

Unity Through Diversity

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

June 7, 2015

Well, we've been going through this series emphasizing membership and involvement in the local church, and we've extended the series just a bit because we want to make sure that we get a good grasp of what God is saying to us through his Word on this very important and extremely practical subject. Just by way of review, I want to get a running start at this just to remind you where we've been. We began this series talking about the church's fundamental role as a guardian of the truth. In fact, on the earth the church is *the* guardian of the truth. We see that God has planted his Gospel of truth in people. He's put his treasure in clay pots, as it were, that the glory and the beauty may be seen in the treasure itself and not in the pot. So he's put his treasure in us, in people, and he's organized people into the local church. So as, as we in the local church, as we live out our lives of redemption, we live out redeemed lives before a watching world, we put the Gospel on display. We



proclaim that Gospel by making disciples. No matter what time in history, no matter what location, local churches engage in evangelism and edification.

So the local church is there to preach the Gospel, first of all to unbelievers outside the church, and then once those people are converted by the Spirit, the local church brings them inside the church and teaches them the implications of that Gospel. So that brings, obviously, when you preach the Gospel to a, a world that rejects Christ, a world that hates the truth, a world that's committed to its sin, that is going to bring opposition from the world. It's going to bring conflict because whenever the Gospel is proclaimed accurately, whenever the Christian life is taught faithfully, people will resist it. People will oppose. So Christians in the local church have to strive. We in the local church, we strive together for understanding. We strive together for clarity in the truth. We strive together for the wise application of the Gospel, to understand the Gospel in all its implications. The local church is the Gospel witness to its own time, in its own particular location. And that's how God preserves his eternal truth. It's through, as we said in, 1 Timothy 3, it's through "the household



of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”

So all that was in our first message, and after that we talked about baptism in our second message, that’s the ordinance of the Lord that is a ritual of initiation into the church. Baptism is, you might think of, as command number one from the Lord Jesus Christ himself to every newborn believer. Baptism there is the, the perfect picture of what happens to a believer at salvation and so it becomes the perfect way to declare a new Christian’s union with Christ and union with his church.

We talked about the Lord’s Supper, then in our next message, and that’s the ritual fellowship in the local church. And we went back to the night that Jesus was betrayed, the night that he established the ordinance of communion, the, the ordinance that would be practiced for the duration of the church’s existence, we saw the kind of fellowship that Jesus intended that meal to signify, even that night as he prescribed it. He wanted this to be practiced all through the church’s history. So the fellowship we celebrate at the Lord’s Table with



Christ and all of his people, it is an intimate fellowship, it's a pure fellowship, it's a humble fellowship, and it's an exclusive fellowship. Communion is the fellowship of the redeemed, joining the Redeemer with his redeemed people, celebrating that union with one another as life-long learners, as disciples of Jesus Christ. That's what we do in the Lord's Supper together.

After that, we had a couple of messages making a distinction between the universal church, on the one hand, and the local church, on the other hand; not that the two are separate from one another, but the two are part and parcel of one another. The local church is the local, in time in space representation of the universal church to the watching world in a particular time at a particular location. We talked about the implications of that distinction on church discipline. We talked about the implications of that distinction on the role of leadership, the role of the congregation, our mutual submission to the discipline of the local church.

And all of that that we described really from the very start of this series to that point, all of that provides a framework of what we're going to talk about today and in the coming weeks. This is the framework, the, the skeleton, so to speak. And it provides the orderly environment in which church life can really thrive. The order, the discipline, the structure, all of that allows the Word to be heard clearly, to be heard distinctly, so Christians can learn and grow together in understanding, so people can have an opportunity to put what they hear into practice in daily life.

Now having said that, let's put a little bit of meat on those bones. There are a number of ways to consider the issue of life in the local church. Last fall we worked our way through Ephesians 4:1-16, which is really the most concise, practical instruction on local church ministry. In fact, turn over there, just by way of introduction, to Ephesians 4:1-16. This passage in Ephesians basically outlines a biblical philosophy of ministry, which means that there is no need today to reinvent how to do ministry in the local church; it's all right there. Paul spelled it out in Ephesians 4:1-16. No need to reinvent the

wheel. Paul by the Spirit has commanded exactly what we're to do in doing ministry.

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

Now stop there for a minute. Notice the emphasis in those first few verses. You've got humility and meekness. You've got patience and forbearing love. You've got unity and peace. Notice where Paul refers there to the unity of the Spirit. He's not talking about some kind of ecumenical unity, where we set aside all theological differences and ignore them, where we overlook or tolerate theological error for the sake of some supposed greater goal. That is not unity. That's not the unity Paul's describing here. The unity Paul is describing here is fundamentally a doctrinal unity. Look at verses 4-6, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope



that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

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

Listen, that's why God gave or I should say Christ gave, verse 11, Christ gave gifted men to the church, starting with the era of the Apostles and prophets, through whom God revealed the New Testament to us. Those men received the revelation from the Spirit. They taught it in their own time, but they also by the Spirit's direction wrote it down. Notice in verse 11,



evangelists are given to plant people into that foundation of New Testament truth. And then the pastors and teachers, they nurture people out of that truth to grow up out of that foundation, really even anchoring them deeper into it.

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

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



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

Nurtured in the teaching, nurtured in the training of the local church, the whole body grows into maturity, healthy, strong, discerning, and sharp. It's unified, brought together by attitudes and actions of mutual care, of building itself up in love. And that is what Christ intends for every local church. Ours is no exception, no exception, beloved. And this whole experience in a healthy local church, it's not without its challenges and disappointments. It's not, not without its sins and failures. But in the main, a healthy local church is an environment where Christian virtue and sacrificial service are on display every single week. In fact, all throughout the week, we are thriving together in this kind of an environment.

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

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

Now, having said all that, I want to look at one of the most fundamental texts of Scripture on the nature of the local church. If you can get a grasp of this text, your gonna be well on your way to embracing, to cultivating, to pursuing the virtues that are going to make this little local church a little slice of heaven right here on earth. So turn in your Bibles with me to 1 Corinthians, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

We're going to look at 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and kinda spend our time there. But I want to start in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, right there at the very end. We already covered some of this when we studied the Lord's Supper, we looked at 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and we saw that there was an environment where there was absolute chaos that existed in that church because people were self-centered. Some people were getting drunk; some people were gorging themselves on food. They weren't waiting for one another. And in chapter 11, Paul rebukes them for that attitude, and he ends that chapter calling for a bit of self-analysis, a little bit of a, a self-assessment, if you will. Really the attitude is an attitude of self-judgment and he told them in 1 Corinthians 11:31-32, he says, "If we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged." Now you remember, some of the people in that congregation had been judged. Some of them were sick, some had fallen asleep, that is died, God judged them because he was trying to wake them up to their sin. That judgment, though it seemed harsh, it was actually gracious. This is a gracious love of the Lord to wake people up. And it says there, 1 Corinthians 11:31-32, "When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

So it's this context of judgment, of self-assessment, which is supposed to lead to repentance and further discipline. This is how the church can grow by receiving Paul's corrective. So he tells them in verse 33, "So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that when you come together it will not be for judgment." Notice that instruction there at the end of verse 33. What does it say? It says, "Wait for one another." Wait for one another. Waiting for others is at the very least an act of consideration, right? But in the context of this communion that loving consideration has another goal in mind, it's the unity of the local church around the Lord's Table. Love and unity, those two virtues were in very short supply in the Corinthian church. These people seriously needed to repent.

Now just a point, here. "Wait for one another," that command, that happens to be one of those, one another statements that are sprinkled all throughout the New Testament. You remember the one another commands. Some of you have studied those yourself. "Love one another...be at peace with one another...in humility count others more significant than yourselves." You probably studied those for yourself. But almost

all the one another commands, not all of them, but almost all of them, employ the little Greek word *allélón*. *Allélón*, which means one another. And these stand out, these commands because they're reciprocal commands, reciprocal, that is, you could say that the responsibility to do what is commanded is, is shared mutually by both the subject and the object. So you might say if the command is, be kind to one another, that means Suzy needs to be kind to Sally, and also that Sally needs to be kind to Suzy. There's a mutual responsibility on both ladies, there, Sally and Suzy, they both need to do this. But there's also, I might add, a mutual benefit. Both share in the positive effects of that kindness to one another. That's the joy of reciprocity, shared as a normal part of life in the local church. And that's what the one another commands are about: mutual responsibility but also mutual benefit.

Now just a footnote. The very existence of one another commands points to the life that's shared in the context of the local church. You don't do the one another in the context of the universal church, the church from all ages, all times, all over the entire world. You don't practice the one another like this. No, you have to do it right there in the local church. The

individual life of every Christian is supposed to be lived out with others, face to face in the local church. And that means that the local church, once again just to emphasize this point, the local church is absolutely vital for the health and growth of every single Christian. It's indispensable.

Now back to that word *allélón*. *Allélón*, it's used 104 times in 98 verses of the New Testament and about 60 of those uses are commands, or they're implied exhortations; and they're given to, or directed to, believers. I've personally counted about 62 of these; there may be some room to differ on that. I just want to be flexible because you can see it different ways. But as you examine these 60 or so one another commands, you can see that several themes emerge as you study them. Fact, I can see really there are three very clear virtues that are commanded and exhorted in every believer. About a third of the one another commands have to do with love; about a third of them have to do with unity; and a very significant percentage of what's left over has to do with humility.

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

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

Now, we're going to get into those virtues more next week, but for now keep those three virtues in mind, love, unity, humility, as we read the passage, which is going to be the focus

of our study this morning , 1 Corinthians 12:1-27. Now listen,
“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says Jesus is accursed, and no one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

"If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not

require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together and if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.))

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

So those early congregations had Apostles visiting, establishing the congregation, it had local church prophets and

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

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

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

So, having made that initial correction, that corrective to Corinthian practice of the gifts, which was very fundamental, very fundamental teaching there, Paul then proceeded to provide the Corinthians with some more fundamental teaching that's gonna help them use their spiritual gifts. And the bottom line, just flip over there for a minute, just a couple of pages to chapter 14, the bottom line of all of this, where he's driving in all of this, is found there in 1 Corinthians 14:4. Paul says there, The one who speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but the one who

prophesies builds up the church. And he's not there talking about the legitimate use of tongues, but this Corinthian distortion about how they were using the gift of tongues. They were trying to build themselves up, practicing the legitimate gift, but doing it with a wrong motive and a wrong purpose.

So the one who speaks in a tongue among you Corinthians, basically is what he's saying, the one who speaks in a tongue among you Corinthians, you're doing it to build yourself up; but the one who prophesies, he's doing it to build up the church. Why? Because prophecy was spoken in the language of the people who could understand, so that everything that came through the prophet, no matter what his motives were, everything that came through him led to the upbuilding of the church.

Continuing on, there, "I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless somebody interprets, so that the church may be built up." Edification, that's what he's after. Look down in verse 12, "So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel

in building up the church.” One more, skip ahead to verse 26. Paul says, he comes to this conclusion, “What then, my brothers, when you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”

Look, that’s the point of every spiritual gift, of all spiritual ministry in the church: edification. In fact, that’s where the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, that’s where the love chapter fits in. It’s not to provide a nice flow or foundation in a wedding, okay? 1 Corinthians 13 is part of an argument, and it’s at the foundation of Paul’s argument. Spiritual gifts are not primarily for personal benefit. Rather, in keeping with what’s loving, in keeping with what’s spiritually best for somebody else, spiritual gifts are targeted to the edification of other people. Okay, back to what Paul told the Ephesians. That triad of virtues, love, unity, and humility, both in attitude and action; same thing here. Everything is for the building up, the edification, the strengthening, the encouragement of the members of the local church.

But before taking the Corinthians there, Paul teaches them a more fundamental, a more basic doctrine, and that's what we're reading in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Here's where we come to the first point in your outline. It's printed therein your bulletin. But that first point says this: Local church diversity demonstrates the unity of Christ's body. Local church diversity demonstrates the unity of Christ's body. The true nature of this body into which the Corinthians have been baptized, of which they've all become members, is manifest not by its sameness, but by its diversity. That's what Paul teaches there in verses 4-14. But rather than skipping, let's let's look at the end of that. Look directly at the punchline there in verses 12-13. Paul says this, "Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

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

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

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

Now back up a bit, and let's see what Paul was teaching. I divided this little section into two subpoints, and maybe it's a bit artificial, my divisions here, but I'll admit that; but just trying to provide a little structure for our thoughts, just something to hang your, your thoughts on to as we go through. Notice your outline there in your bulletin, this diversity is by design. This diversity is by design.

Look at verses 4-6, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."

Varieties, three uses of that word. The word varieties means diversely apportioned. It means distributed in differing amounts, in varying degrees. By its nature the word variety is pointing here to the diversity of the body, right? People, their gifts, their manner of using their gifts, though it's all informed by the same Bible, they're going to look different from one person to another, manifested in unique ways. Now notice what the word variety modifies, gifts, service, activities,

that's just an indication there, that life in the local church diversifies significantly into varieties of gifts, varieties of service, varieties of activities. You get the picture, here, that life in the local church is just bustling with activity. It's just bursting with life. It is an exciting place to be.

But notice that this diversity in the local church, this variety, it is by design, with each person of the Trinity involved in the design and the outworking of this diversity. It says there that the same Spirit is the one who distributes the varieties of gifts to everyone, the same Lord is the one who is served through the variety of gifts, the same God is the one who energizes the gifts, making them effective and useful and fruitful. So you see, the one Triune God, he is the one distributing the gifts, he's the one served through the gifts, and he's the one energizing the gifts. It's the one Triune God who is responsible, here, for the diversity that exists in the local church. This is *his* decision; this is expressing *his* intention; it's manifesting *his* perfect design.

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

"and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit," Whose knowledge? God's knowledge, "to another faith by the same Spirit," Faith in whom? faith in God, "to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit." Healing showing the power of whom? God. "To another the working of miracles," By the power of whom? the power of God, "to another prophecy," Predicting what, telling forth what? God's Word, God's revelation, verse 10, "to another the ability to distinguish between spirits," How do you do that? How do you have that

discernment? It's discerning between what? Between God and all that is not God, "to another various kinds of tongues," so, all languages, "to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

So what Paul refers to abstractly in verse 4 as varieties of gifts, here he's unpacking in concrete terms: nine gifts, you got five speaking gifts, four service gifts. five speaking gifts, four service gifts. The utterances of wisdom and knowledge, prophecy, speaking and interpreting tongues, all those are speaking gifts. They were revelatory in nature, prophetic in nature, and they were for the guidance, the direction of the local church prophets in local church ministry.

Now, like we said, now that the New Testament has come, now that it's written down, now that we have this canon, we have all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ, all that God wanted us to know, and it's recorded for us here in black and white, right here in the Holy Scripture. Listen, we're not missing out on anything. In fact, we probably have a more

comprehensive, more complete, more perfect knowledge than they did in their local churches because ours is complete, written in a book for us to see plainly in black and white. We're not missing out on a thing, beloved.

Well, those other gifts, faith, supernatural healing, miracles, discernment, those are gifts of service, and they provided practical help to these fledgling congregations. They also demonstrated the affirmation of God on this new entity called the church, which was something brand new, incorporating both Jew and Gentile, like I said, transcending ethnic differences, socio-economic differences, gender differences. They were demonstrating the affirmation of God on this new entity called the church, and most importantly, demonstrating God's affirmation on the Gospel that they preached. So supernatural healing pointed to God's affirmation of the church; miracles worked through these early congregations manifested God's approval, his affirmation of the Gospel preached by these churches.

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

Again, all those concrete manifestations of diversity revealed in church members are, verse 7, "the manifestation of the Spirit." They are all, verse 12, "empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." So the diversity manifests the divine: his power, his will, his sovereignty. And it's God the Spirit who's made the choices. He has made the distinctions. He has apportioned to each one by different measure just as he wills, right?

So unity here manifests through diversity. In the local church, our diversity, the uniqueness, the individuality, all of it demonstrates, really, the unity of Christ's church. That may be counter-intuitive, but you know, it's not the first time that God has done something that's counter-intuitive to human reason, human understanding, that's what revelation is, right? He reveals himself, he reveals something we never thought of before. That's why we need his Word.

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

The wisdom of God, why? Why is that? Because every gift of the Spirit, every act of service to the Lord, every activity

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

Listen, that's the wisdom of God. That's something only God could come up with, bringing us together like that. And only those, I understand, only those out there who have eyes to see and ears to hear, only those are going to see and understand that this is the wisdom of God on display. But that is the wisdom of God on display, uniting us together in one body, making us, you know, from all different people, making us a one people, making us a unified people coming together to love, to

be humble with each other, to unify together for the good of this body.

Now by learning to accept one another, we're going to promote an attitude of humility in the church. By learning to appreciate one another, we're going to promote attitudes of love and unity in the church. So take a look, there, at that first subpoint under this heading. Accepting our diversity promotes humility in the local church.

Accepting our diversity promotes humility in the local church. Look at verses 14-20, "The body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is,

there are," statement of fact, there are, "many parts, yet one body.

Now can you see in those verses the problem that Paul is confronting there in that paragraph? It's called envy, envy. The problem is the sin of covetousness, of wanting what hasn't been given to you, of wanting what's been given to somebody else. And he's confronting that sin, that ugly sin of envy, of covetousness, he's confronting that self-centered sin at two levels here. One is on the level of logic and reason. Another is he's confronting it at the level of submission. Logically, just plain logic says a body has parts. You wouldn't be a body without parts, right? I don't want my foot envying my hand. I don't want my ear envying my eye. I need all those parts to accept their place, to do what God designed them to do, because without the parts doing what they're designed to do, my body suffers, right?

Same thing in the church; same thing here. But how tempting, is it, for each one of us to envy the gifts that other people have. Look, we need to accept the gifting, the role that

God has given to others, not coveting that gift for ourselves because we need them to do what they're designed to do. We also need to accept the gifting and role that God has given to us, not lamenting because we're not some other part of the body, right? We need to do what God has designed us to do because all of you need what I do, and I need what all of you do. That's what Paul's saying here.

So Paul confronts our envy not just on the level of logic. We need all these different parts; otherwise, there is no body. He also confronts it at another level, this envy, this covetousness, notice, verse 18, "God has arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose." Your gifting, your role in the local church, that's by God's design. That's according to his will. That's according to his choosing. You know what? To covet another part of the body, or to think of yourself as less or unessential to the overall health, the benefit of the body, you know what that is? That's really a subtle blow against the wisdom of God. That's not good. That's a tacit accusation that God was wrong to design you the way he designed you, that he was wrong or unwise or not good to design others the way he designed them, or he was wrong to assign you to the role you have or them

to the role they have in the body of Christ. And that is not true at all, is it?

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

So accepting our diversity promotes humility, that's sub-point one. Here's sub-point two, also written there in your

bulletin. Appreciating our diversity promotes love and unity in the local church. Appreciating our diversity, not just accepting it, but also appreciating it. Appreciating our diversity promotes love and unity in the local church. Take a look, there, at verses 21-26, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require.

"But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." Wow! The eye can't say to the hand, "I have no need of you," the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." That would be foolish. That would be stupid. We can't imagine living without one part of our body, right? We like all our body parts exactly where God put them.

They're useful to the whole body, doing exactly what God designed them to do.

And you think about especially the unpresentable parts, like maybe the internal organs, things that are covered up and hidden away from public viewing, we're especially grateful for those parts because they are really, really important. Not so presentable, not so sightly or seemly, but they are very, very important. You probably don't want to drag them out when people come over to dinner. That would shock everyone and send them away running in horror.

But you keep those internal organs tucked away not because they're unimportant. Quite the contrary. Those parts are the parts that keep the blood flowing. Those are the parts that keep the air filling your lungs so you can have conversation. They're the parts that take the blood to the brain giving you the energy to think and to reason and to actually have an intelligible conversation with other people at the dinner party, right? So when in our outside parts are taking good care of our inside

parts, you know what? We have a happy, healthy, well-functioning body.

But if our more presentable parts ignore or mistreat our less presentable parts, we've got problems, don't we? It's called disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, all that stuff comes upon us, right? We need to take care of ourselves. I don't need to belabor this point, we all get this. We live with the reality of this every single day in our own physical body. But listen, that's what makes this such a useful, excellent illustration from the Apostle Paul. We get this. And we need to believe it for the church because that's what happening here. This is what's going on in our midst.

And I want you to notice, here, a crucial sentence. It really illustrates the larger point, that the diversity of the local church demonstrates the wisdom of God's design here. Look at verses 24-25, says this, "But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." When we recognize the wisdom of God,

that wisdom right there, in how he designed our church, you know what? We're going to learn to appreciate our differences. And when we learn to truly appreciate this diversity, to embrace it joyfully, it's going to promote an attitude of love and humility and unity among us. You know what? We learn to love each other. We learn to have the same care for one another. Why? Because we appreciate that all of us are necessary. Not one member among us is unimportant, is superfluous. It's not an extra part, unneeded by this local church. Every single one of you that God has brought here is *needed* here for the health and growth of this church. We need you, beloved, every single one of you. It's not a mistake that you're here. It's not an accident. It's not a coincidence. You didn't just stumble in here. God brought you here. And we need you.

Not only that, but notice the next verse, verse 26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." Look, this mutual appreciation, it literally drives us together in a spirit of unity. This attraction among body members is magnetic. The connection between us is organic. That's why when someone suffers, we all feel it. When there's sin in the body, we all mourn. When



someone is honored, we're all rejoicing. When someone is overcoming sin, when someone is growing, when someone is using their gifts well, we all rejoice.

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

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

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

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

Father, thank you for this clear teaching. Thank you for the clear teaching of your Word, how it encourages us, how it exhorts us, how it confronts us. We want to be transformed by it, and we pray that by your Spirit that Jesus Christ would be honored by the coming together of this body, to appreciate one another, to accept our differences, to appreciate the differences, and really to get involved and do what we're designed to do, each one of us individually, for the sake of demonstrating the unity of God, the unity of the church, the

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

unity of Christ and his church, and really to demonstrate the wisdom of your design, the wisdom of your transforming power demonstrated through the Gospel. We ask for your help in putting this into practice. Ask that you'd help with that, even this week. In Jesus' name, amen.