Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

One Body Many Gifts, Part 1
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-28
Code: 1860

One Body, Many Gifts, Part 1

We're going to look this morning, and next Lord's Day, at I Corinthians 12:12-31. We see here Paul talking about one body, many gifts. This is a very, very important and practical word to us, and my prayer is that the Spirit of God will use this, not just as encouragement or instruction to you today, but a catalyst to alter your behavior as a believer in relation to Him and to His church during all the years of your life. It's that important to study Scripture.

Unfortunately, Christianity has become very organized. As one writer put it, "When Christians get organized, they get very un- Christian." You hate to admit it, but he's right. I think this has to be, from any clear study of church history, the time when the church has become most like the world's organization. Maybe it's because the sophistication of organization today is greater than it has ever been. There is no question about the fact that the church has been turned into an organization.

The church was never designed to be ordered along the lines of the world's organizational principles. It was never designed to be a management outfit. It was never designed to follow business philosophy. The church was never designed to be a selling agency in which people are motivated by Madison Avenue promotion, gimmicks, or moneymaking schemes. Unfortunately, it has become that.

I was looking at two church ads this week that sort of illustrated this to me, the amazing gimmicks that churches will use to fulfill what, I suppose, they assume is their responsibility. One ad said to attend a certain church because this Sunday, they were featuring the Hanson Gospel Birds. I thought, "That's interesting, I'll read a little about that." I read, and it said, "These birds eat with a fork, fly backwards, open padlocks, ride airplanes, and swallow small swords." Hanson's Gospel Birds. I read another ad advertising a service that no one should miss on Sunday night where a converted alcoholic was going to play gospel music on converted booze bottles to illustrate the transformation in his life. Instead of drinking out of the bottles what was there, he was blowing gospel music back into them.

You say, "That is ridiculous!" Of course, but it just illustrates the fact that the church has, somewhere along the line, lost the concept of what it is supposed to be. It's not where you go to watch the gospel birds. It is not where you go to hear a man play the converted booze bottles. The church was never designed to be a gimmick to attract people.

Further, the church was never intended to be a business for profit-making, but it is. There are churches today that own monies, properties, businesses, and corporations, and they are turning a profit. At one of our recent elder meetings, some very kind and well-meaning organization wanted to give us a lot of stainless steel. This was tremendous because it was told to us that this was very valuable stainless steel. However, it was all built to fit a certain kitchen and we would have to take it out like that.

The question immediately came up, "Will it fit our kitchen?" No. "Can we use it in our kitchen?" No. "But it's very valuable. What are we going to do with it?" Well, the idea would be that we would take it, and then we would sell it to someone else for a profit. It was interesting, because Wayne Beatty said, "Oh, now we're in the stainless steel business." Of course, it was presented to us in such a way, it was a kind gesture, but our thinking was that we are not to be in the stainless steel business; we're a church. The church is not a profit-making brokerage for people who want to unload certain things for a charity write-off so that we can make a profit on them. That is not our business.

Further, the church was never designed to be run by paid professionals who do all the work while everybody else watches. We live in a society like this. We are watchers; we watch. We sit at home and watch the world happen on the tube. If we leave home, it is to go and watch something. We go and watch people play games, we watch and listen as people sing or make music. We have no involvement, no responsibility, and no commitment, but we watch. And the church has also fallen into that category as well.

If you will look at the church page on Saturday night, you will have difficulty distinguishing it from the movie page. It's "Who is playing where? Where will we go to watch what this week? Over here they are having a movie. Yes, but in this church it's a double feature. Over here they have Hanson's Gospel Birds, but over here there is a converted man blowing booze bottles." Where do we go? In other words, the church has been turned into a spectator place. It's like the local religious production that you go see.

Further, I am also convinced that the church was never intended by God to be a community social center where everybody goes because it's a nice place to go and it is not like a country club, you don't have to pay. Besides, you can get in on the power struggle and, if you're lucky, you can become a little tin god, you know. We see that happening, don't we?

What is the church? Well, I think that man was right when he said that when the church gets organized, it gets very un-Christian. The church is an organism, not an organization. This is the perspective that, I think, we at Grace Community Church understand because we've covered it many times. I want to take you into I Corinthians 12:12-31 in the next two weeks to look at this in the most intense way that Paul does here. What he is trying to say here is that the church is an organism, and

an organism is something that is living. It is different than an organization.

A corpse is organized, but it isn't alive. You can look at a corpse and say, "Amazing! Look at it: all the limbs in the right place, the bone structure, flawless, all the organs are in the right spot and connected to the right things." It's all there, but it is not living. It is an organization at that point, but it has ceased to be an organism.

If you want another illustration, the difference between an organism and an organization is the difference between you and your car. The dictionary says that an organization is a structured system. But an organism is a living system. Your car is structured. It has a frame, it has steel, it has all the little things it needs, and it works to perform a certain function when you carry out things that are commensurate with its structure. But it isn't a living organism. You don't call up to your car and say, "Come and get me, I'm stuck down here!" Your car cannot respond as a living thing.

The church is not like a car. The church is not a highly structured organization with all the right parts, and pieces and frame, with nice, comfortable seats, worked on by a bunch of super-trained, tremendous technicians and mechanics, and driven by a hotshot preacher. No. The church is an organism. It is a living, breathing, vital life. I think this is something Paul wanted to get across with great fervency. Every individual in the church is alive. Pulsing through all of us is the life of God, eternal life, aionioszoe, God's life, God's Spirit. We are living. Just as every cell and every member in your body is alive, so everyone in the church is alive. We are a body, and that's his point.

Now, when the New Testament wants to speak of the church in terms of analogy, it frequently uses analogies of living organisms. For example, the church is called a bride. That is a living organism; that analogy is alive. The church is further called a vine and branches, Christ being the vine and we being the branches. Again, there is life flowing through that organism. The church, further, is called a flock. We are sheep and He is the Shepherd. Sheep are living, breathing, and vital. Further, in Ephesians 2 and Romans 8, the church is called a family and we are sons who cry out, "Abba, Father." That is something living and organic.

So, when God the Holy Spirit wants to show us the church, He shows it to us in organic terms, in terms that will say to us, "Everybody is a living part, nobody is a spectator." It isn't just a structured organization run by professionals; it is a living, breathing, vital organism. But the best metaphor that has ever been used to define the church, the unique one, the one never appearing in the Old Testament but unique to the church, is that the church is a body. Look at verse 12 and this will draw you into the text.

I Corinthians 12:12. "For as the body is one, so also is Christ." Like a human body is Christ's church; we are an organism. We are not a structured system; we are a living system. We are not just organized; we are alive. The church is a plurality of living cells, all alive, all beating with aionioszoe,

eternal life, all vital, all necessary.

This is the message that Paul has for the Corinthians The reason that he has this message, as in all the other cases of his words to them, is because they are not functioning in that way. They are totally chaotic. Their particular manifestation of the body of Christ is definitely crippled, spastic, out of control.

They are not portraying the proper image of Christ in the world. They were carnal. They were immature. They were immoral. They were selfish. They were proud. They were heretical. They were divisive. They fostered parties of opposition. They were enamored with human philosophy. They identified in little cliques under certain spiritual teachers. They tolerated sin. They were suing each other as a rip-off. They had a Women's Lib movement. They were gluttonous. They were drunk. They were sexually evil. They allowed pagan worship ritual to be brought into their own worship. They committed orgiastic sins at the love feast. They desecrated the Lord's Table, and they perverted and twisted the area of spiritual ministries. As a result of all of this, the body of Christ was distorted and spastic and chaotic. The image of Christ in the world was lost.

I guess, when Paul reaches chapter 12, it's as if he says here, "Nowhere in any other area is there more discord or disunity evident than in this matter of spiritual gifts." In an area where the body ought to have been functioning, there was just chaos. Why? Because, as we've already seen, the Corinthians had, for one thing, counterfeited the true gifts. For another thing, Satan had moved in and was doing his thing in the name of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to that, everybody was seeking the showy gifts, the public gifts, the speaking gifts. The chaos that resulted was just terrible. People who didn't have those gifts felt inferior; people who did felt superior. There were people going around grumbling and griping because they couldn't get certain gifts, while others were lording it over the ones who couldn't get them. So, instead of the body functioning in beautiful harmony, it was chaos. The Corinthians, in their self-seeking, in their selfishness, in their attention-getting, ego-pandering efforts, were seeking the showy gifts.

Here, Paul is saying to them, "You are a body. In a body, it isn't for the hand to say, 'If I can't be the eye, I'm leaving,' or, 'I'm frustrated,' or, 'I've been cheated.'" That is his point here, that you must be content with the design of God. You must allow God to put the body together the way He did it, accept the sense of divine dignity that God has placed in every member, and go about ministering in the area God has given you.

When they began to seek for other gifts, they wouldn't minister the ones they had, and chaos resulted. In verse 11, Paul says, "All these gifts I've just mentioned are given by the same Spirit, who divides them out to every man as He wills." This is a divine and sovereign thing. There isn't anything to seek for or to chase after. To seek certain gifts shows discontent, it shows a selfish desire for the

showy gifts.

There are some people who do not have the gift of teaching. Other people have confirmed they do not have the gift of teaching and yet they continue to seek the places of teaching. There are people today who believe that you haven't even arrived, that you haven't received a certain dimension of spiritual life, until you have received the gift of tongues. So they seek and seek for that, and that is not what God intends. It is precisely the thing that Paul is countering right here in I Corinthians 12. We'll see it today, we'll see it even more strongly confirmed next Lord's Day.

Beloved, there is nothing to seek. There is nothing to seek. You will find no such injunction or exhortation to seek spiritual gifts; only to accept what God has given in humility and faithfulness, and minister. But the Corinthians wanted the showy, self-seeking, glorifying gifts. I fear that many folks in the modern Charismatic movement have been caught in the same trap. God never intended all of us to have all the same things, that is the beauty of the body.

Here, Paul wants to make the Corinthians face the truth that they are not to seek other gifts. They are not to feel inadequate because they don't have some showy gift and they are not to feel proud if they do. The way Paul does this is by presenting an analogy of a human body and then drawing out of it an application. He says that the body and the church are similar. Each is an organism with many parts, each is complete only when all those parts function, and each part is unique and yet dependent. When the parts don't cooperate, there is chaos. That is his whole point here: the church is like a human body.

Let's look at his analogy, beginning in verse 12 and going through verse 26. Then in verse 27, he shifts gears and makes the application. We'll get to that further part of it next week.

Paul develops his analogy here along four lines: unity, diversity, sovereignty, and harmony. First of all, unity. He is going to discuss the body from the standpoint of its unity. Look at verses 12-13, and let me footnote by saying our last study covered these in detail, so we'll just allude to them.

"For as the body [that's the human body] is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are still one body, so also is Christ," or so is the church. In other words, the church is like a body. It is one, yet it is many; it is unity and yet diversity. He goes further to illustrate this by saying, "For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink one Spirit."

The point is very simple: a body is one and yet has many members. The church is one and yet has many members. Our unity is emphasized because we have all been placed into one body by one Spirit and made to drink one Spirit. We are born of one Spirit, we are placed into one body by baptism with one Spirit, we are indwelt by one Spirit. No wonder Paul, in Ephesians 4:3, says we

have the unity of the Spirit. We are all one. We have the common life of God in our souls. The Spirit of God lives in us. We have aionioszoe, eternal life. We have that life pulsing through all of us; we are all one.

In Ephesians 2, let me just remind you of a Scripture you might be familiar with. Verse 15 says, "He has made in Himself," that is, Christ, by virtue of His death, "He has made in Himself of two [Jew and Gentile] one new man." He took Jew and Gentile and made them into one new man. The word 'new' there is not neos, new in time, but kainos, new in quality. A new kind of man, a new kind of existence, a new thing. Verse 16 says, "And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body." One body.

In Ephesians 4:4, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, above all, and through all, and in you all." The emphasis here, also, is one. In Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Romans 10:12-14 is the same thing, there is oneness. Paul calls us fellow citizens, fellow partakers, fellow members, and fellow heirs.

You'll recall the words of Jesus, I'm sure, in His high priestly prayer in John 17:20. He says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one."

Jesus says, "I want them to be one." The Holy Spirit comes on Pentecost, and we are one, and Jesus' prayer is answered positionally. So it is, then, that Jesus wanted this unity. The Spirit of God then brought about that unity and we are one body.

Listen to this: there are no spiritual loners. There are no outside people. There are no hangers-on. There are no drifters. There are no spectators. We are one. You have the life of God pulsing through you as I do through me. You are as vital to the organism as any limb of a human body is vital to that body. There are no degrees of importance or responsibility in terms of more or less significance. They are all of equal, spiritual necessity. We are an organism, and an organism depends, for it's total life, on every single part, no matter how minute it is.

So, get the picture of the church. We are not an organization, a business, or a group of people who come to watch what happens happen while the paid professionals do their thing. We are a living cell, we are an organism. We are a community of people who live and breathe the same air. We are citizens of the same Kingdom, members of the same family, a bride for the same bridegroom, sheep of the same flock, branches on the same vine, and best of all, members of the same body. You are

just as important as me, and I am just as important as you. There is never any other way to look at it.

There is no real reason for you to say, "I don't matter. I can hang loose on the fringe. I'm not really a part." Oh yes you are! If the life of God lives in your soul by the presence of the Spirit of God, you are vital. And if you are not an active and practical part of what is happening, then the body is crippled. You say, "You can't really mean I'm that important." That is what God is trying to say to you. Maybe you don't understand how important you are because you have never tried to fulfill your importance and never saw what could be done. So the basic unity underlies the body in its function.

Let's go to the second thought, and that is diversity. Unity and diversity. You know, unity demands diversity. You know the Chevrolet plant over here? I was thinking about that the other day. What would happen if, in the plant, where they assemble those cars, all the workers got together and had a big labor meeting and then announced to the management, "We are united. We have solved our problems. We are of one mind, and we have an announcement to make. There is such unity in this plant that we have all decided, without any dissent, that we are all going to screw on rear taillights." Management would look around and say, "Will you run that by us again? You're all going to screw on rear taillights?" You know what? There would not be anything to screw the rear taillight onto! In order for one something to come putting off that assembly line that is one unit, there has to be diversity.

The same thing is true of the body of Christ. God does not want a bunch of spiritual rubber ducks dropping out of some divine mold. There has to be distinctions. Look at verse 14. That's where Paul drops us into this concept, having stated the basic principle of unity, then he comes to diversity. "For the body is not one member, but many."

There have to be many, many different functions. We've talked about the fact that every Christian is a spiritual snowflake. There are no two alike. You are unique and so gifted as to be essential to the body of Christ and to a local community of believers who are the representation of that greater body. You are absolutely essential. Unity and diversity form the basic theme.

I gave the illustration a few years back of a football team. If all the members of a football team said to the coach, "We had a meeting, and are we united! We have all decided to play quarterback," you don't want 44 quarterbacks. But I look at movements today, and I see 44 quarterbacks. I see seven thousand people screwing on rear taillights. Everyone is saying, "If you don't have that gift, you haven't arrived." So everyone chases after the same thing, and you know what happens? They aren't doing what they should be doing to make the body what God wants it to be. They get a case of spiritual hydrocephalus; everyone is going to the head; everyone wants to be showy.

I remember when I watched a "Flash Gordon" episode and there was a race of people who were all head and no body. Remember that? Just a head sitting there. I see that in the church today. Everybody is running to be the head, or to get on the face, be an ear, an eye to be seen, or a mouth that can speak. Unity demands diversity. We all have to do different things and listen.

This is precisely what was going on the city of Corinth: everyone was like mad trying to get the same gifts, the showy ones. Look in I Corinthians 12:29. Paul asks, "Is everyone supposed to be an apostle? Is everyone supposed to be a prophet? Is everyone supposed to be a teacher? Is everyone supposed to work miracles? Is everyone supposed to heal? Is everyone supposed to speak with languages? Is everyone supposed to interpret?"

What is the implied answer? "No, of course not!" But you will notice that those are all the showy ones: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, speaking in languages. And today I see the church doing the same thing all over again, the very thing that is being dealt with here.

Paul's point is clear: a body is one whole because it has all the necessary, functioning parts. We had better operate or the body is not going to properly present the picture of Jesus Christ. I don't know what your gifts are, but you ought to know how the Spirit of God uses you, and you ought to be able, somehow, to define your ministries and be useful to God.

Do you know what I see the church doing? A whole bunch of living, breathing members of an organism ministering, doing what they do. If you don't do what you do, you really jam up the works. Can you imagine a body in rebellion, where you say, "Go, hand," and the hand says, "I'm not going anywhere"? It happens in the church. So we have to train a foot to do what the hand does because there aren't enough hands to do the job. We compensate. One of the reasons that the church gets organized is to do what the organism won't do. You have to get organized in order to bypass the carnal people. That's unfortunate, because what really ought to be done is to deal with the carnality instead of organizing around it.

Diversity is not accidental. God isn't up in Heaven saying, "Let's see, I will throw a few gifts down there and see where they land." No, gifts are not accidental, it is the very essence of the body. The way the church works is when everybody is in the area of ministry they've been given, and we've been through those gifts in detail. If you weren't here for that study, you should really listen to those tapes to get an understanding of that. Whatever your gift, you need to just begin to minister.

I remember about six or seven years ago, it was the first time that I had ever said it and it kind of revolutionized our church. One day I said, "If you're waiting for this organization to give you a ministry, forget it. We are not going to give you one until you show us that you're a faithful minister. So you had better take your gift and take off, do something. Go out and minister."

One lady came up to me and said, "I have the gift of teaching, but I've checked and there are no openings in the primary department." And I said, "Are there any kids in your neighborhood that age?" "Oh, yes!" "Teach them." "You mean, just go right out and teach them?" "Go right out and teach them." Some people say to me, "I feel that I have the gift of teaching, but I don't have a class." I say, "Do you know somebody that knows less than you?" "Yes." "Then teach him."

I will never forget what happened. Little by little, people began to minister, and now we have a ministering staff in our church of somewhere around 22 and 25 people, and all of them have come out of the congregation. Every one! Why? People developed a ministry, God touched their lives, blessed their ministries, and they grew to a place where we wanted to support that ministry. That's the way it goes. And then the body is functioning. Then you are saying to people, "Be faithful at this level and God will be faithful to put you in the place of a strategic service." Minister; you are a living part of this body. This isn't for spectators.

You say, "Well, why do you get up there and talk at us?" All I am doing is giving you the input so you can minister. This is feeding time. I am trying to pour in some fuel that you can thrive on. We provide a kind of spiritual smorgasbord. We don't expect everyone to come and do everything.

We don't say, "If you don't come on Wednesday night, that's a vote against prayer." We don't say that. If you don't have a Bible study, "You're against the Bible." No. I have actually heard preachers say that. All we say is: "It's all here, and if you want to take advantage of it, we will try to feed you what you need to develop a ministry within the body of Christ, a ministry God can bless." A believer who doesn't have a ministry is a contradiction. You're denying God the right to use you in the way He has gifted and prepared you to be used. So diversity is no accident. There is unity, diversity, and third thing.

The third is sovereignty, and for this one I'm going to skip from verse 18 to 24 to 28, those three verses. We'll fill in the gaps next week. The third reality in his analogy is sovereignty. People, this is really potent. Verse 18. "But now hath God set the members, every one of them, in the body, as it hath pleased Him." Sovereignty. Here, Paul turns to the One who created the body.

By implication in this analogy you can prove once and for all that Paul was not an evolutionist. He believed God created the body as well as the church, by virtue of the statement in reference to the analogy. "But now hath God set the members." God designed every member. God did not put out a monotonous line of uniform Christians; He put out a group of people who were one and yet every single one was unique.

The word 'set' in verse 18 refers to the act of divine appointment. Just as God planned the physical body with all of its parts, so He planned the church. You have the gifts you have because you are

exactly what God wanted you to be, minus your sin. Exactly. Does that give you a sense of divine dignity? Instead of saying, "Well, why didn't I get this gift?" or, "Why don't I have this gift?" or, "I'm going to seek for this gift," or, "I'll tarry for that gift," why not just be content with what God has given you and get into your mind the sense of divine dignity that God has granted you? Unparalleled dignity is given to every part of the body.

"God has set the members." How many of them? Every one of them, "In the body as it pleased Him." When you are not content with your gift, you are rebelling and acting selfishly against the sovereign and supreme will of God. You are like the imaginary antagonist in Romans 9:20 saying to the potter, "...Why hast thou made me thus?" instead of saying, "God, I just want to thank You for making me like this so I can minister in a way that is necessary for the body."

The dignity in the body of Christ does not belong to the people with the showy gifts. The dignity in the body does not belong to the people who are up front. The dignity in the body belongs to every member, because every one of you is what he or she is by the very sovereign will of God; get hold of that. You are that spiritual snowflake; you are that marvelous one that God has made out of all the world of men to be what you are, and to be it in His body for His glory and the blessing of all the other saints.

I think sometimes we think that the only people who are important are the people up front. No. I think if the people up front really think, they know that the people who are important are the people behind the scenes creating the opportunity for the people up front to be there. You, with your gift, are God's masterpiece, "As it has pleased Him."

Beloved, notice this footnote, it says, "As it hath pleased Him." Please remember this: a Christian does not select his own gift. You don't have any part in it; God does it. Do you realize the chaos that would be created if everyone were running around, seeking their own gifts ? Do you think that you can organize the entire body of Christ? God had to do that! For me to question God, feel inferior, or to feel superior is ridiculous. There is a sense of dignity in every individual believer.

You have not only been created in Christ Jesus, but placed within you is a marvelous capacity to minister to the body of Christ and to God Himself. And you ought to get a grip on that lofty dignity. I think that it is terrible when some Christians are not content with what God has given them as a ministry and are proudly pursuing something showy.

There is never a single command in the Bible to seek a spiritual gift. Never. You say, "What about I Corinthians 14:39?" `Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy." Is brethren singular or plural? Plural; brethren, many of you, all of you. What is Paul saying? He is saying, "When you, as a church, come together and meet together, seek to see the gift of prophecy used. Don't forbid languages, because God may want to use that if there are some unbelieving Jews present. But seek to prophesy."

He is not saying to an individual, "Go seek the gift of prophecy." He is saying to the Corinthian assembly, "Brothers, when you come together collectively, seek that prophecy be exalted. Let's get some teaching going on in there." That verse is not an individual command to a Christian to seek the gift of prophecy. You cannot seek a gift. We'll talk about I Corinthians 12:31 next week, which is another you hear verse used along that line. I think you'll see something very interesting about that verse when we get into it.

So there is no place for discontent. There is no place for selfishness. There is no place for conceit. In Hebrews 2:4, you have the same word. It says, "God bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will." It's always that way; the gifts are always according to His own will. I Corinthians 12:11, "Dividing to every man severally as He will." Verse 18. "But now hath God set the members as it hath pleased Him." The gifts, beloved, are all up to the sovereign will of God. In Romans 12:3, he says, you have been given gifts, "According as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

God saved us. God placed us in the body with certain gifts. So Paul says to the Corinthians, "Quit chasing the showy ones." If you chase a gift that you don't have, will you get it? No. What will you get? A counterfeit. Believe me, you'll just get a counterfeit. We see a lot of that today. There is a next step, and I love it. Verse 24. This is just a very beautiful thought. We'll skip the first line, because we'll get into this verse next time in detail, but look at the second line.

"But God hath tempered the body together." Just that much. The word 'tempered' in the Greek means 'mixed together.' It is a term used for mixing colors, an artistic term. Mixing colors, a beautiful thought. It is harmonious blending. God not only chooses the gifts for you, but He mixes you in with the right people, so that the right combination will work in the right location. Isn't that fantastic?

You say, "Why am I at Grace Church?" God mixed you in here for ministry. Imagine it this way: in a previous illustration we had an artist's palette that contained the primary colors. Those primary colors represented the gifts of the Spirit, the permanent, edifying gifts of the Spirit, such as giving, mercy, teaching, prophesying, and so on. We said that when the Spirit of God goes to make up your gift, He takes a little bit from these, in different combinations, and mixes up a color that is yours and yours alone. When He gets your color together, that's just you. You are a combination of many gifts, or areas of giftedness.

This analogy goes a step further right here. Once the Spirit has made you the color He wants you to be, then He transfers you over to the canvas of the church exactly in the spot He wants you to be right next to the other colors that ought to be what they ought to be. So, when all is said and done, everybody is in the right spot. When the picture is finished, it is a picture of Christ. You are not only the right color, but you are the right color in the right place. Isn't that a beautiful concept? God not

only gifts you, but He mixes you into the body in just the right place.

Can you imagine some color saying, "I'm going to fade. I'm going to run, take that. I'm going to drip all over the guy next to me," or, "I refuse to be a color"? You know what happens when the portrait is held up before the world, what do they see? It is hard to tell. I'm not sure they really know.

You need to think of it like that. You are a combination of the primary colors designed to be a gifted individual like no other. God wants to put you right on the canvas. You are strategic because if you're not there, part of the portrait is gone. If parts of the portrait are missing from different places, the world looks at the canvas that is the church and cannot really see very well what it is that they are trying to say. It is sad, selfish, and inconsistent when we rebel and the portrait of Christ is lost. So the choosing and mixing of the gifts is God's work.

Verse 28, the third verse related to this thought of sovereignty, says this. "And God has set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers." Again, you have the same term that was in 18, "God hath set," divine appointment. In addition to the gifts, and in addition to the blending of the gifts, He brings gifted men who lead the church, who direct.

When I studied the lives of da Vinci and Michelangelo, and some other artists, I used to read some writings about them. Did you know that many of them had artists who would work for them? They would do the basic thing, and then the other artists would fill in and touch up any gaps under the direction of the artist. The Holy Spirit is the artist, and He puts us on the canvas in the right place, but He also has some helpers who come in, and that's the gifted men. God has given to the church, according to Ephesians 4:11, apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teaching shepherds. Their job is to perfect the saints, to make those colors as vivid, as bright, and as beautiful as they can so that the portrait of Christ is clear. Again, that is God's calling. God chooses the men and women to have the responsibility in different areas of leadership.

When the Lord Jesus came to earth, the first thing He did was to choose out twelve men. When one of them defected, and through the selection process in Acts 1:24-26, He chose Matthias. Later on, He chose Paul. And Paul even says he had nothing to do with it: "I was going to Damascus. The next thing I knew, I was in the ministry." When God wanted two missionaries to go to the Gentile world, the Holy Spirit stopped off in Antioch and said, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them to do."

So it is that God's sovereignty chooses the leadership. God's sovereignty selects those who shall be the gifted men to assist the Holy Spirit in making the portrait all that it should be. Beloved, we have to recognize that we are in a body and that the body is one. We are a part of that oneness. We must sense that. We have the life of the Spirit in us just like everyone else, and he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit, we are all in it together.

Yet there is diversity, and every one of us is unique and exactly as God made us to be. There is a tremendous dignity in that. You are not an accident. You were planned before the foundation of the world to be you. And you are to use what you are, and to realize that this is God's plan. Not to chase something you don't have, not to be something you can't be, but to say, "God, if this is what I am, I sense that You wanted it so. I sense the dignity in that, and I will minister for You."

We should never have movements after certain things. But when we have them, they always go to the showy things. Have you ever heard of a giving movement, where everyone is seeking the gift of giving? Or have you ever heard of a helps movement? In the history of the church, there has never been a helps movement. Has there ever been a showing mercy movement? No. What you have is always a tongues or healing movement. All it does is create chaos, because God has put it together in the way He wants. And when God says it, that's the way it ought to be.

There was a baseball umpire in the major leagues by the name of Bill Clem. He was an interesting guy, and one day, he was umpiring an important game. There was a guy on third base, and the batter hit a deep fly to left field. The left fielder went way back, caught the ball, he had a shotgun arm and rifled the ball home as the runner on third broke for the plate. It was a perfect throw on one hop to the catcher.

The ball, the catcher, and the runner all hit the plate at the same time as dust flew everywhere. The umpire hesitated in his decision until the dust cleared. One bench screamed, "He's out! He's out!" The other bench screamed, "Safe! He's safe!" Bill Clem turned around and looked at both benches and said, "He ain't nothin' til I call it!" You want to know something? God looks at us and says, "You ain't nothin' til I call it." But when He has called it, then you are something. And the something that you are is the something He wanted you to be, and it is desperately needed by the rest of us. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for our time this morning in Your Word, and how rich it is. Thank You for the good fellowship in the body. I thank You for the area in which You've gifted me and all those beloved ones here. Thank You that all of us are so dependent on each other, that we couldn't do it alone. Give us a sense of that dignity that comes from knowing that we are made of You, and You have called it, and we are something. That something needs to be used for Your glory.

Lord, if there are some people here who have never come to Jesus Christ and don't know what it is to have a sense of being called of God, of being connected to the divine purpose of the ages, who don't understand what it is to have forgiveness of sin, to have eternal life, to have, pulsing in them, the life of God, I pray that this morning, somehow, You would draw them to Jesus Christ. For the rest of us, Father, let us be committed to the truths of the Word that we've heard this morning. May we know that Your church is our church, and that You've got to be the biggest gambler that ever was for

banking on us. Let us fulfill it and make the portrait of Christ clear. Help us to be faithful, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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