

HOW IT WORKS  
1 Corinthians 12:1-3  
February 14, 2010

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Introduction:

I'd like to begin the next section of 1 Corinthians with an illustration. The human body consists of the following: 62% oxygen, 19% Carbon, 9%Hydrogen, 5%Nitrogen, 3% Calcium, and 1% phosphorus (99% total). Or another way to look at the composition of the human body is that it is 70% water. If you were to take the water, throw in some carbon, nitrogen, and calcium, add a few other trace elements, and put them in a container and shake them up; a human body will not appear. So, we are made up of simple stuff, but we are not simple beings. How is it that these bodies which are 70% water can function like they do?

Here is another similar illustration; let's say that a human body had all its parts disconnected and thrown into a barrel. The foot was not connected to the toes, and the eye was not connected to the head, and all the parts were on their own. And let's imagine that all the parts were alive and could move. They wouldn't be a human body, because in order to be a body, they have to be connected and moving together. A human body is more than the sum of it's parts. The human body is not water and chemicals just mixed together in a soup. The cells are mostly water; the chemicals in the body function to move nutrients and proteins in and out of the cell walls. Each human body, no matter how out of shape, weak or even sickly is a mechanical masterpiece, a collection of billions and billions of moving parts and chemical reactions all working in perfect unison.

Chapters 12, 13, and 14 of 1 Corinthians are about the gifts of the Spirit and the working out of those gifts in the body of Christ. Paul devotes a large portion of his letter to this subject because the Corinthians were having big trouble remaining unified in their worship. The image of a body working together is not mine, it is Paul's. He is illustrating to the Corinthians, "You are out of whack because you are like a body whose parts are not working together. To be a church doesn't just mean you take people, you take worship gatherings, you take food, you take prayers, you take preaching, and you throw in the gifts of the Spirit, and shake them all together and then a church comes out. That is not a church, that's a mess. It is like a pile of living body parts not connected to each other. The body works in a certain way with each part doing it's job. Each cell has a job. Each chemical, each element has a job. In order for the body to function, each one must do it's job at the right time in the right place. You Corinthians, in order to be a true church, the true body of Christ, need to have each part working correctly." This is the subject of 12 through 14 of 1 Corinthians. The Corinthians were fighting over the gifts of the Spirit. The one gift they were having the most trouble with was called, "The gift of tongues," or the ability to speak a language other than one's own, by the power of the Spirit. They were fighting over all the gifts, and they were fighting with each other over who was more spiritual. Paul, in these three chapters, seeks to set everything in order. In so doing, Paul pens 1 Corinthians 13, which can be thought of as the wonder drug, the instant health for any Christian body. For this reason, I believe God will greatly enrich us at Harvest if we embrace the Word He is giving us in these chapters.

With that as our introduction to the next several messages, let's get to work by reading together the first portion of 1 Corinthians 12.

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:1-3

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

Paul introduces his subject: Spiritual gifts. He didn't want the church to be uninformed. Apparently, they were uninformed! He says, "When you were pagans, you were led astray by your idols." That's his way of saying, "You Greeks were all over the place. You had all kinds of religions, all kinds of philosophies. But you had no idea what was true. I want you to know the truth because when the Spirit of God is in you, He tells you truth. He will let you know that Jesus is Lord."

Some people have tried to make verse three into a litmus test to see if someone is possessed by the Holy Spirit or by a demon or some other such stuff. But this interpretation is a serious reach. Anyone can say the words, "Jesus is Lord!" or "Jesus is accursed!" These are words that people with mouths can say if they choose, no matter what Spirit is in them. No, what Paul is doing is contrasting verse 3 with verse 2. He's saying, "Look, you Greeks, before you got saved, believed all kinds of crazy stuff. But I'm going to set you straight. When you have the Spirit of God in you, you will know the truth about Jesus."

This reminds me a favorite commercial of mine that's on TV. now. It's a Geico commercial where the guy asks, "Can Charlie Daniels play the fiddle?" They cut to a fine Restaurant where Charlie Daniels has taken the violin from the hands of a guy in a tux, who obviously plays some kind of classical or high-class violin music. Charlie takes the violin, and starts sawing away on it, making some good down-home, country fiddle playing music that you could really dance to. As he does it, the bow is starting to shred apart because of how hot Charlie's playing is. When's he's done, he hands the fiddle back to the baffled guy in the tux and as he sits back down to his dinner, Charlie says, "That's how you do it, son." That's what Paul is doing here. He is saying, "You guys are doing the spiritual gift things all wrong. Now back when you were pagans, you learned all kinds of crazy stuff. And you don't seem to know up from down. I'm going to clear things up for you. And he does.

A lesson for us:

There is a lesson for us in this, by the way. We too were not always believers. We have our own worldview, our own way of thinking. And we often bring that ignorant thinking into the church. We need to give up the old ways of thinking and learn from the Spirit of God. Many people come to me when they are having big problems and want to know what I have to say. What I have to say doesn't matter. What they have to say doesn't matter. The question is, "What does the Bible say?" Most of the work I try to do when talking to people isn't to tell them the truth of the Bible, but to get them to stop relying on the thinking they brought into the room. Christian, you need to take seriously these words:

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*

I know you have ideas about what is right and wrong. I know you have ideas about what you think is fair or the way things ought to be done. I know you have ideas about how you should react to the person who sinned against you. I know you have ideas about how to handle your desires. I know you have ideas about what will make your life work out the best. You know what? None of those ideas matter. Sorry. There is a way that seems right to a man. But it leads to death. I also have lots of ideas about how things ought to be. But who cares. All that matters is doing things Jesus' way. I have conversations all the time where a person will say, "Well, I hear what you're saying, but I just feel I'd like to do things differently." Then I say, "What does Jesus think, what does He want, and what does the Bible say?" Their answer? "I know that's what the Bible says, but I'm not ready to do that. I don't think that's what is best in this situation."

We need to get this message through our heads:

*Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Jesus thinks differently than you. When you want to fight, He says to make peace. When you want to complain, He says give thanks. When you want feel sorry for yourself, He says repent. When you want to steal, He says give it back. When you want to run, He says turn your self in. When you want to curse, He says bless. When you want to hold a grudge, He says hold your tongue and love. When you want to rebel, He says submit. He doesn't think like you used to think when you were lost. So you are not to think how you want to know. It's time to think how He says. Now, I know that all you good Christians believe this in theory. But I often see you when the rubber meets the road, and then, "Well, that's different." There is freedom, there is liberty, there is peace, in giving up the idea that you know what is best and just doing what He says and believing that He knows. "Lean not on your own understanding..."

Gifts of the Spirit:

Relying on what Jesus says is true instead of what you think is best; we will need to do this as we wade into the subject of the gifts of the Spirit. This water is choppy, and it has many currents pulling in many different directions. The water is choppy because many of you, though not all, have come from other churches. Therefore, in this room, when it comes to what are commonly referred to as the "Charismatic" gifts of the Spirit, most people fall into a definable of camps.

We have people in our congregation who identify themselves as "Charismatic." That means many things to many people, but generally, Charismatic churches use phrases like "operating in the gifts of the Spirit" or "full gospel" churches to indicate that they practice speaking in tongues, prophetic utterances, miraculous healings, and other things. Then you have people here who would identify themselves as "cessationists." By this they mean that these miraculous gifts have stopped. They were only for a time, when the Church began, and now they have passed away. We have the Bible and that takes the place of tongues, prophecy, miracles, and all the rest. When the very end times come, God might do some wild things through the two prophets in Jerusalem, but otherwise we shouldn't expect anything to happen.

Then, some of you in here came from either no church or churches where these issues weren't even discussed. So you are in the blissfully unaware camp, and you are eager to find out what the Bible says. Then some of you are a mix, curious. You have been burned by one kind of church or another, and you react against one or the other just as much as you are for one or the other. In other words, some of you are refugees from legalistic fundamental churches and you are not sure what is fully the right position on the gifts, but it better not look like the church you fled. Some of you have been victimized by weirdness in some extreme charismatic churches, and you don't want anything to do with that –you don't know if any of it is true or not, but it is best if it just left you alone. And some of you, probably a minority, but no doubt some of you, are waiting for evidence that this church isn't really following God, and you think you might find it here. You are waiting for me to reveal “what Harvest really believes,” so you can say, “I knew it! They don't believe in the power of the Spirit. Let's get out of here, Ethyl!” Or, “I knew it, they believe in all that crazy holy-rolling mumbo jumbo; let's get out of here, Maude!”

Some are thinking, “I bet he's going to ride the fence, not take a stand. I knew he was a wimp.” Some are just hoping these chapters will be over soon, because you can't see how we are going to get anywhere, and you just don't want a fight. Well, you can see the mess we're in. But for that reason, it's just the time and place for paying close attention to these chapters, because Paul is going to set us all straight.

#### My Strategy:

Here is my strategy: I'm going to seek hard to understand what the Scripture is saying and explain that as clearly as I can. Where the scripture seems to be plain and clear, I'm going say it loud and pound the pulpit. Where the Scripture creates questions I can't answer, I'm going to tell you. What I will not do is seek to teach you experience. I ask you to do the same. Let's not have endless discussions about what this pastor or that pastor says. Let's consider what the Bible says. Let's not go by anecdotal evidence, but let's go by Scripture.

#### An Example:

Let me give you a brief example of what I mean.

Next sermon we will look at verse 8, which says:

1 Corinthians 12:8 *To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,*

These phrases, “utterance of wisdom” and “utterance of knowledge” are often translated, “Word of wisdom” and “Word of knowledge.” What do these phrases mean? Well, if your Christian life involved the 700 Club (like mine does, I like Pat Robertson and the 700 Club), then you will say a “word of knowledge” is when you know that someone is getting healed. Pat will pray and say, “Someone is getting healed of diverticulitis, someone is getting healed of cancer of the lung, and God is saying that He wants to heal aching knees right now.” By this, Pat is claiming that the Holy Spirit is telling him who and what parts He is healing. This, Pat would say is a word of knowledge. Here's the problem; that is truth from experience and not proven in the Word of God.

This phrase is *logos gnosis*. It is used here in 1 Corinthians 12:8. It means Word and Knowledge. Paul never uses the phrase again and the phrase is never again used in the Bible. Paul never explains the verse. So what is it? I don't know. But my best guesses, which I don't have to worry about until next sermon, would probably have something to do with speaking words that have to do with knowing things. I don't think I can glean from this that Paul is describing a special healing news update given to a particular person. But someone could say, "But you don't know for sure that what Pat is experiencing isn't really what Paul means." True. And neither do you. At this point then, what should you believe? What you want to be true? I say no. you shouldn't say, "Well, that's what I think." Who cares what you think. All that matters is what Jesus says.

So when I come up with things like this in the text, I will say, I don't know what that is, and neither do you, because God doesn't reveal that in His Word. Someone can say, "Well, He revealed to me by the Spirit." Do you know how dangerous that is? Then the Scripture is subject to one person's interpretation. "Do you think God ever heals and tells someone else?" He could. "What would you call that, then?" Cool!

### The Beauty of Extremes

The reason why people often go to extremes on the charismatic gifts, as well as other doctrines, is it is easy. By that I mean, if we just say we are cessationists, then everything gets easy. We can say, "Well all those gifts have ceased." then every time we come to texts on tongues or miracles or whatever else, it is easy to handle. We just say "It isn't that way today." If we go to the extreme of saying, "All the gifts are for today and every believer has access to them all the time," it's simpler. Almost anything goes. It's much harder to stay close and tight to the Bible. It's messier.

Another example is the debate over free will and election. Some people want to say, "Well, it all comes down to our free choice and any interpretation that says otherwise, you are misreading." That's an extreme. Others say, "Everything is set, it doesn't matter what you do, nothing can be changed." That's another extreme. Both are easy for then you don't have to deal with any mess. Unfortunately, the Bible has a way of throwing wrenches into the system. It says we are the elect before the foundation of the world, chosen. It says we must pray in order to change situations, and act, and make choices too. Robertson McQuilkin spelled out this principle like this; It is easier to go to a consistent extreme, than to remain in the center of biblical tension. The other mistake is to ignore troubling passages or issues. God wants us to wrestle with these things.

My goal when teaching the Bible is to let it say what it says and try to conform my thinking to it, rather than making up my mind about what I think and making the Bible conform to that. I urge you, as we launch into study of these three chapters to seek to join me in this method of thinking. For, ultimately, the way of God doesn't make sense to me or to you. The idea that my salvation depends on God, taking on the body of a man, and living a perfect life to die as a sacrifice for my sins, makes no sense to me. The idea that God brings the truth through the Jews who reject their own messiah so that I could be saved by receiving that Messiah—that makes no sense to me or the world. In fact if I said that in the paper, the world would say that I was crazy. The idea that the hopes of the entire world hinge on the death and resurrection of one man, this idea is foolish to the whole world. To be a Christian is to lay down your own logic and reasoning about what is true, what is right and wrong, and pick up His logic, and His thinking. We still have reason, and we still have truth, and we still have logic, but they must be in submission to the Book, and not to our own self-direction.