

“Ministry Diversity and the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly”
 Issues of Diversity
 Understanding Spiritual Gifting

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 Title: Priority within Equality
 Text: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31
 The Big Idea: Inside of equality there is gifting priority and inside of God’s sovereignty believers are to seek the greater gifts.

You and I have been gifted by God for the advancement of His Church through the evangelization of sinners and the edification of saints. His passion is for His glory in and through His church. The means whereby this is fulfilled is through the gifting of His people with grace gifts. The Spirit is manifested and Christ is declared in and through this gifting. As this gifting is displayed Christ is declared in and through His people to the communities in which they are found. Listen to Paul as he exhorts his student Timothy as it relates to spiritual gifting.

¹⁴ **“do not neglect the spiritual gift within you**, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. ¹⁵ **Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.** ¹⁶ **Pay close attention to yourself** and to your teaching; **persevere in these things**, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:14, 15).

⁶ “for this reason I remind you **to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.** ⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Tim. 1:6, 7).

With this in mind there are three initial purposes of this passage.

The purpose of this paragraph is . . .

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- Intellect – to help you *understand* that gifting diversity shows the richness of Christ to the community.
- Volition – to help you *choose* to embrace the diversity and celebrate its expression. Because of what we have been and presently are studying, I believe each of us should choose to spend time each week serving Christ in and through His Church. How you serve Christ is so diversified, so what this looks like is not important.
- Emotion – to help you *love* those who are different from you in their gifting. It is only as you serve others that you will find a peace and contentment in life. If your life is lived only for self, you will live a shallow life.

I am so desirous of you living a contented life that I now call you to serve Christ by serving His church. Our present study will show that “although all believers are equal, there is still ministry diversity and ministry priority in the expression of the body in its various parts.”

Why is this important?

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Grace gifting reveals Christ to the community in which the church is found. The priority of God in ministry expression is not based on superiority, but in sequence or order. Some gifts precede others in their ministry expression. The gift of apostle took precedence over the gift of tongues and the gift of teacher took precedence over the gift of healing. The issue is not one of importance, but of ministry priority.

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Let me quickly note four thoughts.

- You will boast of what you have.
- You will be jealous of what you do not have.
- You will compete instead of compliment.
- You will condemn non-conformity instead of celebrating diversity.

Verse 12:27 returns again to the main point: **Christ is one body and we are parts of his body. So there ought to be a sense of unity and solidarity.** Verses 12:28-30 brings us back to the area which seems to have generated conflict: how people exercised their gifts. All these roles were vital for the life of the Christian community. The roles relate to particular functions, not to any sense of status on its own. <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/CEpEpiphany3.htm>

There are three ideas in verses 27-30: **First**, God’s placement of believers in His body. **Second**, gifting or ministry priority. **Third**, there is plurality within the body. Not everyone shares the same gifting. This is intentional. When we get to chapter 14 it would appear there was a problem with some believing their gift was significantly more important than other gifting and that everyone should have the same gift. Paul smashes such thinking. **If gifting makes much of us, then we have abused the gift.**

Transition:

Verse 27 and 28 once more establishes Paul big idea.

- I. God’s perfect provision (vv. 27-30)
 - A. God’s placement (v. 28)

Verse 27 reiterates what Paul has already stressed. Each part has its own place in the body of Christ. And it is God who puts each piece in their proper place. The appointment of God is like the arrangement of a complex symphony or the various parts of a running engine.

ILLUSTRATION:

It is an interesting thought, but no individual part of an airplane can fly in the absence of the total picture. The wings cannot fly by themselves, the seats cannot, the pilot cannot fly, and neither can the body, the front nor back end. Nothing that makes up an airplane can fly in isolation. It will fly because each part is connected to the whole.

So it is with the body of Christ. No part is to exist in isolation. God's placement and design is for the parts to live in community.

ILLUSTRATION:

In the movie "Cast Away" starring Tom Hanks the issue of loneliness and our need for relationships is accented. The scene just before Tom Hanks is rescued from his raft shows the dilemma of whether he should risk his life to save "Wilson" (his only friend – a volleyball). If our best friend is a volleyball named "Wilson," then something is dramatically wrong.

The word "appoint" is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians in the following manner.

- A builder who lays the foundation (1 Cor. 3:10, 11)
- Of presenting the gospel without cost to the audience (1 Cor. 9:18)
- The setting of each member within the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:18, 28)
- The placing of one's enemy under your feet (1 Cor. 15:25)
- The intentional setting aside of one's finances for the work of the church (1 Cor. 16:2)

Each one of these usages stresses design and intent. Such occurrences do not speak of something random or arbitrary.

I cannot stress this enough and our studies have made this clear: "each one of us is special in the body of Christ." You have no idea as to how God is using you in the lives of other people, but God is using you. Every single action, every word you speak, every gesture you make has far reaching implications.

Who is important to this body? Every single believer is important. Your importance and impact is not measured by how well you walk in obedience. Even in your failure you are contributing to the body of Christ. That person who sits dejected and consumed by darkness is important to the body of Christ. We need every one of the parts. Each part contributes to the overall health of the body.

Listen to the following summary by William Loader concerning this passage of Scripture.

Paul challenges us to see ourselves as the embodiment of Christ in the **world, not primarily as individuals but as local communities, yet belonging also to a larger whole. Difference is acknowledged. People are not all the same. They do not all have the same abilities. The common life is nothing other than the life of Christ, the life of the Spirit. This remains the constant.** In each situation the working out may vary, although not without the apostolic connection which keeps us connected to the whole in present time and in history. Thus Paul deals with the common problems of divisiveness, especially of the kind generated by claims to the Spirit, by bringing people back to basics. **Our sense of identity lies not in the role we play, nor the status, nor the reward our role brings, but in the sense of oneness with the life of Christ which is the life of God - and ultimately the life of all that is. We are not asked as individuals to be Christ or Christs, let alone saviors of the world, although many suffer from this misconception and the burn out it produces. We are asked to be members of a body, of Christ, and to play our part - not more, not less.**

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/CEpEpiphany3.htm> First Thoughts on Year C Epistle Passages from the Lectionary Epiphany 3 William Loader

If we do not recognize God's placement of the gifting as being sourced in grace there is a real danger of being seduced away from Christ. Inside of God's placement there is incredible gifting. Sometimes we find ourselves following a person instead of the Lord. This happened in Corinth ("some of Paul, Apollos, and some of Peter" 1:12) and it happens to us all the time. The TV has made global some incredibly gifted people. Technology has made global many ministries. Often people fall in love with gifting and ministries and not Christ and His church. This is a real danger. Any time we are attracted to gifting, we must proceed with caution. All gifting exists to point us to Christ.

B. God's priority (vv. 28, 31)

There is sequence and order to what God does. There are lesser and greater gifts as it relates to function, but not importance.

The construction used gives "the notion of subordination." (Rogers & Rogers, 378).

The passage focuses once again on God's sovereign placing of individuals in the body, and the list of gifts followed by the rhetorical questions are meant to underscore, against the Corinthian bias for *tongues only*, that there are many gifts and God does not want all members to have one gift, but that there be the exercise of many gifts in community (cf. 14:1).

http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1201

Some of the gifting “has precedence over the other in the founding and building up of the local assembly.” (Fee, 1 Corinthians, 620).

C. God’s plurality (vv. 29, 30)

Diversity within unity is to be expected and celebrated. God did not make us the same. This diversity has divine priority within the equality of the body.

In Matthew Henry’s Commentary he writes, "There must be a distinction of members in the body. So Christ's members have different powers and different places. We should do the duties of our own place, and not murmur, or quarrel with others."

The listing provided for us here is one of four in the New Testament.

Romans 12:4-8	1 Corinthians 12:8-10	1 Corinthians 12:28-30	Ephesians 4:11
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prophecy (v6) 2. Ministry (v7) 3. Teaching (v7) 4. Exhorting (v8) 5. Giving (v8) 6. Ruling (v8) 7. Compassion (v8) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Word of Wisdom (v8) 2. Word of Knowledge (v8) 3. Faith (v9) 4. Gifts of Healing (v9) 5. effecting of miracles (v10) 6. Prophecy (v10) 7. Distinguishing of spirits (v10) 8. Tongues (v10) 9. Interpretation of Tongues (v10) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apostles (v28) 2. Prophets (v28) 3. Teachers (v28) 4. Miracles (v28) 5. Healing (v28) 6. Helps (v28) 7. Governments (v28) 8. Tongues (v28) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apostles (v11) 2. Prophets (v11) 3. Evangelists (v11) 4. Pastors/Teachers (v11)

Some of the gifts noted are **not seen anywhere else** in the New Testament. The word used for “helps” is found only here in the entire New Testament. The word “administrations” is used only here. It literally refers “to the steering of a ship.” (Rogers/Rogers, 379). The word used for “healing” is used only in 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28 and 30.

A word inside the same family is used in 28 verses. I would like us to stop and consider the thought of healing for just a moment. This word is used of those who requested healing from Jesus (Matt. 8:8; Luke 6:17, 19) and it is the word used to describe those who have been healed (Matt. 8:13; 15:28; Mark 5:29). God’s passion for His people is for them to be healed (Matt. 13:15; Luke 5:17).

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18).

“And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:2).

Jesus heals people. What I have always found fascinating and incredibly sad is that the religious leaders fought Him over His healing. Friend, I cannot tell you what the healing of God will always look like but every time it happens I praise His name. **I am not here to micromanage the ministry of God.** He may do what He wants even when it does not fit into my limited understanding of what it is suppose to look like.

Listen to the author of Hebrews as he seeks to encourage his audience.

¹² “Therefore, **strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,** ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, **so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed**” (Heb 12:12, 13).

Listen to the powerful words of Peter to his suffering audience.

²⁰ “For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. ²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ and **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.** ²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now **you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls**” (1 Pet. 2:20-25).

I do not really know what the gift of healing looked like during this period of time. But I do know that the power of God was present to heal and that same power is present today. **God has not abandoned His people to the natural consequences of sin.** He is still sustaining, upholding, and healing us. It might not look like what we think it should, but He is healing.

Does He heal our physical maladies? Yes, but there are greater illnesses that afflict our souls.

He can deliver us from our addiction to

- Sex and pornography
- Alcoholic abuse
- Substance abuse
- Food
- Possessions
- Work

He can heal us from failed relationships within

- Our homes
- Our places of employment
- Our church

God can destroy the demons of

- Depression
- Distraction
- Apathy and lethargy

God can empower us

- To pray
- To read the Bible
- To fellowship with the people of God
- To evangelize
- To care and be kind
- To encourage and uphold the weak and feeble

God's healing power might not change your circumstances, but His power can give you rest in the midst of the storm. Your peace of mind and contentment is a product of His healing power. We must stop selling God short.

Transition:

Verse 31 provides us with two stated ideas and implies a third.

II. Believer's proper response (v. 31)

A. Be content with what you have.

The text is not telling us this directly but the contrast of earnestly desiring is to accept what you have and where you are at. Our desire for the greater gifts and the more excellent way is not driven by dissatisfaction with the gifting we have.

The greater gifts and the more excellent way **do not replace our present gifting but enhance and magnify our gifting.** It takes our present service to the next level of commitment and expression.

The desire is to edify or build up the body of Christ. What are you doing to accomplish that end?

B. Earnestly desire the greater gifts.

The word “earnestly desire” is a passion word. It communicates an enormous amount of energy. The idea itself is neutral. The object sought or the object that causes the emotion is what colors its morality.

- When the brothers of Joseph sold him into slavery their emotion of envy is our word “earnestly desire” (Acts 7:9).
- Those who persecuted Paul for his preaching “earnestly desired” to destroy him (Acts 13:45; 17:5).

There is tremendous feeling in the word. We are exhorted to “earnestly desire” the greater gifts. We have consistently seen that our gifting is an expression of God’s grace. We receive what He wants us to have. Yet our present text exhorts us to earnestly desire the greater gifts. Is our desire in conflict with God’s good pleasure? The answer is no. God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility are never in conflict. God is always working in and through the will of man.

By why should we seek the greater gifts? Is our present gifting inadequate? Absolutely not; the desire for the greater gifts is so that our present gifting might be enabled to touch more lives and to manifest the Spirit of Christ to a larger audience and in a deeper way. The desire is to be of greater service to the body of Christ.

Ministry and service in the body of Christ is something that cannot be duplicated anywhere else. No matter how many recreational toys you accumulate or how powerful you grow in the business world or how much clout you might have among your peers, these things can never bring you the kind of contentment and satisfaction that serving Christ can. There is something “magical” when you serve another individual in the name of Christ for good.

There is awe to service. The joy you and I experience when we serve the body of Christ in behalf of our Lord cannot be replicated anyplace else. Nothing else can bring you this kind of joy and satisfaction.

Christian service is never a sacrifice. Very few people will put themselves in harm’s way for the purpose of Christ, yet we are all called to serve. Christian service is not optional. Everything about the Christian life puts us in opposition to the world, the flesh and the devil. Yet the blessing acquired in sacrificial service cannot be reproduced anywhere else.

ILLUSTRATION:

You will read the Scripture in vain to find any illustration of anyone who served God in vain.

So when you are invited to participate in serving the body of Christ we are not seeking to take from you, but giving to you an opportunity to experience a thrill that cannot be found anywhere else.

Notice how Paul ends this thought. Verse 31 walks us right into chapter 13. In the midst of all this gifting and service, Paul speaks of a more excellent way. I cannot wait for us to get to 1 Corinthians 13. It is one of the most beautiful chapters in the entire Bible. The clarity of the picture it gives us of Jesus Christ is staggering.

If we could capture the thought of chapter 13 much of the difficulties we have in relationships would be dissolved. Regardless as to your gifting, love will always win. In the midst of God's placement, priority, and plurality there is connectivity to all of this. That "thing" that holds all the various parts in place and keeps all the gears lubricated is love.

C. There is a more excellent way (1 Cor. 13)

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here?)

1. Our understanding of this text is not based on who we exclude but on who we include.

In the movie *Chocolat* (2000) the young priest Pere Henri in giving his Easter Sermon gives the following counsel: "I want to talk about Christ's humanity, I mean how he lived his life on earth: his kindness, his tolerance. We must measure our goodness, not by what we don't do, what we deny ourselves, what we resist, or who we exclude. Instead, we should measure ourselves by what we embrace, what we create, and who we include."

2. Are we known in the community of Waukesha as a loving community?

I invite you to write someone a note of encouragement this week. It is such a simple task. Do not allow the opportunity to pass you by.

3. Who are you serving within the body of Christ?
4. In what ways is Christ being seen in you and through you to those around you? This question is not as difficult to answer as you might think. (for example: The postcard)

5. I want Christ to be magnified in and through His people. I want to see the Holy Spirit move in our midst and the means whereby both of these desires are fulfilled is when we serve His people. We are the body of Christ.

The Gospel presented

For the truth of Scripture to change your life through renewing your mind you must be in a right relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. This relationship is impossible apart from the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This relationship is built around four key ideas. They can be summed up in four words: God, man, Christ, and response.

GOD

There is a real and personal God who is both Creator and Judge before whom you will stand and give an account as both creature and criminal.

MAN – RECOGNIZE

You have rebelled against God. We've all participated in this sinful rebellion. As a result, we have alienated ourselves from God and have exposed ourselves to His righteous wrath, which will banish us eternally to hell if we do not accept the work of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

CHRIST – REALIZE

But God sent Jesus *Christ*, fully God and fully man, to die the death that we deserved for our sins – the righteous for the unrighteous – so that God might both punish our sin in Christ and forgive it in us.

RESPONSE – RECEIVE

The only saving *response* to this Good News is to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12; Acts 16:30, 31).

Have you turned to Jesus Christ as your only hope of eternal life? Today this can happen to you.