

A church that functions with unction (1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

As many of you know, in-person church attendance is down in our country and in many other parts of the world. And because of the pandemic, which is behind the decrease in attendance, there's been a push for virtual church. But virtual church, which is really an oxymoron, didn't start with the pandemic. It was only accelerated by the pandemic.

Due to technology, we can view church services online from around the world and receive great bible teaching at any moment. These modern-day benefits can augment the growth of our faith, but they should not become a substitute. The bible is clear that being committed and involved in a local church gathering is essential to the Christian life and should never be forsaken, especially in these last days (Hebrews 10:24-25). But the truth is the reason virtual church is increasingly becoming the preferred option for many is not due to legitimate circumstances that sometimes prevent us from gathering with the church. The fact is for many it's just more convenient.

In a book titled, *Rediscover Church*, which is available for free at the connection counter, one of its authors writes, "It's no surprise that virtual, or internet church is growing in popularity. It's convenient and—honestly—it allows you to avoid messy relationships. Yes, gathering with the church can be inconvenient, but so is love. Relationships are messy, but so is love. Vulnerable conversations are scary, but so is love. The push toward the virtual church, we fear, is a push to individualize Christianity. We can debate the wisdom of using such a tool for a limited time in an emergency situation, such as a pandemic. Yet to offer or encourage the virtual church as a permanent [and I would add "equivalent"] option, even with good intentions, hurts Christian discipleship. It trains Christians to think of their faith in autonomous terms. It teaches them that they can follow Jesus as a member of the "family of God," in some abstract sense, without teaching them what it means to be a part of a family and to make sacrifices for a family" (Jonathan Leeman).

Let me add that “the church is more than a place you go to, it is a people you grow with.” Every believer has been in-dwelt by the Spirit to demonstrate in tangible ways the love of Christ and to exercise the gifts of the Spirit for the common good of all.

Main idea: When a church body is healthy, all of its members function in his or her area of giftedness by the power of the Spirit and in cooperation with one another.

To unfold this theme, we are going to consider 3 key elements of a healthy church that builds itself up in love.

1. Dependence on the Spirit

The first element of a healthy church that builds itself up in love is **dependence on the Spirit**. After listing some of the gifts of the Spirit, like gifts of healing and utterances of wisdom, Paul explained in verse 11 that all the gifts are “*empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*”

In other words, spiritual gifts are not something we earn or achieve, but God working through us to build others up. Furthermore, we don’t ultimately determine our gifting. God is the one who distributes the gifts as He sees fit. How do you know what gifts God has allocated to you? Get busy serving. As we learned last week, as you get busy serving in dependence of the Holy Spirit, you’ll discover your area of giftedness and others around you with spiritual discernment will confirm it.

In light of this, notice that Paul uses the metaphor of a human body to illustrate how the gifts are to operate in the church. He writes: “*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*” (1 Corinthians 12:12).

This human body metaphor that Paul uses is an essential parallel to understanding how the gifts of the Spirit function in the church. And

Paul builds on this human body metaphor for the church throughout this chapter and in other epistles as well. Now in verse 12, Paul explains that like a human body has many parts that make up the one body “*so it is with Christ.*”

Notice that although Paul is referring to how the gifts of the Spirit function in the church, he doesn't just say that like a human body functions *so it is with the church* . Rather, he says, like a human body functions, *so it is with Christ*.

In other words, a local church, which is made up of believers, is the vehicle through which Christ visibly displays His love in action. Christ doesn't just display Himself through individual believers, but collectively as a body as each individual believer exercises their gifts to serve one another. Do you know, as Paul explains in chapter 14, when the gifts of the Spirit are in operation in the church, like the gift of prophecy, unbelievers will walk into the gathering of the church, will be convicted of sin, the secrets of their hearts will be disclosed, and so, falling on their face, they will worship God and declare that God is really among us (1 Corinthians 14:24-25)?

What makes it possible for people to encounter the presence and power of Christ in the gathering of the church? Notice that Paul continues in verse 13: “*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*” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Every believer, who has come to Christ, is baptized in the Spirit into the body of Christ. In other words, every believer has been united with Christ. And because every believer is united with Christ, every believer, regardless of their race, gender or social status, is united with one another.

Notice also that all believers have not only been baptized in the Spirit into the body of Christ, but *all were made to drink of one Spirit (v.13b)*. What Paul means here is that every believer has taken in the Spirit or has the Spirit residing in them. It's important to note here that some churches today teach that there is a baptism in the Spirit that is not given at the moment of salvation. Rather they teach that the baptism of the Spirit is subsequent to salvation. It's a kind of second

blessing that brings one into a higher plain of spirituality. Furthermore, some teach that the necessary evidence that you received this baptism is speaking in tongues.

One of the main problems with this teaching is that the gift of tongues is not given to every believer, as we will clearly see later in the chapter. Furthermore, Paul makes clear that although every believer does not receive the gift of tongues, every believer is baptized in the Spirit into the body of Christ (v.13). Similarly there are others that although they view the baptism of the Spirit as a kind of second blessing, subsequent to salvation, they would say that speaking in tongues is not a necessary evidence of it. Rather they teach that the baptism of the Spirit is a greater experience of the fullness of the Spirit.

Now what I want to suggest to you is that we should seek a greater fullness of the Spirit, but the term that the bible uses for this is not the baptism of the Spirit, but the filling of the Spirit (Ephesian 5:18). And the filling of the Holy Spirit is not so much one getting more of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit getting more of you. In other words, to be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be under the control, influence and power of the Spirit. And the filling of the Spirit is not only a second blessing that we must seek. It's a third, and fourth and fifth blessing and on and on. In other words, we need to continuously seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit as we yield to the Spirit's leading, surrender to His control and depend on Him day by day.

I am reminded of a story about the great evangelist D.L. Moody, who was used mightily by God to bring tens of thousands to Christ in his lifetime. When he was still alive, a group of pastors were planning a citywide evangelistic campaign. While they planned, they discussed the possibility of inviting the famous preacher D.L. Moody, to be the speaker. But one young pastor complained, "From the way some of you talk, you would think Mr. Moody had a monopoly on the Holy Spirit." "No," one of the pastors replied, "Mr. Moody does not have a monopoly on the Spirit. But the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody!"

Do you know that the main problem with the Corinthians was that they wanted to possess the gifts of the Spirit, but the Holy Spirit did not fully possess them? They wanted a monopoly of the gifts of the Spirit, especially the more impressive gifts, but the Holy Spirit didn't have a monopoly on them. They were all baptized in the Spirit, which is the initial reception of the Holy Spirit that every believer receives upon conversion, (v.13) but they were not being filled with the Holy Spirit in their walk with God (Ephesian 5:18). They wanted the gifts more than the giver of the gifts. They were pursuing spiritual giftedness more than they were pursuing spiritual maturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). The Holy Spirit is given to us to glorify Christ. The Corinthians were seeking gifts to glorify themselves. Consequently their pursuit of the gifts of the Spirit was bringing disorder and division in the church.

The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make Christ known in and through us both individually and collectively as the body of Christ. So if we are going to be a healthy church where Christ's glory is manifested, we must **depend on the Spirit**. But we must depend on the Spirit not only to empower us for service but to transforms us to be more like Jesus in prayer, in the word, and in community.

We cannot manifest the power and presence of Christ apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And how many of you know, the greatest measure of our dependence on the Holy Spirit is prayer. But not just prayer that seeks God's hand, but prayer that seeks God's face, that seeks intimacy with God that leads to the accomplishment of His purposes. Jesus said, my house shall be called a house of prayer (Matthew 21:13).

As the great prayer warrior E.M. Bounds noted, "Every mighty move of the Spirit of God has had its source in the prayer chamber." O brothers and sisters, if we would see a mighty move of the Spirit in our church that leads to a spiritual awakening in our culture, there must be a mighty move of prayer both in our private lives and in the life of the church.

2. Interdependence of the Saints

Secondly, when a church is functioning as God intends, not only will you see a great **dependence on the Spirit**, but you will also see the **interdependence of the Saints**. In verses 14-26, Paul begins to flesh out his human body metaphor to explain how a healthy church is to function. We will come back to some of these verses, but notice that in verse 27 Paul summarizes his human body metaphor for the church by explaining: *“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it”* (1 Corinthians 12:27).

The main point behind Paul’s metaphor is that like a human body has various individual body parts, the body of Christ is also made up of individual members with particular gifts that make up the whole. And like a human body, all the members of the body of Christ must not only be functioning for the body to be fully functional, but the individual members must function in cooperation with one another.

Furthermore it’s this mutual care and cooperation between the diverse members of the body of Christ that displays the beauty of Christ, which is the ultimate purpose of the church. You cannot be a healthy Christian apart from being vitally connected to a local church and a local church is not going to be healthy unless all its members are functioning in their area of giftedness.

Notice in verse 15 Paul writes, *“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”* (1 Corinthians 12:15). In other words, just because you been given a different function than someone else in the church, doesn’t make you any less a part of the body. Your function doesn’t determine whether you are part of the body or your worth in the body. Christ determines your function. And your worth is found in Christ who placed you and every other believer in His body by grace.

One bible teacher put it this way, “Consider our own bodies. When we stub our toe, our whole body reacts. Our legs react; we bend our knees and raise our feet. Our arms react; we reach down and grab our toe. Our mouths cringe, and we yell. Our eyes dart to see what we stubbed

our toe on. The body works seamlessly and organically together. There are no individual decisions to be made. The body reacts as a whole unit. It is not as though certain members of the body decide to opt out when they don't feel like assisting. And yet the body exhibits great diversity. Toes are unlike ears; eyes are unlike elbows. Their diversity is not a hindrance to their unity, but absolutely necessary for it. The body could not function as it does if it were made up of 100 ears or 100 elbows. Paul wants church members to see themselves as integrally tied to one another like various members of the human body" (Stephen Um).

But now keep in mind that because of their spiritual immaturity, the Corinthian believers were not viewing their gifts as integrally tied to the whole, but as a way to outshine others, which was leading to jealousy and strife (1 Corinthians 3:3). The gifts of the Spirit are not given to us to outshine others in the body. Rather different gifts are given to each of us so that together we will shine for Christ as we build one another up in love (Ephesian 4:14-16; Matthew 5:16).

As Paul illustrates in verse 21-24, every believer with his or her unique giftedness is indispensable to the body of Christ. Paul wrote, "*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."*"²² *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable*" (v.21-22). The bottom line is that we need each other to be all that God called us to be no matter how obscure or prominent our giftedness may be. As Paul also explains in verse 23, like our bodies, which have parts that are *unpresentable*, but yet we treat with greater modesty, we are also to honor and value even the seemingly weakest members of the body of Christ. Everyone matters.

Sadly, this is not always the case in some churches that have been affected by the celebrity culture. Nevertheless, if we are members of a local church, we are indispensable. "And all of the other members are also indispensable parts of our lives." Everyone in our community is part of the body that God has comprised to demonstrate the beauty of Christ in our midst.

This brings us to a third element of a healthy church that builds itself up in love.

3. Providence of the Savior

In addition to the church's **dependence on the Spirit** and the **interdependence of the Saints**, there is the **providence of the Savior**. Let me ask you, is it a coincidence that you are here this morning or that you are a part of this church? Is it a coincidence or is it providence? Regarding the various gifts of the Spirit, Paul wrote in verse 11 that God "*apportions to each one individually as he wills.*" God ultimately decides who receives what gifts.

And concerning the make up of the body, Paul writes in verse 18: "*But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose*" (1 Corinthians 12:18). In other words, God places you where He wants you. And notice also that Paul writes beginning in verse 24, "*But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,*" (1 Corinthians 12:24). Brothers and sisters, God brings people through these doors. And He has designed the church and gifted the church to function through everyone that He has arranged to be part of this local body. And why has God designed the church to function in an interdependent way? Paul continues, "*that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together*" (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

Do you know why there was division in the church of Corinth and why there's division in many churches today? Because many use their gifts as a means of positioning themselves so that they can be served, and they will only serve others who they feel have something to offer them in return.

One commentator put it this way: "Because church members are oftentimes interested in self-protection and self-care, they are unable to fulfill their role in the body (mutual care). They are called to suffer when others suffer, to rejoice when others rejoice. But sharing in the

suffering of others seems too costly. So they become rebellious body parts. In the process they lose their identity as body parts. Hands cease to function as hands are supposed to function, and they ultimately cannot share in the rejoicing of others. Their grace gifts become an occasion for competition and stratification. If an individual is all about self-care rather than mutual care, his gifts become a means of distinguishing and advancing himself rather than advancing the interest of others.” (Stephen Um)

Sadly the church today in many ways has become more of a reflection of our culture of consumerism rather than the counter-cultural, other’s’ oriented and mutually caring community is was designed to be. How do we overcome the consumerism mentality of the culture that has crept into the church and instead be transformed to reflect the beauty of the gospel? We must view the church not as a commodity to be consumed, but as a community where God has providentially and strategically placed each of us for our mutual upbuilding (Romans 14:19).

Notice that Paul writes: *“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?”* (1 Corinthians 12:27-30).

What is the answer to all of these questions? The grammar and context of Paul’s message clearly indicates that the answer to all of his questions is no. A church will not be what Christ designed it to be unless its members function in an interdependent manner. God has not given every member all the gifts of the Spirit, but He has providentially given everyone gifts to build each other up. A church becomes a community of gospel transformation when each member operates in his or her God appointed giftedness in cooperation with the other members of the body.

Now remember that Paul is not encouraging complacency in regards to the gifts of the Spirit. We should not have an attitude that says,

“God is the one who determines what gift I have. So, when he shows me what it is, I’ll use it.” No! Paul writes: *“But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way”* (1 Corinthians 12:27-31).

In the coming weeks we will be examining in more detail what Paul means by *earnestly desire the higher gifts*. But suffice it to say that the higher gifts, like speaking gifts, are gifts that build others up in the church. But notice that although Paul encourages believers to desire the higher gifts, he adds, *“And I will show you a still more excellent way.”* And the more excellent way, as we will see next week, is the way of love.

Earlier I shared that we cannot manifest the power and presence of Christ apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And the greatest measure of our dependence on the Holy Spirit is prayer. But not just prayer that seeks God’s hand, but prayer that seeks God’s face, that seeks intimacy with God which leads to the accomplishment of His purposes. The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make the love of Christ known in us for our sanctification and then through us for service.

What is your first calling as a Christian? Notice what the gospel of Mark says about the appointment of the 12 Apostles by Jesus: *“And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons”* (Mark 3:13-15).

O Brothers and sisters, our first calling as Christians is to be with Jesus—to pursue a dynamic love relationship with Him. The more you know His self-giving love the more you will love Him. And the more you love Him the more you will love others and desire to serve them with the gifts that God supplies. When you know His love, you won’t be so preoccupied with knowing your gift. You will be more preoccupied with meeting needs. And in the process of meeting needs, you will discover your gift.

Conclusion

Are you fulfilling your role in the body of Christ? You're not here by accident. You are here by the providence of God. And if you're saved, you've been called to be with Christ—to seek His face in worship, and then to serve His family in love so that we might together spread His fame in the world through discipleship.

May we all seek to be the church that God called us to be as we each function according to our giftedness, in cooperation with one another and to the glory of Christ our Savior