beliefs and practices - Roman Catholics included. These are contradicted by verses 1 to 3 which stress the importance of truth, and by verse 25 which teaches that there should be no division in the church.

Many charismatics who hear or read a message like this one will want to say that they do not subscribe to all the characteristics of the charismatic movement recorded here. We recognize the fact that not all charismatics are the same; that some are more extreme than others. It cannot be denied, however, that these characteristics are generally true of what is now called the charismatic movement. Whether or not you are an “extreme charismatic” is not the point here. What is important is whether you are associated with it at all, whether you hold to any of the characteristics we have described

above.

We take no pleasure in pointing out the errors of the charismatics. But we have to do it because, otherwise, we would be unfaithful to the Lord and His word. Our purpose is to explain what we believe to be correct biblical teaching. Our aim is to follow the teaching of Scripture. A Christian is a follower of Christ, and the Bible is the revelation of Christ. If Jesus Christ is your Lord, you will want to follow what His word teaches. If you are a true disciple of Christ, you will want to throw away whatever practice that is contrary to His word.

Unity and edification

We have applied this passage to the charismatic movement. We must now apply it to ourselves. We do not wish to be good only at pointing out the errors of others, forgetting about ourselves. What has this chapter to teach us? This study has shown that the body of Christ is one. All gifts of the Spirit are meant to profit the whole body. We must not allow sinful attitudes and actions to disrupt the unity of the body. Two questions are in order.

The first question we must ask is, are you - by your words, deeds or attitude - causing division to the church? This is intensely personal. We must examine our own hearts. If you are in any way causing division in the body of Christ, you should quickly repent. Otherwise, the Lord will chastise you, unless you are not His true children. This is the teaching in Hebrews 12:3-11. Verse 8 says, "But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons." God will pursue His sinning children until they repent. Those who are not His children, He leaves to wallow in their sins. The sooner you turn away from your sins, and return to Him, the happier you will be!

The second question we must ask is, are you making positive efforts to build up the church and maintain its unity? It is one thing to believe in the importance of edification and church unity. It is another thing to work at edifying the church. Positive efforts are needed. There are many things that can be done. You can get to know other members of the church better. You can utter good things about your brothers and sisters in Christ instead of saying bad things about them when they are not around. You can attend the various meetings of the church instead of absenting yourselves. By not attending church meetings, you not only lose out yourselves, but become a discouragement to others. You also become a discouragement to the pastor. Yes, the pastor needs encouragement as well! We know what it is like to find one brother or one sister absent from the reunion dinner during Chinese New Year. Perhaps he or she is unable to come home because of the distance. Whatever the reason may be, you feel his or her absence! You know that the family is not complete! The same may be said about the church. Every time a member is absent, we sense that the church family is not complete! You must work at edifying others.

The church is one body!

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