

## **SERMON: The Diversity and Interdependence of the Church's Members**

**TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

### **Introduction**

- A. Who is more spiritual, an elder or a deacon? A deacon or a children's director? A missionary or a nursery worker? A choir member or a member of our audio-visual team? A pastor of a large and growing church, or a pastor of a 50 member church? Who is more spiritual, more filled with God's Spirit?
- B. It should be obvious to us that one's spirituality, one's closeness to God cannot be measured by the particular ministry the Spirit has distributed as a gift to any one of us. It is not the gifts of the Spirit but the fruit of the Spirit that manifest who is most conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus.
- C. But this was not so obvious to many in the Corinthian church. Some were assigning greater spirituality to persons with one kind of ministry over another. And even among those with the same kind of ministry, some were measuring spirituality by comparing the appearance and effects of one's ministry with the effects of another, creating disunity in the body.

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.<sup>11</sup> For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.<sup>12</sup> Now I mean this, that **each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."**

1. Sadly, a few months after writing 1 Corinthians, Paul, writing 2 Corinthians, would find continued need to rebut such distorted and divisive thinking ...

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but **when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.**

2. Paul had earlier in this letter of 1 Corinthians corrected and rebuked them for such flawed thinking.

1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.<sup>7</sup> **So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.**

1 Corinthians 4:7 **For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive?** And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

3. Now in chapters 12-14 Paul continues to correct their thinking in response to their questions on spiritual things.

1 Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote ....

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.

### **I. All the various ministries with their various effects are gifts from the one triune God.**

<sup>4</sup> Now there are distributions (dairesis) of gifts (charisma), but **the same Spirit.**

<sup>5</sup> And there are distributions (dairesis) of ministries (diakonia), and **the same Lord.**

<sup>6</sup> There are distributions (dairesis) of effects (energama), but **the same God who works all things in all.**

<sup>11</sup> But **one and the same Spirit works all these things,** distributing (daiereo) to each one individually just as He wills

## II. All believers are baptized into one body by the one Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 12:12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For **by/with one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and **we were all made to drink of one Spirit**.

A. The baptism with the Spirit is the washing of regeneration, being born again unto a saving faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as pictured in water baptism.

1. John the Baptist baptized with water, as symbol of the Holy Spirit. Water is the “type” or “symbol,” the Spirit is the “antitype” or “substance.”

John 1:33 "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to **baptize with water** said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who **baptizes with the Holy Spirit**.'

Acts 1:5 for John **baptized with water**, but you will be **baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now."

2. As water washes away the outward pollution of our bodies, the Spirit washes away the polluted passions of our hearts, that we might desire to wholeheartedly receive Christ as our Savior and Lord, resulting in the salvation of our souls. Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,** <sup>6</sup> **whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,**

3. As we see in the case of the conversion of the Gentile centurion Cornelious and his household, water baptism, a symbol of regeneration, is appropriately administered to those who are Spirit baptized as a symbol of God’s cleansing their hearts by the Spirit’s regeneration unto faith in Christ.

Acts 10:43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.** <sup>45</sup> All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. <sup>46</sup> For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, <sup>47</sup> **"Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"** <sup>48</sup> **And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.** Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

4. This is contrary to what is commonly taught in modern charismatic circles (that the baptism of the Spirit is a second blessing different from and subsequent to (after) regeneration (ordinarily), evidenced by speaking in tongues, enjoyed by only some believers, empowering them to live a godly life. This charismatic theology undermines Paul’s entire argument and emphasis in this chapter. He uses “one” and “all” to refute any groupings of Christians as more or less spiritually elite. Every true Christian has been born of the Spirit, baptized by Christ with the Spirit of the living God, and in this way made part of the body of Christ, the church.

1 Corinthians 12:12 For even as the body is **one** and yet has many members, and **all** the members of the body, though they are many, are **one** body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by/with **one** Spirit we were **all** baptized into **one** body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were **all** made to drink of **one** Spirit.

B. Since all true believers have been born of God’s Spirit, all fulfill their ministries by the leading and empowerment of the one and the same Spirit. All who live by the Spirit are spiritual people, regardless of their differing God-appointed ministries with their different God-empowered effects.

### III. God distributes all the various ministries with their various workings for the common good of Christ's one body, His church.

- A. Now beginning in verse 14ff Paul repeats and illustrates what he had stated in 12:7, that these various gifts of ministry are for the common good of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**.

- B. Paul uses a "body" metaphor to illustrate the importance of each member to the collective members of the body of Christ.

- 12:14-16 Believers should neither dismiss or ignore their significance as members of the body of Christ. Saying or acting like, "I'm not a member," or "my participation and investment in ministering to and on behalf of the body does not matter" is unbiblical, unloving, and works against God's building up the body of Christ. How we live, what choices we make, whether or not we fulfill or neglect our God-appointed ministries and responsibilities to Christ's body has a real effect on all the other body members. Denying this fact doesn't allow us to escape this fact, any more than a hand saying, "I am not part of the body," makes it any less a part of the body.

1 Corinthians 12:14 For **the body is not one member, but many**.<sup>15</sup> If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," **it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body**.<sup>16</sup> And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," **it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body**.

- 12:17-20 It is necessary for the good of the body that God should not give everyone the same ministry function. What would become of a body where all the members became the same body part?

1 Corinthians 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?<sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.<sup>19</sup> **If they were all one member, where would the body be?**<sup>20</sup> But now there are many members, but one body.

- 12:21 Believers should neither dismiss nor demean the significance of other members due to their particular God-appointed ministries to and on behalf of the body of Christ. Example: the self-destructive attitudes of the legs, arms hands, mouth who grew tired of responding to the hunger cries of the stomach.
- 12:22-26 God intends for believers to invert the world's values by honoring those ministries and those people which the world does not. The world honors those who already have honor (Cf. James 2:1-4).

1 Corinthians 12:22 On the contrary, it is much truer that **the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary**,<sup>23</sup> and those **members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor**, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,<sup>24</sup> whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But **God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked**,<sup>25</sup> **so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another**.<sup>26</sup> And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

- When Paul speaks of "members of the body which seem to be weaker," he is apparently referring to genitalia, or to put it as delicately as possible, to our "private parts." Though they are not visible like our face, eyes, arms, etc., we do give particular attention to them, making certain they are covered modestly. When we go to the beach, we have spent time, effort, and money on bathing suits, not to cover our face, arms, legs, but to cover our private body parts. Yet these body parts are very important to the body - for reproduction, removal of body waste, nurturing of infants.
- Less visible and prominent members of the church are also to be give special attention to make certain they receive the same care and concern as those in "up front" ministry, so that there will

be no divisions within the body of Christ.

5. 12:27-31 The Corinthians had been devaluing and dismissing those ministries which had a greater impact on building up the body of Christ (apostles), and elevating those with less impact (tongues) in order to elevate their own status directly or through their identifying with their “heros.”

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.<sup>28</sup> And **God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers**, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.<sup>29</sup> All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?<sup>30</sup> All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?<sup>31</sup> **But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.**

- a. Ministries have different effects on the building of the body of Christ, some more than others. Paul begins by ranking 3 ministries of the Word in the church, since the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and NT prophets - that is, their God-inspired gospel.

Ephesians 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of **God's household,**<sup>20</sup> **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,**<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

- b. The rest of the list is apparently in no order of rank, for ministries of “miracles” and “healings” are in inverted order in 12:9,10. But tongues is again mentioned last, because the Corinthians had elevated this ministry above those ministries of God's Word, particularly in the case of the apostle Paul.

1 Corinthians 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, **so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.**<sup>7</sup> For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?<sup>8</sup> **You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us;** and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.<sup>9</sup> For, I think, **God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world,** both to angels and to men.

## Summary:

- A. God gives gifts of ministry how, when, where, and to whomever He wants, according to His wise purposes in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually **just as He wills.**<sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, **just as He desired.**

- B. Since all gifts are given by God for the good of all the body members, we should rejoice, promote, and not be dismissive or envious of the ministries God has given to others.

1 Corinthians 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ...<sup>21</sup> And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

- C. We are to be zealous for those ministries of the Word which particularly build up Christ's body.

1 Corinthians 12:31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

- D. But we must remember that measure of a person is not the gifts of the Spirit, but the fruit of the Spirit. So Paul commends to us in chapter 13 the “more excellent way” of serving one another through love.

Galatians 5:13 ... **through love serve one another.**