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

One Body, Many Gifts, Part 2
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:15-31
Code: 1861

We are looking at the thought of one body, many gifts; I Corinthians 12:12-31. I suppose that you have seen the television commercial with the rugged, bearded, strong, he-man type who runs around the woods with a big bear, have you seen that? I think it's Hamm's beer that does it. This guy is great big, with a beard, and he has a fuzzy bear that runs everywhere with him and paddles the canoe and all. There is a method in a commercial like that. It has a tremendous appeal to people because most people, generally, really admire rugged individualism. Here is a guy who has tamed a bear, who runs around the boondocks all by himself, and who doesn't need anything but a periodic deliveryman who drops off six-packs. Apart from that, he needs nothing.

When you look at the billboards of the Marlboro ad, it's the Marlboro man. One man, all alone on a horse, out in the middle of nowhere - it's rugged individualism. We honor people who go across the Atlantic in a dinghy, or who make amazing solo flights, or who climb Mount Everest. We have this mentality that says rugged individualism is the stuff that separates the men from the boys. The scientist who walks out of his laboratory after ten years and says, "Eureka!" and receives a prize for what he has discovered. There is something that appeals to us; there is something about the fact of doing something all alone, all by yourself, with nobody else, that says, "I have conquered everything. I don't need anyone else. I'm independent; I'm self-sufficient." That appeals to us. Do you know why that appeals to us? We are depraved.

You say, "What do you mean?" God wants us to have a tremendous sense of dependency. God wants us to be a family. Do you remember when Cain had slain his brother Abel, God said to him, "Where is Abel, thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?" Ever since the Fall, man has disdained the thought of responsibility for other people. Man has definitely wanted to be independent of any responsibility. That is one of the reasons that God, in the Old Testament, made an individual who sinned carry a weight of responsibility that hit a whole family, such as in the case of Achan, because God was getting a message across, and that message was, "Yes, you are your brother's keeper. Yes, you are dependent on other people. No, I don't want rugged individualism."

I believe that Satan, in response, has built into the heart of man this concept of independence, this concept of needing nothing and nobody, as being the epitome of life. When the fact of the matter is that this is the very opposite of what God wants. The philosophy of today is, "Do your own thing." The music of today is, "I did it my way." All of this echoes the same philosophy that is echoed by the

man with the bear and the beer. You don't need anyone or anything; you are sufficient. It is Invictus, "I am the captain of my fate and the master of my soul."

I think this attitude pervades our society to the degree that it even gets its way into the church. We tend to translate it a little bit into our theology. We think that we, because we have Christ, are sufficient and we, because we have the Holy Spirit, are sufficient, and we really don't need anyone else. We have missed the point altogether. Since we don't live communally, as they did in the Old Testament when they lived in tribes, or as they did in the New Testament when they lived in the father's house, and since our independence, we have continuously fostered that same attitude, even as Christians. So, in the backlash of all of this, the church today struggles to try and regain the concept that the church is one body with many members. And that we have a tremendous responsibility for dependency on each other.

I was at Dallas Theological Seminary this week, speaking every day to the student body and the faculty. I was thrilled to be there; I thank God for that institution. They have over 1,000 young men training for the ministry and 54 on the faculty. I had to stand there and speak to all these people who are training for the ministry and checking me out. Sitting around me on the platform were 54 faculty members with their Greek texts open, finding out whether I had gotten the right jots and tittles and everything. I figured, "If I can just get in and out of here with my hide, I'll be alright," you know.

The first thing I said when I was there was to let them know that I had never been to the seminary in my life, I had never really met the faculty, and that I only knew a handful of the students. But I wanted them to know that my life and ministry would be eternally indebted to them. I said that the reason is because of the writing contribution of the faculty, and because I have studied under some who have studied under them. I pointed out the fact that all of us are so tremendously dependent upon others. Anyone who would think themselves to be independent, or a rugged individualist, is not really looking at the facts. Beyond the input we've already received, we have the same responsibility to minister back. So I told them, "In view of all that has been given to me from here, this week I hope I can give something back and mutually minister to you." That has to be, I think, the general attitude for the whole Christian life.

I suppose that there will be some people who will say, "Look at Jesus. He was a rugged individualist." Was He? Do you realize that Jesus spent the first 30 years of His life living with His family? I don't think He ever even left and got His own apartment. I think the first 30 years of His life were spent in the family; He lived with the family. The next three years of His life and ministry He spent with twelve men.

You say, "But Paul was a rugged individualist." No, I don't think Paul ever went anywhere without somebody. I don't like to go anywhere without somebody. I like to have someone to lean on, someone to minister to me, and someone to whom I can minister, pray with, share with, and labor

with. Paul was that way. If you read the end of the book of Romans, Paul lists the names of the many people who helped him, who accompanied him, whom he loved, and who ministered to him, with him, and for him. Then in Colossians 4:7-17, there is a list of the names of people who ministered and cared and served and traveled with him and did all kinds of things. In II Timothy 4:9-21, there are more names. In the book of Acts, Paul starts out with Barnabas, then John Mark, then Silas, then Timothy, and then Luke. He's always got somebody. Someone was always sharing in the ministry with him, someone to whom he could minister, someone to whom he could pour out his heart, and someone for whom he could be a source of strength.

There is no place in God's plan or in biblical theology for rugged individualism. There is no reason to think that you are isolated. You are your brother's keeper. The New Testament is loaded with things that say you are your brother's keeper. There is no question about it. But, sadly, there are many Christians today who just don't get into the mainstream of this ministry. There are usually two problems. There are some Christians who feel inferior and unnecessary, so they sit on the fringe and don't ever become involved. Many of them, I'm sure, come to Grace Community Church. But God loves them, and so do their brothers and sisters in Christ. But they think they don't matter much, so they are just content to hang on the fringe and never get involved. But they short-circuit the ministry of the Spirit of God through their life to somebody desperately in need of it.

Then there are, on the other side, people who say, "Well, I am a spiritual celebrity and a modified spiritual superstar. I don't need all these people, I can go on my own." We all fight that kind of attitude. Sometimes, after I have preached a message, someone will come up to me and say, "You really blew it on that one." My first reaction is, "Who needs you, fella? I can handle it." Or else, I will come into my office on Monday and say to someone, "Great day yesterday. I really feel God blessed." Then I open my mail and someone writes, "You so-and-so." I think to myself, "Who needs it? I know what I'm doing. I don't need your criticism." But that's my first response. Then, after thinking about it, I say, "Well, Lord, they are probably right." And I begin to realize that God puts all of these people around me to minister to me, and to keep things in perspective. That is the way it has to be.

You have to realize that there is no place for the individualism of isolation or the individualism of a superstar kind of attitude, where you just don't bother to mingle with the peons. Both of those are wrong. There is a tremendous sense of interdependence in the body of Christ that defies the spirit of pride and the attitude of inferiority.

This is Paul's major message in I Corinthians 12. Let's look at it together. That's really what he's trying to say here, and he uses the familiar metaphor of a human body, then makes an application, and then a final appeal. So, these are the three points we want to look at: the analogy, the application, and the appeal. These three things will draw to a great truth, I think, this idea of interdependence and mutuality within the body of Christ.

In the last lesson we looked at Paul's analogy, that is, a body. An analogy is simply another way of saying something. He wants to state a spiritual truth but he says it in another way by using a human figure, or an illustration. His illustration is a human body. He develops the analogy along four lines. He says a human body illustrates unity, a human body illustrates diversity, a human body illustrates sovereignty, and a human body illustrates harmony. These four things sum up what a human body is and this illustrates what the church ought to be.

Remember unity in verses 12-13. He pointed out that the body is one, we've all received the same Spirit, we've all been placed in the same body, there is a beautiful unity, there aren't any higher or lower, greats and non-greats. There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. We all have the same Spirit; we're all in the same body. We've all been placed by the same Spirit. So, basically, Christians are one. There are not any upper- and lower-class Christians. There are not any highbrow and lowbrow Christians. There are no social strata involved. There is a beautiful unity. The body is one; we all have flowing through us the life of God, we all possess aionioszoe, eternal life. So we are one. There is a beautiful unity in the body of Christ, and a human body is the same way. There is a tremendous unity, a common life principle flowing through every cell in the human body.

Secondly, he says in his analogy, the body must have diversity, in verse 14. He says, "The body is not one member, but many." Here we see that is true about a body; it is one body and yet there are many members: eyes, ears, a mouth, arms, hands, feet, organs, and all the functions of the body are many, and yet the body is one. So this is his illustration. A body has unity and it has diversity. It must maintain its diversity in order to experience its unity.

Thirdly, we saw last time that a body has sovereignty. You see that, don't you, when your children are born? You talk with your wife or your husband and you say, "I wonder what our baby will look like." They now have X-rays where they are supposed to be able to determine many things, but basically, it's pretty fuzzy. I saw one of those a few days ago. I really couldn't tell a whole lot. I could see there was a fetus there, but I certainly couldn't tell anything else.

There are a lot of ways to test it, but you don't know what your baby is going to be like until all of a sudden the life is there, and then you have to say it is a sovereign design. God put the child together. If it is a perfectly whole baby with ears that stick out a little, with red hair, and a certain kind of nose, God made the baby in that way. There are genetic factors involved, but the child is still a creation of God, independent of any effort on your part. A body is designed by God. If the child is born with an infirmity, or a malformation, or is malfunctioning, again that has to be assigned to the sovereign allowance of God, something beyond your ability to control.

The same thing is true of the body of the church. The origination of the various members, their design, the way in which they are gifted, and the way they are placed into the body, is all dependent

upon God.

Didn't we see that in verse 18? God has set the members. Verse 24, God has mixed them together. Verse 28, God has placed the leaders over them. So you have, then, unity, diversity, and sovereignty planned by God to make the body function. God has given us a sense of real dignity in this study, because we now understand that we are exactly what God made us to be, and that is exciting. He planned it all, He put it all together. Now, where those three things function, there will be a fourth, and that's harmony. But there will never be harmony until the other three are functioning.

In the case of the Corinthians, they really didn't experience unity, did they? Paul said to them in verses 12-13 that they ought to have unity because there was no such thing as either Jew or Greek or bond or free. They were all one. But they weren't acting that way.

In I Corinthians 1:10, he begs them right off the bat, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." In other words, "Get it together." According to verses 11-12, there were contentions, there were arguments over certain spiritual teachers.

In chapter 3, he repeats the same thing, saying that they were carnal because there was envy and strife. One was saying that he was of Paul, another of Apollos, they were carnal. In chapter 4, they were glorying as if they possessed something they had earned. They had spiritual pride. In chapter 6, they were suing each other in acts of antagonism, bitterness, resentment, and revenge. In chapter 8, they were using their liberty to defraud each other. They were stepping on the neck of the weaker brother in their pride and independence. In chapter 11, they came to the love feast to share their meal, and they ate their own food, so that when the poor came, there wasn't anything left for them to eat. There's selfishness again. So you can see there was anything but unity.

We come to chapter 12, and the implication here is that instead of ministering their gifts, the proud people were saying, "We are the only ones that matter." The humble people were saying, "We don't matter; we don't have the right gifts." So they were trying to seek for the ecstatic gifts and wound up with a pagan counterfeit. They had just destroyed the whole concept of unity.

Secondly, they didn't function in diversity. Here they are, in chapter 12, all trying to do the same thing. All trying to obtain the same ecstatic and showy gift instead of recognizing that God had ordered them to be independent, to be individual in the sense of their uniqueness. They were all trying to be the same, get the same ecstasy gift, get the same showy gift. Everybody was trying to be a spiritual hotshot.

Thirdly, they were denying sovereignty. Instead of accepting what God had given, they were discontent with what He had given and were seeking other gifts, manifestations, and experiences. So, they had violated all three; consequently, number four, harmony did not exist. Having straightened them out about unity in verses 12- 13, diversity in verse 14, and sovereignty in verses 18, 24, and 28, look at verse 15 and let's hear what he says about harmony.

Here's how he dives into this concept of harmony. He does it by showing the foolishness of anything other than harmony. He takes it from two angles: first, the people who thought they were nothing and envied the ones who had the showy gifts; and secondly, the people with the showy gifts who thought they were something and thought the other people were nothing. Let's look first of all at the people who feel themselves to be nothing, the gripers, the envious, the ones who felt cheated.

Verse 15; these are the foot people. "If the foot shall say, 'Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body'; is it, therefore, not of the body?" Does that make it true? Here's a foot, and the foot is not particularly beautiful or lovely. The foot is something that, if you are smart, you cover up. Especially if you happened to live in that day and age when the feet were what you walked with, and they were usually exposed. The foot was considered a rather ugly thing. So one might say, "I am just that out-of-the-way thing, usually covered by dirt and not seen. When I am seen, it's nothing worth seeing. Since I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body."

Now, what is this saying? What is the principle? The principle is this: no member, by complaining and depreciating his own importance, can accomplish removal from the body. Just because you think that you are not important, it does not eliminate your responsibility to function in the way that God called you. You cannot sit in a corner and say, "Since I am a foot, and I don't have what some others have, I am not going to do anything or be a part at all." That does not make you not a part, that only makes you disobedient. The principle is, you cannot remove yourself from a God-given responsibility simply because you are not happy with what you are. The foot felt clumsy and wanted to remove itself. But that isn't the way it is. God made you a foot, if that is what you are, because it is vital, critical.

I got a prayer request this morning to pray for a the little Johnson boy. He's four years old, and is going to have major surgery to try and correct his feet. They've asked us to pray for him because he needs to have his feet made functional, because the rest of him is so very dependent on those little feet. That's a vital thing, and to say that you don't want to be responsible for what you are doesn't relieve you of any responsibility; it only makes you disobedient.

Don't be intimidated. That is one of the things that we've seen in our study of Colossians, how the Charismatic movement intimidates a lot of feet. It says, "Because you aren't out there on display, doing the ecstatic and showy thing, you're not significant." That is exactly what was going on at Corinth. There were a lot of feet sitting in the background saying, "I wish I was an ear, or an eye,

even a hand wouldn't be half bad. At least it's a little ways up the ladder." Look in verse 16, and you can see how it's only relative anyway. The foot is saying, "Oh, if I could only be an ear." Verse 16, "And if the ear shall say, 'Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body'; is it, therefore, not of the body?"

A little higher, and it is still relative. Some ear is saying, "I wish I could be an eye. But since I'm only an ear, I'm cutting out. I'm going to lay back. If I can't be an eye, I'm out of it. They don't need me." Does that remove you from responsibility? When a foot is jealous of a hand, does that remove the responsibility of the foot to be what it is? When the ear is jealous of the eye, does that eliminate its responsibility? Not in God's eyes, it doesn't.

Whatever your gift is, it is essential, it is needed, and God wants it. It has to be there and it has to operate. There is no sense sitting in a corner, on the fringes, saying, "Well, I don't have that much to offer anyway; there's no sense in me getting involved." But so many Christians do that. Some of you do it. Some of you have been doing it for years. You have never known the joy of ministry because you just thought nobody wanted feet or ears. But that isn't so.

Look at verse 17. "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" It would not make a lot of sense, would it? If everybody had the same gift, it would be ridiculous. Yet isn't it amazing that people today keep telling us that we all need to get the same gifts? It's not true. There is no place for envying another gift. I Corinthians 13:4 says, "Love envies not." There just isn't any place for that, but for contentedness.

You cannot have one organ. The body cannot be an eye, or an ear, or a nose. One organ, no matter how prominent it is, cannot survive alone. You can't cut off your ear, set it down, and say, "I have to leave. Would you hang around and listen? Maybe you can pick up some information while I'm gone." It doesn't do that. You can't pluck out your eye and have it look around for you while you are sleeping. There is no such thing as a spiritual loner.

There is a tremendous sense of dependence in the body of Christ. In Grace Community Church, there are a number of people behind the scenes who make it possible for me to speak to you. All the people who type up things for me, all the people who give me input, and all the people who turn machines on and off, and plug things in, they make it all possible; they squirt off the patio and clean the parking lot. You didn't know we clean the parking lot? We do. There are a lot of other things that go on behind the scenes that you never even know about that make it all possible. Do you know how many people who take upon themselves responsibilities, that normally would be mine, in order to free me to prepare so that I can minister to you? Without those people, I would not be able to say what I say to you, and you would not be able to receive what I say and grow. As a result, the whole idea of ministry would be reduced. It's vital. You can't start putting price tags on gifts.

So, Paul says that all members cannot be the same. Verse 18. That's why God set the members the way it pleased Him; He didn't leave the body for us to figure out. He didn't say, "Get organized!" He said, "Be an organism and I will run it." Verse 19 says, "If they were all one member, where were the body?" If everyone were the same, we would not have a body. But the Corinthians were saying, "We all have to chase after tongues. We all have to speak in prophecies. We all have to experience ecstasies." They were all going like mad after the same gifts. So Paul says, "All that you are going to end up with is one great big eye."

That isn't how it is. So he sums up his main point in verse 20. "Now are they many members, yet but one body." That's his point. From verses 15-20, his point is, "Don't think yourself inferior. Do not underestimate your importance." In verses 21-25, he says, "Don't think yourself superior. Do not overestimate your importance."

Look at verse 21. We've gone from the foot, to the hand, to the ear, to the eye; now we are moving from the eye, to the ear, to the hand, to the foot. We are going backwards from the other side. "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, 'I have no need of thee;' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" Now we're going back down the line from the viewpoint of superiority.

This was what was going on in the Corinthian assembly; they were overestimating their importance. The people who were doing the fancy, showy, public speaking gifts were assuming that they did not need the other people, that those people were nothing. They were the superstars, they were the celebrities, they were the superiors, they were the leaders, they were the hotshots. The rest of the people could just disintegrate into nothingness and oblivion and it would have had no effect. That isn't right. Verse 21. You can't say, "I have no need of you." There is a tremendous sense of dependence.

Now he's going to expand this thought, and he's going to say some most fascinating things. Verse 22. "No, much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are necessary." Eyes and ears and hands and feet are nice, but you know something shocking? You can live without eyes, ears, hands, and feet. Even the ones that are showy, external, and strong, you can live without them. But there are weak members that you can't live without; they are more vital.

Notice verse 22. Paul talks about the members of the body that are "more feeble." That means that they are weaker. Now, in this metaphor, we are moving deeper into the body. Since verse 21 is dealing with hands and feet and eyes and ears (the outward), this part of the metaphor takes us deeper into the less showy, the less obvious, the less out-front, the less comely, the less prominent ones. They are more feeble, but they are necessary.

What are these? They are the internal organs of the body: the lungs, the stomach, the liver, the kidneys, and all the other organs. That's what he has in mind. These internal organs, completely hidden from view, are vital and essential to sustaining life. They are weaker in this sense. The only protection afforded them is from the other parts of the body.

I was watching the football game yesterday between Texas and Oklahoma. I was noticing what you always notice when you see football players: the tremendous padding that they wear. I remember the days when I used to put all that on, but it isn't just a question of padding. They work out with weights, weights, and more weights. They exercise too. Why? So that their physical bodies on the outside are strong, and the muscle is tense and tight. So that, when they are hit with blow after blow after blow, it doesn't mess them up on the inside. They strengthen the outward members to protect the weaker members, which have no protection other than that which is afforded on the outside.

Paul is saying, "There are some members who are so feeble that they are totally dependent on the protection of some of the other members. They are not intended to be out front." You wouldn't live very long if you went around with your lungs hanging outside. They would not be able to handle the environment.

When I think about that, I think about the support ministries, particularly the secretaries at Grace Community Church. This church is a very intense place during the week. We have four or five crises a day. There are crises and deadlines all the time. I believe that the secretaries who work here, for the most part, would never be able to maintain a sense of mental balance if they didn't have some of us to protect them from the onslaught. Sometimes the frustrations mount, and since they are the gentler members of the body, they need the protection of someone else. They will function smoothly and effectively as long as that protection is there. But if the staff walked away and left all of the onslaught to hit them, it would be a little difficult. They are the members who are necessary and vital. You don't even know who they are, and you may not ever see them, but believe me, we're all here because they are there.

Let me go a step further. Verse 23. He's getting in even deeper in his analogy. "And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness." That's a very interesting verse; watch what happens here.

The Corinthians had failed to be kind, considerate, and protective of those who did not have the gift of prophecy, or the gift of languages, or the gift of healing, the out-front gifts. They had failed to be kind, to be considerate, to protect the weaker ones, according to verse 22. So, in verse 23 Paul says, "Don't you realize that even a human body compensates for its less comely members?"

Now what does Paul mean by the two terms 'less honorable' and 'uncomely'? Uncomely means ugly, that's about the best definition of it. Now, it doesn't mean horrible-looking, ugly things, it just means 'the less beautiful parts.' What do the less honorable and less beautiful parts refer to? Two different things.

Most commentators assume this to be the middle part of your body - your trunk, hips, shoulders, thighs - the part you put your clothes on. You basically do that because your face is alright. It is nice to look at and enjoy, people can look at it. And your hands are fine to look at, and so are your feet. But you cover up certain parts of your body because it's not so alright. They need a little help. So it is just a normal, human response, to fix up the parts that need it. You adapt and do what you need to do.

Every once in a while, I'll look at a magazine on an airplane. Some magazine articles will tell you, depending on your build, what kind of clothes to wear. If you are a little wide in a particular place, don't wear the squares, wear the stripes. That is the way people compensate to cover the less honorable parts, and you wind up bestowing more honor on them. You might throw down your charge card and buy $75 dollars worth of abundant honor to drape over your less honorable parts. I do it too; that's just how it is. That is compensation. That's what he's saying. What is the principle? The less the natural grace and appeal, the greater the effort to adorn it. Sure. But now, let's go a step further.

We have discussed the external, which doesn't need much adornment; then we discussed the more feeble parts - the internal organs which are protected by the strength of the others; and then we discussed the parts of your body that you need to put a little honor on. Now he goes a step further.

"And our uncomely." The Greek word for 'uncomely' means 'indecent.' In other words, our indecent parts have more abundant comeliness. He says that it is a normal human reaction to cover the private or indecent parts of the human body, not just for the sake of adornment, but for the sake of modesty with even a greater amount of effort. To show you how far away we have gone from what is normally human, just look at our society today, when those parts of the human body which mankind has long known to be private, and which ought to be covered with honor so that they can be held in modesty, are now exploited. That just shows how far our depravity has gone.

The point is this: the behind-the-scenes part of the body gets the special effort and attention and devotion. Paul is saying, "It is not the place for the highbrow parts of the body to say, 'I don't need you.' That part of the body ought to say, 'I know that I am the only protection you have. I want to care for you and bestow more honor on you. And the more you need that honor, the more I want to give you that honor.' Instead of running around with the attitude of spiritual, rugged individualism, we really should be busy making sure that we stop to honor the people who don't normally receive the honor." That's what he's saying. That is the kind of love that Paul talks about in I Corinthians 13. It

isn't running around with a sense of spiritual independence, but constantly acknowledging your gratitude for those parts of the church of Jesus Christ that maybe don't receive all the glamor and appeal and press. But they are there, and they are vital. They need us to love them, protect them, and honor them.

So it goes both ways. God doesn't want you people who are those parts sitting in the corner thinking they are nothing, and He doesn't want the other people thinking they are everything, but rather passing the honor around where it belongs. Dr. Robert Thomas says, "It is a distorted sense of values when a Christian, well known because of his well received speaking gift, looks disparagingly at other Christians who possess no such gift. This is direct contradiction of the principle of self-concern that characterizes any body. It is far more consistent with the principle of self-preservation that members possessing greater beauty and functional ability devote themselves tirelessly to the well-being of those not so well equipped."

That is a beautiful statement, and that is essentially what Paul is saying. Instead of thinking ourselves sufficient and independent, it is up to us to come down and minister to you, and for you to respond to that ministry by ministering to us in return. And it is for us to say, "We want to help you where you are weak and to strengthen you where you need to be strong." That is the kind of thing Paul wants. Believe me, we ought to recognize the necessity of this because God sees a beautiful equality in the body.

Verse 24. "For our comely parts have no need." The out-front part, we don't mess with. "But God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked."

You may be a beautiful eye, ear, hand, or foot, but you could be cut off and the rest of the body would still make it. But if you happen to be one of the vital organs, we can't mess with you because you are too important. This is how God equalizes things. The people out front with the showy gifts, in the long run, when the judgment is in and the rewards are given, aren't nearly as vital as the people underneath with the support ministries.

I think one of the most exciting events of the ages, and I'm convinced one of the most shocking experiences we will ever have is the bema seat, when we go there and see who gets the rewards. I think most of us will be shocked, if there is such a thing as shock there. Jesus said, "For he that is least among you all, the same shall be great and the one who is the servant of all will be the one who receives the greatest honor."

There are some of us who are eyes and ears and mouths and noses; we are the comely parts, doing our thing, but God equalizes it because the less conspicuous members are the more essential to life. Nobody ever sees anyone else's internal organs, so we usually think of people in terms of outward beauty, but that isn't what makes them what they are. The same thing is true in the church. God

wants all the honor equalized. So verse 25 will be a reality.

"That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." God wants us all equalized. God wants this beautiful unity. He has made these truths of compensation in order that there might be a real unity.

When your body suffers, you don't say, "Well, this half of me is suffering but this half feels terrific." If any part of you suffers, you're all in it. And if any part of you is happy, your whole being is rejoicing. If we are truly sharing, that is the way it will be in the body of Christ.

So Paul says, "Don't feel inferior! You are vital; God will balance. You are necessary, you are important, you are to be rewarded for faithfulness. And don't feel superior! You may be the out-front, good-looking part, and that's good, that's your part for now, that's your ministry for now, and there are certain blessings attendant with that, but you cannot disdain the other parts, because they are the more necessary to life." So rivalry is impossible in the body of Christ. The only thing that is possible is love, and that becomes Paul's theme in the next chapter.

That's the analogy, now let's look at the application. We'll just briefly comment on it, because it's so obvious. Verse 27. Having given that analogy, he makes application. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." I've been talking about you the whole time. You're that body; you're those members. You're the issue here.

A footnote of interest. It is interesting that Paul calls one local congregation "the body of Christ." What is he saying? Is Paul saying, "You are the whole body of Christ, and everyone else is outside of the body?" Or is he saying, "You are one body of Christ, and there is another body in this town, and another body in that town?" No, there is only one body. Paul is saying, "You are a proper, miniature representation of the body of Christ." You know what's so exciting about that? He is saying to them, "You, as a local assembly, you can manifest the fullness of the body of Christ locally." That is so encouraging to me.

In the first chapter of I Corinthians, Paul said, "You come behind in no gift." Isn't it thrilling to know that each local assembly of believers is given, by the Spirit of God, all that is necessary to truly represent the body of Christ so that His image may be seen in the world? We don't need to say, "We are half of the body over here and the other half is down in San Diego. If we could just get together, we could get the whole thing rolling." But God manifests the total picture in individual congregations, and supplies each one with all they need.

So, Paul says, "You are the body, and you are the members I'm talking to. Yours is the unity that is the issue here. God has made you one, and He has poured you together in an act of diversity. You

are what you ought to be and God has sovereignly done it."

Verse 28. "And God hath set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of languages. You're exactly the ones I'm talking about. It's your unity I'm speaking of. It's your diversity I'm speaking of. I want you to recognize God's sovereignty." Look at verse 29. "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with languages? Do all interpret?"

Now, what is the answer to every question? No. Paul says in verse 27, "Remember your unity. You are the body I am talking about." In verse 28, "Remember your diversity. You are the ones with all of these gifts." In verses 29-30, he says, "Remember God's sovereignty. He doesn't want you all to be apostles, or prophets, or teachers, or miracle workers, or healers, or all of you to speak in languages or interpreting."

Paul confronts them at the same three points: unity, diversity, and sovereignty. "Why are all of you trying to be noses and ears and eyes? Why do you all want to be apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, tongues speakers, healers, and all the showy stuff? Don't you know God has called some of you to be teachers and helpers and workers in the area of government or administration? It is all sovereign. You have nothing to seek for; you have nothing to be envious of; and you have nothing to be proud about and so to disdain the others. Let there be harmony." The sovereignty of God. Where the should be unity, diversity, and sovereignty, and as a result, harmony. So Paul applies the analogy.

Last, he makes a final appeal. Verse 31. This is a verse misunderstood by many. Let me read you the traditional King James. "But covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto you a more excellent way." When you read that verse you want to say, "Hold it right now. You have to be kidding. You mean that Paul just spent all of those verses saying to be content with the gift you have, and now he turns right around and says to covet earnestly the better gifts?" Literally, 'the showy gifts.' This verse is used by people from the Pentecostal tradition to prove that we ought to seek the gift of tongues and other gifts because this verse says to covet earnestly the best gifts. They say that it is a command.

When I look at that verse, I say, "It cannot be." Paul would not spend all this time in verses 1-30 saying, "Be content with what you have. Don't seek another gift. It has all been accomplished by God's sovereign plan. Just take the gift you have and use it. Don't feel inferior. Don't feel superior," and then say, "Go covet the showy gifts." Oh no. What is Paul saying? Let me read it to you in two parts as simply as I can.

The second part reads this way. "And yet show I unto you a more excellent way." What was the way they were doing it? No unity, no sense of diversity (everybody was seeking the same gift), no sense of sovereignty, they were not willing to accept God's plan. So Paul says, "I'm showing you a more excellent way: unity, diversity, sovereignty, harmony. I'm trying to show you a more excellent way, and I'm not done yet. I'm going to show you that the cap on this whole thing is that it all functions in love. This is the more excellent way."

You say, "But what about that first statement?" In the Greek, there is an indicative, which is a statement of fact, and an imperative, which is a command. The form they take in the Greek is the very same; there is no difference. So, in the Greek, this verse is either a command or a statement; there is no difference in the form. It either says, "Covet earnestly the best gifts," or it says, "But you are coveting the showy gifts." Now which of these do you think fits the context? There is no question. "But you are coveting the best gifts and yet I show you a more excellent way." The Greek verb zeloonormally has a bad connotation, and that's the word 'to covet.' So, the indicative sense is the normal sense of the Greek in this passage and fits the context, and it should be translated this way: "But you are coveting the showy gifts, and yet I am showing you a more excellent way."

Do you see the point? Paul is not saying to chase after spiritual gifts; he is saying, "You are chasing after spiritual gifts, and that is what is wrong with you. Stop doing it, and do the excellent thing. Accept the unity, diversity, sovereignty, and harmony that God has already planned, presented, and built into the body." And the way it all operates, the key to every bit of it is love. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, for our time this morning. Thank You for ministering to us in Your Word. We pray that these truths might find root in our hearts and spring up to faithful ministry and bear fruit. We will give You the praise. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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