

Many Parts, Yet One Body

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[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and we'll read verses 1 through 11. This is God speaking to us. Now, concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus is accursed, and no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit.

Now, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of service, but the same Lord.

And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit. To another, faith by the same Spirit.

[1 : 11] To another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit. And to another, the working of miracles. To another, prophecy. To another, the ability to distinguish between spirits.

To another, various kinds of tongues. To another, the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Let's hear this preached. No, that was not a mistake. That was the scripture reading for this evening. And yes, we were in that passage the last time that we were in 1 Corinthians.

But it's been a little while. I was looking back, and it's been a little over a month. So I thought it fitting to read the previous passage, because also, that passage ties in so, so very closely to our passage before us this morning.

Or this evening. Whatever time of day it is. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit in writing this letter, has been addressing a variety of topics for the Corinthian church.

[2 : 22] And now he's come to the topic of spiritual gifts. A topic that he will cover for several chapters. So the last time we were in 1 Corinthians, we looked at those first 11 verses.

And here was the basic outline of that sermon. There were three truths given to us in this passage. Truth number one. Those with the Holy Spirit honor Christ.

A truly spiritual person. A biblically spiritual person. Is known not by just the power they possess, but by the person that they confess.

Those with the Holy Spirit honor Christ. Truth number two. Those with the Holy Spirit have been given a variety of gifts. We see those gifts, many listed for us in these 11 verses.

Showing great diversity within the body of Christ. And all of those gifts come from the same source. They are given by the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit himself.

[3 : 23] And then finally, truth number three. Those with the Holy Spirit use those gifts for the common good of the church. We weren't meant to live in isolation of one another.

We were meant to walk alongside one another in this life. And to exercise our gifts. We all benefit. The whole body benefits as we put to use our own individual spiritual gifts.

So there's the review from our last time together in 1 Corinthians 12. Now we come to the second half of this chapter. And as we'll see, these verses tie back very, very closely to the verses 1 to 11 in the chapter.

And most of us have uninspired but helpful headings in our Bibles. And right there at verse 12, there's a heading that kind of breaks these verses up between 1 to 11 and 12 and following.

And it's a good heading. Mine says, one body with many members. It's true. It's a good summary.

And yet, it could give us this kind of false impression that Paul is really transitioning here. This is a new passage.

[4 : 27] But as we'll see, he's right in the flow of his thought. If really we were trying to follow the train of his thought, this would have been just one sermon. That would have been a long sermon on a Sunday evening.

And so we've split it into two. And in fact, I saved the very last verse of chapter 12 for when we hit chapter 13. So you could almost say chapter 12, we cover in three sermons to really do it justice. Well, we've seen the quick review of the last sermon. We've read the verses from that sermon. And now we come to verses 11 through 30.

Kids, do you know the book, If You Give a Mouse a Cookie? This is a book that we read in our household. This is a book I grew up with.

Now there's like a million spinoffs of it, but the original is always the best. So we read this book about a boy who gives a mouse a cookie, and it's not at all where the story ends.

[5 : 26] But there's so many things that come about as a result. If you give a mouse a cookie, he's going to ask for a glass of milk. When you give him a glass of milk, he'll probably ask you for a straw.

And so the story goes. It's simple, but it's creative. There's this logical progression from one thing to another. Well, in reading this passage this week, I could not help but see a similar way of thinking in Paul's words here.

Paul is a very logical writer. He has a logical progression of thought. That's clearly his personality, just coming through his spirit-inspired letters.

So I couldn't help but organize this sermon in a rather, if you give a mouse a cookie, kind of way. And it just so happens that it also rhymes. Unintentional to start, but once we got going, well, somehow we're a poet now, and truly we didn't know it.

So this is the outline for this evening. If we are like a body, then many members we will be. And if we are many members, then many needed functions we will see.

[6 : 37] And if we see many needed functions, then some may be esteemed and others less. But if we are all members, then really all will be treasured, not one above the rest.

So there it is, kids, our If You Give a Mouse a Cookie sermon outline for the evening. Let's work through this text together. Let's begin with that first line, we may call it.

If we are like a body, then many members we will be. We see this in verses 12-14. 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.

So Paul is taking here what he's already established in verses 1-11 about the unity of the church. He's already established the role of the Holy Spirit in giving gifts to each of us in the church.

[7 : 49] How he empowers us to use those gifts for the good of the church. He's taking all of those truths and he's saying, like any good preacher, let me illustrate. Here's my illustration.

If we were to break up 1-11 and the verses that follow, well that would be where we could divide. Here at verse 12, he's giving us the illustration to drive home his point.

And he's using the human physical body as that illustration. Now this is a common one in Paul's writings. He does this frequently and here he does it in 1 Corinthians.

The church, like a human body, is one entity. Now when we look at Paul's wording here closely in verse 12, he actually tells us that Christ is one body.

That's how verse 12 ends. So it is with Christ. We would expect him perhaps to say, so it is with the church. But Paul says Christ. Because of course, the body belongs to Christ.

[8 : 46] He's the head of the church. He's the head of the body. The church has been united to Jesus Christ. The church has been joined to Christ.

But we have no life apart from him. There is no body detached from the head. As much as people may pretend such things at Halloween, that's not true. There's one body, the body of Christ, with Christ himself as the head of this body.

So there's a wonderful unity that Paul is drawing our attention to here. United to Christ and united to one another.

And this work we see done through the Spirit. Paul brackets verse 13 with this phrase, one Spirit. He says at the beginning, for in one Spirit.

And then he says at the end, and of one Spirit. So Paul is layering on the unity here. United to Christ and now we see united to one another. We are one body indwelt by the one Holy Spirit. [9 : 53] And Paul uses baptism language to describe this. We were baptized in one Spirit. Now this raises a question.

Who does the baptizing? Maybe our first thought would be the Spirit. Perhaps that would be the most natural way to think if you have the NIV translation. It reads that we were baptized by one Spirit.

The ESV says, in one Spirit. So who does the baptizing? Well, if we let Scripture interpret Scripture, we find the answers in the Gospel accounts.

Think back to the words of John the Baptist. As he was preaching in the wilderness, as he was baptizing, he says in Mark 1, beginning in verse 7, after me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

I have baptized you with water, that he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. So John the Baptist teaches us that Jesus Christ, he is the baptizer.

[10 : 58] And he is the one who would baptize us with the Holy Spirit. So Paul is just echoing the words of John the Baptist. He is saying, yes, that is true. That is exactly what has happened. We have now experienced this baptism that John foretold.

Jesus said that he would do this very thing. He was in the upper room with his disciples before his betrayal and arrest. He said that he would send the Holy Spirit.

And that is just what we see that he did in the book of Acts. There, as the early church, the disciples were gathered together, the Holy Spirit was sent on Pentecost coming to rest on the disciples as tongues of fire.

It was a strange experience to the watching world. So the Apostle Peter explains. And he says, this Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses, being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

So that's what happened at Pentecost, just as Jesus promised he would do. Jesus baptizes, he baptized the believers who were gathered together. And that's what he's been doing ever since.

[12 : 16] All who come to him in faith, all of us who are in Christ, we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. That happened at conversion. That you now are indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

It's a reality. He lives in you. As he does in every individual who belongs to Christ. And that brings us back to the body illustration. As spirit-indwelt individuals, we have been joined to the one body of Christ.

In one spirit, we were all baptized into one body. So Paul here is talking about a spiritual reality. This baptism in the spirit into the body.

But in physical water baptism, we should be reminded of this wonderful spiritual reality. Often we think of water baptism, of a new believer in terms of his or her newfound relationship to Jesus Christ.

And rightly so. We think of Paul's words in Romans 6.4. We were buried, therefore, with Christ by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

[13 : 30] So our water baptism is a picture of death and resurrection. We died with Christ. Our old self, that body of sin, was buried with him. And our new self raised with him.

We're now alive to God in Christ Jesus. That's all true. That's so very true. And that's often what we think of when we're baptized in water. The newfound relationship with God through Christ.

But there's another newfound relationship that we can't forget. And Paul is actually emphasizing that here in 1 Corinthians 12. Our relationship to all believers.

We see that relationship especially lived out in the local church. So when we are baptized in water, it's a picture of our new relationship to God. And it's a reminder, too, of our new relationship to one another in the church.

Indeed, when one is baptized in our church, they are also simultaneously joined in membership to the church. Here is a brother or sister who is joined now to us.

[14 : 31] Just as Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 12. And there's no distinctions. There's nobody who's in or out. All who trust in Christ are joined to the body no matter who we are.

Paul says here, Jew or Greek, slave or free. Whatever distinctions or labels or markers that the world might employ to divide us in life, well, in Christ there is no division.

Our unity in the gospel breaks down any superficial barriers. And the clear evidence of that is what? The one Spirit that now dwells in us and who empowers us.

Remember back to verses 1-11. What does the Spirit now do in this body of believers? Oh, He gives us gifts. He gives us a diversity of gifts. And as verse 11 says, all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as He wills.

So yes, one body but many members. And now Paul is going to help us to see the great benefit of this many-membered body.

[15:43] So we've established this. If we are like a body, then many members we will be. Well now, if we are many members, then many needed functions we will see.

Follow along as I read beginning in verse 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.

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. 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 of you, nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

[16:52] So Paul addresses two possible problems here. Two problems that relate to our life in the body of Christ. One problem is a problem of looking inward, and the other is a problem of looking outward.

So first, the inward. Looking at ourselves and saying, I don't belong. I'm not needed. I'm a foot. Who wants to be a foot?

It's smelly. It's lint between the toes. Athlete's foot, blisters, the list could go on of things that we might say, oh, feet? I don't know. I don't think it's that great.

I wish I was a hand. Hands are awesome. I mean, think of all the things that you can do with hands, or maybe to put it another way, think of all the things you can't do without your hands. You sit down to dinner, and that spaghetti is a whole lot harder to eat without your hands.

Hands are wonderful. Hands are useful. I wish that I was a hand and not a smelly foot. But Paul reminds us here that we need every part of our body to function properly.

[17:59] Sure, we can't eat spaghetti at the dinner table without our hands, or maybe we could. Kids probably would like to try this, but we shouldn't. We need those hands to eat our dinner properly.

But can we get to that dinner table very well without our feet? I lived that when I ruptured my Achilles. It's very hard to get to the dinner table when you have a cast on. Suddenly, feet were much more valuable to me.

I saw the goodness of my feet. Very useful. So if you're a foot and not a hand, well, you're just as much a part of the body. You serve a needed function.

Paul makes the same point about eyes and ears. Ears shouldn't wish that they were eyes. Because think about if the whole body were an eye. Kids, think about a being that was just an eye.

That would be a monster or maybe a minion from Despicable Me. Just one big eye, that's the whole body. That's not a functioning body at all.

[19:02] So don't look at the other members of the body and say, well, I guess I'm pointless. No place for me. No need for me and the gift that God has given to me. That's the first problem that Paul addresses.

The inward. Looking at ourselves and saying, I'm useless. But then there's a second problem. Just as harmful as the first. And it's an outward problem. Looking at others and saying, useless.

And we see that in verse 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. You see, this is a little different.

It's not you looking at yourself and saying, I don't belong. It's looking at others and saying, you don't belong. We don't need you. This member, this hand, these feet, they're useless.

So let's just cut them off and be done with them. Now, we don't want to get so caught up in, so deep in the illustration that we forget what's the point here again that Paul is making. The point is that in the church, we individually have been gifted in a variety of ways.

[20 : 08] And that's wonderfully good. That's necessary. That's important. You and I are gifted differently. But that shouldn't be some kind of in comparison game that it leads to.

However, we might play the game. We see the different demeanors here, but they're both sinful. One is tearing down yourself. The other is tearing down others. But really, it's the same root problem.

And it's really directed, not even first and foremost, at each other, but at God. Criticizing God's good design. Whether you are demeaning yourself or demeaning others, you are ultimately offending God because who made the body to be what it is?

Like everything that God does, He made the body with perfectly planned out purpose. Remember verse 11 again. All these gifts are empowered by one in the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as He wills.

wills. That last part, especially, so important for this point. If you look at yourself and you say, I'm not needed, then what you're really saying is, God, you didn't do your apportioning very well.

[21 : 27] You didn't get the assignments right. What you willed, what you made happen, what you brought to pass, well, it's just not very good. Because this is God's job that we're talking about.

The giving of gifts, the apportioning of spiritual gifts, God does that. If you're a foot, it's not because you decided yourself to be a foot. It's not because it happened by accident.

It's because God assigned you to be a foot or a hand or the intestines. And whatever that is, we should see it as wonderful. So don't disparage yourself, don't disparage others, because it is God that you are disparaging.

And the same goes if you look at others with a self-promoting spirit and think, yeah, we could do without you. Because again, what you're saying is, God, you messed up that assignment. You really botched the gifting of that person.

What an offense against that brother or sister. But also, what an offense against God. There's certainly a self-righteous spirit about that. And there's a real criticism of God as well.

[22 : 37] The whole body needs all of its members because all of its members play an important function. And God Himself made it so.

So if we are like a body, then many members we will be. And if we are many members, then many needed functions we will see.

And that brings us to the last two lines of our poem. And if we see many needed functions, then some may be esteemed and others less. But if we are all members, then really, all should be treasured, not one above the rest.

So verse 22. 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 our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

[23 : 50] 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 in 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? So what's Paul doing here? Well, he's addressing a possible response as though the Corinthians and us are saying, okay, Paul, fine.

All the members are needed. But Paul, let's be honest. Some of those gifts should be celebrated and others just kind of put up with, right?

[24 : 51] Like, I mean, we still can say that, can't we? Okay, they're all needed, but some, like, wow. Others, mm, okay, I guess. Think back again to the core problem in the church of Corinth that Paul has been addressing.

this problem that we are just as susceptible to. Elevating ourselves. Elevating even others that we may follow. Remember chapter 1.

Some say, I follow Paul. Some say, I follow Apollo. Some, Cephas. Why were they following these different leaders? Well, they were evaluating them based on worldly criteria.

They were looking at the skills and abilities of these men. Perhaps even the spiritual gifts and the graces given to these men. And they were saying, oh, this leader is better than this leader.

He's a more eloquent speaker. He's a better preacher or teacher. And they were pitting these leaders against each other than associating themselves with these different leaders. Honoring and esteeming some while disparaging others.

[25 : 57] What was all of this doing? Creating division. Paul comes right back to that theme again here in chapter 12 when he says in verse 25 that there may be no division in the body.

So this is very much on Paul's mind. He's anticipating that question. Well, we could still like really celebrate kind of these showy gifts but then kind of be like, eh, whatever. I guess they exist.

We need them. But like we don't really love them. They're just kind of here. And Paul is saying, no, not at all. On the contrary, he says, which is a good way of saying, let me correct you.

Some gifts, yes, are more visible. Some gifts are more public. But a true understanding of the body of Christ and the diversity of gifts within it should produce in us humility and a deep appreciation for all of the gifts, even the ones that are not so visible.

In fact, those gifts that are less visible, those gifts that might seem less impressive, those are the gifts that God calls us in this passage to give greater honor to.

[27 : 08] He's drawing our attention to these gifts because naturally, our attention likely wouldn't be drawn to them. Like gifts of helping or administration, gifts of serving and generosity, those might not be as readily recognized and honored as other gifts.

And so Paul wants us to, God in His Word wants us to see them. Even in the first century context of Corinth, gifts of healing and prophecy and gifts of speaking in tongues alongside gifts like knowledge and wisdom and teaching, exhortation, those are very public gifts.

You would see people exercising them in very clear ways before perhaps even many people. Now Paul isn't saying, well, those gifts should be demeaned, but he's pointing out that the gifts which are less visible, less obvious, the gifts that might go unnoticed, God expressly is giving greater honor to them here.

He's drawing our attention to them. He's saying, you need to go out of your way to honor them.

Why? Because those gifts are indispensable.

The gifts that are more visible are in fact dependent on the gifts that are less visible. This is true in the human body. Go back to the illustration.

[28 : 31] There are parts of the body that are not visible, that are under the skin. We can't see them. The heart, the stomach, the lungs, the intestines. What are these called? We have vital organs.

That's a fitting term. Because indeed, they are vital. We need them. Our hands are dependent on the heart to pump that oxygen-rich blood through our veins to reach our hands.

Our hands would literally die without the heart and the veins. Now those are parts of the body that we often think less of. We think less about the heart. We think less about the veins.

But how dependent our hands are on those members. Well, that's Paul's point in verses 22 and 23. 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 unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty. Now that last part, Paul is talking about reproductive organs, crucial to the continued existence of the human race, and yet treated with greater modesty, covered up appropriately.

[29 : 48] So Paul then applies this principle, so very apparent in the human body, to the body of Christ. The gifts that would seem less honorable or less presentable aren't in fact so very deserving of honor and esteem because they're indispensable.

We can think of gifts that are exercised even in our church in the modern day. We wouldn't have services where gifts of teaching or exhortation are exercised if not for the exercise of many other gifts of administration and helping and serving.

Well, the building needs to be clean. The thermostats need to be set correctly. The building needs to be unlocked. Microphones and speakers and the video feed all operating.

There's even a spreadsheet that how many of us even know about the spreadsheet? But there's those who administratively organize this spreadsheet to keep the order of service clear for all involved.

All of those gifts are being used. Not just the visible ones, but the less visible too and how we need those gifts. So how God then in this passage draws our attention to them.

[30 : 59] give greater honor because the more visible gifts, they often receive honor more naturally and because those more visible gifts are absolutely dependent on the less visible gifts.

And so what's the result? What's the result of all of this honor and esteem? It keeps the body of Christ from division. It keeps us from only looking at the more presentable parts and saying, wow, we just need you.

In fact, we kind of all wish that we were you, so we just want to try to be you. No, not at all. We need one another. And so it follows, very practically speaking, we care for one another.

The same care. We deeply care. Not elevating some brother or sister to the exclusion of others. Not overlooking some because we deem them or their gifts of less value.

Not cutting certain members out of the body as if they aren't necessary, but seeing how God has so composed the body. And marveling at that, praising Him for that.

[32 : 08] And then, very practically, very concretely, we care for the body. As Paul says, if one member suffers, all suffer together.

If one member is honored, all rejoice together. That's a healthy body. That's a healthy local church. Thank God for how He has knit our hearts together.

Thank God for how He's done that in love. And let's continue to strive for this all the more as we exercise our variety of gifts in the body. And there's a beautiful humility that we see here.

We're not looking at ourselves and thinking all about ourselves and celebrating whatever our gifting is. No, we're looking at the whole body and thinking of the whole body and suffering and rejoicing together.

And that makes sense to bring it full circle to the beginning of our passage because though many members, we are what? We are one body.

[33 : 10] So, of course, when one member suffers, we do suffer together. When one member rejoices, we do rejoice together in how we've experienced that. How we want to continue to grow by God's grace in that.

The body of Christ. So that's how God has ordered the local church to function. A variety of gifts. And it's not total uniformity. Now, very briefly, as we conclude, this principle we see holds true in the church universal as well.

And we see that in verses 28 to 30. We see that God established the church through the apostles and prophets. And He gave the church teachers as well.

Think pastors today. Shepherds of the flock. That's how God has organized the leadership of the church. Now, not all Christians fill all these offices.

Some of these offices are no longer even held today. But even in the first century, not everyone was an apostle. Not everyone was a prophet. Not everyone was a teacher.

[34 : 15] Not everyone was an office bearer in the church. And in the same way, not all Christians receive the same spiritual gifts. But God so orders the church as He has decided.

And we should give thanks for His wisdom in how He has ordered the church. And then we should embrace our station in the church. our gifting in the church.

And we should live to the glory of God. Which is really to say that we should be content. We should be joyfully content. It is God who builds His church.

It is God who assigns the gifts in His church. And so how joyfully content we should be to exercise those gifts all to the common good of the church and to God's great glory as well.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we do come to You marveling this evening. What a wonder that You have saved so many of us here gathered in this room and then joined us together into this local church.

[35 : 25] What a joy it is that we are able to exercise our gifts together and to see the manifestation of the Spirit as 1 Corinthians 12 says. Help us to continue in that all the more.

to live with one another, loving one another, walking alongside one another in this life. Give us strength by Your Spirit, we pray. Help us that we might continue to suffer alongside one another when one suffers.

To rejoice when one rejoices. And to do all of this that our body might be built up in love and that You, Lord, would receive all of the glory.
We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.