

Unity Through Diversity, Part 1

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

Turn over just by way of introduction, to Ephesians 4:1-16. This passage in Ephesians basically outlines a biblical philosophy of ministry, which means that there is no need today to reinvent how to do ministry in the local church; it's all right there. Paul spelled it out in Ephesians 4:1-16. No need to reinvent the wheel. Paul by the Spirit has commanded exactly what we're to do in doing ministry.

Now, notice how Paul exhorts Christians in the first few verses, saying there, follow along, Ephesians 4:1, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Now stop there for a minute. Notice the emphasis in those first few verses. You've got humility and meekness. You've got patience and forbearing love. You've got unity and peace. Notice where Paul refers there to the unity of the Spirit. He's not

talking about some kind of ecumenical unity, where we set aside all theological differences and ignore them, where we overlook or tolerate theological error for the sake of some supposed greater goal. That is not unity. That's not the unity Paul's describing here. The unity Paul is describing here is fundamentally a doctrinal unity. Look at verses 4-6, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Listen, the blessed privilege of the local church is that it has the opportunity day by day, week after week, to grow in that unity of the Spirit together, in the context of relationships with one another, living life with each other. This doctrinal unity that we're to pursue is not about cold orthodoxy. It's not about ivory-tower academics. It's not about trying to become academically erudite. The study of theology in the local church is not that. The study of theology in the local church is unifying. It is transformative, and thus it is life-giving and joy-producing.

Listen, that's why God gave or I should say Christ gave, verse 11, Christ gave gifted men to the church, starting with

the era of the Apostles and prophets, through whom God revealed the New Testament to us. Those men received the revelation from the Spirit. They taught it in their own time, but they also by the Spirit's direction wrote it down. Notice in verse 11, evangelists are given to plant people into that foundation of New Testament truth. And then the pastors and teachers, they nurture people out of that truth to grow up out of that foundation, really even anchoring them deeper into it.

So the evangelists, the pastors, the teachers, they work in conjunction with one another. They equip the saints together for the work of the ministry, which is, by the way, a disciple-making ministry. They equip the saints, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, equip the saints, and then the saints edify the entire body, building it up, making and developing disciples.

So that's how the whole church becomes healthy and strong. And I like how Paul describes that strength, starting in verse 13. Look what he says there, he says "We're attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by

human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Nurtured in the teaching, nurtured in the training of the local church, the whole body grows into maturity, healthy, strong, discerning, and sharp. It’s unified, brought together by attitudes and actions of mutual care, of building itself up in love. And that is what Christ intends for every local church. And this whole experience in a healthy local church, it’s not without its challenges and disappointments. It’s not, not without its sins and failures. But in the main, a healthy local church is an environment where Christian virtue and sacrificial service are on display every single week. In fact, all throughout the week, we are thriving together in this kind of an environment.

As we’ve already read in Ephesians 4:2-3, Paul exhorts us to pursue those Christian virtues, virtues like humility, and unity, and love. When local church life, listen, when it’s saturated with those virtues, what a wonderful environment that

is! That is the kind of exposure to Christianity that I want unbelieving visitors who walk through these doors, I want them to see that, don't you? That's exactly where I want to raise my children. That is the kind of Christianity that I want my children to be raised in, to see, to experience first-hand, right in front of them. Because that is what the Gospel really produces in the life of a redeemed sinner. That is what the Gospel does to people, it changes them, it transforms them, it sets them free from sin and death and destruction and darkness and error, and it sets them free to walk in a path of virtue, and life, and hope, and joy. This is the power of God on display. That's what brings glory and honor to Jesus Christ, and it's all done here, live and in person, right here in the local church.

Now, having said all that, I want to look at one of the most fundamental texts of Scripture on the nature of the local church. So turn in your Bibles with me to 1 Corinthians, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We're going to look at 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and kinda spend our time there. But I want to start in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, right there at the very end. Some people were getting drunk; some people were gorging themselves on food. They weren't waiting for one another. And in chapter 11, Paul rebukes them for that attitude,

and he ends that chapter calling for a bit of self-analysis, a little bit of a, a self-assessment, if you will.

Really the attitude is an attitude of self-judgment and he told them in 1 Corinthians 11:31-32, he says, "If we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged." Now you remember, some of the people in that congregation had been judged. Some of them were sick, some had fallen asleep, that is died, God judged them because he was trying to wake them up to their sin. That judgment, though it seemed harsh, it was actually gracious. This is a gracious love of the Lord to wake people up. And it says there, 1 Corinthians 11:31-32, "When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

So it's this context of judgment, of self-assessment, which is supposed to lead to repentance and further discipline. This is how the church can grow by receiving Paul's corrective. So he tells them in verse 33, "So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that when you come together it will not be for judgment." Notice that instruction there at the end of verse 33. What does it say? It says, "Wait for one another." Wait for one another. Waiting for others is at the very least an act of

consideration, right? But in the context of this communion that loving consideration has another goal in mind, it's the unity of the local church around the Lord's Table. Love and unity, those two virtues were in very short supply in the Corinthian church. These people seriously needed to repent.

Now just a point, here. "Wait for one another," that command, that happens to be one of those, one another statements that are sprinkled all throughout the New Testament. You remember the one another commands. Some of you have studied those yourself. "Love one another...be at peace with one another...in humility count others more significant than yourselves." You probably studied those for yourself. But almost all the one another commands, not all of them, but almost all of them, employ the little Greek word *allélón*. *Allélón*, which means one another. And these stand out, these commands because they're reciprocal commands, reciprocal, that is, you could say that the responsibility to do what is commanded is, is shared mutually by both the subject and the object. So you might say if the command is, be kind to one another, that means Suzy needs to be kind to Sally, and also that Sally needs to be kind to Suzy. There's a mutual responsibility on both ladies, there, Sally and Suzy, they both need to do this. But there's also, I might add, a mutual benefit. Both share in the positive effects of that

kindness to one another. That's the joy of reciprocity, shared as a normal part of life in the local church. And that's what the one another commands are about: mutual responsibility but also mutual benefit.

Now just a footnote. The very existence of one another commands points to the life that's shared in the context of the local church. You don't do the one anothers in the context of the universal church, the church from all ages, all times, all over the entire world. You don't practice the one anothers like this. No, you have to do it right there in the local church. The individual life of every Christian is supposed to be lived out with others, face to face in the local church. And that means that the local church, once again just to emphasize this point, the local church is absolutely vital for the health and growth of every single Christian. It's indispensable.

Now back to that word *allélón*. *Allélón*, it's used 104 times in 98 verses of the New Testament and about 60 of those uses are commands, or they're implied exhortations; and they're given to, or directed to, believers. As you examine these 60 or so one another commands, you can see that several themes emerge as you study them. Fact, I can see really there are three very clear virtues that are commanded and exhorted in every believer. About



a third of the one another commands have to do with love; about a third of them have to do with unity; and a very significant percentage of what's left over has to do with humility.

So love, unity, and humility, that is not a bad triad of virtues that is to be pursued in the context of the local church. And that's one way to organize the commands by the virtues exhorted and the virtues commanded, but you can also organize those virtues a little bit further, to required attitudes, on the one hand, and required actions on the other. Actions and attitudes, attitudes leading to actions. The attitudes, the actions are all expressions of Christian virtues: love, unity, and humility.

Okay, now, did you notice, those are the same three virtues that Paul had commanded in Ephesians 4:2-3? Those virtues, love, unity, humility, those are to be regular and habitual in the church. Love, unity, and humility are to permeate every aspect of our local church life. They're to be attitudes that govern our thought life, inform our wills. They're also to be actions that have a practical, outward effect in our membership.

For now keep those three virtues in mind, love, unity, humility, as we read the passage, which is going to be the focus of our study, 1 Corinthians 12:1-27. Now listen, "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, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 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 interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

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. 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.' 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. If one member suffers, all suffer together and if one

member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Paul begins that chapter, if you look back at the beginning, he begins that chapter as he does in almost every chapter in this letter with a corrective. The Corinthian church, like all the New Testament churches in the Apostolic era, he was energized by the supernatural and the revelatory ministries of the Holy Spirit. We can see that from what's described in the New Testament. Those early congregations were very, very exciting places to be. As we can see, though, as in all of Paul's epistles demonstrate, Paul spent his entire ministry unpacking the implications of the Gospel, all the implications of the divine revelation that was given to the churches.

So those early congregations had Apostles visiting, establishing the congregation, it had local church prophets and local church teachers. And those local prophets would receive revelation from the Spirit to teach, to guide the congregation. The teachers would then reinforce that revelation given to the local congregation. But that local prophecy and that local revelation, all of that was eventually codified in what the Apostles wrote in the New Testament. So we have it all right here. So Paul exhausted himself, working all the truths revealed

to him by the Holy Spirit into the fabric, into the fiber, of those early churches.

The early churches may have been gifted; early Christians may have been gifted by the Spirit. But look they weren't fully informed. They weren't consistent in living out what had been revealed, what had been taught. They weren't consistent in their practice and their behavior in all the Spirit had gifted them to do. And that's the case, here, as you can see in verses 1-3. It seems almost unthinkable to us today that the Corinthians could mistake some lying, demonic spirit, which said, Jesus is accursed, for a revelation of the Holy Spirit. But they did. They were confused.

Demonic spirits had entered the congregation. They were confusing truth revelations of the Holy Spirit by adding contrary doctrines. The goal, as Satan's goal always is then and now it was to divide the church, to twist and distort God's Word. Nothing new about that! So Paul makes, here, a simple distinction, a very clear distinction in teaching to help the Corinthians with their discernment. The Holy Spirit is only going to speak what's completely consistent with the truth that he's already revealed. Jesus is *not* accursed; Jesus is Lord. And that is the teaching consistent with all of the revelation of

the Scripture. The Holy Spirit will always be consistent with himself.

So, having made that initial correction, that corrective to Corinthian practice of the gifts, which was very fundamental, very fundamental teaching there, Paul then proceeded to provide the Corinthians with some more fundamental teaching that's gonna help them use their spiritual gifts. And the bottom line, just flip over there for a minute, just a couple of pages to chapter 14, the bottom line of all of this, where he's driving in all of this, is found there in 1 Corinthians 14:4. Paul says there, The one who speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. And he's not there talking about the legitimate use of tongues, but this Corinthian distortion about how they were using the gift of tongues. They were trying to build themselves up, practicing the legitimate gift, but doing it with a wrong motive and a wrong purpose.

So the one who speaks in a tongue among you Corinthians, basically is what he's saying, the one who speaks in a tongue among you Corinthians, you're doing it to build yourself up; but the one who prophesies, he's doing it to build up the church. Why? Because prophecy was spoken in the language of the people who could understand, so that everything that came through the

prophet, no matter what his motives were, everything that came through him led to the upbuilding of the church.

Continuing on, there, "I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless somebody interprets, so that the church may be built up." Edification, that's what he's after. Look down in verse 12, "So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church." One more, skip ahead to verse 26. Paul says, he comes to this conclusion, "What then, my brothers, when you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up."

Look, that's the point of every spiritual gift, of all spiritual ministry in the church: edification. In fact, that's where the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, that's where the love chapter fits in. It's not to provide a nice flow or foundation in a wedding, okay? 1 Corinthians 13 is part of an argument, and it's at the foundation of Paul's argument. Spiritual gifts are not primarily for personal benefit. Rather, in keeping with what's loving, in keeping with what's spiritually best for somebody else, spiritual gifts are targeted to the edification

of other people. Okay, back to what Paul told the Ephesians. That triad of virtues, love, unity, and humility, both in attitude and action; same thing here. Everything is for the building up, the edification, the strengthening, the encouragement of the members of the local church.