

Unity Through Diversity, Part 2

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

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.

Local church diversity demonstrates the unity of Christ's body. Local church diversity demonstrates the unity of Christ's body. The true nature of this body into which the Corinthians have been baptized, of which they've all become members, is manifest not by its sameness, but by its diversity. That's what Paul teaches there in verses 4-14. But rather than skipping, let's let's look at the end of that. Look directly at the punchline there in verses 12-13. Paul says this, "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.

Look, that's the central teaching of this chapter. The local church is one body with many members, and it's a local expression of the larger universal one body with many members.

So just as the universal church incorporates all the elect, transcending ethnic differences, Jew and Greek; transcending socio-economic distinctions, slave and free. We might even throw in there Galatians chapter 3, it transcends gender differences, male and female. I feel the need to say that these days in our country. Gender differences exist, and yet in the universal church, being drawn into the universal church incorporates all the elect, no distinction, male and female, Jew and Greek, slave and free; the elect have been made to drink of one Spirit.

So if the local church, like the universal church, is unified by one Spirit even though it's joining together all different kinds of people, it makes sense that we're going to find diversity here in the local church as well, not just the universal church. The local church is one body, many members. And everything that Paul writes in verses 4 to 11 are going to lead up to that truth in verses 12 and 13. Then everything he writes in verses 14-20 point back to that truth. In fact, he restates it; he reaffirms it again there in verse 27, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

Now back up a bit, and let's see what Paul was teaching. Look at verses 4-6, "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. Varieties, three uses of that word. The word varieties means diversely apportioned. It means distributed in differing amounts, in varying degrees. By its nature the word variety is pointing here to the diversity of the body, right? People, their gifts, their manner of using their gifts, though it's all informed by the same Bible, they're going to look different from one person to another, manifested in unique ways. Now notice what the word variety modifies, gifts, service, activities, that's just an indication there, that life in the local church diversifies significantly into varieties of gifts, varieties of service, varieties of activities. You get the picture, here, that life in the local church is just bustling with activity. It's just bursting with life. It is an exciting place to be.

But notice that this diversity in the local church, this variety, it is by design, with each person of the Trinity involved in the design and the outworking of this diversity. It says there that the same Spirit is the one who distributes the varieties of gifts to everyone, the same Lord is the one who is served through the variety of gifts, the same God is the one who energizes the gifts, making them effective and useful and fruitful. So you see, the one Triune God, he is the one

distributing the gifts, he's the one served through the gifts, and he's the one energizing the gifts. It's the one Triune God who is responsible, here, for the diversity that exists in the local church. This is *his* decision; this is expressing *his* intention; it's manifesting *his* perfect design.

So if the diversity is by God's design, then, the second sub-point, here, obviously, this diversity, it *manifests* the divine; it shows forth the divine, that's verses 7-11. You can see here that "to each is given the manifestation" of whom? "of the Spirit." The manifestation of the Spirit, the showing forth of the Spirit "for the common good." Now keep that in mind this is all manifesting the Holy Spirit. It's manifesting God, his design, his character, his Person. It's manifesting his Lordship; it's manifesting his sovereignty. So keep that in mind as you go through gift by gift. "For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom," Whose wisdom? God's wisdom,

"and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit," Whose knowledge? God's knowledge, "to another faith by the same Spirit," Faith in whom? faith in God, "to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit." Healing showing the power of whom? God. "To another the working of miracles," By the power of whom? the power of God, "to another prophecy,"

Predicting what, telling forth what? God's Word, God's revelation, verse 10, "to another the ability to distinguish between spirits," How do you do that? How do you have that discernment? It's discerning between what? Between God and all that is not God, "to another various kinds of tongues," so, all languages, "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.

Now, all those gifts, manifestations of one Holy Spirit in the early church. Today we have other varieties of gifts, and they also, as we exercise them, as they are transformative in our midst, they also point to the Triune God who gave them. Look, just as the many facets, the different angles of a diamond, they manifest the beauty of that diamond. They reflect the light in all different directions, they refract the light to reveal all different colors of the spectrum; well, so also the different gifts in the body, the uniqueness and the diversity of all the people in the body, they reveal the beauty, the glory of the one true God, right?

Again, all those concrete manifestations of diversity revealed in church members are, verse 7, "the manifestation of the Spirit." They are all, verse 12, "empowered by one and the

same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” So the diversity manifests the divine: his power, his will, his sovereignty. And it’s God the Spirit who’s made the choices. He has made the distinctions. He has apportioned to each one by different measure just as he wills, right?

So unity here manifests through diversity. In the local church, our diversity, the uniqueness, the individuality, all of it demonstrates, really, the unity of Christ’s church. That was the first point, so here’s the second point in our outline. Second point: Local church diversity demonstrates the wisdom of God’s design. Local church diversity demonstrates the wisdom of God’s design. Notice the very last phrase in verse 7 again. It says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit,” for what? “for the common good.” For the common good. The body of Christ, which is on display in time and space through each and every true local church, that local church demonstrates the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of God, why? Why is that? Because every gift of the Spirit, every act of service to the Lord, every activity energized and empowered by God is for the common good. It brings us together. It is for edification and upbuilding and strengthening and growing the church. And here’s where we’re



back to the one another's, right? Doing everything for one another means we minister for the common good. We minister for the corporate benefit of this local church. You know what that means? It means we're forced into relationship with one another, right? All kinds of different people; people who would never gather together on any other circumstance, for any other reason, nothing else unites us except this one God, by this Spirit, in service to this Lord. We're forced to grow in Christian virtue because of that, in love and unity and humility, both in attitude and action, right?

Listen, that's the wisdom of God. That's something only God could come up with, bringing us together like that. That is the wisdom of God on display, uniting us together in one body, making us, you know, from all different people, making us a one people, making us a unified people coming together to love, to be humble with each other, to unify together for the good of this body.

Now by learning to accept one another, we're going to promote an attitude of humility in the church. By learning to appreciate one another, we're going to promote attitudes of love and unity in the church. So take a look, there, at that first

subpoint under this heading. Accepting our diversity promotes humility in the local church.

Accepting our diversity promotes humility in the local church. Look at verses 14-20, "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," statement of fact, there are, "many parts, yet one body.

Now can you see in those verses the problem that Paul is confronting there in that paragraph? It's called envy, envy. The problem is the sin of covetousness, of wanting what hasn't been given to you, of wanting what's been given to somebody else. And he's confronting that sin, that ugly sin of envy, of covetousness, he's confronting that self-centered sin at two levels here. One is on the level of logic and reason. Another is

he's confronting it at the level of submission. Logically, just plain logic says a body has parts. You wouldn't be a body without parts, right? I don't want my foot envying my hand. I don't want my ear envying my eye. I need all those parts to accept their place, to do what God designed them to do, because without the parts doing what they're designed to do, my body suffers, right?

Same thing in the church; same thing here. But how tempting, is it, for each one of us to envy the gifts that other people have. Look, we need to accept the gifting, the role that God has given to others, not coveting that gift for ourselves because we need them to do what they're designed to do. We also need to accept the gifting and role that God has given to us, not lamenting because we're not some other part of the body, right? We need to do what God has designed us to do because all of you need what I do, and I need what all of you do. That's what Paul's saying here.

So Paul confronts our envy not just on the level of logic. We need all these different parts; otherwise, there is no body. He also confronts it at another level, this envy, this covetousness, notice, verse 18, "God has arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose." Your gifting, your role

in the local church, that's by God's design. That's according to his will. That's according to his choosing. You know what? To covet another part of the body, or to think of yourself as less or unessential to the overall health, the benefit of the body, you know what that is? That's really a subtle blow against the wisdom of God. That's not good. That's a tacit accusation that God was wrong to design you the way he designed you, that he was wrong or unwise or not good to design others the way he designed them, or he was wrong to assign you to the role you have or them to the role they have in the body of Christ. And that is not true at all, is it?

God is supremely wise. He is supremely good. He is beneficent and loving and kind and merciful and gracious. He's perfect. In fact, he's always working his Plan A in the world and in the church and everywhere. There is no Plan B with God. This is his wisdom. And this is precisely where we see how diversity in the local church is a demonstration of God's wisdom. We need to accept the fact that God has made us different, that he assigned each one of us the role he wants us to have. That is how the diversity of the body, each of us playing a different role that's what forces us to grow in humility. In humility. Accepting our differences is a mark of humility. Accepting the gifts we've received, the role we've

been assigned, that's the attitude that's going to help the church grow healthy and grow strong.

So accepting our diversity promotes humility, that's sub-point one. Here's sub-point two: Appreciating our diversity promotes love and unity in the local church. Appreciating our diversity, not just accepting it, but also appreciating it. Appreciating our diversity promotes love and unity in the local church. Take a look, there, at verses 21-26, "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; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." Wow! The eye can't say to the hand, "I have no need of you," the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." That would be foolish.

We need to take care of ourselves. I don't need to belabor this point, we all get this. We live with the reality of this every single day in our own physical body. But listen, that's what makes this such a useful, excellent illustration from the Apostle Paul. We get this. And we need to believe it for the church because that's what happening here. This is what's going on in our midst.

And I want you to notice, here, a crucial sentence. It really illustrates the larger point, that the diversity of the local church demonstrates the wisdom of God's design here. Look at verses 24-25, says this, "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." When we recognize the wisdom of God, that wisdom right there, in how he designed our church, you know what? We're going to learn to appreciate our differences. And when we learn to truly appreciate this diversity, to embrace it joyfully, it's going to promote an attitude of love and humility and unity among us.

Not only that, but notice the next verse, verse 26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." Look, this mutual appreciation, it

literally drives us together in a spirit of unity. This attraction among body members is magnetic. The connection between us is organic. That's why when someone suffers, we all feel it. When there's sin in the body, we all mourn. When someone is honored, we're all rejoicing. When someone is overcoming sin, when someone is growing, when someone is using their gifts well, we all rejoice.

There is to be a visceral connection between the members of the local church, and it's to produce a sense of compassion. It's to evoke feelings of sympathy. There's empathy of understanding. It's also for our mutual joy, beloved. When I see you succeed, I am cheering! And I hope you do the same with one another, that when you see one another succeed in the Christian life and in the church and in your ministry and in your service to Christ, you ought to be rejoicing and cheering.

And conversely, when you see a member of the body who's suffering, it ought to cause you grief. It ought to drive you to prayer. It ought to cause you to visit, to be concerned, to show your concern and demonstrate it. Look, we appreciate one another, beloved. We, we need to appreciate our differences. We need to rejoice in this diversity because this produces attitudes of love and unity among us. And those attitudes result



in actions that are motivated by love and they're pursuing together a sense of corporate unity.

Clearly, this diversity in the local church is a demonstration of God's wisdom, plain and simple. It is the perfect design of God to drive us together in love, to drive us together in humility, to drive us together for the purpose of unity. Notice 1 Corinthians 12:27, ending here, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." That's the reality; we're one body. Every one of us is an indispensable part of it. We belong to one another.