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1 Corinthians 12:12-31 - One Body, Many Members

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Shall we open our Bibles tonight to 1 Corinthians 12:12? It's certainly a good book, this book of Corinthians, because it was written by a founding pastor to a planted church maybe 8-10 years after it was planted. It was planted in a very vile and corrupt and sensuous city, probably known more for its port activities than anything else; that and their worship of their false gods. So it was a hard place to plant a church, for sure.

Paul had left there several years earlier; had been in Ephesus for the better part of what would become three years when he began to get wind of what was going on in this place that he had left behind. He got letters from the church, visits from other pastors, and he began to hear about the downward spiral that was taking place in a fellowship that was well known for its faithfulness and God's power just a few years earlier.

So Paul felt like he was a dad with this church. He wrote very straightforward, he didn't beat around the bush. He was interested that they turn out well and that they would turn back to what they had started with. And so he writes these two letters that we do have, one at least that we don't, just to say to their church, "Come on. Remember how God began to work in us." And he began to speak to the various things he had heard. And they're long chapters, a lot of them, or multiple chapters on individual topics so that he won't beat a dead horse but at the same time he doesn't want to leave any stone unturned either.

And so lately we've been looking at, beginning in chapter 11, this idea of church gathering. So that should interest us. How does the Lord view our meeting tonight? What would He like to see? What would He like to see of me and of you and of us? What would please the Lord? What would bother Him? What would break His heart? What would thrill His heart?

And so Paul begins to speak to them, to a church that was very carnal, it was very self-centered, it was very interested (from all that we've read) in being liberal as opposed to biblical, that was very interested in being selfish and using every advantage they could to promote themselves. There was a lot of division, a lot of side-taking. The enemy was having a great victory in many of these areas, and Paul addressed them all. But ultimately it all blows into the church service; into the church service came individuals who were not so spiritual and even leadership that didn't seem to be able to have much of an effect.

And so Paul begins to speak in chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14, especially, how the church service ran, what took place there; and when the body came together for fellowship. He spoke to them about some of the social customs; the women, for example, wearing head coverings. It certainly, in that day, represented the spiritual understanding of place. He talked to them about women's leadership in the church. He wrote to them about having communion and discerning the Lord's body and not just coming together for the potluck and rushing in to serve yourself. And last week, beginning in the first eleven verses (last week), he began to talk to us about the extensive use of the spiritual gifts within the body. And we learned last week that God was behind all of these different gifts. The Corinthians were choosing sides; they were valuing some above others. They were thankful for some and just kind of despised others. They didn't see it as a corporate work of God's Spirit, and so they found themselves in little factions and groups and not seeing that the enabling and the ministries and the outreaches had a wide range, if you will, but that the Lord was behind all of them. And he kept saying last week, "All of those gifts are for our good." You know, sometimes people say, "I don't need to be in church to be a Christian," and I would argue you need to be in church to stay one. Now that's not completely right. Obviously, the Lord can keep you, but the body is designed to minister to one another. So we have something you need, and you have something we need. And Paul went out of his way to kind of drive that point home, that it was the same Lord who works all in all.

We looked at an incomplete list last week in verses 8-10 of some of the gifts of God's Spirit; there are others listed in Romans 12, Ephesians 4. We suggested to you we did a 15-week study on "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit" a few years ago with in-depth notes that we have in the bookstore. You're welcome to go get them, or they're online as well (I don't think the notes are or maybe they are, I don't know).

But we ended in verse 11 last time as Paul stressed that it was the Holy Spirit working through these gifts through the individuals

as He saw fit and that these Corinthians should be careful about incorrectly valuing them.

Whenever you come to a list of the gifts of the Spirit in the Bible (in those three places we mentioned), there is always either directly before or directly after a comparison of the gifts of the Spirit in the life of the body with a physical body. And we have the same thing tonight so that, in each one of these places, there is this analogy of the body comparing a physical body and the needs it has with a spiritual work that the church has for its people. The focus is on the gifts of the Spirit for service, the different ways that God uses them; not on the fruit because that kind of follows a life that's dedicated to Him. The gifts are given by God freely. Most of the gifts (we mentioned last week as we went over them) are given for the moment; they aren't in your possession. Especially power gifts: gifts of healing or word of knowledge. Those are things God gives you for a time and a place when you need them to be able to minister one to another. There are other gifts that are really callings of God that we will look at a little bit tonight; but they are all His doing, they are designed for His work. Jesus is the head of the church. The Holy Spirit is kind of like the nervous system. Right? And He works out from the Lord to the body and energizes and directs and helps and enables and gives vision to individuals. And if we all do what God calls us to do, we'll function pretty well. But if the body doesn't work together, we'll fall down, we'll stumble, we'll have nowhere....we'll run into walls or we won't get up at all. And the same principle is carried forward again and again and again – that it is only when we have the mind of Jesus that we can work in harmony.

And the problem for the church at Corinth – and for that matter the problem in many ways is still the same today – is that we place greater value on some parts of the body than we do of others. And I think one of the things that we'll read tonight is the Lord places greater honor on those we place least honor on, and yet they're the ones we need the most. In other words, the Lord looks at life and the church differently that we so often view the body as well. So, Corinth had some real problems. It all stemmed from a lack of relationship with the Lord. Certainly the flesh had taken over and sin had gotten in, and the ways of the world had been adopted. But this was a salvageable problem. God was seeking to work through them. And I think it's a lesson in the verses from verse 12 through the end of the chapter; it's a lesson that you should already know. I don't think you'll learn anything new. Hopefully you do, but if you do, you're probably young in the Lord. On the other hand, if we really do know what we read, then I think we adopt a very different outlook as to what happens at church and the values we place.

Well, we'll start in verse 12, where we read, Paul writing, "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." The basic tenet of what we read for the rest of the chapter is that we're one body. Right? That's how God sees you and me tonight – as one body. A lot of parts. All of you are a part. And it's kind of like He'll make the comparison between the physical body and the different parts. Some of you are toes, some of you are fingers, some of you are noses and ears and arms and legs and a heart and a lung and a brain and hair. (Somebody has hair.) But we're all part of the body. We don't really do very well apart from the connection that we have through Christ in the body. In fact, He says to them, in verse 13, it was the work of the Holy Spirit that brought you to Jesus to begin with, and when you received Him, you were placed into this body with other saints. God put you into this body. The body consists of many folks from many differing backgrounds. Some of you were religious, some of you were not; in his day, slaves or free. But your past matters little for God alone saves, God alone baptized you. The word "baptized," at least in this context, means to be placed into or immersed into the body. So as you drank of the Spirit, as you came to Jesus by faith, God put you in the body. You now belong to His family and as such, and especially from the standpoint of a local church, you are obligated to take your place where the Lord wants to put you. My frustration in seeing people run from church to church....it was worse when I was a young Christian because the bands, the rock bands – Christian rock, were just starting to emerge. There was a lot of opposition, even to Calvarys having these rock bands, and there were arguments about the kind of music you could listen to. But all the kids were into it. But they would literally run from one church to the other just following bands around, and that's great to get saved, but it's horrible for the church to function. Now there needs to be a commitment to a local body, to a local ministry. It's easy to pack up and go when things aren't going your way, but we need to belong somewhere where people know us, we know our gifts, they know ours, and we can take our place.

Paul's point, early on here, is none of us can brag about how we got here. Nobody can say, "Yeah, I smartened up and came to Jesus. I finally saw the light." I'm not going to give you any credit for that, whatsoever. Thank the Lord that He spoke to you or you'd have never gotten in. So the field is level. Right? And understand that Paul's words of argument here, or teaching, have everything to do with the way that they exalted and valued one thing over another; that there wasn't this understanding of being equal in God's sight but rather some were greater than others. And Paul begins by saying, "No, there's only one body, and both those that came in and those who go out, we're all indebted to Him to get us in here and to send us forth." We might have

come from different places, but we all came through one door. We didn't come through the back door, just one door, and His name is Jesus. And now you're a part of the body which He alone enables by His Spirit. So if there's any boasting to be done, we have to boast in Him. He got us in here. We have that in common.

For the longest time, when I was a youngster in the Lord, when the hippie days were around, the kids all had really long hair and I had really long hair (I did, it was so awesome), and we just looked like hippies. But we'd be sitting next to people in three-piece suits that were just coming from the business world. It was the coolest thing to see, and people got along. There was a guy here when we first started whose son had the best Mohawk I ever saw; it must have been, I don't know, a foot and a half off his head. And his dad loved wearing pin-striped suits. He looked like the most straight guy in the world, and then his son was just wacked-out lookin'; and yet they were there together to worship Jesus. It was the coolest thing. But we shouldn't lose track of that.

He says, in verse 14, "For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body?" Almost seems like a silly argument, doesn't it? "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? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? 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. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body." Now it almost sounds like third-grade arguments to me. Like, "Okay, there are my eyes." You know, it's almost like (Pastor Jack makes sounds and motions of slapping back-and-forth). Come on, really?! But Paul was dealing with some really unspiritual and unwilling-to-change Christians. He treated them like kids; they were acting like kids. So he points out that each one of them was saved in the same manner, and then he points out that they were all called to diversity. Look, the word "diversity" has taken on a really bad meaning today; that's not the way Paul was using it. God will make us in His body to function in a way that we can all bring something to the table. Right? We're not all called to...if you're a doctor, you can be a general practitioner which means that you treat the overall body. But when you run into a problem, you get sent to a specialist. In the body, there are really no general practitioners; everybody specializes in something. God has called us to pick a place and to serve well, and we have the desire for it and the aptitude for it and the gifting for it. And it functions well.

I've had a great chance over the years to go to the mission field because we have people in a lot of places. I do not want to be a missionary. At all. I don't like it. I like my own bed, my own bathroom, my own food, my own schedule. But we have guys in the ministry field that have been there 4-5-6 years who don't want to go anywhere else. If you go, "Go home for a few weeks, see your family," they can't wait to go back. It's just...the calling of God is...and I'm so glad that...I want to participate in their rewards, and I want them to participate in mine. You know? And yours. We send them money, we pray for them daily, we send them workers and laborers, and we are involved in their lives. And sometimes they're in very dangerous situations. I'm so glad that they're part of the body. But that's not me. But I recognize that they're as valuable to our church life as I am or you are. It's God's work in the body that matters.

So, it does sound juvenile in the way Paul has to present it, but it literally means diversity (I hate the word) does not disqualify you from the body because the body has lots of parts. If the whole body....just use Paul's argument....was full of eyes, that'd be gross, wouldn't it, and not very functional. If the whole body were a bunch of ears, that wouldn't do well either. We need them both. Yet the Corinthians, what was their problem? They valued some over others. And Paul's point is God doesn't do that. He doesn't look at the church that way.

I'm thankful that we have nursery workers tonight watching your children. I am. Because if those kids were in here, number one, it'd be chaos, and none of you would pay attention to me. You'd all be making goo-goo eyes at those cute little kids. But they have a function. Aren't we grateful for them?

The point is, verse 18 for example, that God is the head and, as such, will appoint each of us a place in the body that will bless Him and serve the whole. And that couldn't be accomplished if we were all one thing. And so it's all right to be different or to be called to a different perspective. You should be grateful God has given you a vision. Sometimes I hear from people in the church, and they'll go, "You know, I have a real concern for this, but no one else seems to care." To which I usually say, "Well, you care, so get on it!" "Well, what about....?" "The Lord'll have.... It's the Lord who places people as He sees fit." And they want to run around and beat people over the head like, "Be an eye, be an eye, you gotta be more eyes!" It doesn't work. Just go be an eye or whatever it is that God's called you to be. Don't be too frustrated with others. We're not all eyes or ears or noses. Look, if we were all ushers, who would we seat? Or if we were all preachers, who would be sitting in the pews? Or if we were all

Sunday school teachers, there would be no room for the kids. God's idea, verse 20, is a better one. By the work of the Spirit, He will assign and place us where we can best serve Him. And that may change from time to time, but as long as we're doing what God calls us to, the church can be very healthy, and it should be.

Verse 21 says this, "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.'" We need to learn to see that we need each other very much and that no part can function independently or exclusively or superiorly to someone else. Get that through your head when you look at the church tonight. Like I said, I hear people say that they don't need to go to church to be saved, they don't need the fellowship, they can study on their own. But that's not what this says. If the idea... if I didn't have a certain gift, I must not belong, look, here it says you can't set aside those who don't have specific gifts like you and say, "I don't have any need for you because I already can take care of that," oh, there's plenty of need that you have. Contention and pride and division and hierarchy all set aside what God would really want in the church, which is mutual dependency; that we depend upon each other in the body. We cannot function without Sunday school teachers. We cannot function without maintenance workers and a janitorial staff. And God knows most of you should never be up here leading worship. Because our focus would quickly go from Jesus to our bleeding ears. You know who you are. But I notice if we sing together, we sound beautiful. But sometimes if you sing really loud and you're not really good at it, this tooth right here starts to hurt. This one right here. Why is that? Because we're not all called to it. But aren't you glad when people can lead us in worship? Now you may prefer quieter songs, louder songs, more songs, less songs. That's all incidental. The thing is praise the Lord we have people that know how to play in tune and sing in tune so you're not going, "Thank You..... oohhhh.....that's horrible." Redpath – Alan Redpath – used to come to (great, by the way, pastor of years gone by) our pastors' conferences, and he would sing, but he was horrible. And he would sit up with Pastor Chuck, and we'd sing songs everybody knew, and no one would sing because everybody was watching Alan just go to places in his voice that no one had gone before. (Laughing) It was Star Trek, you know what I mean? Oh, my goodness! Worship didn't exist when Alan was in the building. But he was such a wonderful teacher, had such great insight, was really gifted in writing commentary. But he shouldn't have been singing out loud. He should do what most of you do – sing lower so you hide in the group. That's exactly where we need to be. But to say I don't need you...how crazy is that?! We need everybody here. Every one of you.

And to prove his point, Paul starts in verse 22, and he says this, "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 honorable," (now that was their problem) "on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor 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." To prove his point - and like I said, it's like he's arguing with an eighth-grader because they're not listening well - Paul declares that our opinion of the worth of gifts analogous to the parts of the body, if you will, that seem to us to be weaker, not as glorious are indeed more so. He says parts of us are clothed, dressed up, presented in ways that we show all of our glory, and yet other parts are out of sight, they are hidden, upon which God has bestowed the greater honor.

Think it through for a minute. Go to your body, and then go to the spiritual application. You know, we all look in the mirror a lot. Pastor Rich and I were talking today about we don't remember when we got old. And you look in the mirror, and you go, "Pfffft. When did this happen?" I feel like a young man in my head, and then I looked and went, "No!! You're crazy! What happened to you?" We worry about appearance. We have plastic surgery; it's the rage of the world. Liposuction, breast implants, lip collagen, Botox shots. All so that you can look and go, "Oh, you're not as old as I thought you were." But how many of those things are really necessary? We bestow great honor. But make the comparison between liposuction and the health of your lungs, which you've never seen, which are hidden; or the strength of your beating heart. I had a stroke seven years ago – almost eight now – and my heart just was not cooperating. It had a mind of its own; it wasn't good at all. But imagine one day your lungs saying to you, "I am so tired of breathing in, breathing out while you stare in the mirror trying to get your face made right. You go to sleep, and I've got to work....and breathe, and then you wheeze, and I've got to be part of that. I quit." Well, you would die. "I'm not going to take it anymore. I am coming out of the belly button, and I'm not going to.... Live on the outside of your stomach so everyone can appreciate my breathing." I know, it's nonsense. But Paul's comparison was that's kind of the way we treat spiritual things in the church. What about your big toe? You think it likes being stuck in that dark, dank, smelly place every day? What if it decided to rebel? "Well, nobody appreciates me! I'm coming out and planting myself on your forehead." Who do we exalt in the church? Singers, musicians, entertainers, pastors. We'll even pay money to go see some singer who's supposed to be worshipping the Lord, now makes a living charging you to listen. The exalted parts. The exalted parts that we, "Oh....." (Pastor Jack claps) "They're amazing!" What about the Sunday school worker or the fellow who shows up every time that we have intercessory prayer and spends his mornings praying for you? We don't know him. You don't know

his name, you don't know what he looks like or she looks like. Are they less important? We honor the parts we see, and we devalue – in our understanding – the parts that we don't. How 'bout the folks from our church that go to jails every week and preach to the inmates? There're quite a few of them....go for years. Sometimes show up, and the jail gets locked down, and you spend your evening getting over there, and you can't get in. So we'll sit out in the parking lot and pray. How faithful are they. Yet by God's Word here, regarding gifts, we should value each of them equally and glorify God for the work He is doing in like manner.

In fact, in our bodies, the only time one part lives for itself to the disregard of others and it doesn't contribute to the rest, we call that cancer. It's when it lives for itself.

Spurgeon wrote a quote – and I wrote it in my Bible – and Spurgeon doesn't beat around the bush either.....so he wrote this, "I want every member of our church to be a worker. We do not want any hovering around. If there are any of you who want to eat and drink and do nothing, there are other places that you can go, but don't be here. There are empty pews in abundance. Go sit in them. We don't want you here. Every Christian that is not a bee is a wasp. And the most quarrelsome persons are the most useless while the happiest and most peaceable ones are those who have made themselves available for Christ." Now, Spurgeon, you know (Pastor Jack makes a slapping sound), likes to do one of those things. He's kind of a crotchety old guy, but he's funny to listen to.

So I think the comparison makes every bit of sense, though. The things that you depend upon the most – your heart, your lungs, the inner workings – those are all unseen. What you see is what we spend most of our time on, what we adore. I lose a few pounds. "Have you seen me in this dress? Look at my pants....." Yeah? Great? Tick, tick, tick, tick.....quietly going away. We are gifted by the Lord in the place that He gives us, and together we make a healthy body that's able to perform His will. So don't be too frustrated if nobody knows your name, and no one's seen you do anything. Just be faithful to the Lord. We have Sunday school teachers here that have been here since the day the church started – teaching kids who are now married and have kids. You may not even know who they are, but God does. And it interests me that maturity and faith allow me to see that God's work is in every place and that He is the way, and He's the One that's able to put that all together. And our individual responsibility is, "God, where do You want me to be?" Right? "What do You want to do with me?" Maybe you have a heart for the mission field. I don't. I have a heart for the missionaries, but I really don't want to go sleep in a tree somewhere. But we have guys that do it. I just talked to a pastor friend who is responsible for a lot of the ministry in the Sudan, and they're driving from Kenya across 50 miles of death zone where people just get shot and killed; they lost two pastors last year. But he can't wait to go there to serve. You might go, "That's crazy!" And you'd be right. But it's also the Lord's calling in his life, and he does it with great joy. So just find where God has called you, but go serve. What He hasn't called you to do is just sit around. If you're here ten years, and you're goin', "This is my spot, look at the impression of the....this is me right here, left this spot," you've left a mark, all right! Okay. You get what I'm saying.

Verse 24 says, "But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it." The word "composed" there is the Greek word for tempered. It literally means to blend together as you would food to get a good taste. I read an article the other day – I think it was in "The Atlantic" – anyway, it was in one of the news magazines. It had an article about a lady who had used baking soda instead of baking powder in her recipe, and I guess that gives a quite different result. The only other place this word is used is in Hebrews 4:2 where you read "the gospel was preached to us as it was to them; and the word was not profiting them because they did not mix it with faith when they heard it," and that's that word "mixed." It's the same word as this word, "composed." So, God mixes us together as He sees fit. He gives greater honor to the things we would give less honor to because that's just the way we do things. We shouldn't, but God makes up the difference. He blesses those who are faithful to Him. I get to stand up and preach but.... "Oh, Pastor, that was such a good message. Oh, the Lord really spoke to me." And I go home going, "I did a good job." And the Sunday school worker just goes home, having done a great job, prayerfully, sacrificially, and he or she doesn't get the warm glow, right, doesn't get the immediate feedback. The musician.... "Oh, he's just the....I want his record. Will you sign my....? Everybody.... Oh, he's....." The rewards are already gone in many ways. But the faithful person who's not seen, the backbone of the church, the one that we rely upon the most, keeps storing up treasures and getting the honor from the Lord. Not from the world, understand; and unfortunately, sometimes, not from the church. The key, of course, is to see where God wants to place us and what gifts He's given to us and what the Spirit of God wants to do with us. And then we can, under certain situations, find ourselves going, "Oh, this is where I need to be. God is showing me where I need to be." I would just say if we could go around the room and have you stand up and go, "Here's where the Lord's called me to do, would you have an answer?" Or would you just go, "Come back to me in a minute"? I don't know for sure. The overlying picture is God has a place for you, and we'll only do as well as all of us faithfully do what God calls us to. And that takes a lot of

us, but every gift is important, every calling is important, every person is vital to the church. Important.

We'll read down in verse 31 in a few minutes "earnestly desire the best gifts." But what are the best gifts? In terms of the gifts of the Spirit, they are in His control where He gives them as needed. The best gifts are determined by the situation we find ourselves in. So there's a mixture here of gifts and callings. If someone is ill, you would want a miracle of healing. If someone's not sure of something, a word from the Lord would be great, a word of knowledge. It's like the saws in your garage. If you want to cut a hole in the plywood, use a jigsaw; don't use a skill saw. You want to cut a pipe, use a hacksaw; don't use a miter saw. So God puts us in situations and in ministries and then gifts us with the things that will help us to accomplish His task. If you're teaching, you really want the gift of prophecy and words of wisdom and words of knowledge. If you're counseling, you really want God to give you discernment. And so it goes. He will see fit. But one thing for sure – God doesn't call you without enabling you for that calling, and God doesn't just want you to sit around and not know where you're supposed to be. He knows where you're supposed to be, and He'll be more than happy to tell you if you're willing to go.

Verse 25 says, "that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another," or, if you will, we should all see this as a work that we do together as one body. Verse 26, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." One body, many parts. I can rejoice when a brother is given a forum to share. I love Franklin Graham's boldness to get on TV and no matter what question he's asked, "What do you think about the war?" he goes, "Yeah, I just want to tell you about Jesus." He's great at turning the topic around immediately to the gospel. It's good to have guys like that out there. I love when some of the golfers lately have been speaking out for Jesus. They win these big prestigious million dollars and up, and all they want to do is tell you about the Lord. It's so good we rejoice in those. We receive lots of really wonderful letters from the radio and how God is using His Word, and we just stand back and shake our head. But God's Word is that way; it's powerful. I teach on Wednesday night. Three or four people spend hours putting this stuff together so that it can go out on the radio. Radio stations play it, they follow up, there's other folks that follow up, keep things all going. There're a ton of folks that work on a radio show to go out, but someone gets saved, and we all get to high-five the Lord and His greatness and His goodness and the power of His Word.

Go back to the big toe analogy, getting stuck in that stinky shoe. If someone walks by you and stomps on your toe, does it react by itself? No. Your mouth makes a sound, "Oohhh." Your back bends, your hands reach, your mind starts wondering if it's still attached, and if it's not attached, why does it still hurt so much? Or if you get something in your eye, everything reaches for your eye. There is a body that works that way. Collectively, the body is composed of individuals, but they are very dependent and very responsible. And Paul sees in this whole tenor of the Corinthian church was such selfishness and individuality and isolation rather than the concept of God doing the work. And Paul goes after it in a big way, and by the time we get to chapter 15, he'll tie it all together and just say, "Look, it's our faith in Jesus and His resurrection that gives us a hope at all!" before he signs off with a lot of his friends.

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. 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? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way." Paul then gives to us several callings and gifts from the Lord, and notice he mixes those together; the callings of God and the enablings of God by His Spirit that God has graciously appointed to the church. And he starts with the apostles. There were twelve specific apostles. They are unique in the sense that God gives them a place both in the establishment of the early church, the teaching of His Word. We will see them in the book of Revelation as pillars and towers and doors. But there were many apostles. The word "apostolos" just means to be sent out or to be sent forth. Prophets – in the Old Testament, they spoke for the LORD to the nation or the nations. The gift of prophecy in the church - you will find some speaking to the church at large in the New Testament. But more often than not, it speaks of those who bring God's Word to bear at an appropriate time (1 Corinthians 14:3). Teachers are those who are willing to lay out God's Word precept by precept, line upon line (Isaiah 28:10). The idea of some of these power gifts – miracles and healings – are mixed with helps and administration and tongues. We know from the Scriptures that those power gifts are never available to the will of the user, which means God gives those as He sees fit in the position you find yourself but according to the will of the Giver. Whereas helps, the gift of helps, the gift of administration and, in private use, the gift of tongues in your personal life (which we'll talk about in chapter 14), are at the discretion of your use as God has enabled you to have those in your life. So the ministry of the prophet or the apostle or teacher is a gift, the enablings that come from the Lord. But I love the fact that he mentions here the gift of helps. We're big on gifts.... "The Lord healed him! Whoo! That's the Lord, man!" And you go, "Yeah,

I went over and helped a guy move.” And they go, “Yeah, way to go. You didn't have anything to do on a Saturday?” “No.” So neglected and so little honored.

I read an old Puritan preacher who once did a study out of Matthew 10:3. Matthew 10:3 just has a list of names. It says, “Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus.” And the preacher – I have it in a book – this Puritan preacher said, “Whenever you read the words ‘and Bartholomew,’ you never just read of him without his name being attached to somebody else.” It was always like somebody else, and Bartholomew was with him. And he did a whole study on how this guy must have been quite a helper. And it was very helpful. It was really a good study. I thought it made a lot of sense. He had a lot of good verses.

The point that Paul makes, even in verse 30 and verse 31, is that we're not all called to the same things, and we should all be excited, I think.....we would all be excited if the Lord restored someone's blindness or raised up a lame man. But we probably wouldn't get as excited about someone who had a gift of administration which means that everything is put away right and filed correctly, and the decisions are made that keep things decent and in order and that the bills are paid on time, and the lights work. We need administrators. But it sounds a whole lot less spiritual than the guys going, “In Jesus' name!” and somebody walks out of a.....we're like, “Who! We gotta go to that meeting!” And here's this guy going, “Let me just file that under 'F' or 'P', and we got that there.” And you go, “Oh, that was good!” But yet, look, they're listed together which is very interesting to me. They are of equal value in the Lord's eyes. Are we all called to do the same thing? No.

I think the reference to tongues here is not the reference of the use of prayer language but rather to the use of it in the church service as evidenced by the inclusion of the interpretation. But, like I said, I'll try to cover all that in-depth in chapter 14.

But we want to be open to what God wants us to do. I think you've got to be.... here's my conviction.....God's more willing to do with you than you're willing to let Him. God is more willing to do with you than you're willing to let Him. He's got a plan, He's got a purpose. You have what you need to have to accomplish His will. Paul wrote to Timothy, in 1 Timothy 1 and 4; 2 Timothy 1, “Stir up the gift that's in you,” Three times to a 40-year-old guy Paul goes, “Come on. God's gifted you that, God's called you to that. We've seen it in your life. Get on it, man!” And he needed to be told. And maybe so do we.

Verse 31 says, “Desire the best gifts,” the ones that best serve in the place where God has put you. Paul will talk next week about the love of God that has to motivate any kind of service that we get involved with. If we can just see ourselves on an equal footing, I think it'll be easier to love the body because we'll be able to appreciate what everybody brings to the table. But His agape love is the focus for next week.

If you really don't want to be convicted, stay home next Wednesday. These are horrible verses. You're going to feel like you've read a Tozer book. Okay, you guys didn't know. Tozer's like a holiness guy that.....in my greatest week of godliness and holiness, Tozer makes me feel crummy about my own life. He's that good at lettin' you.....stripes on your back. Anyway, that was the joke, and I apologize for not setting it up properly. Next week we're going to talk about the love of God in your heart and mine. Yeah. All of you sit towards the front.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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