

1Corinthians 18-08-19b

We're going to resume our study here in the book of 2nd, actually it's the 12th chapter of 1st Corinthians, I was thinking about a passage in 2nd Corinthians and it kind of scrambled my brain momentarily. So we're down to verse 12 of chapter 12, where the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ. And you have this wonderful analogy that helps us understand that even though there is diversity, it is defined by unity.

The hand is not something that makes the rest of the body incidental or just something to attach the hand to. It is subordinate, it is an integral part, but we don't typically actually say talk to the hand. You talk to the person, you talk to the entirety, you talk to that which defines and gives someone their identity.

You don't say, oh look there goes that really great looking hand, or look at the efficiency of that foot, or boy what an ear. I just want to go focus on that ear for a while. It's important that the dominant and the defining element be the unity.

And I have a little something to say about that. I've said this before and I appreciate everybody being sensitive to my sensitivity. Ever since before I left the Marine Corps to go to seminary, I have thought there's really a problem in my own mind, and everybody else can go be warned and be fed, but I do not think it's appropriate to attach the prefix reverend to a guy who is a pastor, reverend this.

It's an old tradition that goes back hundreds and hundreds of years. I don't like it. I think it partakes of the same thing when Jesus told his own disciples, the twelve apostles, he told them, let no man call you father.

You've got one father in heaven. You're in his service. If somebody's going to call somebody father, they need to be calling the heavenly father, father.

After that, their earthly father. Hopefully he's worthy to be called father and has earned the title because of his integrity and his character and so on. And here's why, and there's documentation for it here.

It's one thing out in the secular world. I think one of the more useful titles that's in the world at large is doctor. I want to know that a guy is qualified to carve up one of my teeth and replace it with something better or drill into my bones and put in a screw to hold a bad fracture together, get in there and fix something that's broken.

If a guy's got doctor prefixed to his name, that's a good thing. That doesn't come easy. That's an accomplishment that speaks specifically of qualifications to get a thing done.

I don't want to go to some guy that just is kind of good at picking mushrooms and blending

leaves and herbs and shaking a rattle at what's wrong with me. I want somebody that has got whatever training and knowledge and wisdom and experience is available. But in the body of Christ, it is not so.

We have already got someone in charge who has the plan, has the wisdom, has the knowledge, and that is God incorporated. That's what this section began with. You've got the Holy Spirit, you've got the Lord Jesus, and you've got God the Father.

That's it in terms of putting a prefix on somebody's name and identifying them as the ones who have got what you need. It's the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is God.

God's got what we need. Everybody in the body. This is not the body identified by the hand or the foot or the ear.

It's the body of Christ. The body of Christ. So I think calling some guy reverend is completely out of line.

It just is fingernails on a chalkboard. Nobody has chalkboards and very few people have their own fingernails anymore, so I don't even know if that pertains. But it's a great irritating thing to me.

I occasionally get a piece of mail because somebody will get my name off of a DTS mailing list or something and it will say Reverend Sam Hall and I just want to get a pen and scratch it out. If you are a wonderful encourager, if you've got the gift of prayer, if you've got the gift of helps or something else, do you just start prefixing yourself help or this, help or that? I think the clerical collar. I think the magisterial robes.

You see some flavors of preachers, especially in the older days. Everybody's kind of gotten away from it now, but they used to actually put a surplice or something on, I think it's surplus, but if I say that it sounds like something you got at Goodwill or the Army-Navy store or something. It's not surplus, it's surplice.

But it's a fancy deal. And it sets you apart. You go out, the parson used to have a little funny hat and a turned around collar.

I think that is in direct violation of this passage. It's in direct violation of this passage because what was happening? People were trying to gain honor for themselves by saying, well, I speak in tongues. And it goes on today in your temporary gift focus churches and gatherings, and it focuses on the gift and not the giver.

It focuses on the person exercising the gift instead of the benefit, the advantage that is supposed to be conferred. And it is confusion. While I'm on my soapbox, I'll tell you something else.

Without naming names, you're going to know what I'm talking about anyway. But listen to what

Paul says here. After talking about the presentable parts and the unpresentable parts, skip down to verse 26.

Verse 25 says, there should be no schism in the body. He opened this letter talking about, I hear that there are divisions and schisms among you. I'm of Paul.

I'm of Apollos. It shouldn't be that way. When I go somewhere and somebody sees me, they don't say, look, there's Sam's arm.

Or look, there's Sam's foot. They say they're Sam if they say anything. I hardly see anybody I know anymore.

But if they do see me, they look at me in my entirety. They don't say, well, look, that little finger, I believe that's Sam right there. I'm made up of all of my parts, and it's me.

Whose ship is it they talk about where if you start out with a ship, and then you replace the mast, and you replace a board here, and a spar there, and a sail here, and an anchor there, and by the time you've replaced all the parts, is it still the same ship? There's a name for that. It's somebody's ship. Some ancient philosopher said, at what point do you lose your identity if you start swapping out parts? And restoration people get into this.

If you're restoring a 34 Ford or something, and, okay, I put on the left front fender, the right front fender, I put on a new hood, I put on a new left rear fender, and by the time you get finished, you've completely replaced all the parts in the car, and none of the original parts are left, is it still the same car? Or is it a different car? And it's an interesting question. If ourselves allegedly, I don't believe this, I never will believe it, they say, well, every seven years, you're made out of entirely new stuff. All of your old, my bones, my teeth, sorry, no.

There's still parts of me that have been here since I was little. But a lot of your tissue does change out. All your blood cells die and you get new ones as they're made in your marrow and all that.

And so you say, well, if I'm all completely changed out every seven years, am I still me? More importantly, if this whole entire frame gets changed out and I get a resurrection body, am I still me? I could be resurrected, and if I wasn't in there, but I looked just like me and sounded just like me and talked just like me, they get into this in cloning. If you could implant all of the memories and experiences in there, how would the clone know that they weren't me? How would anybody else know that that wasn't really me because I'm not actually there? And to me, the most miraculous thing about resurrection is, as Dr. Criswell is wont to say, I shall be I and you shall be you. And it will be this conscious awareness.

It's not going to be a facsimile. It's not going to be a perfect copy of me. It is going to be me, myself, and I, the same guy that's talking to you right now, and I'm aware that I'm here.

I know when I'm asleep and I know when I'm awake. Actually, I don't always know when I'm

asleep, but I know when I'm awake that I'm me. And it wasn't a different Sam yesterday or the day before.

It wasn't a different Sam that lived in all these other places. It's me. I'm the same guy.

I'm decrepit compared to what I was, but it's still me riding around here. The ship is slowly disintegrating and there's not much replacement parts going on, but I'm still in here. If you're married to somebody, you know the person inside.

Our outer frame is subject to the ravages of time, but inside, it's still us. We're still in there. It's like your house weathering a hurricane.

The shingles may blow off and the siding may weather and the glass may break, but you're still in there. God is going to completely re-embody us, but it's still us. We are defined by an essence that makes us who we are.

This is my point of the ship analogy and our bodies. So your cells do regenerate every so often. Well, they come from the same source that generated the ones that were here before.

This may be different skin than was on my face five years ago. You watch an oldie like we had to do the other night and you say, well, that's not really the same face because all of those cells were different. Those have all gone away and the hair has all grown out.

That hair has been cut off. This is completely different hair. It's defined by what it is a part of, and it's a part of me.

It's what I use to express myself. You are using whatever your body is made of at the moment. Whatever it was made of 20 years ago doesn't matter.

You are what defines your body. Why am I saying this? What is Paul talking about here? Read it. The body is one and has many members, verse 12.

All the members of that one body being many are one body. That's what Christ is. Now, you think about the body of Christ 100 years ago.

None of those people are around. Just 100 years ago, 1918, World War I is just cranking up good. None of those people are here.

Zero. I watch in my alumni magazine from the Naval Academy, and the oldest classes, the Silver Port News, they've got a few wives hanging on. All the guys have gone, and the wives outlast them almost always.

But it used to be, I was in 26th Company, and we had sort of a familiarity with the class of 1926. Back when there were 01 through 36, there were 36 companies at Navy when I was there. So the classes, 1901 through 1936, would sort of adopt a class, and there were still enough of them around when I first got there that the class of 1926 would talk to 26th Company, and the

class of 1936 would talk to 36th Company.

That class news is no more. There's nobody from the class of 1926 left. It erodes away as everybody dies.

So what was the body of Christ 100 years ago? If you were old enough to be a well-informed believer, you had to at least be five years old, which means you were born in 1913. Well, you'd have to be 105 years old now to still be, you know, all of that body of Christ has been replaced. Were they the body of Christ? Are we the body of Christ now, even though we weren't the body of Christ then? 100 years from now, if the Lord tarries and it's 2118, what makes it the body of Christ? It's not who's in it.

It's what those members are a part of. Seems like such a simple concept, but why does Paul spend so much time emphasizing it? Because if you start looking at yourself and you say, well, I've got a turned around collar. I've got a parson hat.

I've got reverend in front of my name. I'm special. What do you end up doing? You make an issue of yourself.

And, you know, people, even now, people find out you're a pastor, they change what they're talking about. Everybody gets nervous. Everybody gets quiet, like, oh, you know, I don't want to say the wrong thing or whatever.

And it's unfortunate because being a pastor does not make me special any more than you having whatever gift you have makes you, I mean, it's special in the sense that it's a God-given assignment. It's enabled by God's Spirit and it's directed by God's Son. I mean, that's special, but it's true for everybody.

And which gift it is, one gift is not any more special than another. In Corinth, they thought the big gift was Tom's. In our day, we have thought the big gift was pastor, at least I did when I was in Bible churches and such, even Baptist churches.

Everybody treats the pastor as special. Oh, the pastor's here. He's, you know, he's something.

No, no, no. You don't recognize the body by one part, and one part is not special. We need to put prefixes in front of everybody's name if we're going to put reverend in front of a pastor.

It's just visible. It's more visible. It functions more regularly.

It's, you know, a church is generally, well, who's the pastor of your church? He's probably the face or the mouth of the church or whatever. But look, it isn't, oh, you know, this person is so great. Just look at the shape of that mouth.

It's weird. It's like, you know, do you want the church to be Angelina Jolie and well, you know, those lips just define or Michelle Pfeiffer, you know, had a particular kind of lip and then all these women went down, actresses went in and got collagen stuck in the side of their upper

lips so they would look like Michelle Pfeiffer. She was born that way.

The rest of them get injected that way. But it's just goofy to focus on somebody by what their mouth is shaped like. It's an entirety.

It's a whole body. That's what Paul is talking about because what have the Corinthians done? They've done with tongues what we do with pastor. And I just use that as an example because I'm not sensitive.

You can't take one part and glorify that. There are other examples I could give that I won't like Jennifer Lopez. But there are parts of the body that people will identify and say, oh, that's the most spectacular part of the body I've ever seen.

And it just stands out and it becomes a part of the definition of the person and it shouldn't. And women have rightfully complained about being objectified. Well, you don't look at me as a person or who I am or what I think or my character or my integrity.

It's my appearance. You're making an issue out of me or some part of me. Well, it's just everybody sort of instinctively knows that that's wrong.

Well, to be feeling less than because you don't have some visible gift or a nameable gift or a gift that function all the time or aggrandizing or popularizing or overappreciating somebody because they have a more visible gift or a more regularly expressed gift like pastor misses the point that Paul is making here. And he goes to great lengths to make it. One spirit.

We were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink into one spirit. Why does he say Jews and Greeks and slaves and free? Of all the different things he could pick, why would he say that? Because there were Jews who said, I'm better than you because I'm Jewish. There were Greeks that said, we're anti-Semitic.

We're better than you because you're a Jew. There were masters who said, well, I'm not a slave. And there were slaves who said, you know what? I'd rather have one slave for a friend than 10 masters because the masters are all idiots and self-important and abusive and insensitive.

In the slave community, slaves are better than enlisted officers. Officers appreciate each other. Enlisted appreciate each other.

And I'd never trust an officer. I'd go to a non-com or a staff NCO or something. And it only gets a piece of the truth, and it's not balanced, and it's not right.

So if the ear should say, verse 16, because I'm not an eye, I am not of the body. Is it therefore not of the body? It is of the body. It's just messing up.

This happens with novocaine. You know, sometimes you want to block the function of a part of the body, and so you detonate or you Botox. You say, well, I don't want your frowning muscles to work up here between your eyebrows, so I'll Botox them, and I'll take away their front.

Well, if I've immobilized my eyebrows, does that mean they're not my eyebrows anymore because they're out of my control? If I wake up and I've slept on my arm and it's asleep, boy, isn't that just the strangest thing? If your whole arm or your whole leg is asleep and not just a little bit, it takes it like a while to come back. And I've picked up my hand with my other hand because it was just completely numb, and it's like grabbing a hold of somebody else's hand. And it's just, but is it not my hand just because it's not functioning right? It's my hand.

It's just weird. You know, it's not doing what it's normally supposed to do. Well, we have to be using this analogy to think of the body of Christ and both the local assembly and the larger group of believers that we come in contact with.

And this really only counts when you're in contact. That's why all of this section of Corinthians is when you come together, when you are assembled, when you are with each other, these are the truths that pertain. So is it therefore not of the body? And the answer, of course, is no.

This is a second-class condition in Greek. If and it's not true. If the ear says, I'm not an eye, therefore I'm not of the body.

I'm not a pastor, so I'm not important. I'm not speaking in tongues, I'm not important. Is that true? No.

If and it's not true. Second class. If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear anything? If the whole body were hearing, how would you smell anything? God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased.

What view of God did we have at the beginning of this chapter? The Spirit, the Lord Jesus, and God the Father. Which one of them is in view here in verse 18? God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased. This is God incorporated.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit have all been involved in placing a member in the body. So Paul doesn't need to specify that the Spirit decides where you are in the body or that the Lord Jesus does. Or that God the Father does.

They're unified. They're all in agreement and in harmony, and each one has done his specific God-like function in placing us in the body. You can't say, well, the Holy Spirit did this to me, or the Lord Jesus made the assignment, or God the Father determined this and decreed it.

It's God. There's no distinction in their purpose in assigning us what we do in the body. What part of the body are you? Now, does the body benefit itself? Do we take care of ourselves? What a wonderful blessing that we can dress ourselves, we can feed ourselves, we can groom ourselves, we can orient ourselves and operate things and get things done with our body.

Whether it is for ourselves, we do things for ourselves that benefit us, and then we can also do things for others that benefit others. We can help somebody get something done. We can take somebody somewhere.

We can give support. We can give encouragement. We can give counsel.

We can do all kinds of things. Some of what we do is for our own maintenance and enjoyment. Other things we do are for other people's maintenance and enjoyment, right? So, it's a function of the body, both directed inward and directed outward.

God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased. If they were all one member, where would the body be? It wouldn't be a body. It would just be a giant ear laying there on the ground.

But now, indeed, there are many members, one body. 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. No, verse 22, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary, seem to be weaker, are necessary.

I told you before, it's one of my favorite immediate illustrations of this principle. I've got a wonderful VW bus, still have it at the moment, and engine, tires, steering wheel, all the brakes, and everything that makes a vehicle. And you get in there, you turn the key, and you drive around.

You can go hundreds of miles in the thing, and it's great fun. But my ignition switch, and not just the switch, but one tiny little set of contacts inside the ignition, when you turn it on and then you hit start, those contacts have failed inside. And turning the key, which is essential, and the ignition switch, which is essential, but these two little contacts that come together to activate the solenoid and send power to the pinion gear in the starter to engage the flywheel and turn the engine over and make it start, these two little tiny pieces of brass don't work anymore.

It cracked or broke or something. I haven't taken it apart to find out. But the entire thing is deactivated because this little minuscule part doesn't work.

I solved that by wiring around it, and I have a Ford Taurus window up-down button underneath, and when I hit their momentary contact, as long as you hold it, it works. When you let go, it quits. That's what you need for ignition.

So I have a window switch. And I say, window up, and the key engages. So it's like a feature.

It's like a security feature. You can turn the key all day. Even if you steal my keys, you can't drive my bus.

You got to reach up under the dash, and you have to know where it is because you can't see it, and push that little button. Well, now everybody knows. If my bus disappears, I'll know it was one of you.

But you push that button, and that makes it happen. Another time, that was all working. And so

I started the bus, and I'm getting ready to go somewhere, and I put it in gear, and just nothing happens.

It doesn't engage. I go to reverse. I go to first, second, third, fourth, nothing.

Well, I crawl into the bus, and of course, you sit in the front of the bus, and the engine and the transmission are in the back. So there is a linkage from your four-on-the-floor stick shift that goes under the floor and goes all the way back and moves a lever on the transmission. Well, this is a long rod, and right in the middle of it, there's a little link, a little special part that just takes this rod and hooks it to this rod.

Well, that had come undone. I kid you not, this is like a 57-cent part. It's just a little sleeve with a couple of lock screws, and it's got some flexibility because of the way the bus moves.

It needs a little bit of flex, and so it's this special little part. It's a nothing part. But without it, the bus is useless, except maybe to keep you dry in the rain.

But you can't go anywhere. It doesn't perform its function. You can have a doghouse that would do the same thing as the bus without this little tiny part.

It's a weak part. It's seemingly nonessential. But without it, the rest of the bus is useless.

The little contacts in the ignition switch have to be faithful to do their job, or the bus is going nowhere. You say, but it's such a little part. I want to be the engine.

I want to be the steering wheel. I want to be the windshield. I want to be the exterior where I'm seen.

I want to be the tires. The rubber hits the road. I want to be the transmission.

I want to shift gears. And listen, that little part, if it's not there doing its job, the rest of it's useless. Useless and frustrating, especially when you have to order that part because nobody carries them at the auto parts.

And so your bus is sitting there useless for a week until you get a little tiny UPS package. And inside is this tiny little sleeve. You crawl into there.

Five minutes later, the bus is whole and entire and functional and glorious. And enviable as you go down the road because of this one little tiny part. That's what Paul is talking about here.

You may be the switch. You may be the link. But you are essential.

The rest of it's not going to go without you. Not going to go properly. Or it may run amok.

I've told you many times the story of my little leather disc giving way in the VW bug and being unable to steer. It looked like I made coasters in high school out of round discs of leather. I actually almost put those in because that's exactly what it was.

They were just two round discs of leather, one on this piece of metal, one on this piece of leather, little fingers. And they screwed on there. And I thought, you know, I could take two of my coasters.

But I thought, man, there's probably something special about what they use. I ordered the right part and got it back when you could still order parts. But little old leather discs, seemingly minor, invisible, non-essential.

Without that thing, I was just so glad it happened in a parking lot. So that's what Paul is talking about. Verse 23, those members of the body which we think to be less honorable on these, we bestow greater honor.

How many times have I told you about my steering link? How many times have I told you about this little transmission link? Why? I bestow greater honor on those because it impressed me about how critically important they are. You think about astronauts up in space and the failure of one little seal or one little part that, see, and this is why they check and check and check and check and look at all of the small stuff. Because one small thing going wrong, one bad solder joint can mean the difference between life and death for all of the people inside the thing.

Every little part has to do its job. It has to be faithful. It has to hold together.

It has to not fail when it's being depended on, right? Our unpresentable parts have greater modesty. He's talking about, you know, there are parts of our body that we try to ensure are always covered up. And you think, well, is this a bad thing that we're trying to cover this up? No, it's a good thing that we consider them so important that they are not to be seen by just anybody.

And yet it isn't that they're unpresentable and shouldn't be seen. It's that they are special and unique and not to be seen except by special and unique people, unless you're seeing the doctor. So our presentable parts have no need.

And yet people want to say the presentable parts are the most important. But sometimes those unpresentable parts are by far the most important. God composed the body.

Notice again, no distinction in the Trinity here. God composed the body having given greater honor to that which lacks it. That there should be no schism in the body.

Nobody should be saying, you're unimportant, I have no need of you. We look at our bodies and we say, I don't think there's really any part of me that I can afford to lose. I saw a guy that had his earlobe ripped off because he had one of those piercing ring things in, then he snagged it on something and it just ripped the whole bottom of his ear off.

And you think, well, earlobe, no big deal. If it's no big deal, do you want to cut your own earlobe off? I don't. It's nice just to have smooth skin and you think, well, I've got a scar.

I knew a girl, beautiful girl, older than me when I was a teenager. And I was actually kind of sweet on her younger sister who was my age, but went over to their house one day to play some tennis. And so the older sister came out in shorts.

And she had an ugly, ugly divot scar on her thigh. And the natural question is, wow, what happened? She was bitten by a horse. And the horse reached down there and took that chunk out.

Well, in those days, they didn't have the kind of cosmetic surgery options they have now. And I don't know that she would have worried about it anyway. One of the reasons she was so admirable wasn't for her looks, but for her demeanor.

And she was completely unselfconscious, didn't know, didn't care, didn't mind talking about it. And as you know from your own experience, appearance lasts about 15 or 20 seconds. When you get to know somebody, your mind changes their appearance.

I've seen allegedly really nice looking people that were just ugly as soon as you got to know them or as soon as you heard them talk for a couple of minutes. There are movie actors in Hollywood that are renowned for their looks that I can't stand the sight of. And there are people that are just the opposite, very plain.

And yet, when you get to know them, they suddenly become attractive. And you like to see them. And you want to talk to them or hear them talk.

And I'll give you kind of a lame example. Just because this came up, I was in the middle of doing something. And I ran across an interview with Paul Simon.

And Paul Simon is probably the single greatest musician that our country has turned out in the last 60 years, just in terms of creativity, performance, talent, melodies, musically speaking. The guy, I saw him talking about a song that he was writing. He was halfway through Still Crazy After All These Years when he was interviewed.

And the song was only half finished. And he said, look, I'll play the first part. And so Still Crazy After All These Years.

And then he got to the part where he needed to write the bridge, the part that kind of changes. And he hadn't figured out the bridge yet. And he said, now, I've just finished on this chord.

After all these years, and he played that chord. And it's kind of a leading chord. It leads to something.

He says, now, from there, I could go here. And he played a chord. Or I could go here.

And he played another chord. He said, but you know, there's two notes that I haven't used yet in this whole song. I've used every note except I haven't used a C. And I haven't used a C sharp.

He said, so I'd kind of like to do something where I use it. And I'm thinking, how do you keep track of what notes you've used? And he knew all of the appropriate chords. I mean, musically, the guy is just incredible.

And he has gotten every award and then some that you can get musically. But have you ever seen Paul Simon in context? He's short, very short. He's one of the smallest entertainers you will ever see.

He is extremely short. And he's, especially at this point in his career, if you passed him on the street, you would not recognize him. He doesn't stand out.

But anybody that sees him says, there goes Paul Simon. There goes Ryman Simon. That was one of his first solo albums.

There goes Ryman Simon. He is who he is because of what he does and how he does it. And he's very intelligent.

He's so fun to listen to. You can pull up any Paul Simon interview, the rare ones that you can find, and listen to him talk. He's just interesting.

And you forget what his appearance is. Makes no difference. It's who he is, not what he is.

The Apostle Paul, according to early church tradition, was short, bald-headed with a high, squeaky voice. And evidently, was kind of hard to look at because of all of his scars. He'd been beaten.

He'd been whipped. He'd had all kinds of things done to him. He was stoned and left for dead at Lystra.

And that messes you up. Apparently, there was something with his eyes. He might have had a weeping eye or a leaky eye or something disfiguring his face.

He was rough to look at and evidently rough to listen to. And he said, you know, people say that I'm unimpressive. The Apostle Paul, are you kidding me? If you had a choice of a thousand people standing out in the yard, one to invite in, and the Apostle Paul was out there, who do you think you'd invite? Outside of the Lord Jesus, my second most desirable person to talk to would be Paul.

I've got some questions for him. And just to hear him. Let him talk about anything, hopefully in a language I can understand.

Do you see what I'm saying? That's what Paul is saying here. You can't judge by position in the body, nor can you judge by how comely or uncomely the part of the body is. Every function is essential or it would not have been assigned by God to be in the body.

They take parts out of you now. You typically have to take medicine. You know, if they take out

your spleen, we have to compensate some way.

You're different. You're changed if you lose a part of yourself, internal or external. So Paul says, look, there should be no schism in the body.

The members should have the same care for one another. Stars, emphasis, underline, highlight, this is the point. What was the point at the Lord's table in the previous chapter? You should care for one another, look out for one another, right? This is the point.

This is what he's been driving to in the previous 24 verses here. There shouldn't be division. There shouldn't be separation.

There shouldn't be looking askance. In a healthy body, every part of the body appreciates every other part. Have you ever had an itch right in the center of your back where you can't reach it? That's probably like a square quarter inch of skin, but if that thing's got an itch, the whole rest of the body is trying to reach it and scratch it, right? You're looking for a fence post you can do like the horses, you know, and get up against there and get that thing.

The whole body becomes concerned. Have you ever stepped on a nail? I know somebody stepped on a nail yesterday. Suddenly, the whole body is occupied with fixing that, right? And it's the size of the point of a nail.

You see the point Paul is making here? There should be no, all of the body ought to be for itself. It ought to be concerned with itself. Big, small, presentable, unpresentable, beautiful, ugly.

The members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. That's a healthy body.

If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. You are the body of Christ and members individually. You are a member.

God has appointed these in the church. First, apostles, second, prophets, third, teachers, after that, miracles, then after that, gifts of healings, after that, helps, after that, administrations, after that, varieties of tongues. Notice how it's last in the list and they had made it first.

Are all apostles? No. Are all prophets? No. Are all teachers? No.

Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? Earnestly desire the best gifts, and yet I show you a more excellent way. Earnestly desire the greater gifts, the best gifts. What are the best gifts? What did he just say? Now, when he says earnestly desire, we get the idea that I'm in the running to get a gift assigned to me.

When he says earnestly desire, what is he saying? Oh, I've only got tongues. I want prophecy. I've only got prophecy.

I want apostle. Is that what he's saying? Earnestly desire means earnestly seek out the function

of the best gifts. What is the best gift in the list? It's apostle, right? So if you're going to earnestly desire apostle, what is he saying? I want to reap the benefit of that apostolic gift.

I want to hear what that apostle has to say. I want to seek out his counsel if he's in the area. I want to benefit from the wisdom and the insight and the stewardship of the mysteries that God has given the apostle Paul.

So in the church, what do I want to seek even today? The apostolic gift is the one temporarily assigned gift that still functions. We don't have prophets today, but we still have the benefit of the apostolic gift. And this is why we go to the scriptures.

We go to the New Testament scriptures. We go to the Old Testament prophets. We go and we get this word of wisdom and word of knowledge.

These communication gifts have been recorded and still benefit us today. Miracles were good at the time, but we don't have miracles now. Healings were good at the time, but we don't have healings now, not in the spectacular, supernatural sense.

Earnestly desire. Desire the benefit of those, not the possession of. Because your assignment comes from God.

He's made that explicit time and time again. So you can't go to God and say, Oh God, please change my gift. But you can desire the benefit.

Yet I show you a more excellent way. And what he's saying is, if you're going to think about gifts, look at the function of the best gifts and benefit from that. But here's a better way.

Instead of, why don't you take your eyes off of gifts altogether. Take your eyes off of comeliness or uncomeliness altogether. Take your eyes off of identity or non-identity altogether.

Of visibility or invisibility. Of appreciation or no appreciation. Instead of looking at everything in terms of a gift, think of the whole body and have concern for the rest of the body, which has been his constant theme.

But I'll show you the best way. And it is to take your eye off of the gift and focus on something else. And we know now as we come to chapter 13, this is the love chapter.

So, love is going to be the more excellent way. And that's going to be fascinating because as we've observed in the past, you can't necessarily... In fact, there's a song, one part of the recurring part of it says, I can't make you love me if you don't. That's kind of the hooky part of the song.

It's the only part I remember. I can't make you love me if you don't. And that's true.

You can't make somebody else love you and you can't make yourself love someone. Not in the sticky emotional sense of romantic love. It's kind of either there or it's not.

And one of the constant delusions that is perpetrated, particularly the modern human race is, but I love this person so, so, so much. If they just knew how much I love them, they would have to love me back. Honestly, at least for people like me, somebody who gets so obsessively, compulsively interested in you, it's a little scary and off-putting and you want to retreat.

There's nothing worse if you have a crush on someone in high school than that person being told that you have a crush on them because they're keeping an eye on you and everything you do is now suspicious because they know you've got this obsession. And it just, in my personal opinion, it's better to, the more you like somebody, the less they ought to know it. That's why Patty thought I didn't even like her when I met her because I was really impressed and so I just, I played my cards so close to my chest that she thought I didn't like her at all.

But we fixed that later. But the better way is love, but if you can't make yourself love someone, then how do you develop this love and what kind of love is it? It must not be the kind that is uncontrollable or is a matter of compatibilities and things in common and the sort of things that define romantic love. Actually, nothing defines romantic love.

The kind of things that characterize romantic love in terms of people love at first sight, allure, just obsessive. They used to call it melancholy in Shakespeare's day. A guy would see a girl and he would get moonstruck and then he couldn't do anything.

He was just leaning against trees and thinking up poetry and worthless to the world because this thing had just stricken him out of his senses. But that's, how do you know? It's like lightning. You don't know how and when that, you have very little control over that.

This is obviously a very different kind of love because Paul is going to show us this love, how to have it, how to exercise it, how to cultivate it. And so this is not going to be like love as the world sees it. This is going to be something that is a part of the body of Christ and is intrinsic to it.

So it's going to be a very fascinating study next time. But in conclusion here, once again, Paul says the body should be characterized. You've seen, unfortunately, as I have, someone who has an epileptic fit, who goes into convulsions.

I've seen it. You've seen it. That's the body at odds with itself, not subject to central control.

I mean, even something as mild as cramps. You get out and work too hard in the sun and don't drink enough or get your electrolytes out. The body's working against itself.

One muscle says, I'm going to pull your leg up behind your ear. And you think, whoa, stop that. It's out of harmony.

It is no longer conducive. Paul points out that the body of Christ, the only way you can do that is to be sensitive, A, to the central direction, which he begins with, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. And secondly, sensitivity to the rest of the body.

And, well, I don't see any other muscles in this area contracting. Maybe I ought to quit clenching up here and creating pain and loss of sleep and everything else that bad muscle cramps can give you. You know, have you ever tried to go out and hunt raccoons at night while you've got a horrendously severe cramp in your leg? I have, and it's really hard.

You hold a flashlight in one hand, a .22 in the other, and your right leg is useless because it's got this totally seized up muscle inside there. You really can't do things that may actually need doing. I was running through my mind.

I was thinking, you know, what if I was driving a car here and I was, you know, 70 miles an hour and this leg did this and I couldn't operate the brake or the... I mean, it's, you know, everything needs to kind of be singing out of the same hymnal here, operating out of the same playbook. We're all running the same play. We're doing the same thing.

We need to be in harmony. Well, inestimably more important is that it happened in the body of Christ. And in order to do that, we have to be sympathetic.

We have to be sensitive. We have to be in touch and in communication and in tune. We have to communicate.

If we're having an ouch, we need to let the rest of the body know. If we're having a great day, we need to let the rest of the body know. Paul says, we should give, verse 26, if one member suffers, all the members suffer.

One member is honored, all the members rejoice. Well, they can only rejoice if they know what to rejoice about. I love it when one of my daughters or the other will contact us and say, hey, I'm having a really good day.

Or, hey, I'm having a tough time. And we can help go through this, be together, be in it. That's one of the wonderful things about fellowship in a family or in a church is that we're kind of all in this together.

So that's the upshot. It is sensitivity. It has permeated all of this section.

And you know where we're going with this. If somebody comes into your assembly and there's a bunch of glossolalia and confusion and disorder, how is that person going to be benefited? And what I started to say earlier and I'll finish my thought is if you have a vocabulary in your church that is inscrutable to those who come in from the outside, and I will say in my own experience and in many of yours that you can observe a fellowship where strongly against tongues, strongly against glossolalia and confusion and holy rolling and gibbering in the aisles and ooh, boo, boo, boo and yet you turn right around and in the teaching and in the discussion of the Word of God you use such cryptic vocabulary that nobody from the outside knows what in Hades you were talking about. You're speaking in tongues.

You're doing the very thing you're condemning. If you exclude a visitor, if you exclude the

stranger and they walk in and they say what is going on in here? I don't know what these people are talking about. Whether it's during Bible class, before or after people talking about this, that and the other in these inscrutable terms you fall into the condemnation that Paul is about to lay on the Corinthians.

Five words with understanding are better than no end of cryptic vocabulary. And this is why in our church I have assiduously tried to not use, it's convenient for insiders it's a shorthand but if you talk in shorthand, you can't glaze your wife's eyes over faster than two marines getting together and starting talking about acronyms. Right? Two computer guys getting together and everybody else just glazes over because you're talking in a language they don't understand.

How much worse if it's in the spiritual realm? If you're actually talking about the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit and God the Father and nobody knows what you're talking about because you've encrypted it, you've encoded it and you're on the inside and you almost get a joy out of being able to decipher the lingo and everybody else is just, it sounds like a cult, which it is. When you bar outsiders and they've got to go through an initiation ritual to get inside, it's a cult, it's not the church. So that's the rest of my soapbox speech on that.

We're going to conclude for this morning, we'll pick up next time with a quick review of the tail end of chapter 12 but we're going to move into chapter 13 and find out what is the better way. I'm all about the better way. Is there a better way to get a thing done? Aren't we all ready to do things a better way? I know you've seen life hacks on the web.

Don't tell me you haven't. You go to YouTube, put in life hacks. Here's a better way to peel a banana.

Here's a better way to get the chips out of the bag when it's halfway down and you don't want to get your knuckles greasy. Here's a better way to cut vegetables. Listen, everybody wants the better way, right? And by the way, that potato chip bag thing works on coffee bags and all kinds of stuff.

It's so clever, I can't believe it. And you should open your banana from the bottom and not the stem. That's how monkeys do it.

They're smarter than us in that sense. Turn the banana over, pinch the little black part, it'll split and you can peel it every time. You don't bruise the top of the banana and the stem doesn't bend over and you turn the half of it to mush and it splits without... Turn the banana over, pinch the bottom and peel it every time.

Works every time. You watch a monkey in the zoo, that's how they do it. And it's a better way.

We all want the better way. We're going to get the better way next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word and for the better and higher and greater way that

we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the ministry of your spirit. We thank you for the wonderful work that the Lord Jesus Christ has done on our behalf and his ongoing work of intercession and pleading and direction for our lives.

We thank you most of all for your grace in sending your son and your spirit to us and drawing us to yourself and incorporating us into your eternal plan and purpose. We pray that we will be sensitive to that first and foremost and that we will also be aware of each other and as we grow in grace and knowledge, we will also grow in love and in perception of what our fellow believers and those who are in our periphery, both inside and outside the body of Christ, can be benefited by as we seek to be pleasing to you in every way and glorify the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in his name.

Amen.