

One Body, Many Members

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[0:00] All right, the sermon text for today is 1 Corinthians 12, 12 through 31.

So let's see, 1 Corinthians.

It says, For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

If the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less part of the body. And if the ear should say, because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less part of the body.

[1:19] If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need for you, nor again the head to the feet.

I have no need for you. So, on the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty.

Which are more presentable parts do not require? But God has to compose the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it.

But that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

[2:39] If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. 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.

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?

Do all speak with tongues? But earnestly desire the higher gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way. This is the word of the Lord.

Father, we come to this word. This is your word. And we ask, as Andrew already prayed, that you would take this word and use it, God, to change our hearts, to change our church, to make us look more like the body of Christ.

[3:44] Work your purposes in us for your glory, and for our witness to this world, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, good morning, Shoreline. My name is Mike, one of the pastors here at Shoreline.

And if you're new here, we welcome you. We're so glad that you came on this special Sunday. In many ways, I feel like the sermon that I have from this text has already been preached, and everything that's already happened.

But I'm still going to preach it, so you guys will be sitting here for a little bit longer. Did anyone else grow up reading the book, The Treasure Tree? Anybody? Written in 1992, yes.

We got a few people here. The Treasure Tree. It's a heartwarming story about four animal friends who go on a birthday adventure in which they need to find four keys to open up the gate to the

treasure tree.

Now, there's Lance the lion. He's the take-charge leader of the four of them. There's Honey the golden retriever with a big heart and listening ears. Then Chewy the beaver.

[4:47] We have a lot of Chewy's. The engineer with an eye for detail and a desire to always do things the right way. And then finally, Giggles the otter, you know, the life of the party. And with each obstacle these animals face, they find that one of them is uniquely fit to help the group succeed and to move forward.

And in the end, the four keys, they fit together to unlock the gate that leads them to the treasure tree. So this adventure has been, it was one big lesson teaching them how they are each made differently.

They're designed uniquely and how they all need each other. And so it is in a far more profound way with the many-membered body of Christ, the church.

And this is what we see in our text for today, which is 1 Corinthians 12, 12 through 20, 31, as Brianna just read. So if you haven't yet, please turn there in your Bibles, get the text in front of your faces.

And if you don't have a Bible, we have them on the back table. Feel free to take one and keep one of those. This year, if you're new here, we're walking through the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul's first letter to the problematic church in Corinth.

[5:58] And we're considering the church's call to display Christ, to live out the gospel in all things, in all areas of their corporate and individual lives.

And today we're in the second of five passages in which Paul is addressing the topic of spiritual gifts. And this is all under the broader topic of corporate worship.

And so last week we took Paul's Spiritual Gifts 101 course, and we learned that the spiritual gifts are gifts of God's grace.

They're gifts of service and of his power, given by the Spirit to each believer as proof that Christ is Lord, and for the building up of his church.

So that's what we learned last week. Paul is reshaping the Corinthians' distorted understanding of the spiritual gifts. They were using them. They were misusing them and abusing them for self-promotion, rather than for the glory of God and for the good of others.

[7:02] And so as Paul continues this discussion today, he compares the church with the human body. And so the title of today's sermon is One Body, Many Members.

There we go. One Body, Many Members. And so in the first few verses here, Paul introduces this body analogy that the church is the spirit-indwelling body of Christ.

Now all throughout this, if you've been walking with us, all throughout this letter we have seen, Paul has been alluding to, he has been hinting towards this analogy, but he hasn't actually made it explicit.

So if you go all the way back to chapter 1, verse 13, Paul was addressing this anti-gospel party factioning in the church, and he had said, is Christ divided?

It's a question he posed. Is Christ divided? He was talking about the church. In chapter 6, verse 15, addressing sexual immorality, Paul had said, Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

[8:10] He was implying that each believer is a member of the body of Christ. He didn't say it though, but he's implying that. In chapter 10, verse 17, when he was addressing eating in idol temples, and how it does not accord at all with eating the Lord's Supper, Paul said, That was the first time he explicitly refers to the church as a body.

Sharing the one bread, which represents Christ's body broken for us, makes us one body. And then in the next chapter, chapter 11, Paul expounds on the Lord's Supper because of the Corinthians' abuse of it, and he says in 11, verse 29, For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

He's talking about the church, right? The church body. But he had just been talking about the body of Christ. And so finally, after all of these instances, hinting towards this body analogy, Paul pulls

back the curtain, and he says, For just as the body, verse 12, is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

So there it is. We, the saints, the followers of Jesus, are the many members that make up the one body of Christ. The church is the body of Christ.

And how did this all come about? Paul says in verse 13, For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit.

[10:00] Now today on the church calendar is actually Pentecost Sunday. It's 50 days after Easter Sunday. We celebrate today that what was prophesied about in the Old Testament, and then what Jesus promised to his disciples that it actually came to pass.

The promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, was poured out from on high upon Jesus' disciples, filling them with the very presence and power of the living God.

Now as the story unfolds in the book of Acts, as the gospel goes forth from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, similar outpourings of the Spirit occur as people yield their lives to Christ by faith.

So in this, in Acts, we see the divine confirmation that Jew or Greek, slave or free, rich or poor, male or female, all who believe in Jesus become partakers of the divine nature.

They become united to the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. The Father is the fountain. Christ is the channel.

[11:12] The Holy Spirit is the living stream, writes Andrew Murray. Another commentator writes that every believer has been plunged into and drenched with the Spirit.

And Paul's not talking about here a second baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now he is speaking of how at conversion, each believer is immersed in God's Spirit, becomes a temple, a dwelling place for God. That was in chapter 6. And out of his heart, Jesus promises in John 7, 38, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit.

Saints, if you're here and you believe in Jesus, this living water refreshes our souls eternally. And it also provides daily soul-satisfying, empowering nourishment.

We've been made to drink of the Spirit forevermore. And this is amazing. We've been permanently indwelt with his presence. And also, we need fresh fillings of the Spirit continually.

[12:25] Saints, seek fresh fillings of God's Spirit continually. Do so. Drink of the Spirit by day by day, communing with him. And the Father and the Son in the Word and in prayer.

And you know, we become more useful to the body when we're not just, like, sipping on the Spirit on Sundays, but when we're drinking deeply of the Spirit day by day.

When we renounce the flesh and worldly ways, which is what Paul is over and over again calling the Corinthians to do. And when we instead embrace the Gospel and allow the Spirit to manifest the life of Christ in us.

Right? When we're drinking deeply of the Spirit, our minds are renewed. Our wills are aligned to God's. Our hearts are rightly affected by the Gospel.

And we're empowered. We're empowered by God for this Christ-exalting, body-edifying ministry. And that is our aim, after all, which we keep coming back to in Corinthians.

[13:31] The glory of Christ and the good of the body. And so we return here to Paul's point, that through baptism in the Spirit, each believer becomes a member joined to the body of Christ.

And you know, this reminded me, as I was studying, of Luke's opening words in the book of Acts. He says, In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up.

What does Luke mean? He began to do and teach. He means that Jesus' doing and teaching, his mission and ministry, it began in his life on earth, but it continues as he reigns from heaven through the church, his body.

He's filled that body with his presence and power. And I will be with you even to the end of the age, he said at the Great Commission. Okay, so having established this body analogy, Paul goes on in this text here to draw two different lessons, and then he's going to pan out to give us God's purpose for the body, and then he takes that analogy and he plies it right to the topic of spiritual gifts that

we're talking about.

So that's where we're headed in the rest of this sermon. Look in your Bibles at verse 14. Paul continues, I bet Paul really enjoyed writing this portion of the letter.

[15:13] He's imagining that various parts of the body have powers of thinking and feeling and talking. You know, if the parts of your body were to compare themselves to the other parts, this is what they might think and feel, right?

I'm just a stinky, dirty foot, right? People are always having to cover me up. I mean, look at those beautiful hands. So dexterous and useful.

What good am I? Right? That's what the foot's thinking. I don't even belong here. I don't belong on this body. I'll never be as good as those hands. That'd be ridiculous, right?

Paul is saying here, the foot cannot decide to unbelong to the body, right? The foot belongs to the body. The ear cannot decide that because it looks weird and always gets flicked by the older brother, you know, unlike those sparkling eyes that get all the praise, the ear can't decide to just ghost the rest of the body.

Right? The ear belongs to the body. The foot belongs to the body, whether they think so or not. That's what Paul's saying. Not only that, but look at verse 17. If the whole body were an eye, that'd be weird.

[16:25] Where would be the sense of hearing? Right? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. Paul's logic is very easy to follow here.

Right? If the whole body was one member, all the other important functions of the body would be lost. The body would cease to be the body. It would not function as the body was designed to function.

Now, the Corinthians, they were elevating certain spiritual gifts. We talked about this last week.

Especially the gift of speaking in tongues. They were elevating that over the other gifts.

Now, if everybody only spoke in tongues, first, they wouldn't understand each other. But second, who would lead the music? Who would preach the word? Who would minister mercy to those that needed it?

[17:27] And, you know, perhaps that mercy minister viewed themselves as just a stinky foot. You know? Perhaps the one gifted in faith thought of themselves as the odd-looking ear.

And I think Paul is speaking in these verses here to those brothers and sisters. And what he's saying is, here's the first lesson that we learn. To the insecure, don't think you're not needed. Don't think you're not needed. First, he's saying, you actually can't even decide, like the foot, that you don't belong to the body. You belong. And second, you play a vital, indispensable role in the body.

You are needed. The body would not be the body apart from you being in it. And Paul, he doesn't only appeal to the human body, but he goes much, much bigger.

He appeals to the sovereignty of God. But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose.

[18:35] This body of believers that we call Shoreline Community Bible Church, it has been divinely, sovereignly composed by God.

That's what Paul is telling us. God is constantly arranging and rearranging all the members in the body, each one of them as he wills. Right? At every moment, with every change of member, God is sovereignly orchestrating the makeup of the whole.

Do you ever think to yourself, you know, I'm not needed here. I have nothing to offer.

Like, what do I have to offer? Megan sings so beautifully. I can't do that, you know? Or do you think that what you have to offer is less important than the giftings of others?

This is emphatically not true. You are a vital, indispensable member of the body of Christ. You are uniquely gifted by the Spirit to serve and to strengthen, to build up the body of Christ with your gifts.

[19:43] Every member with their unique gifting, every member is needed in the body of Christ, the church. The church needs preachers and teachers

just as the church needs encouragers.

Just as the church needs people that are ministering mercy behind the scenes that nobody can see. Just as the church needs brothers who excel in faith and sisters who labor in prayer, even if there's nothing else that they can do.

The church needs every member to be doing their part. Paul says in Ephesians 4, 15 and 16, that speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

To the insecure, don't think you're not needed. And if Paul has a word for the insecure, he also has a word for the proud. Don't think others aren't needed.

This is what we see in the next few verses. So look at verse 21. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the foot, I have no need of you.

[21:07] On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. So here is Paul's word for the proud.

The ones that think they are superior. The ones that look down condescendingly on the so-called less important members with the inferior gifts.

Paul's word to them is the same. Every single member is vital and indispensable. Whether you seemingly more useful members think so or not.

I mean, have you ever stubbed your pinky toe? Anybody? Has anyone stubbed their pinky toe? Yeah, I'm getting a few head nods. All of a sudden, that little tiny appendage that seems so useless becomes so important.

Like, I did not realize I needed my pinky toe to walk and to run. And now I'm having to do this awkward dancing in order to walk. You need your pinky toe, right? And just as the big toe can't just dismiss the pinky toe from the body, the eye cannot reject the hand, no member of the body of Christ can simply dismiss another member as non-essential.

[22:20] As one commentator states the matter, there is no room in the church for either inferiority complexes, that was the last several verses, or superiority complexes.

Paul continues in verse 23. And on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor. And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require.

Paul is, of course, talking about those private parts of our body that we cover up rather than exposing. And in doing so, he's saying we actually treat these less honorable parts with greater honor.

Is Paul telling the Corinthians to, like, cover certain people in their giftings up? No, no. He's telling the Corinthians to honor them, to honor them in their giftings, to not consider them inferior.

You know, and reflecting on these verses, I was reminded of Paul's words back in chapter 1, verses 26 through 29. Paul said, For consider your calling, brothers.

[23:28] Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

This is the way that God works in his upside-down kingdom. He's taking the ones rejected in culture, the nothings of society, and bestowing upon them divine honor, divine glory in Christ and him crucified.

And Paul doesn't want the status-seeking, one-upmanship of culture that subverts the gospel. He doesn't want that to exist in the redeemed community of the saints, the ones who have been made one in Christ through the baptism of the Spirit.

And then just like with the last point, Paul not only appeals to the human body, but he appeals to the sovereignty of God. He says, But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it.

[24:44] God has so composed the body. This living, breathing organism that we call church is not a construct of man.

It's not a construct of man. This is a construct of the divine power, the divine wisdom of God that he determined before the ages began.

And this is true not only of the universal church. It is true of the universal church, of all saints from every generation in all places. It is also true of the local church where these things become concrete and visible.

Our many-membered one body has been composed by God in his infinite power and wisdom. And this means that to look down on another brother or sister, to view another believer as dispensable, that is to oppose what Almighty God has done in saving them and making them to drink of the Spirit and fitting them with grace gifts for the building up of the body.

Do you ever find yourself thinking that you don't need your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you ever find yourself viewing yourself and your giftings as more important or more needed in the body?

[26:11] Paul would have us ask ourselves here, would I cut off my own hand? Would I cut off my foot? Would I even cut off a single finger or toe?

That's what I'm effectively doing when I decide that a particular brother or sister is dispensable. And we need to remember here that their gifting is the result of God's sovereign will and grace.

Their gifting. So we ought to honor them. We ought to praise God for them. And we need to remember that our gifting is the result of the same, right?

It's not our own doing. And so that should lead us to humbly boast in God alone and not take pride in ourselves. On a more practical note here, but before we move on, two things.

First, it requires some self-reflection to discern whether we are taking pride in our own gifts. This is a good self-reflection to do.

[27:16] And here's just, here's two questions to prayerfully consider. Here's the first one. Have I received criticism related to my area of gifting? And if so, how did I respond?

Did I become defensive? Did I seek to minimize or to rationalize or to deny or deflect? If the answer is yes, then perhaps I'm not viewing it as a gift of God's grace, but rather a source of pride, a source of status.

So that's the first question. Here's another question you can ask yourself. Was my ability to exercise that particular gift, or maybe some ministry that you had, was my ability to do that ever taken away for a season or permanently?

And the question is, how did I respond to that? Right? Was I angry or bitter? Did I feel less fulfilled? If yes, then perhaps I was looking to my gifting, whatever it was that I was doing, I was looking to that rather than to the Lord for my satisfaction, for my fulfillment.

So that's the first thing. It takes some self-reflection to discern, are we taking pride in our gifts and viewing them as more important than that of others? Now here's the second thing before we move on.

[28:39] If you find your heart looking down on a brother or sister, the first step is to repent of that, right? It's to repent of that sin and ask God to change your heart.

But also, I would exhort you all, I exhort myself, when we're doing this, to pray regularly for that brother or sister. Thank God for them.

Thank God for the ways that he has gifted them. Pray for their spiritual flourishing in Christ. Pray for God to use them mightily in building up his church.

You know, we pray for one another like that. I mean, this is actually what Paul was doing. We saw this in 1 Corinthians 1. Paul begins his letter thanking God for the problematic Corinthian church. He thanked God for bestowing gifts of grace upon them, even though he knew he was going to write chapter 12 and 13 and 14 and talk about how they were misusing these gifts. He thanks God for them and that leads him to be able to encourage them with a good word.

[29:39] So that's what we should be doing. We should be praying for these brothers or sisters if we have this heart attitude towards them. To the insecure, don't think you're not needed. To the proud, don't think others aren't needed.

Every member of the body of Christ, every member is uniquely gifted, is vital and indispensable to the whole. These are the two lessons Paul has drawn from the analogy and now he pans out to

God's purpose for the body, unity and love.

But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it. Verse 25, that there may be no division in the body.

That there may be no division in the body. So the first thing we see are God's purpose of church unity. Now that verse, verse 25, should sound familiar to us because Paul had said again back in chapter 1, I appeal to you brothers by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same minds and the same judgment.

And then recall his question a few verses later, is Christ divided? No. The answer was no. Christ is not divided. The spiritual reality of the body of Christ, the church, is that it is one unified body and God intends for that spiritual reality to be manifested in the unity of the visible church, especially the local church.

[31:18] Paul is writing here to the church of God that is in Corinth. That was chapter 1, verse 2. He's writing to the local church. The local church is meant to display the oneness of the body of Christ in concrete reality, like in time and space.

And what does this unity look like? It looks like mutual love. It looks like mutual love. Paul continues, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. We were just doing that earlier today, which is beautiful.

This is what God is calling us to do. This verse here, it's anticipating Paul's beautiful discussion on love in chapter 13, which Jordan is going to be preaching on next Sunday, and I am so excited to sit there and hear him preach that word.

In that chapter, Paul is going to say that love is not self-seeking. In Philippians 2.4, Paul says, let each of you look not only to his own interest.

[32:25] He knows we're going to do that, right? Look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others. God intends for every member of the body to exhibit mutual love, right?

The same care, the same concern for every other member of the body. So much so, he's saying that when one member is suffering, every member suffers with them.

When one member is honored, every member rejoices with them. Paul says this in Romans 12.15, we are to rejoice with those who rejoice, to weep with those who weep.

Is not this the embodiment of Christ-like love? You know, Christ did not stand aloof from our situation.

Christ did not stand indifferent from our plight, our sin sickness. He didn't look upon us indifferently. He came down.

[33:28] He entered our world. And in the greatest display of love in all of human history, he went to the cross where he bore our sin and our shame in our place.

Friends, Christ did that for us. He endured the wrath of God. It was poured out upon him so that we could have eternal life. So that we could be one with him in glory.

And this love, this radical, self-giving love is to be the defining mark of the Christian community. The jersey that we wear, to quote Brother Jim from our time in John, you know, Jesus told his disciples there in John 13, 34 and 35, a new commandment I give to you that you love one another.

Say, that's not new. That's what the Old Testament said. No, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

And that loving unity of the church, it's so important to Jesus that we find him praying to the Father for that in John 17. Jesus prays that they, he's speaking of all future disciples who would come, that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

[34:54] And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Colossians 4.14.

Saints, we see here that God has sovereignly arranged us, every member, that we might display radical gospel unity, radical Christ-like love for one another.

Let us pursue one another in love. And not only those that we're most drawn to, right? Not only those that are in our exact same life stage and situation, but even those least like us. That proclaims the power of the cross to unite us as one body. And it does so to the watching world. That's what Jesus was praying, that they would see, that the world would know that Jesus was sent. It proclaims that to the world and even, Paul says in Ephesians 3, to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. The loving unity of the body of Christ is a declaration to the world and the cosmos of God's divine wisdom.

[36:06] So church, let us die to our own desires. Let us cease the endless comparisons that help nothing.

And let's do that so that rather than envy those who are rejoicing, oh, look what they have. I wish they had that. No, let's rejoice with them. Praise God for what he has bestowed on another brother or sister.

And church, let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ. And rather than saying, Lord, thank you, that's not me and my situation when others are suffering, let us willingly enter into their suffering, lamenting with them, laboring for them in prayer, ministering to their physical and spiritual needs.

What beauty there is to behold when the body of Christ manifests the loving unity of the triune God amongst its diverse members and specifically amongst its diversity of spiritual gifts.

And that's where Paul brings back the conversation here. He applies the body analogy to the spiritual gifts in these final verses. He starts by shifting here to the second person.

[37:18] He makes it personal. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. In case it wasn't clear, Corinthians, I'm talking about you.

Right? The church of God in Corinth. Not only you, but you actually. He's actually talking about the church of God in Corinth. You are the many-membered body of Christ.

And God has appointed, look at verse 28. God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating various kinds of tongues.

Now that list gives rise to a lot of questions. And time fails us today to adequately address all of the questions. But I at least want to address three questions that you might ask when considering this verse.

Okay? Three questions that you might ask. The first question is why does Paul change up the list from his previous list in verses 8 through 10? And we talked about this a little bit last week.

[38:24] I think first, to show us that these lists are not comprehensive. They're not comprehensive. Right? Last week, we looked at all the other lists in Scripture. There's a lot of other gifts.

They're not comprehensive. But second, to flatten distinctions, we said, between the so-called spectacular gifts and the more ordinary seeming gifts. Right?

Here he adds helping and administrating. Helping is similar to the gift of service that we see in Romans 12, 7. Administrating is like the gift of leadership in Romans 12, 8.

Now these are not flashy, like speaking in tongues. Right? Or performing miracles of healing. They're not flashy. But they are gifts of God's grace, gifts of God's power, given to the saints to build up the body.

So I think that's a couple things Paul is doing. Secondly, what exactly is an apostle and are there apostles today? In the narrowest sense, the apostles were those who had seen the risen Christ and were commissioned by him.

[39:32] Right? So Jesus had originally chosen the twelve and he named them apostles, Luke 6, 13. And then after his ascension, a member was chosen to replace Judas, right, who had betrayed Christ and committed suicide.

They wanted to preserve the twelve. And you see that in Acts 1. And then, last of all, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, 8, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

On the road to Damascus, Paul saw the risen Christ. and he was commissioned by Christ. And so I think it's in this narrowest sense, the twelve plus Paul, that Paul is speaking here, which is why he says, first, apostles.

We'll talk about that in a little bit. In a broader sense, there are others, both then and now, who fulfill an apostolic-like ministry. Okay? There's people like Randy Matthews who we support who are uniquely gifted to teach and to train others, other churches and other leaders.

But these should not wear the badge of apostle. They don't claim the authority or wield the authority of the original apostles. That's just a brief, a brief answer to that question.

[40:49] The third question that we see here is Paul offering a hierarchy after just talking about the indispensability of every gift.

Is that what he's doing? I think that perhaps you could call it that, but not at all in a way that contradicts his message. Now, what do I mean here?

I think Ephesians helps us. In Ephesians 2, verse 20, Paul speaks of the church being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. In Ephesians 4, 11, Paul speaks of Christ giving the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And I think those verses shed light on what Paul's doing here in 1 Corinthians 12. Yes, every believer, every spiritual gift is indispensable. It is vital.

It is given by God to the church for its flourishing. And at the same time, as one commentator writes, apostles, prophets, and teachers play a crucial role in the founding and the maintenance of the church, for they proclaim and explicate the gospel, which is the very basis of the church's life.

[42:02] If you want to speak with me further about these things or other questions you have pertaining to these verses or just about spiritual gifts in general, by all means, please come talk to me. But Paul's main purpose in relisting these gifts is to set up the rhetorical questions that he asks next.

Look at 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? Each question in the Greek expects a negative answer. Right? Not all are apostles, are they?

Not all are prophets, are they? The answer, no, of course not. Of course not. Paul is driving home the main point of the passage and if I can put it before us, the main point that every member of Christ's body is uniquely gifted and vital to the whole which God arranged for the sake of unity and love.

Every member of Christ's body uniquely gifted, vital to the whole which God arranged for the sake of love and unity. And Paul adds this very curious exhortation at the end, but earnestly desire the higher gifts.

[43:28] Paul, aren't you trying to get the Corinthians to stop desiring certain gifts? Like, what are you saying? I think to understand what Paul is saying requires us to read the next 18 and a half verses which we're not going to do so I will summarize.

Paul says next, Christ, and I will show you a still more excellent way. What is that way? It is the superlative way of love in chapter 13.

Love which transcends all of the spiritual gifts. And then Paul tells the Corinthians in chapter 14, pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts especially that you may prophesy.

Why does he say, why is he talking about prophecy? Because of prophecy's ability to edify, to build up the church. So I think that Paul is calling the saints here to desire for the sake of unity and love those gifts which most build up the church, which most show Christ.

So brothers and sisters, let's do what Paul is saying. Let's desire them. Let's pray for them. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to apportion us a measure of his grace that maximally builds up and unites the body in love.

[44:48] But most of all, trusting that God has gifted each of his saints including you, each of you, according to his sovereign will and grace, put your vital spiritual gifts to work in service to the body for the sake of unity and love.

I'm going to close by reading from Psalm 133. Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers and I'll add and sisters in Christ dwell in unity for there the Lord has commanded the blessing life forevermore.

Please go with me in prayer. Father, we stand here, we sit here in your grace. first and foremost, we are here by your sovereign grace. Lord, we thank you that you have united us to Christ by faith.

You have united us to the body of Christ, to one another through the spirit whom you have poured out on us richly, living water in us, through us.

[46:05] God, what matchless grace and mercy. We thank you, Lord, that you have given to us each other. Lord, that was testified of earlier today. You have given us each other so that we might build one another up in love, so that we might be the unified body of Christ in visible reality, so that the world would see that and know that Jesus is risen, so that the angels would see that and worship, so that the demons would see that and tremble, that God is doing what he promised to do from of old.

He is building the church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. We thank you, Lord. Pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.