



We're continuing this morning in our journey through 1 Corinthians. This week we're picking up where we left off a few weeks ago in chapter 12.

Paul has been dealing with different issues the church at Corinth was facing. Chapters 12–14 really deal with one issue. It had to do with how they related to one another as a church community; how they viewed themselves and how they viewed their fellow believers who sat next to them on Sunday morning.

It's like being in an orchestra. I'm no musician but I've been told this is how it works. You start out and learn an instrument and practice by yourself. You make your mistakes; you try out scales and small solo pieces in private. But then one day you get to sit with 40 or 50 others, and you discover though you're all playing different instruments with different parts, it all fits together and the results are beautiful.

But did you now there are class distinctions within an orchestra? The strings consider themselves to be superior to all others as they carry the tune on most classical pieces. But within the strings, the violins consider themselves to be superior; ask anyone who plays the viola and they'll tell you. Within the wind section the flutes and oboes consider themselves above the brass, and within the brass the trumpets feel superior to the trombones. The only form of life lower than the trombone is the tuba! So there's this strange hierarchy within an orchestra.

The issue Paul confronts in the church at Corinth is there were some who considered themselves superior to others. The result was the whole symphony was being played out of balance and out of tune with what God wanted. All this revolved around what we call spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is a special endowment or ability given by God to a believer. The believers in Corinth had been blessed with a variety of gifts. Like the members of an orchestra, there was a great variety, but some were being made to feel like the part they played was inferior.

This is a huge problem in the church today. The church today is plagued by a superstar mentality. The idea is the church is totally dependent on a few really talented people in a few key positions. Certain gifts are placed on a pedestal. The church has its own string section everyone looks up to and often they look down on everyone else. If you just happen to be in the brass section,

especially if you play the tuba, you're made to feel unnecessary, at least until someone needs the chairs set up!

This is the problem Paul confronts in 1 Cor. 12. In this chapter he gives us seven principles regarding spiritual gifts that will help us as a church to each play our instruments in balance and stay in tune and create a symphony that's beautiful.

### **We must use discernment in evaluating spiritual gifts.**

**Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit (verses 1–3).**

First of all, we must use discernment in evaluating spiritual gifts. The Corinthians prided themselves on being "spiritual" people. But Paul reminds them being "spiritual" doesn't always mean being Christian. Even as pagans they were "spiritual." Even as those who worshipped mute idols they got carried away with inspired utterances. Later we'll see one of the gifts they put on a pedestal was speaking in tongues. Paul reminds them they did that as pagans too. And so they need to be discerning. What's the message being delivered in these utterances? Is it a message that exalts Christ as Lord or curses him? To say "Jesus is Lord" is one of the most basic confessions a person can make of Christian faith. Last week we baptized about 40 people on our two campuses and each one who was baptized made this confession. And it's not just the confession he's talking about but also living a life that's surrendered to Christ as Lord and Master.

So we should use discernment. We live in a time when a lot of people consider themselves "spiritual" but their message and their life isn't under the Lordship of Christ. This is true in the church as well. Just because someone appears to have a gift that's impressive and powerful doesn't mean it's of the Holy Spirit. There are other spirits that lead people. Maybe they speak in tongues or perform a healing or a miracle, you still have to be discerning. In an orchestra, just because someone in the horn section has an inspiration and stands up in the middle of the symphony and plays this incredible solo doesn't mean it's good. As a matter of fact, that could ruin the whole symphony. So be discerning. Does it promote Christ? Does it exalt Christ?

## **A variety of spiritual gifts are sovereignly distributed by the Holy Spirit according to grace.**

This leads to the second thing he says: a variety of spiritual gifts are sovereignly distributed by the Holy Spirit according to grace. Look at verses 4–7.

**Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

The emphasis here is on both unity and variety. There are a variety of gifts and ministries and effects but one God. Notice how he mentions the three persons of the Trinity: there are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit; a variety of ministries but the same Lord (Jesus); a variety of effects but the same God (Father). So Spirit, Son and Father (one God) work together to produce these things in the church. Paul is hinting that just as there is unity but diversity in the Trinity so we have it in the church. There is one God but three persons who each have a different role to play. Wouldn't it be great if we could work together as beautifully as Father, Son and Spirit?

I think of the ministry of the Holy Spirit as an example. The Spirit's role is to point us to Christ and to produce Christlike qualities in our life. He's all about Jesus. The Holy Spirit is very selfless; he doesn't like attention. He stays in the background.

Notice it's the Spirit who distributes these gifts. He chooses who gets what. Down in v. 11 Paul makes it clear: the Spirit distributes these gifts *“just as he wills.”* Our job isn't to determine our gifts but to discover our gifts and use them.

One thing we have to remember is they're gifts. The word for spiritual gifts is *charismata* which means something that's given without merit or strings attached. You don't earn your spiritual gifts; they're given to you as a birthday present when you're spiritually reborn in Christ.

### **Every believer has at least one spiritual gift.**

The third principle is seen in v. 7. He says, *“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit...”* Every believer has at least one gift. No one is left out. But we also know that no believer has all the gifts. The only one who had all the gifts was Jesus. You can see all the different gifts at work through him: teaching, mercy, healing, helps, words of wisdom and knowledge. But no one besides him has all the gifts. In this symphony, no one plays all the instruments!

Not only that, no one gift is intended for all of us to have. Skip down to verses 29–30.

**All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts**

**of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?**

You can't exalt one of the gifts to the status that you judge the reality of someone's Christian faith by whether or not they have that gift. Although we all have a gift there is no one gift we're supposed to have.

But if you're a follower of Jesus you have a special gift; probably even more than one. By the way, these are different than natural talents. You may have a talent for sports or math or music or acting. God gave you those talents and you should use those for his glory. But spiritual gifts are different. They're given not at physical birth but at spiritual birth. And they have a very specific purpose.

### **Spiritual gifts are given for the common good.**

This is the fourth thing: the purpose of the gifts. Paul says in v. 7 *“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* These gifts aren't given so that I can go off by myself and do my thing. They aren't given for me to go out and make a living using them. Our gifts are meant to be used in community for the good of others. They're meant to build up and edify other believers.

This past week I was going through a difficult time about a decision I had to make. I was experiencing a lot of fear, doubt and worry. And right at the worst time I got a call on my cell phone and it read “Mike McCollum.” Mike is one of our elders. At first I didn't want to answer that one. I had too much going on. Then I thought about Mike. If you know Mike you know he has the gift of encouragement. I answered the phone and for the next 20 minutes I experienced the body of Christ at work. Mike encouraged me right when I needed it.

You see, this is why we all need to be in community with other believers. If you're not in community, if you're not part of a church family you miss out on what others have to offer you. Today there are a lot of what I call “churchless Christians.” You know, the I-worship-God-on-the-golf-course variety. Or I-love-Jesus-but-not-the-church variety. But if you separate yourself from the church, not only do you not get to use your gift to help others but you don't get to benefit from the gifts of others.

### **There are a variety of gifts.**

**For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills (verses 8–11).**

In these verses Paul mentions nine gifts. By the way, these aren't all the gifts; this is just a sampling. Several others are mentioned later in this chapter, as well as in Ephesians 4, Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4. There are also gifts of teaching, mercy, administration and leadership, encouragement, giving, evangelism and many more. Peter divides the gifts into two main categories: speaking and serving. In another letter Paul says four of the gifts are equipping gifts that function to equip others to do the work of the ministry. Later in this chapter Paul even indicates that some gifts are more foundational than others in starting a church (verses 27–28). But here the ones he mentions represent the more miraculous gifts because those were the ones the Corinthians were magnifying.

When we look at the variety of gifts we see a wonderful diversity. We're like a box of See's chocolates. When we get one of those in our house I love to sequester it. I can pretty much tell which ones I like just by looking at them. I don't like people poking their finger in my chocolates to find out what's inside! Of course you can buy just nuts or just chews or just soft centers or you can buy a box that says “assorted” on it. What Paul says here is the church is an assorted box. Some of us have a soft center. Some of us are kind of hard like chews. Then there are the nuts! But we all belong!

But the assumption is we know what our gifts are and we use them accordingly. Part of the growth process from being a baby Christian to a mature Christian is discovering what your gifts are and learning to use them. I've found this is a process; it takes time. But if you have no idea what your gifts are you should begin to ask that question. You do that by being informed. So take some time and study these passages that I've mentioned. You do that by asking your fellow believers what they think your gifts might be. Their answer might surprise you. You do that by being in touch with your desires and your passions. What has God laid on your heart; what do you do that causes you to most feel his pleasure? You do that by jumping in and getting involved in ministry and looking out for patterns of fruitfulness. Finally, you do that asking God to show you what your gifts are and being patient in the process as he shows you.

### **The church is the body of Christ and we're the limbs and organs.**

**For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are 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 we were all made to drink of one Spirit.**

The sixth thing is found in verses 12–13. The principle here is the church is the body of Christ and we're the limbs and organs (members). For the first time in the chapter he uses the metaphor of the body. He says just as the human body is one but has

many limbs and organs so also is Christ. I would have expected him to say “so is the church.” But he says “so is Christ” because the church is the body of Christ.

It's like when Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. At that time Paul (Saul) was a persecutor of the church and Jesus said to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me.” But wait a minute, he was persecuting the church, not Jesus. But Jesus says “I'm one with the church. The church is my body. When you mess with them you mess with me.”

Paul says we get to be a part of the body by being baptized into it by the Spirit. This is what happens when you become a believer. Some of you crossed that line on Easter and you feel different. That's because you have the Spirit. He's not talking about water baptism here. Water baptism simply symbolizes the Spirit baptism that's already taken place within a believer's life. It doesn't matter what our background is—Jew or Greek, slave or free—we're all one as members of Christ's body.

One of the things I love about CPC is our diversity. We're diverse ethnically and we're diverse economically. This is as it should be. You see, we have a unity that transcends human distinctions. We're the body of Christ.

### **There's no room for inferiority or superiority among members of the Body of Christ.**

Just as in a body, each one of us has a part to play. You might be a hand or an eye. You might be a ribcage or a kneecap; a little toe or an esophagus. But there are two temptations we can fall into and this addresses what was going on in Corinth and so often goes on today.

The first temptation is for the less prominent parts of the body to feel inferior. Look what Paul says about this in verses 14–20.

**For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body.**

We all know how even the smallest parts of the body need to function properly or else we're in a heap of trouble. Last week my son called from the Chicago area where he goes to school and said he had a toothache. We said go see a dentist. The dentist took an x-ray and couldn't see anything wrong except a canker sore. A day later Matt called again and said, “I'm going crazy. This doesn't feel like a canker sore. I'm going through the roof!” So he

went to another guy and sure enough he had an infected tooth. They did a root canal and now he's fine. But try to tell him that one tiny little area in his tooth that couldn't even be picked up on an x-ray isn't an important part of his body! You may not have an up-front type role in the body of Christ but you're still important! If you don't function properly, if you get infected, we're all in major pain!

**And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.**

The second temptation comes in verses 21–26. Here is the opposite problem. There are some who because they play such a prominent role feel like they're superior members of the body. But that won't work either. You see, in a body the true value of a body part is inversely proportional to its outward appearance. Think of our internal organs. You don't see them. They're covered not only by clothing but by skin. But how important is the pancreas? We should give greater honor to those parts that are hidden.

I think of our Men's Fraternity ministry here at CPC. That ministry would never have grown like it has and never have the impact week after week if it weren't for the men who show up in the wee hours of the morning (4:00 am) and start cooking and setting up. It would be utter foolishness for those who teach to somehow think they're more important than those who work behind the scenes.

That's the seventh principle: there's no room for inferiority or superiority among members of the Body of Christ. When the body of Christ functions properly, no one should feel under-appreciated and no one should feel overly important or proud. In the body of Christ there is only one head. Who is that? It's Jesus. He's the only one with prominence among us.

## Conclusion

When we fail to understand this, one of several things happens\*. First is **amputation** from the body. We cut ourselves off from really committing ourselves to the body. It is easier just to go to Sunday morning service . . . or not to go at all. Both amputated limbs and the remaining trunk lose out.

Second is **elephantiasis**. Someone in the body grows to a size far greater than they ought to be. The result is other parts are kept from making their contribution, and so they find themselves doing all sorts of tasks for which they are not fitted.

Third is **atrophy**. People just sit there on Sunday morning and think that is all there is to the Christian life. There is no exercise, no muscle-building activity. So whatever strength they have is atrophied. Like people who have been lying in bed inactive for a month, they can barely stand if they try to get up.

Fourth is **fracture**. People get upset with one another and their fellowship is broken. They may stay in the same church but they avoid each other. Resentment festers into bitterness.

Finally, there is **arthritis**. There is an abrasiveness, a grinding of bone upon bone. It hurts. Of course, in a well regulated body this doesn't happen. Bone does not grind upon bone, but upon a seating of gristle instead. The name of that gristle in the body of Christ is love. That's what we will learn about next week. Paul ends the chapter with these words: ***"But I show you a still more excellent way."***

\*These 5 maladies in the Body of Christ were found in Michael Green's book, *To Corinth With Love*.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No. 1350–26