

**09/21/25      We Are Interdependent Not Independent  
1 Corinthians 12:20-31**

Welcome...

We live in an age of independence. We are bombarded with a philosophy of standing alone and doing your own thing and being your own man.

By contrast, Christianity is not a religion of independence. It is a relationship of interdependence. You enter that relationship through the door of dependence - through dependence upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30...

You must repent of your sin and come to Jesus, dependent on Him for forgiveness and salvation.

Once you come to saving faith in Jesus and become a part of the body of Christ, you begin to experience an interdependence with other members of the body. This is Paul's point in our text today.

**Let's read 1 Corinthians 12:20-31...**

Have you ever had a small injury that seemed to take over your entire body? A paper cut, a toothache, or a stubbed toe can suddenly dominate your attention. I have been dealing with tendinitis in my right elbow and suddenly that is all I feel. Something so small reminds us that there are no unnecessary parts in the human body. Paul uses this illustration in 1 Corinthians 12 to teach us the same truth about the church—the body of Christ.

**Main point: 1 Corinthians 12:20-31 describes how God has designed His church so that every member is necessary, every member is nurtured, every gift is sovereignly named, and every believer is called to the nobler way of love.**

**The Necessity of Every Member in verses 20-24**

**The Nurture of Mutual Care in verses 25-26**

**The Nature of Spiritual Gifts in verses 27-30**

**The Nobility of a More Excellent Way in verse 31**

Some in Corinth were puffed up about “greater” gifts. Others felt like their contribution didn't matter. But Paul reminds us that in the church:

My prayer is that we each trust the Lord and see that every member of the body is important, no one is unnecessary, and to love the Lord and love one another will be our highest pursuit.

Let's walk through this text together and discover four truths about the body of Christ.

**I. The Necessity of Every Member**

Look at verse 20...

Paul continues the theme of oneness, stressing Christians' mutual dependence on each other and on each other's callings and gifts.

Unity without diversity would produce uniformity, and uniformity tends to produce death. Life is a balance between unity and diversity.

In his book *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer wrote, “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned not to each other but to another standard to which each one must individually bow.

So one hundred worshipers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become unity-conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

Although Tozer’s comments were written with worship in mind, they reveal the secret of Christian unity. The more we center our thoughts on Christ, the more we will be drawn to one another as His followers and the more our differences will fade into insignificance.

But notice how verse 21 continues...

Paul says plainly: “There are many members, yet one body.”

- The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you.”
- The head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you.”

In the illustration that we saw last week back in verse 15, the part of the body was saying, “Because I’m not like them, they don’t need me.” But now we see the member of the body saying just the opposite: “Because they are not like me, I don’t need them.”

That attitude was common in the Corinthian assembly. A few prominent and gifted members acted as if they were self-sufficient, as if they could carry on their ministries and daily Christian living completely by themselves or with only a few select friends. They overestimated their own importance and underestimated the importance of other believers.

Independence is not a part of God’s plan for His people. Neither does He have two alternate plans like cell phone plans. The Lord doesn’t say, “Oh, you don’t want to interact with other Christians. That’s okay, we have this ‘Go It Alone’ plan that allows you to walk and talk only with Me.”

Listen, there are no self-sufficient Christians. I cannot live the Christian life without you. And you cannot do it without me.

Have you ever heard of the corny Tate family. They pervade every organization including the church. There is Dick Tate, who wants to run everything. Ro Tate tries to change everything. Agi Tate stirs up trouble whenever possible, and his sister Irri (Irre) Tate always lends him a hand.

Whenever new ideas are suggested, Hesi Tate and Vegi Tate pour cold water on these ideas. Imi Tate tries to mimic everyone, Devas Tate loves to be disruptive, and Poten Tate wants to be a big shot. But it’s Facili Tate, Cogni Tate, and Medi Tate who always save the day and get everyone pulling together.

Look at verse 22...

There are some members of the body which, at first glance, seem unimportant. When you first see a human body, you tend to look at the face -- the eyes and the ears and the nose. You may never get around to noticing the feet or the knees or the spleen or the heart.

As important as some of the prominent members of the human body are it is possible to live without them. They are important but not absolutely necessary. You can lose an eye or ear, a hand or leg, and still live. But you cannot lose your heart or lungs or brain and live. Those organs are more hidden than the others but also are more vital

The same is true of the body of Christ. There are no unimportant parts. God has no unimportant people in His church. They are all necessary.

Look at verse 23...

Less honorable probably refers to the parts of our body that are not particularly attractive and maybe less honorable. Like armpits for example.

Just because we don't show off our armpits doesn't mean they're unimportant. Think about how you would function without an armpit! The armpit produces sweat to cool the body and maintain a stable temperature. The armpit helps with Immune Defense as the axillary lymph nodes filter lymph fluid from the upper body.

The presence of armpit hair helps reduce friction and skin-to-skin contact during activities like walking and running. In fact, if you stop to think about it, we probably spend more money on our armpits than we do on our foreheads (at least men do, or I hope they do in buying and putting on deodorant), though the forehead is seen by everyone and the armpit is seen by almost no one.

The less visible parts of the body are less noticed. Out of sight, out of mind. And so it is with members of the body of Christ, the church.

The sad mistake such a person is making is failing to recognize, as verse 22 points out, that the seemingly weaker or less visible members of the Body are in many ways the most necessary. What good would a beautiful voice be without lungs, though one's lungs are neither seen nor heard? What good would beautiful skin be without a skeleton? A skeleton is considered frightful and gross, and no one tries to show off his skeleton—but imagine what shape you'd be in without one.

So also in the church the gift of preaching may be highly esteemed, but without members exercising the essential function of prayer, the sermons may not bear fruit. Unity of the parts is every bit as important as diversity.

If you are blessed by the teaching of this pulpit, keep in mind that you would probably not hear the voice of the preacher if it were not for those servants back there running the sound board. If you were to zone out for a few moments and wonder what point we are on in the sermon, it is that technician on the computer who is keeping the proper point displayed on the screen.

It is a great reminder to thank the Christians who serve behind the scenes and let them know how much you appreciate what he or she does for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Verses 24...

Honor comes to the those who have the more noticeable gifts almost as a matter of course, and that honor they should share with members whose gifts and temperaments are less attractive and more likely to be ignored. They should give more abundant honor to that member which lacked.

Because we are dependent on one another. It takes every part of the body working together to have a healthy, properly functioning church body. Each part of the body is dependent on other parts of the body to do its work.

When you drive a car, you need your eyes to guide the car, your hands to steer the car, and your feet to press the gas or the brakes. Your eyes, hands, and feet are not competing with one another; they are completing one another. Many parts are needed because each part is dependent on others.

Even though we believers are different members of the body, we are still members of the same body. The eye can do things the foot cannot do, and the foot can do things the eye cannot do, but both need each other. There is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christianity. There is no such thing as a Christian who does not need to be involved in a local church.

Everybody is needed. Everybody is somebody in Christ's body.

## **II. The Nurture of Mutual Care**

Look at verses 25-26...

Paul explains God's design: "that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another."

Paul uses the same Greek word "schisma" he had used to describe the division of the church in 1 Corinth 1:10. which would undoubtedly "strike a nerve" in the mind of his readers.

There is a clear sense of responsibility of the believers for one another, to care of one another, just as with members of the human body.

Verse 26...

I get excited about doing home projects but also a bit fearful. Because I almost always make a mistake and have to redo something. Something always goes amiss. Or I get injured doing my project.

When I am hammering a nail and I miss and hit my finger, I want you to know that my whole body responds. My heart accelerates, my feet begin to jump up and down and my eyes water and my mouth yells makes known the pain and then I cry on Paula's shoulder. The same ought to be true when someone hurts in the church. Everyone ought to respond.

Mutual support and encouragement is necessary to avoid both underconfidence and overconfidence. It is also necessary to avoid division in the body.

In our eyes, as in God's eyes, every believer should be of the highest importance and every ministry of the highest importance. One of the marks of a mature and spiritual congregation, church members will have the same care for one another. We should care as much for the nursery teacher as for the pastor, as much for the groundskeeper as for the elder.

In the obedient and loving church that God has planned for His children, if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Only that sort of mutual love and concern can prevent division and preserve unity. The one who is hurt is consoled and the one who is blessed is rejoiced with.

There is no disdain for one another, no rivalry or competition, no envy or malice, no inferiority or superiority, but only love. Look at 1 Corinthians 13:4-7...

The only people that can love in that way and be unified in that way are Christians, who are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And only Christ's love can produce such love.

Think about your body again—if you sprain an ankle, your whole body compensates. You limp, you slow down, you rest. The whole body adjusts to care for the wounded part.

That is how the church should function. When one person is hurting, the church comes alongside with prayer, meals, and encouragement. When one is honored, the church celebrates together. No jealousy. No division. Just mutual care flowing from love. This is the nurture of mutual care but third our text moves to:

### **III. The Naming of Ministry Gifts**

Paul now gives us a list of spiritual gifts. It is not an exhaustive list. It is not meant to be. We saw another such list at the beginning of this chapter. It contained different gifts from the one on this list.

Verses 27-30...

There is a list of spiritual gifts in your sermon outline. But notice in verse 28 the text moves from the gift manifested (e.g., prophecy in verse 10) to gifted persons (prophets).

On the other hand, Paul doesn't refer to anyone as a healer, miracle-worker, tongue-speaker, or interpreter of tongues. He only refers to the gift itself.

Verse 28....

Paul seems to go out of his way to emphasize an order to these gifts by the use of the terms "first, second and third." Why is this order important? Why is it even mentioned? Paul does not say, but I think it is because the first gifts that are mentioned are FOUNDATIONAL gifts.

A true New Testament apostle had to (1) see the risen Christ, (2) be directly commissioned by Him, (3) be confirmed by miracles, and (4) serve in a foundational, non-repeatable role.

2 Corinthians 12:12 says, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." The purpose of these gifts was to authenticate the apostles and confirm the message they preached. In the apostles' case, their message was authentic revelation from God—the true Word of God.

In that sense apostleship was a foundational gift limited to the formation of the church. When the foundation of the church was laid, the need for the gift ceased. Just as the office of apostle has ceased (because no one can meet the qualifications of Acts 1:21–22), so the gift of apostle in the strict sense has ceased.

Ephesians 2:19-20 says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone."

The second office listed in verse 28 is the office of prophets, those who were the inspired spokesmen of God who delivered the truth of God. Like the apostles, however, their office ceased with the completion of the New Testament, just as the Old Testament prophets disappeared when that testament was completed, some 400 years before Christ.

Next Paul lists a spiritual gift that is in practice today, the gift of teaching. The teacher not only has the spiritual gift of teaching but God's calling to teach. The teacher is called and gifted for the ministry of studying and interpreting the Word of God to the church.

The temporary sign gifts of miracles and healings were discussed in my sermon two weeks ago when we studied verses 9–10. The gift of tongues will be discussed in more detail when we get to chapter 14.

But notice in verse 28 there are two permanent gifts that we have not seen before.

The first is the gift of helps which is a gift for service in the broadest sense of helping and supporting others in day-by-day, often unnoticed, ways. It is the same gift as that of serving in Romans 12:7. The Greek word for "helps" (*antilēmpsis*) is an especially beautiful word, meaning to take the burden off someone else and place it on oneself.

I have found in my time in ministry, that the gift of helps or service is not only the most widely distributed spiritual gift of any, but is a gift that is immeasurably important in supporting those who minister other gifts.

A church member gifted with helps quietly makes coffee every Sunday morning, sets out snacks, and ensures the fellowship hall is ready so people feel welcome.

A person with the gift of helps and service cooks or bbq's, or delivers meals, or drives someone to a doctor's appointment. The person gifted with helps may not speak in front of the church, but their practical care shows Christ's love in tangible ways.

A person gifted in helps takes joy in mowing the lawn, changing lightbulbs, or repairing a leaky faucet in the church building. No one may notice, but their service makes the church a safe and welcoming place.

In all of these, the person with the gift of helps finds joy in doing practical tasks that free others to minister. Their heart is: "How can I lift the load so God's work can go forward?"

To the Philippians Paul speaks of Epaphroditus in Philippians chapter 2 as my "fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need, ... risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me" Philippians 2:25, 30. Whatever other gifts he may have had, Epaphroditus clearly had the gift of helps and ministered it faithfully.

The other permanent gift in verse 28 is the gift of administrations. The Greek term literally means "to steer or pilot" a ship. It refers to one who keeps a ship, or a church, on course toward its proper destination. People with this gift are often behind the scenes, but their impact is huge—they bring order, clarity, and direction so the church can focus on ministry and spiritual growth.

Here are some practical examples of how the gift of administration might show up in the church:

Coordinating Ministry Teams – Helping different ministry teams stay on schedule, aligned, and resourced.

Planning Events or Programs – Organizing a church retreat, missions trip, or conference so all the details (lodging, food, transportation, registration) are handled.

Budget & Stewardship Oversight – Helping develop and monitor a church budget, keeping track of funds, and creating reports so that funds are accounted.

Communication Flow – Making sure pastors, deacons, and ministry leaders all have the right information at the right time.

There are many who use their gift of administration to bless all of us here at Cornerstone, but let me bring attention to one. Next month will be Jen Kramer's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of serving on our office staff. For 15 years Jen Kramer has steadfastly and faithfully blessed all of us by using her gifts in administration. God has given her an incredible ability to create processes that make ministry more efficient and she has faithfully served in the church office making sure we have the right information at the right time. As the church bookkeeper, she tracks giving and prepare giving statements for members. She tracks expenses from ministry teams. Provides the treasurer and elders with accurate reports for decision-making. Jen is not only good at what she does, but she ministers with a joyful spirit.

Now some of you would love to do what Jen does and others (like myself) can say confidently, "that is not my gift!"

Notice the repeated questions that Paul asks in verses 29-30 – do all have the same spiritual gift? The construction of the Greek demands no as the answer to each of these questions. No individual believer possesses all the spiritual gifts. Each believer has the gift (or gifts) assigned to him by the Lord and needed at that time. God sovereignly appoints the gifts. We don't choose them; He distributes as He wills.

Think of a symphony. Each instrument plays a different part—violins, trumpets, drums, flutes. You don't hand everyone a trumpet and expect a symphony. The conductor assigns each role, and the beauty is in the diversity working together in harmony.

Don't despise your spiritual gift or covet another's. Instead, discover your spiritual gift, develop it, and use it faithfully. The body works best when each member embraces the gift God has given.

We have seen the Necessity of Every Member in verses 20-24

The Nurture of Mutual Care in verses 25-26

The Nature of Spiritual Gifts in verses 27-30 and now fourth:

#### **IV. The Nobility of a More Excellent Way**

Paul closes the chapter with verse 31, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way." That way is love—described beautifully in chapter 13.

Spiritual gifts without love are empty. Service without love is meaningless. Love is the more excellent way that gives life to every gift and ministry.

Unity and diversity must be balanced by maturity, and that maturity comes with love. It is not enough to have the gift of the Spirit and gifts from the Spirit. We must also have the graces of the Spirit as we use our gifts to serve one another.

A church may have powerful preaching, moving music, impressive programs, and generous giving—but if love is missing, it is like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Pursue love above all. Your gift is important, but the spirit in which you use it is even greater. John 13:35 tells us the world will not be drawn to Christ by our talents but by our love for one another.

The church is not a one-man show—it is the body of Christ. That means:

You are necessary. (No member is useless.)

You are called to nurture others. (Care flows both ways – suffering and rejoicing.)

You are named by God with gifts. (Use what He gave you.)

You are to pursue the nobility of love. (The more excellent way.)

So let me ask: Are you embracing your necessity in the body? Are you nurturing others with care? Are you faithfully using your God-given spiritual gifts? And above all, are you pursuing the nobility of love—the more excellent way?

When the body of Christ lives this out, Jesus is exalted, the church is unified, and the world sees the beauty of His gospel.

Let's pray...