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By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

## All Ministry Is Body Ministry

**“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body”—1 Corinthians 12:18-20**

This twelfth chapter is crucial to our understanding of the function and ministry of the church. Let us have a brief look at some of the main points.

### **The Holy Spirit Works Differently in Every Church.**

The first point the apostle Paul makes is that the Holy Spirit works differently in every church. The Holy Spirit is a spirit of infinite variety. Therefore in each church where Christ is the head, He displays a different aspect of His gracious workings in the hearts of men. If there is monotony in a church service it is likely that the Holy Spirit has been shut out. So here, Paul talks about diversity of gifts, differences of administrations and diversities of operations (v. 4-6). When the Holy Spirit leads, each local assembly takes on its own unique personality. Through this process all hungry hearts are blessed, fed and encouraged and Jesus' presence will literally be in the sanctuary.

### **Each Believer Has Received a Gift to Profit the Whole Body.**

Paul proceeds to talk about **the gifts of the Spirit** that were given to members of the body of Christ: to one He gave wisdom, to another He gave knowledge, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, or the interpretation of tongues. Notice that at the end of the chapter Paul mentions another gift: helps (8-11, 28). Whatever gifts do not fall into the category of the nine mentioned earlier are in the area of helps. **By far most of us have been called to be helpers.** The two most important things to notice about these gifts are 1) God has no unassigned members in His body. Not a one! 2) Writing a generation after Pentecost, Paul does not say that *all* are given the gifts of healing, *all* are given the gift of prophecy or *all* are given the gift of tongues. His language is *to another, to another, and to another* is given...

### **The Church is Like a Body.**

Then Paul compares the body of Christ to a human body with its many parts. He points out **the interdependence of each member of the body.** *“For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand; is it therefore not of the body? ... And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you (v. 14, 15, 21).* No Christian can sur-

vive outside the body. Each Christian must contribute to the life of the body. Each Christian has something to give to the body. No exceptions. This is why God gave each one a gift, to profit the whole body.

Paul then distinguishes the presentable from the unpresentable parts of the body, **the visible from the hidden parts of the body** (v. 23). The visible parts of the body of Christ are those which are under the public eye, such as the ministries of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers and workers of miracles, etc. We know when they do something! But we don't observe the ministries of hidden parts of the body. In the human body, we don't see the liver, kidneys, lungs and glands working. Yet these organs are more necessary than the visible parts: we can do without a hand or a foot, but not a liver. We can do without seeing or hearing. We still can function, although we are handicapped, but if we lose the pituitary gland we die. Many times you go to see a doctor because there is something wrong in the hidden parts, with the organs of the body. When something is wrong in the church, when a church does not function properly, there frequently is neglect in the hidden parts of the body of Christ.

**Now the greatest temptation the visible members face is in the area of pride.** It does not take much for pastors, preachers and evangelists to boast about their spiritual accomplishments: their education, the churches they have built, the countries in which they have preached, the people they have led to Christ, etc.

**The greatest temptation of the hidden parts of the body is belittling themselves.** But note that those who are in the "invisible ministry" are generally those who do the sowing and watering - without them there is no harvest. Look at the story in 2 Kings 5 of the healing and conversion of Naaman, the leper. He would never have found Elisha or been healed if there had not been a "little maid" in the background. The slave girl built her spiritual credentials day after day, year after year. She prevailed in prayer and gained favor with Naaman. All Elisha contributed to this miracle is one sentence. Then look at Rhoda, another simple maid. She was the only one who believed in her prayers to free the imprisoned Peter. Could it be that it was her prayer alone that caused his release? (Acts 12:12-16) Could it be that without her there would be no Epistles of Peter? Friend, you may not get any honor for your hidden ministry in this world, but if you are faithful and devote yourself to it with the same degree as an evangelist, **your reward will be no less than that of the evangelist** who sweeps thousands into the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "*he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward... and whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water... shall in no wise lose his reward*" (Matt. 10:41, 42). The "little ones" here were Jesus' apostles, little by reason of their lack of possessions, recognition, learning and gifts. To receive a prophet means to 1) believe him whom God has sent and 2) to take care of him.

The lack of power in the pulpit is often the result of people in the pews belittling themselves. These laymen do nothing because they feel inadequate, or they become sloppy and unreliable. Just as it takes dozens of men working hard on the ground to get each fighter pilot into the air, so there need to be dozens or hundreds of people in the

hidden ministry, who believe in and support a pastor so that *he can fly*. Somebody needs to fuel the plane and somebody else needs to sweep the hangar, regardless of how they feel and what else is going on in their lives at the time. What would you do if your minister would be unreliable or sloppy? In Jesus' parable of the talents, the servant who received one talent was held to the same strict accounting as the one who received five. Watch it! Do not belittle your gift or calling to ministry. Do not be an unprofitable servant, or you will be cast into outer darkness (Matt. 25:30).

Had the people of Nazareth given Jesus "a cup of cold water" (that is, had they supported him), Jesus could have done as many miracles there as He did in Capernaum. Each one of us is responsible for what comes from the pulpit. Believe, and give that cold water as long as you live. Do not drive your man of God into a secular job as the early church did to the apostle Paul (1Cor. 4:11, 12). Overall, the public ministry's effectiveness depends on the hidden ministry's commitment to the servant God sent them.

Again, do not belittle yourself. You are important. Gideon belittled himself, but God called him "*a mighty man of valor*." Shake off defeatism and discouragement and be cleansed in the fountain of God. Believe, obey and get with it. Elijah also belittled himself when he moped under a juniper tree. Jeremiah claimed to be too young for the work of God. Watch it, teenager. Don't say, "they have no need of me" - that is of the devil. **All ministry is body ministry.** When one member suffers, all suffer; when one is honored, all are honored (v.26).

Look at how Jesus honored the hidden ministries. Look how He spoke of the woman who anointed Him with oil for his burial (Matt. 26:12, 13). Jesus raised Lazarus, a common man, from the dead, instead of John the Baptist who had a great public ministry. Further, why did Peter raise up Dorcas the seamstress instead of James the apostle? It is because to Jesus the hidden ministries, the little things, are just as important as the public ministries. **God has no second-class citizens.** Finally, notice how Paul ends his Roman letter. He lists 28 mostly laypeople who were still fighting with him the great fight of faith. These were nobodies in the world, but mighty men of valor for God.

Friends, what riches we have in First Corinthians 12 on the ministry of the body of Christ. I have given you a few thoughts. Study it for yourself and find your place in your local body of Christ.

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