

One Body, Many Members

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[0:00] Amen. Please be seated. If you remember, we took a break from our series through 1 Corinthians.

! We've taken that break since Palm Sunday, but I'm glad we can return to it this morning. And if you're new among us, or if you've missed any of the sermons in that series, they are available on the church's website, HolyTrinitySyracuse.org, and they're available there under the sermons tab. So you're welcome to go and listen to them there. I want to give a short introduction to this section of the book on spiritual gifts, which is the topic being considered in chapters 12 to 14 of 1 Corinthians.

Often these chapters in this portion of 1 Corinthians are misunderstood, because some think this is the conclusive teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, in these verses, in these chapters.

But we go to these verses, and many of them go to these verses, as examples of how the church should operate in its spiritual gifts. When in fact, most of what Paul has to say in these verses are correctives.

[1:31] He writes to the Corinthian church to correct their wrong views and practices about spiritual gifts, and the work of the Holy Spirit in general. It will be helpful to keep in mind that Paul is writing to correct wrong practices, and also I think it will be helpful for us to first understand the situation in the Corinthian church, before we then try to apply these verses to ourselves.

You know, the major issue seems to be, the major issue in the Corinthian church seems to be a misunderstanding and abuse of the gifts, especially the gift of tongues.

In these chapters, we see Paul's corrective in setting down for them principles for the church to follow, as the church gathers, principle of orderliness in worship, as we gather, principles that, in fact, still applies to us today.

People are taken, I think you will agree, people are just taken with experiences today, just as they were in Paul's Corinth, particularly spiritual experiences.

You know, the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have seen the revival of sort of new age, transcendental philosophies, and even we've seen in the 21st century a return to occult and pagan practices in the West.

[3:08] These are all evidences of our society's preoccupation with the spiritual. But we saw in the first verses of chapter 12, Paul's emphasis is that true spirituality is not based on subjective experiences, but upon objective truth.

In other words, truth is more important than experience. I'm going to say that again. Paul is emphasizing in the first verses of chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, the principle that truth is more important than experience.

this fascination with the spiritual is proved that just because something is spiritual, spiritual, I put those in quotation marks, because Paul doesn't think anything is spiritual unless it's in Christ.

But just because something is spiritual, we have this fascination, if it's spiritual, then it has to, it is of God. If anyone has anything that's a spiritual experience, it must be of God.

But Paul wants us to see that, and he points it out in verse 2 of chapter 12. It reminds the Corinthians, when you were pagans, it reminds them, you had spiritual experiences.

[4:30] You even had out-of-body experiences. You may have even spoken in otherworldly terms. But all of that, all of those experiences were to mute idols.

And ultimately, it was not spiritual in a biblical sense. Rather, if anything, it was demonic. It was the idols and the demons behind them.

And so, the question then for us is, what's the difference between pagan spiritual experiences and spiritual experiences for a Christian? If both claim spiritual experiences, what's the difference? For Paul, the basis by which he judges if they are truly spiritual is not the experience in and of themselves, but rather their confession.

Their confession. You see that in the first, I'm going to refer you, I hope you have your Bibles open to page 1140 of your pew Bible.

[5:34] I want to write it to page 1139 of your pew Bible. But I want to remind you of what Paul says in verse 3 of chapter 12. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus is accursed.

And no man can say, Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit. So that's the difference. The confession, a confession that Jesus is Lord, is really what grounds a true spiritual experience or spirituality in general.

Because Paul knows that the thing that makes any experience truly spiritual in a godly sense is if the object is Jesus. Because that's in fact what the Holy Spirit does among us.

That's the Holy Spirit's ministry among us. It is always to point us to Jesus and to help us to grow into Jesus. That is the measure by which we judge if anything at all is spiritual.

Whether it's something that we are doing or it's being done that we are witness to, that is the measure by which we judge it. Does it point to Jesus? Does it uplift Jesus? Does it tell the truth about Jesus?

[6:51] If anyone denied Jesus or the truth concerning him in the Bible, then no matter what that person says or does, no matter what experience he or she manufactures, we can definitively say that those things, whatever it is, it's not of God.

Truth is more important than experience. Any experience that does not point to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is not in fact spiritual. And we need to run from it.

And the second point that Paul goes on to make in these verses of chapter 12 is that service is more important than self-satisfaction.

And we see that in verse 4. Paul lists a variety of spiritual gifts in operation in the Corinthian church. By the way, this list is not exhaustive as we said it last time we went in 1 Corinthians.

This list is not exhaustive of all spiritual gifts in operation in the church. Paul's emphasis is that the gifts are all, what he's trying to emphasize is that all the gifts in its variety and its diversity are all from the same source.

[8:08] The triune God. In verse 7, Paul says, look there, he says, they are given for the common good. This phrase, for the common good, is a good way to measure our own desires for spiritual experiences and to have spiritual gifts.

You might ask yourself, why do you want spiritual experiences? Oftentimes, if we're honest with ourselves, sometimes it's for self-satisfaction to experience, we say, the divine, to exhibit gifts that makes us look mature, super spiritual.

At least that's what's going on in the Corinthian church. Or to let people see how spiritually advanced we are by our display of our gifts. Unfortunately, many Christians chase after experiences in this way.

Spending their time and their money in search of higher and higher experiences and trying to acquire greater gifts. But that's not what the gifts are for.

They're not for you or even necessarily for your own experience. Paul wants us to see that the gifts are given by God. For what purpose? To serve.

[9:27] To serve one another in the body of Christ. That's why the gifts are given. First, their gifts. That's the key thing. Their gifts. Paul was intentional to use that charisma.

Their grace gifts. God graces us with them as He wills. That's how we begin them. They're not merited. I want to repeat that.

Their gifts. They're not merited but freely given. And since it's freely given, we must not boast about them as if we've earned them or merited them.

We must not hoard them. Or we must develop a case of superiority about them over against other people in the body of Christ.

They are given to use in service to the body of Christ. That is the sole purpose why God in His great wisdom and sovereignty has given those gifts.

[10:31] And He gives it to all within His body. You know, we perhaps condition ourselves to think God shows up in these experiences.

Right? That's why we chase after them. This is where we see God. I want more experiences of God. I want to experience Him. This is where I see Him. This is where I experience Him. And I often think that's a misunderstanding there.

Because in fact, I think that the truth is that we know God more and we find Him nearer to us when we serve one another.

When we relate to one another within the body of Christ. Not when we chase after experiences. When we serve and relate with one another another. Even when we do it out of our weakness and our deficiency.

In those moments we find, as Paul did in 2 Corinthians, that God's grace is sufficient for us. And His power is made perfect in our weakness.

[11:40] And like Him, like Paul, we can say we will do what? We will boast all the more in our weaknesses. not our superiority, mind you. What does Paul boast in?

In his weaknesses. Why? So that the power of Christ may rest upon us the more. Do you see the clear contrast that is there with the Corinthians and Paul's view of the gifts?

The Corinthians are clamoring for the gifts. For what purpose? For clout. For prominence. For spiritual power. Whereas Paul, who is gifted by God with various gifts, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, still says, I boast not in the gifts that God has given me but in my weaknesses.

Because in them and as I relate to the body of Christ, Christ's power is made known and displayed. In verses 8-10 and then in verse 28, Paul lists two sets of gifts.

And I said it before, these are not meant to be exhaustive of the gifts within the church. And Paul states these gifts as descriptive rather than prescriptive.

[12:55] They describe the kind of gifts that are in operation in the early church. And you know, elsewhere in the New Testament we'll see other lists of gifts that are slightly different from these.

The point is not to break down each gift. That's not what Paul is doing here and I don't want us to do it either. Paul doesn't do that here. Instead, the point he's making is that all these gifts are different and various, yet they are given by the one giver in their varieties to serve and unite the church.

When we use these gifts to divide, we are doing the very opposite of what they are intended for. So Paul's aim is to champion unity in diversity in the operation of these gifts in the church.

Hence, the analogy that he now gives. The analogy of the one body and many members. The members of your body, what are the members of your body?

They are your limbs and your organs, external and internal. Those are the members of your body. So it is with the church. one church, one body, comprised of different limbs and organs to make it work in a healthy way.

[14:18] This phenomenon of unity and diversity is exemplified supremely in God himself. God the Trinity, the triune God. One God, three persons working together in perfect unity, giving gifts to the church.

And Paul is emphasizing that what is true of God must also be true of his church. We are to be united in our diversity.

And in that unity and diversity we reflect the nature of our God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This requires relationship.

I hope you see that. This requires relationship, requires fellowship with one another, just as there is within the Trinity. There is in the body of Christ.

You cannot say you are part of the body and abstain from fellowship with the body. And using the analogy again, it's not just passive fellowship, it's active fellowship.

[15:28] Actively participating in the life and upbuilding of the body. Exercising your God-given gifts, not being spectators.

And so Paul goes on in verse 13, for in one spirit we are all baptized into one body. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of the one spirit. Paul has no category for a second baptism of the spirit.

When he's speaking of baptism here, into one spirit, he speaks of the baptism into one body by the spirit. He speaks of the Christian sacrament of baptism by which we're initiated into Christ.

In fact, he's expressly talking about the very means by which you come into the body of Christ. Salvation. If you're born again, you've been baptized into God, into Christ.

You've been baptized by his spirit. The baptism being the visible marker of our union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. So we come into Christ, as Paul says here in verse 13, we come into Christ from different ethnicities, we come, we come from different stations of life, but in Christ, when we come, we are made one, equal, at the foot of the cross.

[16:51] Note the word, all, twice repeated in verse 13. All were made to drink of the one spirit. Again, I think Paul here referenced in the sacrament of baptism earlier, now is, as the mark of our initiation into Christ, now he references the Lord's Supper.

We're made to drink of one spirit. The invisible sign being the wine that we drink together when we gather as the body, as we partake at the Lord's Supper. But the invisible grace that's given to us is communion as we partake of the Lord's Supper.

We're in communion with Jesus himself through the spirit as he refreshes us when we feed on him by faith. Here are the tangible and profound signs of our unity into the one body which is Christ. But, brothers and sisters, what happens in a body, what happens in a body that things, others, are more or less important? What happens?

Look in verse 14 to 20. There we see Paul's appeal to those in the body who feel inferior or feel that they don't belong in the body.

[18:07] Maybe they think they don't have anything to offer. But Paul says in verse 14, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

A body is indeed functioning in a healthy way when each limb and each organ recognize and exercise its particular gift in the healthy operation of that body.

If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong in the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. Notice the analogy here.

The foot is jealous of the hand. And instead of recognizing its unique gifts and vital role in the body, what is the foot saying?

I want to be the hand. And the foot does not stop being part of the body because of its attitude and feeling the foot might feel it doesn't belong.

[19:11] That doesn't negate the fact that in fact, in reality, it is part of the body. Because in fact, it is. But unfortunately, its clamoring, that is, the foot's clamoring for self-satisfaction instead of service, will eventually harm the foot.

and not only the foot, it will also harm the rest of the body. Do you feel inadequate?

Or maybe you feel jealous because you don't have the gifts that someone else in the body has?

Well, the question then you must ask, where does that lead? When you say, well, you know, I just, I'm, I don't have anything to offer.

I'm not like that person. Well, it definitely leads to harm because it harms you because it keeps you from faithfully exercising your God-given gifts.

And it also harms the church because it deprives her of your faithful service in the growth, growth of the body. That's, that's what Paul wants to emphasize.

[20:27] There is no insignificant part of the body. Every part is important to the health of the whole body.

What of those who feel self-sufficient in the body? Perhaps you see yourself as the high, right?

Look at verse 21. The high says to the hand, I have no need of you.

Or, now again, the head to the feet. I have no need of you. Perhaps you think yourself as the high. You say, well, the body's so lucky to have me. If not for me, they'll be stumbling into things all over the place.

Or perhaps you can consider yourself the head. You think of yourself, you're the brain of the whole operation. You make it all go. I mean, after all, you can cut a finger off and the body will survive and adjust.

You can even cut a whole hand off and the body will survive and adjust. But what's a body without its head? Dead. Dead. That's what. So you think of yourself as the head.

[21:32] You think of yourself as indispensable to the body. But you've forgotten that the body of Christ has only one head. Jesus Christ.

And it stops being a church. It stops being the body of Christ when it rejects Christ has head. It might as well be walking around already dead, just not knowing it.

A body starved of the source of oxygen and not long for death. Well, the overarching principle that Paul sets up is this.

Vain ambition within the body of Christ of misplaced emulation, trying to be somebody else, trying to be something that you're not, or envy in the body of Christ.

All of these things are recipes for ruin to the body. And so it's seeking that everyone should be like you. Perhaps you're the I.

[22 : 36] You're like, why is everybody not an I? You want everybody to exercise the same gifts that you have. Why can't they all be as spiritual like me?

Well, look, think about it. What does that turn the body into? If everybody's an I. It turns the body into a misshaping monstrosity. Picture it for a moment.

It's not a pretty sight. So Paul goes on in verse 18. But as it is, this is God's wisdom. God arranged the members in the body, each one of them arranged by God as he chose.

Who does the arranging? Who does the arranging? God. And on what basis does he do the arranging? As he chose.

The apportioning of gifts is the sovereign privilege of God alone. And here's the beauty and wisdom of God. Verse 22. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

[23 : 42] And on those parts of the body that we think less honorable. What do we do? We bestow the greater honor. And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require.

But God has so composed the body giving greater honor. This is what God does. Compose the body giving greater honor to the part that lacked it.

God has so arranged, so composed the church that greater honor is given to the parts of the body that are deemed less honorable. Greater concern is given.

Greater comfort, attention is given to the member of the body that is weak or suffering or disgraced. So that the disgrace is graced and ornamented with love and honor from the other parts of the body.

the weak, those who are weak are strengthened with prayer and care of the other members. And those who suffer the less honorable parts, their load in their suffering is lightened as the other members come along to carry the load and provide rest and respite for them in the midst of their suffering.

[25 : 10] That's how God intended for it to work. And by the way, at one point in our life as Christians, at one point we will find ourselves the weakened.

We will find ourselves the disgraced. We will find ourselves the suffering member of the body. But here's the comfort and the beauty of the way God intended it.

God has placed you into his body so that when that happens, he will sustain you through the fellowship that you have with him and with his body.

That's why God has placed us when we come in Christ into a particular body. This is why there is no such thing as a lone! Christian or solo Christian.

It's an oxymoron. it's like a lone sheep. You can say a lone wolf. That's such a thing. But what happens to a lone sheep? Not long for this world.

[26 : 23] If you are a Christian and not part of a church or if you neglect to participate in the life of the church, you are in fact hurting yourself and depriving the church of your God given gifts.

Or maybe you might not be a Christian after all because you don't understand what it means to be part of the body of Christ. And Paul is saying to us, this is how God designed and intended the body to function.

that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, verse 26, all suffer together.

If one member is honored, all rejoice together. Weeks back, I had a pain in my tooth that increasingly got worse. But I didn't attend to the pain.

I ignored it. Until the pain from that one tooth became so unbearable that it led to a searing headache that I couldn't do anything.

[27 : 30] I was incapacitated. And I had no choice but to go to urgent care and get a prescription of antibiotics. One tooth.

Eventually, because of the pain from that one tooth, it made me useless. Really. If one member suffers, all suffer together.

Thanks be to God. I'm okay now. I'm well. The antibiotics did their work so that you don't have to worry about me. But the reality is what's true about the interconnectedness of our physical body is

also true.

In fact, I think it's more true of this body, the church. are we a church that ignores those who are suffering?

And you know, there are many ways we can do that. We can look away or we can walk away instead of getting closer to the brokenhearted as Jesus would.

[28 : 47] We can shun a disgraced member of the body instead of receiving the repentant sinner back and remind them of God's abundant mercy and love.

Which one are we? What kind of church are we? We can see a weakened and weary brother and instead of inviting them to rest in Christ and inviting them to have their soul replenished, we can chide them and reprimand them for not getting on like we are.

We can also wallow in self pity and envy as members of the body instead of graciously and humbly serving within the body knowing that our service is unto the Lord.

We're serving Christ our Lord as we serve His church. You know, we can even shy away from confronting a member of the body with the truth. Even when we know that what they're doing is harming themselves or harming the body, we refrain from telling the truth, from confronting them with the truth in love.

All these and more will lead to what? Will lead to an unhealthy and deformed body, contrary to what Jesus wishes for us.

[30 : 18] When we fail to see that we are one body, when we fail to see that if one suffers, all suffer, eventually all will suffer. The pain does not stay in one locality, in the body.

This is as one writer puts it. He says, in the body of Christ there are, strictly speaking, no private sufferings. Do you hear that?

In the body of Christ, there are, strictly speaking, no private sufferings. All are shared because there is one life of the whole. We share in the one life.

Accordingly, a wrong done to one member is a wrong done to the whole church, and therefore to Christ himself. Who's the head of the body?

I think this challenges us in two ways. First, for those of us who are suffering, and we want to pretend as if there is no suffering going on, and we hide it from the rest of the body.

[31 : 27] Well, there is no private sufferings. God has placed you within the body for one purpose, to share, it's for other members of the body to help you to carry your burden.

And for the rest of us, we'll see if there is pain and suffering. We are not to turn a blind eye.

We're not to ignore it. We're not to walk away. We're not to give them their privacy, as we tend to do. We're to come closer, to draw in, in love.

Look at verse 27 to the end of the chapter. Paul then says, now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Just let's pause there for a second. Look at the list of these, in fact, these are offices now. The list in verse 28 are actually offices in the church.

[32 : 43] But the reality is that even these offices can only be exercised based on giftings that God himself gives to those he calls.

God would not call anyone into an office without first equipping him or her with the requisite gifts for the task for which he calls. He calls them. But again, notice the diversity of the gifts as in the earlier verses.

And Paul is not making a tear here. All these gifts are vital to the upkeep of the body. And then he goes on in verse 29.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

These might seem like the really glass, shiny gifts. But do all do this? Is there anyone that possesses all of these?

[33 : 50] In the original Greek, it's more clear that the answers to these questions are a clear and resounding no. No. there are rhetorical questions that emphasizes the reality that no one member of the church possesses all the requisite gifts to make it function in a healthy way.

Neither you nor I are sufficient to make this church function the way that God has composed it to by ourselves. I can't do it by myself.

You can't do it by yourself. each member must exercise his or her gifts from the littlest among us to the biggest. We must exercise the gifts that God has given us for the healthy functioning and upbuilding of the body.

We need each other. We are not in competition with each other. Rather, we are united in fellowship with one another in Christ.

We are one body. We are his body, which he has brought with his precious blood.

[35 : 07] We are precious to Christ, our head. May we see through Christ's highs and consider one another as Christ considers us.

Verse 31, Paul says, but earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. Well, we have already seen two principles so far in this chapter.

The first principle is truth is more important than experience. The second principle is that service is more important than self-satisfaction. And then in verse 31, we see the introduction to the whole of chapter 13.

13. And the third principle, which is fruit, is more important than gifts. And as he calls us, Paul enjoins us to highly value and earnestly do what?

Seek after a more excellent way. And we will look at that next week, God willing, as we look in chapter 13. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for saving us, for choosing us, for calling us out of death into life, and for placing us into a living body of the church.

[36 : 33] We thank you, Lord, for this particular local body of your church. We thank you for your faithfulness to us as your people. We thank you for every member, every limb and organ of this body.

It is you in your wisdom and sovereignty that you've placed us here. Help us, Lord, to see that we are important, valued by you, first and foremost.

And in turn, help us to value and honor one another. Destroy our pride, Lord, destroy our feelings of inadequacy or our feelings of self-sufficiency, and help us to lean and trust in you, the giver of all good gifts, as you work in us for the outbuilding of your church and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. God bless you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Ukraine.