

"The Church in the World:
Studies in 1 Corinthians" No. 14

"God-Given Unity and God-Given Diversity"

1 Cor.12:1-31

--CEFC 8/22/21; 3/15/92; 5/24/98

One of the most powerful social trends in recent years

has been the celebration of diversity.

If you ask anyone today if diversity is good,

they would say, "Why, of course!"

But there's nothing new about that.

It's a part of our American heritage.

Way back in 1782

Congress authorized the Latin phrase, *e pluribus unum*--"out of many, one"—
as a part of the Great Seal of the United States of America.

The 13 letters of the phrase happened to correspond to the original 13 colonies.

Out of their real differences—from Massachusetts to Georgia—

these colonists were forging one new nation.

And our diversity as a nation has only increased since those days.

Did you know that the United States is the largest Irish nation in the world;

it's also the largest Swedish nation;

it's the second largest Jewish nation,

and it's the third largest Hispanic nation in the world?

E pluribus unum may still be our national motto,
but the emphasis today is certainly on the *pluribus*.

Instead of a melting pot,
in which all our various ethnic cultures are blended together
to form one American stew,
this country is now seen more as a tossed salad,
or even a buffet table--
with each cultural subset of society preserving and cherishing
its own identity.

In fact, you can be accused of cultural appropriation
if you seek to adopt the customs and practices of others.

We are no longer simply Americans—
we are Native-Americans, northern European-Americans,
Italian-Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and so it goes.

It is quite natural to want to see one's cultural heritage
kept alive and valued--
and the American expectation has always been that we will all be enriched
by the contribution of each.

But the question remains--
will the increased interest in diversity
and its emphasis on distinctives and difference,
undermine a sense of national unity?

Will it result in a splintering of American society
into a thousand competing interests

with no concern for the well-being of the whole?

Can this American experiment continue to survive as a cohesive society
in the face of such centrifugal forces within?

It's one of the most important questions set before us as a nation—

What exactly is the unum—the “one”—

that can now unite the pluribus--the “many”?

How can we maintain our national unity

while also recognizing and appreciating our increasing diversity?

That's not a question that only nations have to answer.

No, quite literally that question comes home to us every day--

in our friendships, in our marriages and in our families.

We used to feel it at our house whenever we said, "Let's go out to dinner tonight.

Where should we go?"

Some want pizza; some want hamburgers--What should it be?

And even then, you have to decide if it will be

Pizza Hut or Dominos, MacDonalds or Burger King.

We come at things from different perspectives--

The 16-year-old daughter asks, "Has anyone seen my new sweater?"

Her father asks, "You mean the one that costs \$75?"

Her sister asks, "You mean the one you won't let me wear?"

Her brother asks, "You mean the stupid one that makes you look fat?"

Her grandmother asks, "You mean the one with the low neckline?"

And her mother asks,

"You mean the one that has to be washed by hand in cold water?"

Everyone has their own point of view--

and the question is,

how do you hold these differences together under one roof? /

This leads us to consider this question of unity and diversity in the church family.

which is just what the apostle Paul is concerned with

as he addresses the church in Corinth

in our passage this morning.

And I want you to see that the key in his mind here

is that we recognize that in the church, both our unity

and our diversity are given by God.

Both are part of God's good purpose and plan.

And only when we have that theological framework firmly in place

can we begin to work out the inevitable problems that arise

in trying to hold these two poles together in peace./

Let's turn then to 1 Cor. 12--

and let me begin with a little background.

It's quite clear from the opening chapters of this letter

that Paul is addressing a divided church.

In 1:11 he refers to some information that has come to him

about the party lines that have been drawn in the church--

"My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me

that there are quarrels among you," he writes--

One says, **"I follow Paul"**--he's my man.

After all, he founded the church, didn't he?

another says, **"I follow Apollos"**--

how can you reject his eloquent teaching of the word?

another says, **"I follow Peter"**--

he is the rock, the leader of the mother church in Jerusalem.

Surely, Peter has the last word.

No, you've all got it wrong, says still another, **"I follow Christ."**--

"The rest of you are just worldly.

Am I only one who is spiritual around here?"

Paul spends the first four chapters combating these fractious attitudes.

As we saw a couple of weeks ago in chap. 11,

there were divisions, too, perhaps based on socio-economic differences,

related to the gathering of the church

for sharing in the Lord's Supper.

But as you look at chap. 12 you can still catch something of the spirit

of that underlying dissension in the church.

The subject here is spiritual gifts--

and it appears that some in the congregation thought that

they had been empowered by the Spirit of God

to do some pretty impressive things

that put them a cut above the rest.

They had experienced the Holy Spirit in some powerful way,

and so they felt themselves to be spiritually superior to others in the church.

They are like the eye saying to the hand, "I don't need you" (12:21).

And this attitude has left others feeling threatened and disheartened--

Like the foot Paul refers to in v. 15, who says,

"Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body."

Paul's desire is to help both sides to think rightly about this issue

helping them to appreciate what God has done in their midst.

He affirms three things--

I. We are united by the Spirit into one Body.

II. We are divided by the Spirit into many members.

III. We live in the Spirit when each is valued.

We'll look at each of these three points in turn

as we turn to 1 Corinthians 12.

First, let's talk about unity.

Elsewhere in his letters Paul speaks of unity

as one of the fundamental marks of the church--

Gal. 3:28--"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,

for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Eph. 4:3-6--"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit
through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit--
just as you were called to one hope when you were called--
one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all."

"We who are many form one body."--Rom. 12:5

So here in our passage--vv. 12,13--

" Just as a body, though one, has many parts,
but all its many parts form one body. . .
For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body--
whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free--
and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

Don't you see, Paul says--

the unity of the church body is a fact, it is a given--for it is given by God.
When you become a Christian, a believer in Christ,
you are born again by the Spirit into this new community--this new body.
You are adopted into this one new family.

In one sense, you didn't do anything to create it,
so you can't do anything to destroy it.

It's like the unity of a biological family.

Father, mother, brothers and sisters—

you are one family whether you like it or not;

and whether you act like it or not.

And you become a part of a spiritual family

when you are born again by the Spirit.

Paul says in v. 3, "**No one can say 'Jesus is Lord'** [and mean it!]

except by the Holy Spirit."

Becoming a Christian is not just a matter of your decision;

it is a matter of God's Spirit working in you.

You can choose your friends,

but you are stuck with your family.

So in the church, as brothers and sisters in Christ,

we're stuck with one another--

and we're going to be stuck with one another for eternity! /

And that realization is sometimes one of the hurdles

people have to overcome if they are to become a Christian.

I remember my own struggle with it as a teenager.

I knew that if I became a Christian I would have to identify

with those sometimes odd and sometimes nerdy religious folks

who actually talked to God

and carried their Bibles around with them.

I would have to become a part of their family.

It took a while before I was willing to take that step--

Jesus I liked, it was Christians that I wasn't sure about.

Let's face it—in our day, the public perception of biblical Christianity
is not exactly glowing.

In the last forty years, the favorability rating of the church has dropped by a third,
though I will say, it is still significantly higher than the US Congress.¹
Evangelicals are not the darlings of the media, to be sure,
and unfortunately, there are Evangelical Christians who give the media
plenty to write about.

We often have a lot to overcome.

And so in our evangelism we have to realize
this psychological dimension of the conversion process.
Generally, the first step in evangelism is simply letting unbelievers get to know us,
and by expressing the love of Christ,
we help them overcome some of their negative stereotypes
so that they might be willing to join our family as followers of Christ.

For this corporate belonging to one another is part of what it means to be a Christian.

We are united ***by the Spirit*** into one Body.

Our nation may be searching for its source of unity—its *unum*,
but in the church we know exactly what ours is—
it is our common connection to Jesus Christ.

Do you believe that?

¹ <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2021/07/18/most-and-least-trusted-institutions-in-america/5/>

Do you look around you here this morning
and think only of all the ways you are different from other people,
or you do you sense the deep reality of a spiritual bond
that unites you with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?
The same Spirit who unites you to Jesus Christ,
and by whom you now call God your heavenly Father—
he is at work in them also.

They may not be as godly and Christ-like as you would like them to be,
but hey, you still have a long way to go yourself.
And if your focus is on their faults and ignore your own,
the bigger hypocrite you become.

We are all recipients of the same grace of God—
Jesus died for them as well as for you,
and we all share the same hope of eternity in Christ.

That recognition can make a big difference in how we relate to one another.

Let me simply note in passing that what Paul says here in v. 13
undermines a central tenet of Pentecostal theology
that sees the baptism in the Holy Spirit
as some second blessing that comes to the believer.

First, a person is converted by putting their trust in Christ, they say,
and then often at some later stage, a person is baptized in the Spirit
through some overpowering experience
of the Holy Spirit's influence in his life,
normally accompanied by speaking in tongues.

This second step, they say, is an indispensable step
to spiritual power and a full Christian life.
Without it you'll always be a second-class Christian--
saved, but not effective;
going to heaven, but not enjoying the trip there very much.

But Paul has no conception of any two-step reception of the Holy Spirit--
Either you are a part of the body or you're not--
and if you are, it is because the Holy Spirit brought you into that body.
The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a universal blessing of all believers.
Yes, we are to continue to seek the filling of the Spirit,
but every believer has been baptized in the Spirit—
that's what it means to be born-again.

There is one grace, one cavri", which unites us all in the one body of Christ.
We are one because God has made us one.
We need to understand and appreciate that fact.

But just as surely as there is unity in the body of Christ,
so also is there diversity.

Again, this is a theme found in several places in Paul's letters--

In Ephesians 4, after affirming that there is one body and one Spirit,
Paul continues--

"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. . . .

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets,
some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers"

In Rom. 12--"Just as each of us has one body with many members,
and these members do not all have the same function,
so in Christ we who are many form one body,
and each member belongs to all the others.
We have different gifts, according to the grace given us."

And again, in our passage from 1 Cor. 12--

v.12--" Just as a body, though one, has many parts,
but all its many parts form one body,;"

v.14—"the body is not made up of one part but of many."

vv.4-6--

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

There are different kinds of working,

but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."

There is one grace, one carisma", which unites us all in the body of Christ.

There are many gifts, carismavta, which give diversity to the body of Christ.

Unity and diversity--

both are a consequence of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the church. /

There is something exciting and wondrous about God's design for the church.

I probably wouldn't have designed it that way--

No, if I had designed it, everybody would have been just like me—

everybody would have my somewhat easy-going

and somewhat introverted personality,

everybody would have my same theological interests and convictions,

everybody would share my generally conservative

but not radically partisan political views,

and everybody would route for the Florida Gators on college football Saturdays.

But that is not the case.

The sovereign God of the universe, our loving heavenly Father--

he had other plans for the makeup of his family.

You see, the God who unites us also loves diversity--

When he sends a snowstorm, he makes every snowflake different.

We manufacture ice-cubes.

The church is to be a mighty army,

but that doesn't mean we all have to have the same haircut.

The unity of the church is to be like that of an orchestra--

united in harmony, though each member may play a different note,

each making his or her own unique contribution

to create the beauty of the symphony.

Unity and diversity are a part of the very nature of God himself--

one God in three divine persons--Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It would be easier if everybody was the same--

but God didn't intend for it to be easier--

he wants it to be better--
so he made us different.

The specific area of difference Paul addresses here concerns spiritual gifts.

He begins the chapter with the words, "**Now about the gifts of the Spirit**"--
with the assumption that his readers knew what he was talking about
when he uses that term.

Unfortunately, Paul never defines the term "spiritual gifts,"²

and our understanding of it must come through the way he uses it.

How does Paul describe the source, the activity, and the purpose
of these spiritual gifts?

In v. 7 he says that "**to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given
for the common good**" (cf. also 14:26).

In other words, the Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers
so that they may act to benefit the church.

This activity is not for personal glorification or selfish gain.

Whatever is done has in view the ultimate well-being of the whole body.

This is their purpose

The term "spiritual gifts" is further defined by what they do, their activity.

Look at the examples Paul gives--

Vv. 8-10 seem to point to supernatural manifestations of the power of God--
he mentions the message of knowledge (which Paul nowhere defines),

² pneumatika

then gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy,
distinguishing between spirits,
speaking in different kinds of tongues,
and the interpretation of tongues.

But it seems too narrow to limit spiritual gifts

to what we would call the "miraculous,"
for in v. 28 he includes the more mundane activities of these gifts--
his list of the gifted includes teachers,
and those able to help others,
and those with a gift of guidance,
a word which could also refer to leadership or administration.

He seems to make no distinction between the so-called "charismatic" gifts

and the "non-charismatic"--
which is precisely the point of the illustration of the body in vv. 14-26--
a spiritual gift is anything that helps the body of Christ to grow.

And the body grows whenever it displays the character of Christ--

whenever it becomes more like Christ—
manifesting the grace and truth of the gospel.

This is what edification and spiritual maturity is all about.

So what is a spiritual gift?--

I like J. I. Packer's definition--

"Our exercise of spiritual gifts is nothing more nor less
than Christ himself ministering through his body

to his body, to the Father and to all mankind.

From heaven Christ uses Christians as his mouth, his hands, his feet,
even his smile;

it is through us, his people, that he speaks and acts, meets, loves,
and saves here and now in this world."³

This is to say that a spiritual gift is simply a way in which Christ, by the Spirit,
equips and empowers you to do his work
in his church and in his world.

There are twenty or more distinctive gifts referred to
in five different lists in the New Testament.

No single gift occurs in all five of the lists,
and thirteen occur only in one of the lists.

This leads me to hold an open view about the gifts--
the ones that appear here are just examples of the kinds of things
that the Spirit can do through us for the edification of the body.

I think this giftedness can be a supernatural endowment
that is received after conversion,
or it may be a natural ability which, after conversion,
the Spirit draws into his service.

So, for example, I believe that God has given me some gift of leadership,
but I was engaged in leadership activities before I became a Christian.

³*Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 83.

But when I was converted, the Spirit empowered and directed that natural ability
toward the service of the church—it became a spiritual gift.

So I would say that whatever you do that God uses to build up others in his church
and he uses to display Christ to the world
can be considered a spiritual gift.

In that sense, you could say it is God's use of our abilities
rather than the abilities themselves that constitute spiritual gifts.

**"All these are the work of one and the same Spirit," Paul says in v. 11,
"and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines."**

v.18--**"But in fact God has placed the parts in the body,
every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."**

This diversity of gifts is God's work--
it's just the way he wanted it to be.

Every believer is gifted--
every member of the body has some God-given capacity
to contribute to the well-being of the whole.

Each has an important role to play.

I'll talk about how you might discover what your gift might be in a moment. /

But let me move on to Paul's third point--

- I. We are united by the Spirit into One Body;
- II. We are divided by the Spirit into many members;
- III. And we live in the Spirit when each member is valued.

There are ditches on either side of the road that one can fall into
in this area of spiritual gifts--
on the one side is a feeling of **self-disparagement**.

This Paul addresses in vv. 15-20--

The foot looks at what the hand is doing and feels unneeded--

"I'm good for nothing--I don't belong"

Or the ear realizes that it can't see like the eye,

so the ear doesn't feel that he's worth anything.

But this is silly! Paul says--

"If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?

If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?"

Don't you see--

God has arranged the various parts of the body, every one of them,

just as he wanted them to be.

If they weren't different you couldn't have a body.

There's no place for envy in the body of Christ--

wishing you could be what God hasn't made you to be.

Thinking you're not important you are not the preacher in the pulpit

or the teacher in the classroom.

And for me, it's not being jealous for the gifts
of people like Billy Graham or Tim Keller or Alistair Begg.

Because your spiritual giftedness comes from God,
there's no place for envy when you look at the way God has gifted others.

You need to appreciate how God has uniquely gifted you. /

And just as importantly, neither is there a place for vanity.

If the feeling of **self-disparagement** is the ditch on one side of the road,
the feeling of **self-importance** is the ditch on the other side.

That's the theme Paul picks up in vv. 21ff.--

"The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!"

And the hand cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

**On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker
are indispensable,"**

It seems that in Corinth some were exalting themselves

because of the apparent demonstration

of the work of the Spirit in their lives.

Particularly it seems some were exercising the gift of tongues,

speaking to God in unintelligible words.

We'll talk more about that when we get to chap. 14.

But don't think so highly of yourselves, Paul says.

Speaking in tongues may sound impressive,

and it may make you appear very spiritual,
but the gifts that are most important in God's eyes
are the ones that most directly build up the church (14:12).

God's view of things is often different than ours--

We exalt the flashy, the powerful, the exciting--

God notices the humble, the pure, the selfless.

Jesus said it--

The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,
but he who would be great among you must become the servant of all.

And Jesus modeled that greatness by washing his disciples' feet.

So don't be too impressed by the gifted ones that the world honors—

There should be no place for the adulation of Christian celebrities.

look at v. 24--

**"God has put the body together
giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,
so that there should be no division in the body,
but that its parts should have equal concern for each other."**

Every person in the family has a role to play--

from the person who stands up to preach on Sunday morning
to the person who locks the door when everyone is gone.

The body needs administrators

as well as teachers;

it needs people who set up agendas

as well as people who set up chairs.

And a church that was just full of preachers—well, that would be a disaster!

There are some whose greatest gift to this body is never seen--

and that is their secret prayer to the Father on our behalf.

And that elderly widow who prays for the church alone in her room

may be the one who most deserves our honor.

Beware of the attitude of self-importance--

thinking that you could say to anyone else here--

"I don't need you."

It's not true--

as hard as it is for us in our individualistic culture to understand,

we need one another—

we are to walk together in this journey of faith--

v.26--"**If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;**

we grieve with our sister Susie Elmore at the loss of Paul,

and "**if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.**"

And I don't know you'd call it an honor,

but we rejoice with Sam and Hannah Hakes

at the birth of their son Job.

That's the spirit that manifests the Spirit of God--

it's not great preaching,

it's not the gift of healing or tongues,

it's not phenomenal growth and great crowds.

The Spirit of God is most clearly manifest
where there is love for one another--
and every member of the body is valued.

Valuing every member of the body is critical,
because the very fact that God has gifted us differently
makes us vulnerable to division.

Let me give you an example of what can easily happen--

Say there was a fellow in our church who got involved
in some unethical business practices and he ended up going bankrupt--
with the all the pain and family stress that that involves.

How would we respond as a church to this brother?

Some, with **prophetic gifts** would immediately want to tell him
exactly what God thinks about what he did--
they would be concerned about truth and justice and righteousness.
He only got what he deserved.

Others, with **mercy gifts**, would want to come alongside him
and see how he was feeling, and what they could do to lift his spirits.

Others, with **teaching gifts**, would want to instruct him
on the proper way to handle his finances,
and the godly principles by which to deal with stress.

Others with **administrative gifts** would want to help him
set his house in order--
they'd want to marshal resources and make a plan for restoration.

Those with **helping gifts** probably wouldn't say anything--
they'd just bring him and his family a meal.

And then those with the **gift of faith** would want to pray
and see God just do a miracle to make everything work out for good.

Now try to imagine what that would look like
if we were discussing the right way to deal with this person
at a congregational meeting,
if each person argued that their approach was the one right approach.
It could go on forever!

The mercy people would say to the prophetic people,
"You're being harsh and heartless."
While the prophetic people would say to the mercy people,
"Aren't you concerned with righteousness?"
This brother needs a rebuke."

You see how problems can develop even when everyone involved
is simply seeking to help.

There's nothing wrong with any of these approaches--
In fact, every one is needed at some stage

in the process of repentance, recovery, and restoration.

That's why we need each other—we are truly better together.

But the potential for division in the church in this kind of thing is enormous--
even when our hearts are pure and we're all trying to do the right thing.

The key point I want to make is that that potential for division is God-given.

It is he who "place the parts in the body, every one of them,
just as he wanted them to be" (v. 18).

God has made us different--

he has gifted us in diverse ways.

And that in itself can give rise to division

if we don't appreciate the God-given value of our differences.

Let's think about that as we grapple with the kinds of issues
that are tearing churches apart these days.

I think the differences that God has built into the body

provide opportunities for the demonstration of love--

for love is the clearest way of all that we exhibit the reality of Christ.

And that is just where Paul will go in the next chapter

For God has made each one of us as one of a kind--

he has gifted each one of us "just as he determined."

So I ask, how has God made you to serve and to build up the body of Christ?

Have you answered that question?

Do you want to know what your spiritual gifts are?

Before we close, let me quickly give you some simple steps to discovery--

First, pray--

we are in the realm of the Spirit here--

more than just a talent assessment is needed.

Pray that the Lord will guide you in your search.

Then, second, look around at the needs.

There are various slots to fill in the church organizational chart, that's true,

and that may be a place to start,

Can you count?

There's a need for counters

Can you change a diaper?

There's always a need for nursery workers.

But don't stop there--

What are the needs for ministry that don't have a label on them yet?

what are the needs of people around you?

Look around,

and ask the Lord to give you a burden to help meet some need.

Is there someone you could get together with

to read the Bible or some other Christian book and pray for one another?

Is there someone you could send a note of encouragement to?

Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the needs around you.

Third, assess your own spiritual strengths and abilities--

ask two questions--

A. What do I enjoy?

There is good reason to believe that if the Spirit of God

has equipped you in some area,

he will also give you desires in that area,

and he'll give you a certain satisfaction

when you have exercised the gifts he's given you.

B. A second question--What am I good at?

Where am I effective?

Where have I seen God use me to serve others well?

And in answering that question I say, **fourthly**,

Seek the wisdom of the church.

Ask church leaders for guidance.

It is the church's role to identify and encourage

the exercise of spiritual gifts.

And **finally**, and most importantly, simply serve others--

that's the bottom line.

Find a need and try to meet it, and see what God does with your efforts.

Try new things--you may discover new things about yourself.

Try something in the life of the church

that you've never done before.

Beware of pigeon-holing yourself--

saying, "I've got this gift so I won't try anything that's outside my area."

No, God gives spiritual gifts at his discretion--

but we are also told to seek spiritual gifts (12:31; 14:1)

You may have more gifts than you realize--

No need to think in terms of exclusive ecclesiastical specialization--

you may have a whole range of gifts--

and God may give you new gifts--Who knows?

The most important thing is to serve!

Seek ways to build up the body—to help others in any way you can.

That's the responsibility of each one of us--

to play the part God has for us--

to be the hand or foot or mouth or big toe that he wants us to be.

And then to thank God for every other part of the body

that he in his glorious wisdom put together

to form the one body of Christ here in this place—

May we weep with those who weep,

may we rejoice with those who rejoice.

May we both appreciate the unity and celebrate the diversity

that God has given to his church.

That's what a community of grace and truth—

a church shaped by the gospel—

looks like.

An O how our world needs to see that gospel displayed in our lives!

Prayer--

Closing Song: O Church, Arise

Benediction:

2Ths. 2:16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,
who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,
encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Amen.

"The Church in the World:

Studies in 1 Corinthians"

Aug. 22, 2021

"God-Given Unity and God-Given Diversity"

1 Cor. 12:1-31

How can we as a church maintain our unity, while at the same time recognizing and appreciating our diversity? We must understand that both our unity and our diversity are *God-given*. In our passage Paul speaks to a divided church and seeks to resolve their conflict by focusing on the uniting work of the Holy Spirit.

I. We are united by the Spirit into one Body.

"we were all baptized by one Spirit

so as to form one body" (v. 13)

II. We are divided by the Spirit into many members.

"There are different kinds of gifts,

but the same Spirit distributes them" (v. 4)

III. We live in the Spirit when each is valued.

"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;

if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (v. 26)

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit

through the bond of peace." --Eph. 4:3

Sermon Response:

"God-Given Unity and God-Given Diversity"

1 Cor. 12:1-31

- Read v. 3. Can you say from your heart, "Jesus is Lord"? Then thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit in your life!

- Read vv. 4-6. What does Paul say is the basis of our unity? Why is this so important? Spend some time reflecting on this source of unity and pray that it would become more evident to us all.

- Do you ever feel that you have no gift of any importance to offer to other believers? Read vv. 14-20. How does what Paul say relate to your situation?

- Are you ever tempted to look down on the contributions of others? Read vv. 21-26. How does what Paul say relate to your situation?

- What sort of gifts do you think God has given you? In what ways are you using them for the benefit of the body of Christ? Ask God to give you opportunities to use those gifts for his glory. Consider these steps to discovering your gifts:
 - 1) Pray for the Lord's guidance
 - 2) Look at the needs around you.
 - 3) Assess your own spiritual strengths and abilities--
 - What do I enjoy?
 - What am I good at?
 - 4) Seek the wisdom of the church.

Ask church leaders for guidance.

5) Most importantly, simply serve others and see what happens.