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- [0 : 0 0] Imagine a church where the members, where many of the members played the French horn. They were proud about this.
- And they gave the impression that all truly spiritual people were French hornists. Horners? French horn players.
- I struggled with that. What do you call them? They also think it's their right to exercise their gift when the church meets. And the result is chaos.
- 60 people playing the French horn at the same time, all at different levels of degree of ability. And Paul writes to correct this abuse.
- He affirms the gift by saying, I too play the French horn as much as any of you, in fact, more than any of you. But then he criticises them for not loving each other in the way they're using their gift.
- [1 : 0 1] He suggests, could you limit yourselves to maybe two French hornists on a Sunday? And how about a few of you taking up the ukulele as an option?
- Or maybe some of you help the church with coffee, and maybe some could be out there parking the donkeys for you on a Sunday morning. And so 2,000 years later, we unearth this letter, and we go into a panic.
- No one in our church plays the French horn. Are we therefore an unspiritual church? That would miss the point.
- It would miss the point of the letter. The point is not that a spiritual church will have French horn players. The point is that there's a great variety of the gifts that God has given. He wants to use those gifts, those different gifts, in harmony with one another, for the service of one another, for the service of the body, the church.
- That's the point of 1 Corinthians 12 to 14, in fact, of the whole lot. It fits completely with what we've seen already in 1 Corinthians.
- [2 : 1 4] This letter is about living the cross-shaped life, and Paul defines true spirituality not by the presence of certain spiritual gifts or spiritual experiences.
- He defines true spirituality, Christian maturity, about living out what you know. It's about taking up your cross and following Christ, is true spirituality.
- It is about dying to self and rising to new life in Christ. It's about dying to my self-interest and serving others. It's the way of the cross. And so true spirituality is not judged by gifting.
- True spirituality prioritises love, not spiritual gifts, not power, not status, not eloquence, or anything else. And so that means that these chapters will leave some of our contemporary questions about spiritual gifts unanswered, because Paul's intent here was not to actually answer those questions.
- A great deal of confusion and hurt has been caused in recent decades by Christians teaching or implying that they are more spiritual than other Christians. And our debates have often focused on particular gifts and whether certain Christians are overemphasising them or some are under-emphasising them.

[3 : 33] And some of our differences on the subjects of spiritual gifts are significant. And I believe we should continue those discussions, but we must not let the discussions get out of proportion.

Whichever side we find ourselves on, and you will probably find yourself on a different side than me, God's challenge to us is to focus not on the gifts, but on love.

In Ephesians 4, verse 3, Paul urges us to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. He assumes that a profound spiritual unity already exists among Christians because the Holy Spirit has worked in their lives to join us together in Christ and therefore join us to one another.

We are already one in Christ and in our call to work out that unity in practice, not least by the patient, respectful love that we are to show one another, particularly as we disagree on secondary matters.

And so this unity and love principle need to be in play, I think, even in the next couple of days. Forefront of our thinking as we venture into these chapters, we, like the Corinthians, need to be reminded that love is far more important than any particular view about the nature and use of spiritual gifts.

[5 : 09] And so while not answering all our questions on spiritual gifts, these chapters will leave us with a significant challenge. Okay, chapter 12. Paul begins chapter 12 by saying, now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

The word translated spiritual gifts there is in fact different from Paul's usual word that he uses to describe gifts. It is in fact better translated, he better off starting off, now about spiritual things or now about spiritual people, I do not want you to be ignorant.

It's possible that this was the word that the Corinthians themselves used for the supernatural experiences that they valued so much or it might have been how they described those who they thought belonged to the spiritually elite class.

whichever it is, we do know that they regarded themselves as knowledgeable on spiritual matters. And Paul humbles them within the first couple of verses.

He brings them right down. He says, you are in fact ignorant. The word is not knowledgeable but without knowledge.

[6 : 32] You're actually in fact ignorant of what it means to be a spiritual person. You're ignorant of what it means about spiritual things. In fact, so ignorant you are just as ignorant as when they were pagans worshipping idols.

And what follows in verse 3 is the corrective. The thing, this is the thing that they don't understand. This is Paul's foundational teaching about true spirituality.

Therefore, I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus be cursed. And no one can say, Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

That's his foundational teaching. It's almost an anticlimax, really. How could they have missed it?

The simple lesson here is that the spiritual person is any person who can say, Jesus is Lord and mean it. Really simple.

[7 : 40] And by ourselves, none of us will recognise the truth of Christ's unique identity as Saviour and Lord and respond to him with repentance and faith. It is only by the Holy Spirit that we are born again and born again and we cross from darkness to light from spiritual death to spiritual life.

And this conversion with its knowledge of Christ's lordship is the only marker that distinguishes between the spiritual and the unspiritual person.

It's the only marker. All Christians are spiritual people is what Paul says here. And it is from that very foundation that Paul launches into teach generally about spiritual gifts and where they fit.

And I say generally because the exact nature of the gifts he doesn't really define. He doesn't go into a lot of detail about the actual gifts. What, for example, is the message of wisdom?

In verse 8, we may speculate that it could be some kind of revelation, it could be a wise saying, or even the proclamation of the cross, which is the wisdom of God according to chapter 1, but in the end we cannot be really sure.

[9 : 03] And if it was important that we knew the exact nature of every gift, then I suspect the Holy Spirit would have made it a whole lot clearer for us through Paul here. And so it would be a mistake to suggest that Paul is giving us a checklist against which we should measure our church to see if the different gifts he mentions are actually present.

He presumably refers to these particular gifts and not others because they were especially prevalent in Corinth and were most likely the subject of controversy.

And so notice a few things. This is what he does say about gifts. Notice firstly that the word he uses for spiritual gifts in verse 4 is the same Greek word as the word we use for grace or undeserved gift.

That's its foundation. Paul uses it here to refer to any God-given ability of a Christian which God uses to bless other believers.

that means pride and boasting about our gift is actually perverse because they're not something that we've achieved.

[10 : 23] They've been given to us by God's grace and so writing to this church in Corinth that was prone like us like me to spiritual pride he stresses repeatedly that the gifts are given in verse 7 verse 8 and verse 11.

Notice secondly that Paul stresses that all gifts come from the same source according to verse 4 5 and 6 the gifts are different but they are given by the same spirit in verse 4 the same Lord in verse 5 and the same God in verse 6 and I'm assuming here that Paul who's careful with every word he puts down that the reference to the Trinity is not accidental just as there is both unity and diversity within the Godhead so there is unity and diversity within his body the church notice thirdly the diversity of the gifts in verse 8 to 11 and again in verse 28 Paul includes a list of gifts and there are three other lists of gifts in the New Testament and it's striking that every list is different they're all different 10 gifts are mentioned in this chapter and a further 10 elsewhere in the

New Testament and I don't think there is any reason to believe that there are only 20 gifts in all for instance music which was practiced in the early church doesn't get a mention anywhere it's not described explicitly as a spiritual gift but it surely belongs to the category as one of the means by which God ministers his grace through one Christian to a bunch of other Christians to build up the church notice fourthly that although there is diversity in gifts no clear distinction is drawn between abilities we might consider rather mundane and more obviously supernatural gifts he doesn't make a distinction between supernatural and natural gifts there's no distinction drawn in verse 28 between those able to help others and those with gifts of administration and the ability to work miracles they're all spiritual gifts and so that's his foundational teaching his broad general teaching on gifts and now he wants to bring them to apply them his point to this church at

Corinth and in fact to us and so he uses an illustration to do that he likens the local church to the human body which is a unity and yet is diversity and in the diversity it is unity and so as Paul used an illustration to make his point I think I'll do the same very quickly some of you have seen me do this before he says first of all the church is a body made up of many parts and without the parts connected to the body they're not the body the parts in themselves are not the body by themselves they are just parts and the unity of the body is achieved when all the parts or the diverse parts are brought together as one whole verse 12 so I don't have to put it all together again the unity of the body is achieved in the diversity of the parts coming together as one whole verse 12 the body is a unit though it is made up of many parts and though all its parts are many they form one body the body can now function correctly they can achieve its purpose notice thirdly the diversity of the parts serve the unity and the function of the body verse 14 now the body is made up of one part is not made up of one part but of many if the foot were to say because I'm not a hand

I do not belong to the body it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body and if the ear should say because I'm not an eye I do not belong to the body it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body if the whole body were an eye where would the sense of hearing be and if the whole body were an ear where would the sense of smell be and so what he's saying is that all parts different in the diversity are essential for the unity and the function of the body what he's saying here is that this is not a body where all the gifts were the same this is a church where everyone plays the French horn and that does not serve the unity of the body the body does not function correctly the unity of the body is not seen in all the gifts being the same and so these words here in this last section of chapter 12 are both an encouragement and a rebuke for this church at

[16 : 21] Corinth it's a word of encouragement for those who did not belong to the so-called group that regarded itself as the elitist group at Corinth where all the arms were the ones who said that this is what it means to be a truly spiritual person you're an arm and so the poor old ear over here is trying to work out where it fits so this is a word of encouragement here for these people Paul here implies that the image of the body to show them how wrong their thinking is every part plays an important function whether it's an obvious part or not and I want to say that I along with many other people have been greatly helped by the frequent words of wisdom and example of godly brothers and sisters in

Christ who have prayed for me consistently behind closed doors not visible and the word of encouragement is that you don't need to be visible and of the same in order to play a crucial part of the body and the second thing here associated with implications for the other part of the church is that all parts need each other in the body for it to function correctly let us not say I have no need for you ear I don't need you verse 20 the eye cannot say to the hand I don't need you and the head cannot say to the feet I don't need you on the contrary those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty while our presentable parts need no special treatment but God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lack it and so while some of these churches in

Corinth were feeling a bit inferior because they didn't have the gifts that were so prized amongst them others were proud they thought they were the ones where everyone depended on me because look at my arm look at how great I can play the French horn they gave the impression that the rest of the church was not necessary Paul's teaching here that is no individual member of the body can think that they are self-sufficient no one is self-sufficient in the body and so Paul's word here is to both humble the proud and encourage those who are feeling inferior verse 22 on the contrary those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable it's not they are not optional they are necessary they're not just helpful they are necessary and so these verses ought to either encourage us or humble us regardless of what we do in the body now the last verse of this chapter is a bit of a transition into chapter 13 he says but eagerly desire the greater gifts and now

I will show you the most excellent way for some reason it's a strange word but eagerly desire the greater gifts Paul's word there eagerly desire the greater gifts somehow does not negate what he's already said and that God is the one who gives the gifts somehow doesn't negate that and what I think he's saying here is that while I said earlier that Paul makes no distinction between us having spiritual some gifts are spiritual some gifts are unspiritual in the church he does seem to rate gifts in terms of importance in two broad categories in verse 28 first of all second third he does give a list there with a certain order of priority and what the two broad categories are in the way he orders the gifts are those that are for the common good for building up the church and those which are more personal and that seems to be his argument in chapter 14 but I'll leave that to Sam and he can correct that if I've got that wrong it seems to be his argument in chapter 14 and when he says eagerly desire the greater gifts he's referring to the gifts which are there the greater gifts as those which are for building up of the church not for personal use the greater gifts are for the common good for the church the body that we might function well but even even those greater gifts are only great if they are used in love and therefore the transition into chapter 13 as the greater way there's a number of implications for us in these verses and

I won't pick on them all first of all I want to say that it's unloving it's unspiritual it's immature to not exercise gifts to sit over here and not make a contribution not to serve the body a congregation is a body Christ's body with the life of Jesus flowing through its members by the Holy Spirit and for our function and for our health we all need to play our part in love and to sit over here and to say to the body serve me serve me serve me serve me serve me is in fact unloving and unspiritual this teaching I think here is a real challenge for us in an individualistic generation which tends to keep all but a few people at arm's length we could easily lapse into viewing church as just one of the many products we consume and you generally tell consumers by the level of complaints that's how you tell consumers

[23 : 21] I've heard of a church in America that sought to meet such demands of the individual over here by offering a drive in Sunday service which enabled people to tune into their corporate worship of their local church in the church car park via their car radio and they didn't need to get out of their car not sure how they took up the collection at that point but I'm assuming something like they did taking orders for morning tea someone on roller skates around the car park or something like that now it's easy for us as we did just then to shake our heads and be shocked by that and have little more interaction than if they had stayed in their car throughout the course of the whole thing they may well have stayed in the car park they rush in at the last minute they leave as soon as possible at the end having only had the briefest of conversations if any conversation at all and certainly no contribution or service to anyone church is certainly not meant to be like that we in fact need each other no part of the human body can function and grow unless it's attached to the rest of its parts

Thursday my Phoebe had had her tonsils and adenoids out they're dead somewhere they're in some bin somewhere in the martyr hospital wherever it is I don't know where they go actually wherever they are they've been detached from the body and they are dead they have no life no part of the body is meant to function independent of the local church it is as a community that God expects us to grow together in the Christian life and be his witnesses in this world we should not see church simply as a meeting that we attend but rather it's a community to which we belong with all the duties all the privileges and all the joys that go with that secondly I am very grateful for those who do see that as their duty and their joy and their privilege one of the great things things that I would say about the reformation was we rediscovered something about putting the scriptures into the hands of the ordinary person and putting ministry in their hands as well every member of ministry was discovered at the reformation it's a very good thing the church was never meant to be a body where only a few people do all the functioning and the rest are spectators but for those of us who are doing the functioning who are serving there can be the same level of selfishness in every member ministry as if I'm not making any contribution at all and the same level of service is that ultimately if we're not careful it becomes about me it becomes about me hanging on to what makes me feel significant this is my part my place this is my gift your job is to recognise it to use me in this way this is what I do and if we're not careful it becomes more about me and we get detached from the head and what

I find my significance in is my particular part in the body it's a very big danger for anyone who's in full-time ministry and anyone who's making a contribution and involved in ministry at all normal practice when a new minister starts a church comes into a church and it happened to me here and this is not any way of an accusation it's a bit of a common theme with every minister I've spoken to is that you go into a church as a new senior minister and within a matter of weeks you'll have a whole range of people lining up to tell you this is what I do in this place this is where I fit and this is how you can help me fit so there's an encouragement here for those of us off on the sidelines to get engaged there's encouragement here or rebuke for those of us who are engaged but wanting to hang on to it as well exercise our service of one another out of love the way of the cross in everything that we do including what we do in church is to take up our cross and go to the place of execution the cross is not just the place of my past substitution for my sins it is the daily place of execution for me as I die to my rights and I serve