

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-19

### INTRODUCTION

Now while Paul is keen in this chapter to highlight the diversity of spiritual gifts it is clear that he also wants to highlight the truth that spiritual gifts unite rather than divides. This is because the gifts come from a common source, God (vs. 4-6, 8, 9 and 11) and God is not divided but is united within the Godhead. We could say that within the godhead there is clear unity yet there is also diversity.

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all have clear roles yet they are one and they have a common purpose. So it is with the gifts of the Spirit, there is diversity within a unity and they should always be used for a common purpose, which we saw last time is for the good of the church (v 7)

Now sadly the gifts of the Spirit were being abused at Corinth and this resulted in division rather than unity so Paul in this section explains and illustrates the nature and importance of the unity of the church and the importance of diversity as a key factor within that unity. The diversity that is found in every true church is the God ordained means of bringing the church into a greater sense of unity. It is through diversity that everyone understands the part they play in the unity of the body. When believers fail to accept or understand the part they play in the body of Christ then diversity divides rather than unites, it destroys rather than builds up.

### 1. AN ILLUSTRATION OF UNITY (vs. 12-13)

Paul uses the illustration of the body to show the unity and the diversity found and expressed within every true church. The human body is an amazing organism. It is no wonder Paul is fond of using it as an illustration of unity and diversity. The body is marvellously complex yet unified; it has amazing harmony and diversity. Each part of the body needs and depends on one another.

It can only exist and function as a unified body when one part ceases to function then body is deformed and ceases to function effectively as intended.

In the same way Christ's body the church is also unified. In fact Paul is so keen to get the Corinthians to understand this point that he refers to Christ as the church (v 12). We can no more separate Christ from his church than we can separate a body from its head. When that happens then it ceases to be a body that is alive, it is dead and so it is with the church. A church without Christ as its head is a dead church. The Human body is a whole and so is the church of Jesus Christ without any part of the body, the church ceases to function as it should it needs its head and body to be united in one purpose. Paul is making a very important point here when he says so it is with Christ.

Jesus Christ once walked this earth people could see him at work etc. He then died rose again and went back to heaven. He then sent his spirit to indwell his people and his church.

How do people see Jesus Christ today? Through his church we are his body he is our Head, when people see the church functioning as a church should in unity and with diversity then people see Christ through the church. They see God in all his unity and diversity.

Paul goes on to explain this in verse 13. How is the church formed? The church is formed when sinners repent and believe and are consequently baptised or immersed with the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. Now the thought here is not so much of water baptism but of union with Jesus Christ. Water baptism is an outward physical ordinance to publicly declare someone's new found faith in Christ. But Paul is saying that just as one's body can be baptised in water so believers are immersed spiritually into the body of Christ. In truth when one is converted you are made a

member of Christ's church because you are baptised into the body of Christ, we are joined to Christ's body.

That is why it is wrong to be a member of Christ's body and yet fail to join the local expression of that body as it is seen in any town, village or city. Therefore the clear implication is that if we are joined to the church, Christ body through our union with Christ in the Spirit then we must be united together as brothers and sisters.

Therefore if spiritual gifts are being used to divide then the use of those gifts must be a misuse, because gifts must enhance unity within the church not divide it. So whatever your gift is, it must always be used in ways that is enhancing the unity of the church. If you find that your gift is being used in such a way that division is being caused in the church then you must assume that you are abusing and not using your gift for the good of the church.

Paul shows this amazing unity by proclaiming that Jews and Gentiles, slaves or free are united in Christ. You cannot get any people more divided than Jews and Greeks or Gentiles. Yet in Christ they become members of His church. Likewise slaves and free are in completely different spheres in life yet in Christ they are united and are both equal members of the church.

That is Paul's point a free person and a slave might be viewed differently in this life but in Christ both are equal and both are members of the same body. One is not more important than the other both are equally united to Christ and to his church. The important thing to notice at this point is the unity of all believers. We who are all believers are united in Christ whether you are a member of this local church or not.

If you do not belong to any local church then you should for it is a denial of this wonderful truth that we are united in Christ, that we are the body of Christ.

Paul makes this unity even clearer by telling us that all Christians were given the one Spirit to drink (v 13). When we were born again the Lord not only united us to his body the church but he gave us the Holy Spirit to make his home within us. That is what Paul means by the words "we were given the one Spirit to drink" We have the same Holy Spirit living within us. We have the Spirit in common not one of us who is a Christian does not possess the Spirit therefore we are united by the Spirit. No Christian has any right to feel superior or more spiritual because they are more committed to the church than other Christians.

It's good that you are committed and its sad that some Christians are not as committed as they should be but essentially Paul's point is we are all the same we are all united to Christ and his church because we all received the same Holy Spirit when we were saved. In the church we are all equal and we are all united and we should treat one another with equity and with sense of oneness.

We are family so we ought to live and behave as families live within the community of the church.

## 2. AN ILLUSTRATION OF DIVERSITY (vs. 14-19)

Now unity is essential and important in the life of any local church. We are united in Christ therefore that unity needs to be worked out in practise. But unity does not mean uniformity, for diversity is actually essential for unity in the body of Christ. Again Paul uses the illustration of the body to demonstrate the diversity that exists within the unity of the body of Christ.

The body is not made up of one part but of many parts. The Corinthian church, like many churches today, was divided when it should have been united, and it tried to bring uniformity when it needed to encourage diversity. Many of the Corinthian believers were unhappy with the gifts that they

were given. They envied those who had the more public showy type gifts and they tried to imitate those gifts.

But uniformity brings disaster to churches what every church needs is what every human body needs an essential unity but with diversity. Within the human body the foot never thinks its not part of the body because it is not a hand or the ear does not think it is not part of the body because it is not an eye.

Likewise you and I cannot think that we do not belong to the church because we do not have the gifts that other people might have. But feet, eyes, hands and ears are all important parts of the human body and the body only functions as it ought when all those parts function properly. Some of you know this truth from experience. You know that your body is not working as it once did or should because your hearing is not working as it once did or your legs are not working as they ought or your eyesight is waning etc. You know that you cannot do what once you did because the parts of our body are wearing out.

We are not as effective as we once were because parts of our body are not functioning as intended. So it is with the church. A church where each gift is not being used to its fullest potential is a church where it is not as effective as it needs to be. A church where people despise their own gifts and want the gifts of others is a church that is disabled and less effective than it could be.

If the body were only an eye then how would we hear? If the body were an ear then how would we smell? The truth is that every part of our body plays a vital and key role in helping the body to function. Likewise every person and every gift helps the church to function. This church needs every gift that God has given to you to be used to its fullest potential.

It is sad when churches have people with gifts but because of the selfishness of some people the church does not benefit from their gifts as much as it should and could. The very youngest person and the very youngest believer have gifts that this church needs. The older people and the older believers have gifts that this church needs so that we will function effectively in this community.

I am always sad when people are so taken up with their own lives that they seem to forget that they belong to the body of Christ. Such people have so many gifts to give but the church sees so little of those gifts because we see so little of those people. Why? Because they are too taken up with themselves, and because they still have not understood the nature of the church.

It is the body of Christ everybody needs each part to function. So can I plead with you to learn how valuable you are to this church and can I encourage you to see yourself as belonging to the family of God. Can I encourage us all to use our God given gifts for the good of the church? If we all do that then we will function effectively as a church.

I always say and I believe this passage supports it that any church is only as strong as its weakest member. That's why we need to accept one another's gifts and appreciate them and encourage one another in their use so that we can be strong as a church.

At the end of the day God knows what He is doing (vs.18-19). He has given to each one of us the gifts that this church needs at this moment of time. God has saved us from our sin and placed us in his body the church and has placed us in this local church. You and I have the right gifts the ones God wants us to have.

Therefore we must always be content with our gifts because if we envy the gifts of others then we are actually saying God does not know what he is doing. That's what the church at Corinth was in effect doing, they were questioning their gifts desiring the gifts of others and ultimately they were questioning God.

So Christian be content with your gifts and use them for the benefit of the church. God is in charge, he has entrusted those gifts to you for he knows that this church needs your gifts. Don't worry if your gifts are not public ministry ones and don't worry if you think no one notices your gifts, God has given them to you and he notices them and he knows that this church needs them whether we realise it or appreciate it.

If you fail to use the gifts God has given to you then someone else will have to do what you should be doing. A hand will never be as effective at walking as feet. A person with the gift of serving will not be as effective at teaching as someone who has that gift and vice versa.

No one will be as good at encouraging others as those with that gift. If the person who does have that gift fails to use it then someone else will do it but because they have different gifts they will never be as effective as the one with the right gifts. Many churches have to make do not because God has not given its members the right gifts but simply because some members do not use their gifts as they should.

Therefore other believers are doing their best to fill the gaps while those with the right gifts are sitting back and enjoying watching others who are not gifted do what they are gifted to do. I hope you can that. We don't want this church to make do we want this church to be effective and the only way that will happen is by making sure that you and I use our gifts in the way that God intended us to use them.

Let us conclude by pointing out that a body with only one part is not actually a body (v 17). Likewise a church whose members all have the same gift and the same ministry is not really a church. Every church must have unity because we are united to Christ and His body. But within that unity there must be a diversity of gifts, a diversity that actually enhances and promotes unity within the church.

I trust that each one of us will understand better our place within this local church. You belong to the body of Christ therefore you and I are united to one another. But you and I have different gifts we have just the right gifts for this church.

They have been given to us by God and He knows what he is doing therefore use those gifts let's see this wonderful diversity being exercised within the stability of the unity that we enjoy in Christ and in his body the church.

Amen