



SUNDAY SCHOOL JANUARY 26, 2025

Prayer:

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NEW TESTAMENT

1 Corinthians 12:12-19, 29-31

THE BODY WITH MANY MEMBERS

(Paul's letter to the Corinthians.)

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work powerful deeds? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

OVERVIEW

1 Corinthians 12:12-19 and 29-31 are part of Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts and the unity of the church. In this passage, Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to explain the diversity of spiritual gifts and their essential unity in the body of Christ. He emphasizes that each member of the church has a unique role, and no part can claim independence or superiority over another. In verses 29-31, Paul transitions to ranking gifts to highlight that love, as described in the following chapter, is the greatest spiritual gift.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Authorship and Audience:** The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth, a diverse and troubled Christian community. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city with a mix of cultural and religious influences, leading to divisions within the church.
- **Purpose:** Paul addresses issues of division, immorality, and misunderstanding of spiritual gifts. This section follows his discussion of the variety of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) and serves as a prelude to the famous chapter on love (1 Corinthians 13).
- **Key Themes:**
 - **Unity in diversity:** Just as the human body is one with many parts, so is the church.
 - **Mutual dependence:** Each member is vital to the whole.
 - **Order of gifts:** Spiritual gifts should serve the church and point to God, not personal glory.



HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Cultural Diversity in Corinth:** Corinth was a major trade hub with people from various backgrounds. Social and economic hierarchies often created division, which seeped into the church.
- **Greco-Roman Philosophy:** The metaphor of the body was common in Greco-Roman literature, often used to promote political unity. Paul adapts this concept to a spiritual and theological purpose, emphasizing interdependence rather than hierarchy.
- **Religious Practices:** The diversity of spiritual gifts may have been influenced by the practices of pagan religions in Corinth, which often featured ecstatic speech and other dramatic expressions of worship.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Written Around 53-55 AD:** During Paul's third missionary journey, likely from Ephesus.
- **Early Church Development:** This period was marked by the expansion of Christian communities in urban centers like Corinth, where new converts often struggled to reconcile their past cultural practices with their new faith.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL & MODERN-DAY INTERPRETATION

- **Metaphor of the Body:**
 - **Scholarly Interpretation:** Paul's metaphor underscores that diversity is not a threat to unity but its foundation. Each member's unique contributions enrich the church's mission, similar to how the body's parts work together for the organism's well-being.
 - **Modern Context:** This metaphor speaks to contemporary challenges in fostering inclusion and cooperation within diverse communities. Whether in churches, workplaces, or society at large, recognizing the value of each individual's gifts is essential for collective flourishing.
- **Focus on Love (Foreshadowing 1 Corinthians 13):** Paul's ranking of spiritual gifts culminates in the exhortation to "desire the greater gifts" and transitions to his discourse on love, reminding readers that all gifts are meaningless without love.

SUMMARY

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-19, Paul uses the analogy of the human body to illustrate how the church, though composed of diverse members with different gifts, forms one unified entity in Christ. He stresses that every part is essential and interdependent. In verses 29-31, Paul concludes by ranking gifts to encourage believers to value gifts that build up the church, while preparing to introduce the supremacy of love in 1 Corinthians 13. This passage calls for unity, mutual respect, and the proper use of spiritual gifts to glorify God and edify the community.



NEW TESTAMENT (GOSPEL)

Luke 4:14-21

THE BEGINNING OF THE GALILIAN MINISTRY AND THE REJECTION OF JESUS AT NAZARETH

Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

"He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

OVERVIEW

This passage marks the beginning of Jesus's public ministry in Galilee, shortly after His baptism and His time of testing in the wilderness. Returning to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit," Jesus begins teaching in synagogues, gaining a reputation. In His hometown of Nazareth, He reads from Isaiah 61 during a Sabbath service, declaring that the prophecy is fulfilled in Him. This moment is pivotal, as Jesus proclaims His mission to bring good news to the poor, release the captives, heal the brokenhearted, and announce the year of the Lord's favor.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Placement in Luke's Gospel:** Luke 4:14-21 follows Jesus's baptism (Luke 3:21-22) and temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). It inaugurates His teaching ministry. It reflects Luke's focus on Jesus as the bringer of salvation for all people, especially the marginalized.
- **Connection to Isaiah:** Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1-2 but omits the phrase about "the day of vengeance of our God." This omission emphasizes His message of grace and salvation rather than judgment.
- **Synagogue Practices:** The setting in the synagogue reflects first-century Jewish worship customs, including Scripture readings and teaching.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Synagogue Culture:** Synagogues were centers for teaching, prayer, and community gatherings. Reading from the Scriptures was a central part of Sabbath services. Visiting teachers like Jesus were often invited to read and comment on the Scriptures.
- **Roman Occupation:** First-century Galilee was under Roman control, creating economic and social hardships for many, including heavy taxation and oppression.



- **Messianic Expectations:** Jewish communities awaited a Messiah who would liberate them, restore justice, and bring God's kingdom on earth.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **1st Century CE (circa 27-30 CE):** Jesus begins His public ministry around this time, following His baptism by John and His wilderness experience.
- **Isaiah 61:** Written during the post-exilic period (6th century BCE), this prophecy originally addressed the Israelites' return from Babylonian exile and their hopes for restoration.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL & MODERN-DAY INTERPRETATION

- **Metaphorical Interpretation:**
 - The passage symbolizes liberation on multiple levels—spiritual, social, and economic. "Good news to the poor" extends beyond financial poverty to spiritual and emotional impoverishment.
 - The "year of the Lord's favor" references the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25), symbolizing forgiveness of debts, freedom for the enslaved, and restoration of community equity.
- **Modern-Day Context:**
 - This passage challenges modern Christians to reflect on their role in addressing societal inequities, such as poverty, systemic injustice, and marginalization.
 - The emphasis on Jesus's mission calls for active engagement in uplifting the oppressed and advocating for restorative justice.

SUMMARY

In this passage, Jesus begins His ministry empowered by the Holy Spirit, teaching in synagogues throughout Galilee. He gains a reputation for His wisdom and authority. Returning to His hometown of Nazareth, He reads from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue, proclaiming that the prophecy is fulfilled in Him. This bold declaration announces Jesus's mission to bring liberation, healing, and restoration, embodying God's grace and the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a foundational moment that defines His ministry and mission, emphasizing care for the marginalized and a radical message of hope.



ADDENDUM

The "Rejection" of Jesus

The subheading "THE REJECTION OF JESUS AT NAZARETH" can initially feel inconsistent with the text of Luke 4:14-21. Here's a deeper look at why this heading, which might be misleading in the immediate context but relevant when considered alongside the verses that follow.

What Happens in Luke 4:14-21

In these verses:

- Jesus reads from Isaiah and proclaims, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."
- There's no explicit rejection yet; in fact, the people initially "spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips" (verse 22).

At first glance, the passage focuses on Jesus's announcement of His mission and His powerful teaching, without indicating outright rejection.

What Happens Next: The Broader Context

The sense of rejection becomes clear in Luke 4:22-30, the immediate continuation:

1. **Skepticism:** The crowd shifts from amazement to doubt, asking, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" (verse 22). Their familiarity with Jesus as a local carpenter's son clashes with His extraordinary claims.
2. **Provocation:** Jesus challenges their expectations, implying that His mission will extend beyond Israel to the Gentiles, using examples like Elijah and Elisha ministering to non-Israelites (verses 25-27). This angers them.
3. **Rejection and Violence:** The people, enraged by His words, drive Jesus out of the synagogue and attempt to throw Him off a cliff, but He escapes (verse 30).

Why the Heading Refers to Rejection

While Luke 4:14-21 alone shows a positive reception, the rejection unfolds immediately afterward, making the subheading encompass the broader narrative. Luke often employs a storytelling technique where themes develop gradually, and what begins as amazement turns to hostility.

How to Interpret This Tension

This progression offers profound insights:

1. **Initial Acceptance vs. Long-Term Rejection:** People may welcome the idea of good news and liberation, but when it challenges their preconceived notions (e.g., Gentiles included in God's mission), they resist.
2. **A Lesson for Modern Readers:** The passage invites us to examine how we respond to transformative messages. Do we welcome them fully, or do we resist when they disrupt our comfort or expectations?

Summary



The subheading "The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth" captures the full arc of the story, even if the rejection doesn't occur explicitly in verses 14-21. It's a reminder that context and continuation matter when interpreting scripture. Let me know if you'd like to explore this further!

Corinth after Paul

Corinth continued to be an influential and dynamic city after Paul's time, with a history that reflects its prominence in the Roman Empire and its role in early Christianity. Here's an overview of what happened in Corinth after Paul's time there:

Roman Corinth (Post-Pauline Era)

1. **Continued Prosperity:** Corinth remained a wealthy and cosmopolitan city due to its strategic location on the Isthmus of Corinth, connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnesian Peninsula. It served as a key trade hub between the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. The city hosted the **Isthmian Games**, a major athletic festival that brought prestige and economic benefit.
 - a. The Isthmian Games were one of the major athletic festivals of ancient Greece, second in importance only to the Olympic Games. They played a significant role in the cultural and religious life of Corinth and its surrounding regions. According to myth, the games were founded either by the hero Theseus in honor of Poseidon or as a funeral celebration for Melicertes (Palaemon), a minor sea deity. There were athletic, equestrian, artistic and naval competitions. The Romans embraced the Greek culture and often participated in the games.
2. **Roman Governance:** Corinth was a Roman colony, established by Julius Caesar in 44 BCE. After Paul's time, it continued to thrive under Roman administration. Roman cultural and architectural influence was prominent, with temples, public baths, and forums that underscored its status as a significant Roman city.
3. **Religious Practices:** Pagan worship persisted, centered on temples such as those dedicated to Apollo and Aphrodite. The city's reputation for immorality and luxury remained, with temples and cults promoting various religious and social practices that often conflicted with Christian teachings.

Christianity in Corinth

1. **The Church's Growth:** After Paul's letters and visits, the Christian church in Corinth grew, but it continued to face challenges such as divisions, moral issues, and integration of Gentile converts. Clement of Rome (circa late 1st century) wrote a letter to the Corinthian church, known as **1 Clement**, addressing divisions and encouraging unity—indicating that the issues Paul addressed had persisted.

See Addendum on 1 Clement

2. **Martyrdom and Persecution:** Like many cities in the Roman Empire, Corinth likely witnessed periods of persecution against Christians, particularly during the reigns of emperors like Nero (54-68 AD) and Domitian (81-96 AD).
3. **The Rise of the Byzantine Era:** By the 4th century, Corinth had become a part of the Byzantine Empire as Christianity became the dominant religion. Pagan temples were repurposed or dismantled as Christianity spread further.

Destruction and Rebuilding



1. **Gothic Invasions:** In 267 AD, Corinth was sacked by the **Heruli**, a Gothic tribe. This marked a decline in the city's prominence. Rebuilding efforts under Roman and later Byzantine rule restored some of its former importance.
2. **Earthquakes:** Throughout its history, Corinth suffered from devastating earthquakes, including one in 375 AD that severely damaged the city. Despite these setbacks, Corinth remained inhabited and rebuilt.

Archaeological Discoveries

1. **Roman Ruins:** Excavations at ancient Corinth have uncovered significant remnants of Roman Corinth, including the bema (platform) where Paul likely stood during his trial (Acts 18:12-17), the Temple of Apollo, and the agora (marketplace).
2. **Christian Artifacts:** Inscriptions and artifacts from later periods reflect the Christianization of Corinth, including churches built during the Byzantine era.

Corinth in the Byzantine and Medieval Periods

1. **Strategic Importance:** Corinth continued to be a key city due to its location on the Isthmus. It became a fortified town during the Byzantine period, especially under Emperor Justinian. The **Hexamilion Wall**, built across the Isthmus in the 5th century, aimed to protect Corinth from invasions.
 - a. The **Hexamilion Wall** was a massive defensive fortification constructed across the Isthmus of Corinth during the early 5th century CE, likely under the reign of Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II. Its name, meaning "six-mile wall," reflects its length, stretching across the narrow land bridge to protect the Peloponnesian Peninsula from northern invasions. Built with stone and incorporating reused materials from earlier structures, including ancient temples and buildings, it symbolized the strategic importance of Corinth. The wall was reinforced and repaired multiple times but was ultimately breached during later invasions, underscoring the persistent challenges of defending the region.
2. **Decline:** After centuries of invasions, including by the Slavs and Ottomans, Corinth's prominence faded. By the Middle Ages, its significance had shifted to other regions in Greece.

Legacy of Corinth

1. **Cultural and Historical Significance:** Corinth's blend of Greek, Roman, and Christian influences offers rich insight into the cultural and religious dynamics of the ancient world.
2. **Christian Heritage:** The Corinthian letters remain foundational texts for Christian theology, ethics, and church organization. The city is a pilgrimage site for those interested in Paul's ministry and early Christian history.

1 Clement

1 Clement is not in the Bible. It is an early Christian document traditionally attributed to **Clement of Rome**, a leader of the church in Rome in the late first century. While highly respected and considered valuable for understanding early Christianity, it is not part of the canonical scriptures recognized by most Christian traditions. Here's more about 1 Clement:

What is 1 Clement?



1. **Authorship:** Traditionally attributed to **Clement of Rome**, considered one of the earliest Popes or Bishops of Rome. Modern scholarship debates the precise authorship but generally agrees it reflects the Roman church's views.
2. **Date and Context:** Written around **95–97 AD** during a period of unrest in the church in Corinth. The letter addresses issues of division and rebellion against church leaders, urging unity and submission to proper authority.
3. **Content:** It emphasizes themes like humility, repentance, and the importance of order within the church. It extensively quotes and alludes to the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament writings, showing the early church's reliance on scripture.
4. **Theological Themes:** **God's order and authority:** It highlights the need for church hierarchy and leadership. **Unity:** Calls for peace and reconciliation among divided members. **Examples of faith:** Provides examples from scripture to encourage steadfastness.

Why is 1 Clement Not in the Bible?

1. **Not Apostolic:** Canonical New Testament books are traditionally attributed to apostles or their close associates. Clement was not an apostle, though he was an early church leader.
2. **Timing:** The New Testament canon was mostly established by the 4th century. While widely read and respected, 1 Clement was never universally considered scripture by early Christians.
3. **Intended Audience:** 1 Clement is more of a pastoral letter addressing specific issues in Corinth rather than a universally applicable theological treatise.

Role of 1 Clement in Early Christianity

1. **Highly Regarded:** 1 Clement was read in some churches alongside scripture and held in high esteem by early Christian communities. It is part of the **Apostolic Fathers**, a collection of early Christian writings valued for their insight into the post-apostolic church.

I am planning a separate paper or papers on the Church Fathers and the Apostolic Fathers.

2. **Influence on Church Leadership:** It provides one of the earliest defenses of hierarchical church leadership, laying groundwork for later discussions on bishops and ecclesial authority.

Modern Availability

1 Clement is widely accessible today and often included in collections of early Christian writings, such as the **Apostolic Fathers**. While not scripture, it remains a valuable historical and theological resource for understanding the early church.