

## Each is Necessary

*By Linda Rex*

**January 26, 2025, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Epiphany**—In my last sermon blog, we tackled the first part of 1 Corinthians 12 and saw how all of the gifts the Spirit pours out are meant for the common good. As the body of Christ in the world, the Church best reflects our Lord Jesus as we serve one another and those around us with compassionate care and concern. When we serve and care for those around us as a unified whole, we more truly reveal Jesus Christ to the world in which we live.

As we read on into the next section, 1 Corinthians 12:12–31a, the apostle Paul continues to address the issues which were causing division in the church at Corinth. Paul reminds them that their unity is found in Jesus Christ. They were baptized into Christ, having been given the one Holy Spirit. Our value is not lessened or increased by the spiritual gifts we are given. Nor is it changed by whatever role we have in this life, our culture, or our gender. Rather, we are defined solely by our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus elevates us to a place of unity within the body of Christ.

And God himself determines the place we have in his Body, the Church. Just because the way God has made us or gifted us isn't obvious to others and doesn't play a dramatic or significant role, does not mean we are less important. In God's view, each person and their gifting are an essential part of the whole.

Speaking from personal experience, I found that it was next to impossible to effectively lead a church without people who were specifically gifted to do such things as pay attention to whether there is plenty of toilet tissue and paper towels on hand, ensure there is proper drainage around the building, or help clean people's houses. Some tasks are just not very "spiritual" in nature, but are very essential to the proper working of a fellowship and its service within a community.

People may expect a pastor to do all of these things him or herself. And that may be how it works out at times, but this is actually why God brings a lot of people together into a group and gives each of them different gifts. It's a good thing for a pastor to serve others by keeping track of inventory, digging ditches, and cleaning houses. But if a pastor spends all of his or her time doing these things, he or she will struggle to complete the specific tasks he or she was called and gifted by God to do such as preaching, teaching, and evangelizing.

This is why we see the example in Acts 6 where the apostles selected certain people to help the Hellenistic widows so that the apostles could focus on the ministry of the Word of God and prayer. Over the years, there were some very beautiful people I met along the way in my ministry who took on these challenging tasks I didn't have time for (and wasn't gifted for) and did a marvelous job of keeping up with them, thereby easing my burdens. Because of their service, I was freed up so I could preach and teach, and serve in music ministry at the church. And I'm so grateful for each person who did this, and for the gifting the Spirit gave them, and how they generously and faithfully offered their gifts to God and to the church.

Going back to our passage for this Sunday, we are reminded that the apostle Paul sought to help the members in Corinth quit placing so much emphasis on speaking in tongues and on having greater status in the church, depending on which gift the Spirit had given them. What Paul continued to emphasize in this chapter is how each and every person is specially gifted by God's Spirit to play an important role within the body of Christ. Because God values each person, each person should respect and value the other members of Christ's body. And they should respect and value themselves, for God has chosen and gifted them, "for the common good." We each have an important role to play, even if nobody seems to notice or care that we carefully do our part in any way that we can.

And what we can sometimes fail to realize is that the Spirit is continually at work within us, growing us up in Christ. What this means is that, as we offer our gifts and service to God and his Church, we may discover new gifts and abilities we did not realize we had. We may begin to reflect Jesus in new ways, and feel a call to contribute in new ways to what God is doing in and through his Church in this world. The Lord is always up to something new, and wants us to be a part of it. And fundamentally, as we look ahead to 1 Corinthians 13, his main objective is always self-giving, sacrificial love. This is what should be the central focus of our life and ministry.

*Dear Father, thank you for all the wonderful people you have gifted and joined together into the body of Christ. Thank you for the blessed gifts you have given and continue to give. Open our eyes, our minds and hearts, to see and receive all you offer us, and to generously and faithfully serve you and those around us, as you have gifted and called us to, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts.” 1 Corinthians 12:12–31a NASB*