



When you think about “church,” what is your mentality? **Do you think of it as you, an individual, gathering with other individuals in order to be filled up personally with the potential of encouraging others if the situation is right or do you think of it as you, an individual, uniting with others for the common good of the whole church?** Notice, I’m not asking, “What do you think is the right answer?” I’m asking, how do you often view church?

Last week, I gave the illustration of a pizza versus a puzzle. With the pizza, we might gather around the box, pray and then get our pieces to fill our individual selves. But with a puzzle, we gather together for the purpose of working together and sharing in the joy of completing a puzzle together. The puzzle illustration is a better analogy because what we discover in the Scriptures is that church isn’t simply a place you go to, it’s a people you’re committed to grow with. This point is especially brought out here in Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church. The Corinthian believers have constantly viewed Christianity through the lens of the culture, and they consistently view God’s blessings as badges of superiority. Therefore, they viewed abilities and service as a badge of honor, too. If someone spoke in tongues, they must be more spiritual than someone who just does normal acts of service.

Last week I stated that when Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, he doesn’t spend his time emphasizing the gifts in and of themselves. Instead, he speaks in such a way to emphasize the Giver of the gifts and/or the purpose of the gifts: which is, God and the believer’s growth. If we evaluated gifts this way, I think we’d keep our bearings. We might even be more fruitful in our personal godliness, and I believe the Lord would be honored supremely. But, living this way also means “sacrifice” for us. And, I know we don’t really care for that word “sacrifice.” Yet, as I’ve said before, whenever we love *anything*, we will sacrifice for that thing or person we love. This all points to Jesus himself. Remember that at the beginning of this letter, Paul says he determines to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and him crucified. As a result, in all of his teaching, he calls the Corinthians to evaluate their views and behaviors in light of how it mirrors and points to Jesus and his sacrificial love.

Because Jesus loves God and because Jesus loves the world, he took on the limits of human flesh. He bore the weights of rejection. He endured temptations and trials. He embraced friends who would reject him and betray him. He patiently loved and taught others. He served miraculously – even when he knew those people wouldn’t stay by his side. And he went all the way to the point of death on the cross, taking the spurning of people and also the wrath of God on himself. Why wrath? He was righteous and sinless! He took all the punishment people deserved in their place so that any human who would turn to God for forgiveness would be forgiven and reconciled with him and given an eternal home with the Lord. Why? Because this glorifies God to be the sole Savior of humans. Why would he save us? We who were rebels. We who hated him. Why would he delight in giving us a home with him forever? I honestly don’t know, but again, I know Jesus did all of this because He loves God and his glory – and he loves us! Jesus, the greatest gift, reveals to us the purpose of spiritual gifts: Love God and love the body of Christ.

Do you know and trust Jesus? I pray you do, and if you have more questions, please talk to me or any other Christian here after the service.

So, Jesus didn't die and rise in order to give gifts to show who his favorites are. No. The Spirit gives gifts so that we can reveal to one another the superior worth of our Triune God. And we work out these gifts as we mirror and point to Jesus' sacrificial love. As a result, we don't evaluate our spirituality by saying, "Well, I have the gift of teaching," we ought to instead say, "Do I love Jesus and show loving sacrifice to others?" Now, I confess I am getting ahead of myself a little bit because Paul will emphasize this all the more in chapter 13. But I need to state this here because it does shed some light on the teaching of this chapter. Paul's great concern is that we love God and love others through the exercise of our gifts whereas the Corinthians' great concern is how spiritual they may be depending on a gift they get. Again, this misses the point because the local church isn't simply individuals gathering together to be filled personally and walk away. The church is a gathering of individuals who are seeking the corporate growth in Christ-likeness.

With this foundation, let me share with you what I believe the main idea of this text is: **The church is diverse and interdependent as members of one body.** If we want to glorify God more fully and love one another more fully, and boast in Christ and him crucified, we must recognize who we are as a church. We are one body that is diverse and interdependent. I'm going to take this statement apart and preach the text from this main idea. But before I do this, I want to add a qualifying phrase to this big idea. I want to add, "**By our Triune God's design.**" In verses 12 and 27, Paul talks about Jesus. In verse 13, he mentions the Spirit. In verses 18, 24, and 28, Paul refers to God the Father. Again, this goes back to Paul's foundational reason for unity and interdependence within the church. The Trinity is the Great Three-in-One. Now, we who are image-bearers of God have been given restored images in Christ and can therefore begin to image him forth more and more in the church! By the Spirit's power, and by the design of our Triune God, the church is diverse and interdependent as members of one body *for the common good*. So, let's jump into the text now.

1. The local church is one (united) body (vv. 12-14, 27-30).

Interestingly, Paul orders his argument like a sandwich. Verses 12-14 and 27-31 are like the bread that keeps everything else together. These two slices of bread focus on the one, united body. Then, what's on the inside focuses on the diversity and interdependence. As I stated last week, diversity for diversity's sake leads to chaos and all sorts of sin. But if the diversity happens within godly bounds, it is good. One commentator wrote, "unity dominates diversity and makes diversity genuinely meaningful and constructive" (Soards, as quot. in Garland, p. 590). So, if we are going to talk about diversity, we must talk about our *unity* first. Let's begin by reading verses 12-14: ¹²For 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. ¹³For 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. ¹

Paul has been talking about the differing gifts within the church and then in verse 12, starts with the word "For" and then gives us an illustration to make his point. He uses a body illustration. One body is filled with many members. This illustration had strong cultural ties in the Roman world and even within Corinth itself. From Stoic philosophy to political illustrations to temple idolatry, the body illustration was used to explain certain truths. Interestingly, in Corinth, excavations have revealed a huge number of

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:12–13.

archaeological pieces that represented different parts of the body, appealing to the healing god to heal these parts of the body. In general cultural teaching, the body illustration communicated everyone's purpose as a part of the whole, even though we are all distinct people. I wonder if Paul could be incorporating all these realities. We aren't to act like disconnected, dead limbs looking for life. We are only effective when connected and functioning with the body.

Why is this the case for the church? The end of verse 12 states, ". . .so it is with Christ." Then Paul explains in verse 13: For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. . . . When you trusted in Jesus, when you turned from your sinfulness and turned to him as your life and forgiveness, the Spirit united you with Jesus! You are so united you are, in a spiritual sense, part of *his body*. How much more united with Jesus can you be?! When Paul states that we were all baptized into one body, the "we. . .all" is referencing all who are genuine believers. That includes those of us here who look to Jesus for forgiveness and relationship with God. And, it doesn't matter your status or cultural acceptance at all. Paul adds that this includes Jews or Greeks, slaves or free! Wow! To put in our cultural language, it doesn't matter if you were born in a Christian home or a Muslim home, or if you were born in a back alley or a penthouse, if you've turned to Christ, you are one with him. Your previous identities don't define you. Wealth, gender, status in society, job, popularity – not of these things – make you more a part of the body. Instead, "all were made to drink of one Spirit."

What does "drink of one Spirit" mean? There's a lot of speculation. It could mean "drink" or it could mean that the Spirit drenches us in Christ. I take the second meaning. Being baptized, we're drenched by the Spirit into Jesus! We are overwhelmed by the Spirit and saved in Jesus. But whatever it means, the point is that the Spirit baptizes us into Jesus. And now, whatever "may polarize the world does not or should not divide the church" (Garland, p. 592). We are *one* body. We are Christ's body.

Now, let's get to the other slice of bread in verses 27-30: 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?²

In verse 27, Paul emphasizes that he can focus this illustration on just the local church of Corinth: "*You* are the body of Christ." This body illustration can be applied to the local churches. After all, we live out our salvation in closer community with other believers who are more committed to each other. I can say I love believers in Africa, but how do I treat the ones I'm sitting with each week? This verse is why I entitle the sermon, "The Local Church: One Body & Many Members." Then verses 28-29 add to this point. Apostles were given to establish local churches. Then prophets and teachers were within the local church as well. Now, at this point, you might say, "Ok, are you going to define the gifts this week since you chickened out last week?" Answer: No. Again, I don't think this is Paul's point at this point. When we get to chapter 14, I'll emphasize and define a couple of the gifts, but here, I think Paul is actually highlighting something else here.

Clearly, as we move on in this letter, tongues were the major issue in Corinth. And, in this list, Paul puts tongues and interpretation *last*. If the Corinthians were going to compile a list, tongues would make the top! It was the "wow-factor." Paul highlights many other gifts that they're negating. And, while there are many gifts, Paul emphasizes not everyone has the same gift. By the way, this confronts the more

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:27–30.

extreme charisma that teaches that all Christians should speak in tongues. Every question is rhetorical with a “no” answer. Does everyone speak in tongues? NO! We are one body that is unified in Christ.

Ventura, this is reality. I love how Scripture often speaks to us to live in light of reality. I don’t make myself unified with you. We don’t make Ventura unified. We are unified in Christ, and now we are called to live like it! Live the reality! So, if all of this is confusing, just tell yourself this, “Live with and serve Ventura like I’m one with them – because I am.” What does this look like? That leads us to the second point:

2. The local church is diverse and interdependent (like body parts; vv. 14-26).

In this argumentative sandwich of Paul, we now come to the meat! And, if I can continue this illustration, we have two meat patties. Verses 15-20 emphasize diversity. Verses 21-26 teach on the interdependence. So, we’re going to start with **diversity**. Let’s re-read verses 15-20: ¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If 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. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷If 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? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ³

There is so much fun that we can have with this illustration. As God is speaking to us, as a local church, about our giftings, he says we’re as diverse as body parts. The human body has 206 bones, 78 organs, muscles galore, veins, cells, skin, hair, and more! Everything is unique and valuable. Honestly, I don’t want to give up any part of me. I like it all connected, don’t you? Unless there’s something horrifically wrong, I want it to stay here.

You know, living with chronic pain, I’ve appreciated this illustration even more. I didn’t realize how important your hip, low back, foot and knee was until experiencing pain. I didn’t realize there were muscles that could hurt until they hurt. And yet, for many people, they function well. Most of you stand without realizing all that’s working, and it’s working because there are diverse parts. But we can sometimes resist the diversity. We may want to emphasize ourselves or we just like “sameness.” Differences can confront and/or scare us. So, we might be tempted to just emphasize what we know – which is *our* gift.

Paul asks us important questions in verses 15-16: ¹⁵If 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. ¹⁶And 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.

It’s intriguing to me how these verses are translated. The phrase “I do not belong to the body,” can actually more simply be translated as, “I am not the body.” I actually think that’s a more fitting translation because in verse 17, Paul writes, “If the whole body were an eye. . .” The issue with the Corinthians is that they were trying to make one gift *the* gift, but since the church is a body, it would be

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:14–20.

a very weird body if it were just an eyeball. But this is how we can act. Have you ever thought to yourself, “Well, I don’t have this gift or that gift, therefore, I guess I’ll just relegate myself away from the church?” You ever thought that way? This has convicted me as a pastor. Have I emphasized certain gifts to the exclusion of other gifts? A commentator named Stendahl writes this, **“The fullness of the church cannot be better ridiculed than by the habit, long established, according to which every denomination or sect takes its gift of the Spirit and builds a special little chapel around it”** (Stendahl, as quot. in Garland, p. 595). We might be able to point fingers at Corinth for their tongues-speaking overemphasis, but what’s Ventura’s overemphasis? Are we an eyeball rolling around trying to pose as a healthy body? Are you trying to force a gift on yourself that you don’t have because you think the more spiritual people have the “eye” gift or “hand” gift?

Paul adds that if we were all an eye, where would the sense of hearing come from? If we were all ears, where would smelling come from? Here’s the beauty of the diversity in Christ! We want all our senses, don’t we? What if you could never smell again? Those who cannot see, long for an ability to see. Those who can’t hear, would want to hear – and I appreciate the gift of hearing laughter, crying and conversations. In a similar way, Paul teaches us that all the gifts are like the different parts of the body that enable us to experience more of the fullness of life. But the gifts of the Spirit aren’t simply enabling us to experience more of the fullness of this earthly life, the gifts are enabling us to experience more of the fullness of life united with Christ in God. In the passage last week, we learned the goal is the common good of the church. “Good” is often another way of saying actions that reflect Christ-likeness and lead to being more like Christ. So, that’s what these gifts do. The Spirit manifests himself through us in diverse ways. Therefore, let’s rejoice in the multifaceted gifts that God has given to each of us. Let’s help each other grow to be more like Christ.

What we see in verses 14-17 is that gifts are given not to elevate self, but they are truly given for greater effectiveness and appreciation of God’s glory within the church. And, all of this is by God’s design. Verse 18 says God arranged us all in a specific way as he chose. Instead of elevating you or diminishing your gift, thank God. Could you do that right now? Can you thank him he has immersed you in Christ and given you gifts for the growth and health of Christ’s body?

The *one, unified body has diverse parts, and we also see that we are interdependent*. Re-read verses 21-26: ²¹The 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.” ²²On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and 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, ²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ⁴

If you’re a member of Ventura, you could still believe that we’re unified and also diverse without believing we’re interdependent. I think many Christians think this way. I’ve heard people say or suggest, “I have the Spirit in me. All I need is the Bible, and I’m good.” Really? That’s not what the Bible says. You might even look at other Christians in the church and judge some, thinking you at least don’t need *that* Christian. Maybe they’re more negative or you just don’t get along with their personality. Well, if any of these statements are true of you, listen up. Can an eye say to the hand it doesn’t need the hand? Can

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:21–26.

the head say it doesn't need feet? No. Our body is on mission *together*. If my brain wants to get something on the table, the eyes told it and the feet get there.

But, I know, you can say, "But really, Pastor Timothy, in practicality, there are some people who are just weaker spiritually or very immature or annoying or fill-in-the-blank. Are you saying I need them?" No, I'm not saying that. God is saying that. And God is very specific. He presses this point, through Paul. Paul talks about the parts of the body that are weaker, less honorable, and unrepresentable. The phraseology of Paul matches the Greek verbiage for our "private parts." We know that a person who wants to walk around naked in public is publicly shaming themselves. They're shaming their whole body by not covering up? Yes. So, Paul writes here that even these parts that we might think are less honorable, we actually treat with greater honor. We clothe them. Now, don't take the illustration too far. The point here is simply that *every person* in Corinth, and every member of Ventura, no matter how weak we think they may be, is necessary. God has made them so! Maybe instead of judging them and looking down on them, you should learn to honor them! Esteem others as more significant than yourself. Again, Paul goes back to God's ordering in this. He actually says in verse 24 that God has composed the body this way, and gives honor to them!

As a result, don't say you don't need *any single member of this church*. We are interdependent. I admit I don't naturally think this way, but we all need to train our minds and souls in the truth! Believe what God says is reality. We are unified in Christ. We are diverse and we are interdependent. All of this is the case so that there would be no division and we would have the same care for one another. That's the end of verse 25. God has given us all different gifts not so that we can be jealous and divisive, but so that we can be unified and caring for one another. So that we can really engage in relationship with each other. As I said last week, chapter 12 teaches us that every gift is a manifestation of the Spirit. If I know the Spirit is at work through you, that should compel me even more to grow in my connection with you and you with me! The care would increase. If the Spirit resides in you, shouldn't I want to reside with you? And so, Paul writes in verse 26: If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

We are so interdependent that our joy and pain are woven together. When we get a prayer chain, we ought to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we hear of burdens of other church family members, our burdens increase. When we hear joys with church members, we rejoice. This has happened so many times for me here with you, Ventura! I pray we continue to know each other more so that we truly rejoice and sorrow with each other. Do you see how gifts are meant to knit us together all the more?

Now, we can read the final verse of this chapter. Look at verse 31: ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. ⁵ This was a little confusing to me. Paul has said no gift reveals more spirituality and now he says there are "higher gifts?" How can that be? Well, Paul doesn't say there aren't gifts with greater responsibility and sacrifice. Some gifts are more public with more accountability and even potential of fruitfulness. Others may not be. Just like body parts. My pinky toe is important to me, but cutting off my pinky toe isn't as scary as losing my heart.

Even as I say this, some of you might say, "See! There are more important gifts! So, I'm lesser." And, that's a mindset of the sinful culture. Value comes from what I'm able to do. Remember, that's anti-gospel. My value comes from what Christ has done! Jesus paid it all, and God has given me the gifts he

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 12:31.

deems best! Is God better at decisions or you? God! So, rejoice. And, Paul says we can earnestly desire these gifts. You can pray to be a preacher or teacher. It's up to God if he decides that should be for you.

But in all of this, Paul says, "And I will show you a still more excellent way." What is that way? Chapter 13. The gifts don't matter without love. If we don't love each other as a church, who cares what "gifts" we have. We won't rejoice and weep with one another. We won't serve one another. We won't seek the common good if we don't have love. **By our Triune God's design, the church is diverse and interdependent as members of one body. May we long to love like Christ loves us, and therefore may we serve one another like Christ, with whatever gifts God has given us.**

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