

September 29, 2019

“The Body and the Gifts”
1 Corinthians 12

FCF: Our struggle with our roles

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Lord has gifted His church.
(magnet) We must utilize those gifts in the right way.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

No doubt no few of you know there is a *Downton Abbey* film in the theaters. The king and queen are coming to spend a night at Downton during their tour of Yorkshire. Of course, it's all tied to the TV series that aired from 2011 to 2016, a high-styled period piece focusing on the intricacies and mannerisms of the British class system. Something of an *Upstairs Downstairs*.

The beauty of *Downton Abbey* is how it illustrates that inequality need not breed enmity. Bonds can still hold between those of varying stations and callings. It's a point easy to overlook.

And it's a point with a strong biblical basis that the church of our day dare not miss.

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Corinthians 12**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

In his commentary on 1 Peter, Edmund Clowney makes this observation (**READ quote**):

Deep in the Luray Caverns of Virginia stands the console of a unique organ. Ages of seeping water have created thousands of stalactites, icicles in stone, hanging from the vaults of the caves. Each stalactite resonates, when struck, with a slightly different tone. The organ builder explored the cavern till he found the right stalactite for each note in the full range of an organ console. Some had to be 'tuned' by chipping away a bit of their length. He then wired an array of motorized mallets so that each stalactite could be struck from the keyboard of the organ. Visitors who have heard the music long remember the deep, throbbing echoes of the singing rocks. If such melodic variety may be found in calcium deposits, what varied tones has God's Spirit given to the heirs of Christ's glory?

That's a great question. God has this very thing in mind for the church. The difference being He does not intend for us to be hidden underground but to be thrust out in the open air for all to see.

Which brings us to Paul and the church at Corinth. This is a pastoral letter to a spiritually troubled church. It was an “occasional” letter. Meaning it is focused on situational concerns. That said, it is still very relevant for us. Divisions in the church, sexual sin, marriage and divorce, the problem of idolatry, and concerns about corporate worship - it's all there. Which then brings us to the matter of spiritual gifts (**READ 1 Corinthians 12:1**). And Paul goes on to say that, by God's grace, we have been freed from bondage, enabled to confess Jesus, and given gifts. The Lord has gifted His church. And we must utilize those gifts in the right way.

The Lord has gifted His church. We must utilize those gifts in the right way. This would mean three things. First, seeing the one source. Second, the one purpose. Third, the one body.

I. ONE SOURCE

First, Paul wants us to see there is one source to these gifts (**READ 1 Corinthians 12:4-6**).

A) Diversity Acknowledged

1. Varieties

Paul is clearly acknowledging the diversity. Three times he uses the word “varieties.”

2. Of gifts

There are varieties of gifts, freely given. There are varieties of service, emphasizing the focus. And there are varieties of activities, pointing to how all this is enabled solely through the Lord.

B) But with Unity Emphasized

The diversity is acknowledged. No mistake there. But with the unity emphasized.

1. Varieties offset

The varieties are all offset. Three times Paul says it, “But the same...” Which gives balance.

2. Tied to the Trinity

The varieties are offset and the unity is emphasized, all tied back to the Trinity. Each member is mentioned. The idea being that there is a common origin for every gift we see within the church.

However diverse the gifts, there is but one source - the triune God.

Application:

Sometimes it can be hard to understand and appreciate the gifts of others, their place and value in the larger whole. Each one is essential but not all are obviously so. So we have to come back to this. All these gifts originate with the Lord - not just yours or mine but everyone’s.

The Lord has gifted His church. We must utilize those gifts, seeing the one source.

II. ONE PURPOSE

They have one source. And so also one purpose. We see this laid out in vv.7-11.

A) As the Lord Sees Fit

1. Repeated theme

The Lord gifts and equips as He sees fit. This is a repeated theme (**READ 1 Corinthians 12:11, 18, 24a, 28**). This is a Trinitarian apportioning, arranging, composing, and appointing.

2. Applicable to all the gifts

And this is applicable to all the gifts - those still at work, those that have clearly ceased, and also those we may disagree on. On this, I’d urge you to read the *PCA Statement on the Holy Spirit*. It’s a helpful place to begin regarding the debate over what are called the charismatic gifts.

B) For the Good of the Whole

The point being that these gifts are given as the Lord sees fit for the good of the whole.

1. Extraordinary promise

(READ 1 Corinthians 12:7) This is an extraordinary promise. To each of us - with no exceptions - has been given a manifestation of the Spirit. A disclosing or an appearing of the Holy Spirit.

2. For a singular purpose

That’s an extraordinary promise. All for a singular purpose - the common good. It’s not chiefly about the one but the many - the supply, strength, growth, and maturity of the larger church.

These gifts have but one source and so, ultimately, one purpose.

Application:

This is something we've seen before in this series. Our gifting is not about our fulfilling. It's not about "what's in it for me" but the larger whole. Which means, to steal a phrase, we should ask not what the church can do for us but what we can do for the church. What else can it mean? Though that may not be how we think, this demands a corporate stewarding of gifts.

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III. ONE BODY

One source, one purpose, and one body ([READ 1 Corinthians 12:12](#)). And Paul goes on from there, unpacking this brilliant word picture of the church as the body of Christ - one single organic whole made up of many parts, each critical to the flourishing of all. It's quite profound.

A) *Against the Inferiority Complex*

And it corrects a couple of things. First, an inferiority complex. We see this in vv.14-20.

1. Absurd scenario

The absurd scenario is our thinking, "I don't much care for what I am. I want to be something else. And since I can't be that something else, I'll pull away." Again, an absurd scenario.

2. Root cause

The cause? Dissatisfaction with God's plan and a distrust in His dealings with me. Not just that, also a failure to see the beauty in the diversity He designs. The reality of the body corrects this.

B) *Against the Superiority Complex*

Now, swinging over to the other side, we have the superiority complex in vv.21-26.

1. Absurd scenario

Again, an absurd scenario, "I don't care much for what you are. I don't see the point of your role. And since I don't, I'll pull away." Again, like the inferiority complex, an absurd scenario.

2. Root cause

The cause? Pride. An overinflated sense of our importance. A real problem both then and now.

The reality of the body speaks to both of these complexes - inferiority and superiority.

Illustration:

Much was written this summer about the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11 ([READ quote](#)):

In her book [Team Moon](#), (Catherine) Thimmesh shares stories of these hidden heroes—spacesuit seamstresses, radio telescope operators, parachute designers and others who made it possible to get men to the moon, get them home, and let the rest of the world watch while it happened. At Kennedy Space Center, some 17,000 engineers, mechanics, soldiers, contractors and other workers set up the enormous missile for the launch. Then there were the "Two Bobs"—the guys in Houston monitoring just how little fuel was left in the lunar module during its descent to the surface. Team Moon also included a 24-year-old "computer whiz kid Jack Garman" who helped work through worrisome computer glitches during the *Eagle's* landing. The computer code that ran all the systems was developed by a team of software engineers at MIT led by Margaret Hamilton. Roughly 500 people worked on the space suit, including one seamstress who commented, "We didn't worry too much until the guys on the moon started jumping up and down. And that gave us a little bit of an eyebrow twitch."

No wonder astronaut Neil Armstrong would later say that as he took his first step on the moon he immediately thought about all those 400,000 people who had given him the opportunity to make that first step.

Application:

There is one source, one purpose, one body. Each of us has been gifted. No one has every gift. And we all need one another. Why? We are both one with Jesus and each other.

The Lord has gifted His church. We must utilize those gifts, seeing the one body.

CONCLUSION:

Speaking of Apollo 11, did you hear of the Sotheby's auction this past summer? Three video recordings of the lunar landing sold for \$1.82 million. These were the original tapes of the Apollo 11 Lunar EVA, the ones that capture Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon. What's astonishing is where these tapes came from. For the past 43 years, they were in the collection of Gary George. Gary George bought them while he was an intern at NASA in 1973. For a price of \$217. That was a bargain. Sometimes there can be priceless resources right under your nose.

Paul is saying the same thing about the church and the gifts the Lord has given to us. They should not go undiscovered, untapped, and unharnessed. They are far too valuable for that.

Which brings me to our spiritual gifts inventory. I know some of you are working on it. Do take your time. But do get started. Set a completion goal for yourself. Again, it is easily accessible on our website. And it is a good application of what we've learned in this series.

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