

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 for Grace Church by Jonathan Shradar

If you are new, on Sundays we just usually read through books of the Bible and see what they have to say and hear what it reveals of our Savior Jesus. We do it this way because we believe that every word of this book is meant for us, that it is helpful, refreshing and worthwhile! With that in mind that we turn our attention to God's word.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 “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. [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.

[14] For the body does not consist of one member but of many. [15] If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. [16] 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 a part of the body. [17] 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? [18] But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. [19] If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

[21] 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.” [22] On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [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, [24] which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, [25] that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. [26] If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

[27] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. [28] 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. [29] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? [30] Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? [31] But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.” (ESV)

Prayer for help.

We don't have to go far in our experience of life to find voices encouraging or even professing unity - movements claim it. Association based on shared experience, skill or opinion. Think of the workplace - unions and the specialization breakdown. Or our exercise, Crossfit people rallying together around the same workout each day. Socially, we can see groups of people align

by their shared age or location. And certainly our politics, movement configured on a strict set of ideological views.

We attempt to label them for broader appeal but when it comes down to it, unity is maintained by the specifics. And in fact it breaks down quickly when you move beyond the affinities shared. When it moves into all of life... While some Crossfitters would die for each other, not many members of the engineers of America are going to go out of their way to worry about the emotions of other engineers (okay bad example, engineers don't have feelings). But you get the point, that our professed unity in any number of things can't last. Situations change, thinking changes and division occurs.

What if there is another way? Maybe something like the 3 Amigos. Where three different people, with different skills and purposes really, come together in unity.

In a way so much better than fiction, Christianity is meant to be a place of unity, and not just in shared specifics but in all of life, beyond the things that usually divide and separate and it is all because of the one ultimate, Jesus.

In Christ the church is built for variety, unity and ministry.

This is what Paul is laying out in our text today and this is something that might just move the church into the Spirit-empowered life it is designed for.

This letter is the unfolding instruction from their first pastor about life as a church and an answer to a number of questions that they had for Paul. As we arrive at chapter 12, it appears that the Corinthian Church was highlighting certain gifts, one in particular, over others. Saying if you don't have this gift you aren't "spiritual enough," or you are weaker and not meaningful to the church.

In correction, Paul has said that the Holy Spirit gifts each member of the church with a gift or gifts for the common good - in order to glorify Jesus and benefit the whole of believers. As the Spirit gives as he wills, when he wills, all barriers or attempts at "spiritual stratification" are destroyed. And the church is given something else to live for over individual acclaim and reputation.

Now Paul begins to outline how the church functions, lives in the Spirit. He uses imagery we are familiar with - each of us - the human body. Like our physicality, the church is made up of a variety of parts, members, that are unified just by being the body and have a mission together, a ministry to live out. "Just as the body is one and has many members, and all members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

This matters to us because if we are "in Christ" this is what we are made for. We can miss the point of our faith when we box it into a personal space, as if the good news of Jesus is not meant

to be responded to with real life. I want this real life, and to be part of the body that God has placed me into, maybe you do too and that's why this is good for us today. If you are not a Christian, this will help you see what a group of people that love Jesus is living for.

Our path today is to realize the variety in the church, our unity and then the ministry the follows.

1) Variety

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” Each one of us in the church have been “baptizo” identified, made into one body by the Holy Spirit and this Spirit is our drink, our source, the God who empowers his people for good in the church.

And this new body does not consist of just one “member;” one part only but many. This is the church given a variety of gifts not just one.

The Spirit unites peoples across lines of ethnicity and social class that would otherwise divide them and gives them various gifts that will rely on each other. This is an important message for a church that wanted to be a bunch of tongues!

The foot doesn't decide that since it isn't a hand it doesn't belong to the body. The ear may not be an eye but that does not mean it doesn't fit, that is any less part of the body.

This really is the perfect analogy for us to grasp the reality of the church. Here we have different parts of our physical bodies and each part does it's thing but it does so for the whole body... my lungs breathe air, which my heart needs, and my heart pumps blood that my lungs need and somehow both provide for my brain that tells them and everything else in the body how and when to work. And this variety of parts and roles is necessary for the health of the body. If the whole body were an eye, how would it hear...

A gifted church works the same way. There are a variety of gifts, varieties of service and variety of activities... for its health variety is necessary.

How do we do this? A church full of teachers never leaves the classroom... a church full of evangelists doesn't know what growing to maturity looks like. A church full of prophets... well it just gets really loud! We are probably more subtle but we are prone to it. This is what is going on in Corinth - they want everyone to aspire to one gift and once they get there no one knows what is going on.

Move to the individual mentality and it gets worse - because I am a bright and beautiful eyeball - I have wonderful vision and for the last time the toe can't see what I see, so I must not be part of this body... So I just keep to my eyeball self, not sharing my “gift” with the rest of the body which then runs into things, falls off a cliff and dies a horrible death because it didn't see it coming...

Or even thinking the gift is already functioning in the church so I don't need to participate - a hand thinking since there is another it doesn't need to work...

That way is wrong and the glorious variety of the human body is a picture of the glorious variety of the church empowered by the Spirit and it is never random, never assembled wrong - **v. 18** "But as it is, God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as he chose."

God is planning and forming the Mr. Potatohead of the church. You can argue some are prettier than others, but each is designed and arranged by God with whom you can't disagree! The church is a collection of people with diverse gifts, given by the Spirit to bring functional full life to the church, and while variety is necessary for life, life itself is experienced in the unity of the body.

2) Unity

While a variety of parts make up the body, they must all work together for vitality. And in the church having a variety of gifts is good and real for us, but they must be used together, in alignment and unison, to be function as the church.

This is the difference of coming to "church" and being the church. We all have a variety of gifts as the Spirit gives, we may even use them in our individual capacity, but if we just attend the gathering of the church and neglect to lend our gifting to the body of believers in partnership with other gifted believers, then we are no better than a blob of eyes. There is life stopping dysfunction.

Think of it in these physical terms, if your pancreas were to decide "well I here in the body, nice and cozy actually, benefiting from the other parts functioning as they are meant; and being here is enough; I need not function as designed, I just want to stay cozy..." If this happened and the pancreas ceased to work before long the other parts of the body, organs, arteries, veins, muscles, skin, bone... would be destroyed... there would be death - from the disregard of one part. The pancreas is still very much "part" of the body but instead of participating in the vitality of the body it brings death to it.

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you...'"

And what an example that in the church the parts that seem weaker, less flashy, less sought after by people, these parts are indispensable. We can't live without them.

It works for other parts too, what of the hippocampus (part of the brain for emotion, memory, nervous system); Most likely no one thought about their hippocampus while getting ready for church... but we certainly looked at our head to make it presentable... we even covered with

clothing (giving great honor) those parts not appropriate for public viewing - so we have paid attention to a lot of our bodies today, but not the hippocampus...

The gift of tongues might be sought after, a noticeable gift, it might even be very common and we can think of those with the gift as more spiritual, more blessed, but those using their gifts of helps, administration, or faith are essential for the vibrancy of the body. We can't live without them.

Just as God gave the variety and arranged the members together, he has "so composed the body giving greater honor to the part that lacked it..." he orchestrates the body of believers by his purpose and plan, bringing unity that there would be no division but that the members may have the same care for one another.

Here again is the common good that gifts are meant for. This is our place of unity, all working our gifts for the whole, for the vibrancy and vitality of the church. At belief in Christ, in calling him Lord the Spirit works in us a unity of purpose and what becomes a biologic relationship of a variety of parts living as one. It doesn't work without you.

What happens is care for one another. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." This is what we are built for.

Loving each other in such a way that we feel each other's pain and joy... a sweet gift of the Spirit.

This is more than acquaintance. This is deeper still than some of our definitions of family... this is the church as the body. One for all.

When this unity exists, when the individual members of the body are aligned and functioning together, living as one, the Lord uses us for his ongoing mission in the world - the God of mission has a body; has the church and the Spirit equips us for ministry.

3) Ministry

This is where variety and unity play out, specific gifts that form the ministry of the church, all different but together on mission.

In verse 28 Paul gives another list of gifts the Spirit gives, some he has mentioned and some new ones - and it is important to see that these are gifts or roles and not just people - these can function in different people at different times. Some have read Paul's language - he says first, second, third - as a ranking of gifts but I am more inclined to see Paul laying out how the gifts were used to form the church.

Apostles are the church planters, bringing the gospel to uncharted territory. Then the Spirit raises up prophets to declare the truth of God and teachers to bring believers to maturity in the

faith. Then in the church the Spirit gifts the believers as he wills, with miracles, gifts of healing, helping, administrating and various kinds of tongues.

All for the common good but listed here as they are the ministry of the church meet the mission Jesus gives the church - making disciples. To know Jesus and make him known.

Again Paul emphasizes that we all need these gifts to function in the church for this ministry, but not all of us are given each gift. The church is a variety of giftings working in unity to accomplish ministry. Each of us different, equipped differently, but together for something greater, something higher than just existence.

Paul commands desiring gifts - those that are higher - those that do more to build up the church and execute the mission of the church.

Where the Corinthian church was desiring a gift of internal significance, Paul is saying, don't stop there - and he will build his case in the coming chapters especially as he shows us the "more excellent way of love," - desire gifts that minister to one another and others, to outsiders that they might know Jesus and believe in him.

The point is, a church gifted and functioning in unity moves outward... bringing the coolness of gospel refreshment to a thirsty people. This is the heart God has for the church, to be his hands and feet in the rescue of the lost.

This makes me think of one of the first experiences of the church working in unison not long after we started meeting here at Del Norte. Service had ended after what I am sure was a great sermon! We were having fellowship on the patio and enjoying the typical beautiful San Diego weather when Stacy comes up to me and asks, "where is Ewen?"

What followed was a chaotic 20 minutes of searching for the lost kid. The campus was new to us, and that day there were multiple events going on with lots of other people around. And many of us set off in different directions shouting "Ewen" and looking all over for him. As his father... maybe you have felt something like this before... the weight of the unknown whereabouts of your child sets in your gut in the worst way. I can remember being on the back lot of the school yelling his name, concerned, contemplating the worst outcomes... and praying fervently that God would restore him to us, that he would keep him safe.

After searching all over finally Rory Egger found Ewen in the gym at a wrestling tournament he had stumbled into. And the relief!

Now on that day most of us worked together to find the lost one... but what would my response have been if one of the elders was munching on a donut, sipping coffee and said to me,

‘Jonathan, don’t sweat it, he was a disobedient kid anyway, running off like that. You can adopt another one, and we have plenty of good kids in the church already...’ (if this happened we would have one less elder today!)

This is exactly what Jesus has done for each of us... with urgency he faced the cross in order to save you, to deal with sin, to give you forgiveness and new life in him. And we respond to this gift of grace by bringing him to others, running after the lost sheep together.

Here's the thing... this is the ministry of the church, to function as we were built, to find the lost and give them a home in Christ. This same urgency of a parent losing a child is the urgency Jesus has for the lost and that led him to create the church as a missionary force.

Yes the ministry of the church is care for its members, yes it is the facilitation of spiritual maturity and shared burden - but it is ultimately a disciple making, Jesus proclaiming, lost and found!

This is what Paul wants the Corinthian church and us to understand. Gifts have a purpose, for the common good, and function in unity for ministry. This is the body working like it was meant to.

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Response: Is it just a good illustration or is it something to actually be experienced?

Drink of the same Spirit - Believe in Jesus. Recognize your lostness and need and call him Lord. Be filled with the Spirit.

All of us for life, seek the empowerment, the gifting of the Spirit... that we would drink deeply, filled, to be poured out for others.

This week we had our first Revision 2017 prayer meeting (picture). And we focused our prayer on seeking and waiting on the Lord - that as a church we would be a people of seeking, waiting and hearing from the Lord. This next week our focus is on renewal. That the Spirit would work in us a spiritual renewal, a refreshing in the gospel, a rest in Christ’s finished work that defines us and invigorates us for the adventure of life together. This is a prayer of being filled up. But we seek filling, so that we can distribute what we have been given, to revive others.

I like to think of the church as a reservoir, filled to be shared, the storehouse of what is vital for life and that freely lets it flow - for us the gospel. But reservoirs are not meant to be only filled. Living in SoCal a year ago we couldn’t imagine we would have experience with full reservoirs, but even this week - for the first time since I have lived here Lake Hodges has water on both sides of the 15 and Lake Poway almost overflowed! If a reservoir does nothing but holds water disaster is coming, but when they faithfully distribute water, send it out, they flourish and have met their purpose.

So we drink of the Spirit, seek the Lord for filling and power, so we can flow out. So we can bring the gospel to those in need. So drink... and drink together.

Get in on the action - Love, use your gifts as part of the church, for the good of the church and for the ministry of the church. Commit, come around and invest who you are into who we are as one in Christ. Share burdens, share joys, share the work of mission.

Ephesians 4:1-7 "...walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." (ESV)

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Earlier I said God was assembling the "Mr. Potatohead" that is the church, because when he composes the body of the local church, it can be unique. There will be many "looks" but still one mission to be met.

I am more that cool with not looking like all the others as long as we are on the same mission. Living our variety, in unity, ministering to each other and to others for the glory of God.

If you are down for that, say Amen!

Prayer: Ephesians 3:14-21 (adapted) Father we bow our knees before you, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of your glory you may grant us to be strengthened with power through your Spirit in our inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith—that we, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[20] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (ESV)