

## **God's Idea for His Church**

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-27**

**Series: Core Values #6 *Diversity***

**Modesto CRC**

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There are few chapters in the Bible that **have more potential** for encouraging individual Christians or for strengthening the church in its life and work than this chapter. The emphasis here on the gifts of the Spirit is very powerful. **Here we find our 5<sup>th</sup> core value of the church.** **We would miss something crucial if we did not stop at this point to look at this chapter that lays out God's intention for the way his church should function.** This is both a celebration for what God is doing among us and a challenge to more fully follow his idea for his church. Our goal is to see God's gift of **diversity** among us, and to embrace that diversity. This is the opposite of thinking that everyone should look, act, and think like me. (shudder – what an awful thought)

A quick review of our discussions on core values looks like this. We saw two values emerge from Jesus' instruction to his disciples: **unity** and **love of another kind**. This led us to **worship and justice**. Overlapping with those we talked about **Christian self-discipline**. **Spiritual growth or maturity** is the goal and result of being faithful to our core values. Today **Diversity in Unity** is again another aspect of the two basic values.

**Outline  
on Slide**

1. **God's Idea for the church:**
  - a. One diverse, servant church (our differences are gifts to each other)
  - b. One diverse body filled with a variety of spiritual gifts.
2. **The problem: distribution**
3. **God's Idea for the church here.**

### **I. God's Idea for the church**

This chapter is written with a kind of passion and clarity that makes us realize it is a response to a crisis in the church at Corinth. **Corinth was a church in trouble, a church full of conflict and divisions**. Here is the overview: 1 Corinthians addresses one after another of their problems. They were fighting with each other over **moral issues**, specifically sexual issues. There were some people who were claiming that only spiritual matters were important to God, and therefore sexual immorality was OK, or at least neutral; while others were extreme opposites – ascetics – opposed to all sexual activity, even opposed to marriage. **How complicated is that?!** There was the problem over **the status of slaves and women** in the church. They were also struggling with **dietary laws** because much of the food they bought on the street had

been previously dedicated to idols. In addition, there were those who were saying that they were more spiritual because they had **ecstatic experiences**, like speaking in tongues. At the same time others remembered similar experiences in idol worship and thought it was highly suspicious. There was a dispute over the **resurrection from the dead**. The church was being divided among its **various pastors** -- followers of Cephas, Apollos and Paul. There were **social divisions** that showed up at the Lord's Supper. This is not our usual picture of the early church. You get the point. **THIS CHURCH WAS IN BIG TROUBLE.** Some of their problems sound familiar? This list probably should make us feel hopeful. All of this points to the fact that they lost the understanding that the church is a **servant church, a church following it's Lord who served them with his life and death.** The truth is problems in the church today come from the same source. In this context, the chapter is a passionate description of the reality that **the church is God's people, called together in worship and for service to each other and the world.** Let that sink in. Do we have this straight you think? Do churches generally understand this? We are trying: our purpose/vision statement is essentially: **love God, care for each other, serve the world.**

#### **a. One Diverse, Servant Church**

The Apostle points out over and over in this chapter that the basis of the unity of the church is in God, as we have previously talked about. It is **not** about everyone being or thinking alike. **It is not about uniformity.** They thought if they could get to the place where they all looked alike the problems would go away. Not so. **The church of Jesus Christ is as diverse as the creation is diverse.** **People are diverse, the unity is in God.** We have gotten so bad with this that we cannot even discuss a controversial issue with fears that someone will leave or split the church. We are so uptight one can't even ask a political question unless we are assured everyone in the group agrees to begin with. Some people have politics and Christianity all mixed up. **There is one Spirit, one Christ, one God and Father of us all, and one body.** This is the Bible's refrain. And only because of the Holy Spirit can people say together **JESUS IS LORD!** One Lord! This unity in the Lord is above all differences of nationality, race, social class, politics and sex. ***"For you were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free."*** (vs. 13) In Galatians he includes male and female in that list.

The church of Jesus Christ is one body, and it is a servant church. That means that we all live in **gratitude and love** for what Jesus did for us, and the way we show that love is to follow his example. The Bible's teaching about this is clear: one body of Jesus Christ, a servant church. It **cannot** be about personal gain or power: the first shall be last. It **cannot** be about authority or just success: we are the servant of all. Grace is the economy of the church. **Love** is the watchword. **Humility** and **meekness** are the mode of operation. **Valuing people** with compassion and empathy is the first line of action. The **symbol** the church follows is the **picture of the Lord washing the disciple's feet** and his **metaphor** of **giving a cup of cold water in his name.**

A well-known Scottish minister of a former generation was trying to illustrate this point to his congregation. He shared with them one of his dreams. He dreamed that he died, and naturally he presented himself at the gates of heaven. But to his dismay Peter denied him admission until he presented his credentials. The old man told Peter about the sermons he had preached, but Peter said he had not seen a record of them in heaven. He spoke of the service to the city and of his pastoral work that resulted in many people loving him. That did not get a response either. In despair he was about to turn away from the gates, when Peter said, "*Stay a moment and tell me this. Are you the man who used to play with the children by the church on their way home from school?*" "Yes," came the hesitant reply, "*what has that to do with my credentials.*"

"Come in," said Peter, *the Master who loves those children wants to thank you.*" The dream illustrates a point Paul is making. **Great services may indicate our talents and brain power, but small unheralded services indicate the depth and range of our commitment to the Lord. (repeat)**

**b. One body filled with a variety of spiritual gifts.**

The Apostle's point here is that there is a huge variety of people and gifts that the Holy Spirit chooses to give. **God is the architect of a totally unique organism.** There is one Lord and one Spirit who gathers people of different temperaments, interests, nationality, ethnic backgrounds, perspectives, traditions, social class; and to this variety of people he gives a vast array of gifts. **In God's plan all these differences are gifts that we offer to each other.** God loves this vast variety. To validate that, all you need to do is look at his creation and the numbers of different kinds of plants, animals, fish, cells, planets, on and on. God loves diversity!

**Take note here that everyone in God's family has spiritual gifts!** Don't miss that. **You have spiritual gifts – everyone, without exception.** Some people like to make the distinction between spiritual gifts or other kinds of service. That may be, but I don't see the distinctions. There are several lists of these gifts in the Bible, some are leadership gifts, there are gifts of faith and healing, and there are gifts of hospitality and helps. I love that one, "helps," – that is typical of a person who sees something that needs to be done and just does it. After every list we need to see an "etcetera" – because that is the structure of the Greek in this situation. **Everything we do in the name of Christ, for the sake of his people, for the sake of ministry, for the sake of helping, is a manifestation of a spiritual gift, a demonstration of the Spirit's work within us and through us.**

**We see spiritual gifts right here this morning** in the offering of our musicians, in the efforts of worship planning, in people doing *children's worship*, in people doing the sound and power point, in administrators and organizing ministries to serve the poor along with those doing the work, in deacon's work, in people who visit with hurting people, in those who are in the nursery, teachers – on and on. All of these and so many more are opportunities given by the Holy Spirit and transformed into spiritual gift giving. Each one is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and in our church. If we start giving and serving, we quickly begin to discover our gifts if we are not aware of them.

**Every person has spiritual gifts, and all the gifts are given for the common good.** These gifts, whether faith or helps, are given to us because the rest of the church or other people need them. **They are not FOR us, they are for us to give.** **The implication of God's planning here is awesome. Not one of us is here by accident. God put us together because of what he plans for us to give and for us to receive.** God knows our needs, and put people here to help us with our doubts, our fear, or our need for encouragement, whatever those needs are. God called you here for you to get some needs met. God called you here to give what you have from him in order to meet the needs of others. **The beauty and meaning of this is mind boggling.**

Everyone is different; yet, we are one in Jesus Christ. Everyone has a gift or several. Everyone has some needs. Every gift given, every need met is a witness to the work of the Holy Spirit among us. **And it all forms a whole.**

Paul's analogy to the human body is a great one. One person is the eye, another the hand. Are we all eyes? We would be in big trouble. Is one part of the body more important than the rest? No. What part of your body would you be willing to give up?

## 2. The Problem: Distribution

**God's plan is ingenious – variety that causes unity.** However, we sense that it does not always work, does it? Why? The truth is there are some needs not being met here, and there are some jobs not being done. Why? **The problem is not with the plan.**

I read an article the other day about **world hunger**. The author was listing all the places in the world where people are starving or close to dying of malnutrition. She then made the point that there is more than enough food on the planet, enough food in storage to feed everyone. What is the problem? Distribution. Why is distribution a problem? Because it does not seem profitable to feed the hungry? We dump millions of gallons of milk down the drain because it is too expensive to process it, while people starve. We burn millions of tons of grain. I would have to say that if that does not offend us, perhaps nothing can. There are so many barriers of economics, race, war, hatred, and fear. It is a distribution problem – a lack of will, means, or desire to care. We've seen the same thing with money in our county – no will to serve children at risk and the poorest of the poor.

Sometimes God's plan for the church gets sidetracked because **we have a distribution problem**. Why? I think there is a list of reasons that every one of us need to consider this morning. **The first distribution problem in the church** is that some people are not using their gifts, perhaps because they do not think what they have to offer is important, or maybe because we have not been aware of God's plan, or maybe because we are unwilling to offer them due to a spiritual problem. Sometimes we cannot see the joy in giving because we are too busy. Are we missing something? **A second reason for a distribution problem** might be that we are very proud people, and are not willing to let the needs we have to be known so they can be met. **A third reason might be** that we have valued some gifts too much and others too little. Some people have misused their gifts for control, power, and authority that is self-serving while not valuing the less visible gifts that are too numerous to mention. This is a spiritual problem where the awareness of the servanthood for Christ is lost. **A fourth reason for a church gift distribution problem** might be that we are so into

individualism – lost in *WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?* Then we have lost our sense of community, of corporate identity, of being the body of Jesus Christ on earth together. This is seen when we hear people talk about a ministry that doesn't touch their lives as somehow less important than others. There is even suspicion that it is a waste of resources, instead of being proud that this is a part of them. In one church I served there was a small group of people who refused to support community outreach efforts because it did nothing for them and took attention away from them to other people from the community. I actually heard someone say recently that they don't give to the poor because that would be the poor stealing what God has given to them. Can you believe it? What Bible do they read? WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME? WHAT MAKES ME FEEL COMFORTABLE? WHAT DO I GET OUT OF IT?

### 3. God's Plan for the Church here,

**This plan of God is so awesome.** God's plan for the church is working here. I see so many of you using your gifts in ministry. We have a ways to go. We still have some distribution problems. I sense that we are ready to move toward health, a movement toward unity in diversity. That is exciting. It is all about God's plan here. **We are God's partners in this plan – one body together, with every part needing the rest and offering their gifts for others.** Everyone has a crucial role. Everyone is important. Everyone is called to the joy of giving and receiving. God has a little secret here. The more we give the more we receive. The more we give the more he gives us. And the more everyone is involved, the **balance** grows.

**Dream with me a minute.** What will Modesto CRC be like when everyone is using their gifts, and each gift is seen as the Holy Spirit at work? How will we impact the community around here? How will we look like the diversity of our community? How would that kind of joy change your life? With that kind of love floating around, what will you do with all the people? Dream with me. What will we look like if we all followed God's plan for his church – using our gifts of leadership, administration, helps, hospitality, on and on; as well as being willing to receive so that our needs are met. What will this church look like? **It will be the picture of diversity that creates ever greater unity.** Will you think about your gifts? Let's make an effort to give them. If we treasure our diversity, looking past the lines of clans, families, and friends to treasure others in Christ, we will sense the power of diversity as a core value of the church.